MEANING AND MINDFULNESS: AN IPA EXPLORATION INTO THE MEANING-MAKING EXPERIENCE OF STUDENT LEADERS AFTER PRACTICING MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

A thesis presented
by

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to
The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

In field of

Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
June 2019
Abstract

College student government leaders are subject to the stresses experienced by both students and leaders. Also, meaning-making can be an effective buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017); and mindfulness practice has been found to increase the capacity for meaning-making in response to stressful experience (McConnell and Froeliger, 2015). The purpose of this study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. Mindfulness theory, as understood by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982, 2003, 2015), served as the theoretical lens for studying the experience of student leaders at a private, liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States. Using semi-structured interviews, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was the research method used. The study found that student leaders developed new mindfulness habits after completing an eight-week mindfulness course, and that student leaders also experienced stress relief after practicing these exercises. In addition, student leaders who practiced mindfulness exercises experienced both savoring and positive reappraisal—two core elements of meaning-making through mindfulness (Garland, et al., 2015). Finally, this study suggests that both student leaders and student affairs professionals may be helped through the implementation of mindfulness training for student leaders.

Keywords: student leaders, meaning-making, mindfulness, savoring, positive reappraisal.
Acknowledgements

What I remember most about important journeys is not only the destination or sites seen along the way. I remember the people that I traveled with. I am grateful that on this path of research and study, I have been accompanied by wonderful people for whom I am very thankful.

I am grateful for my committee. My advisor, Dr. Rashid Mosley, was patient, wise, and consistently shared sound advice. Without his guidance, I would have been lost. My second reader, Dr. Margaret Gorman shared profound insights, provocative questions and timely encouragement. My third reader, Dr. Katie Bash, is much appreciated for her helpful advice, support, and friendship.

I cannot say enough about my appreciation for my wife and family. Their support and encouragement has been expressed in countless ways. They have been a wonderful strength to me during this entire process, and I am confident that I would not have made it without them.

I also want to express my appreciation to my colleagues at Graceland University. It is a wonderful thing to work with close colleagues who are also good friends. Their support and encouragement has meant a lot.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not express my appreciation to Dr. John Sellars. He consistently challenged me to seek a doctoral degree--something that I would have never dared for myself. I am grateful that he imagined things that I did not.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A great deal of attention has been given in recent years to the negative physical and psychological effects of stress (Quick and Henderson, 2016). This includes research on the stress experienced by college students, who have the highest stress levels when compared to any age group (Coccia and Darling, 2016), as well as the research on the stress experienced by leaders of organizations, whose stress is both an antecedent as well as a consequence of their leadership (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, and Jeung, 2017). This study seeks to understand the impact of mindfulness practices in the lives of people who stand at the intersection of these two populations, due to their dual roles of being both college students and leaders of student government organizations.

While some scholars state that “stress and leadership are inextricably linked with one another”, (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, and Jeung, 2017, p. 178); others have suggested that strategies to cope with stress be included in the college curriculum so that these students, once they have left college and are in the workforce, can both handle their own stressors and also teach other members of their organizations to learn effective coping mechanisms (Houghton, Wu, Godwin, Neck, and Manz, 2013). In regard to handling stress, the literature suggests that meaning-making can be an effective buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017), and that, in particular, mindfulness practice has been found to increase the capacity for meaning-making in response to stressful experience (McConnell and Froeliger, 2015).

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. Participants in the study are undergraduate student government leaders in a private liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States. All student leaders in the
study have been selected for leadership by their peers, and have been approved for their positions by university officers. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will help both student leaders, as well as Student Affairs professionals who recruit, train and support them.

In this chapter, the problem of practice relative to the stress of student leaders and their dual roles will be presented, as will the significance of this research project and the research question that guides this study. After key definitions are shared, the theoretical framework for this study will be presented, including the rationale for its selection.

**Statement of the Problem**

People who function in dual roles are subject to increased levels of stress as they seek to meet the demands of both roles (Terrill, Garofalo, Soliday, and Craft, 2012; Wierda-Boer, Gerris, and Vermulst, 2009; Wong and Lee, 2015). This study seeks to understand the experience of people who live in the dual roles of being both college students and leaders of college organizations. The literature understands the term student leader to refer to undergraduate students who are in roles giving them positional authority (Domingue, 2015; McKenzie, Iverson, Crowe, and Kulics, 2015); and who are typically leaders of campus government or club organizations (Curtis and Burnett, 2017). In this regard, this study focuses specifically on students who are leaders of student government organizations and who are dormitory floor leaders.

In their dual roles of both college student and leader, student leaders are subject to the stressors of both roles (Mulenga, Brouze, and Gardner-Lubbe, 2016). First, as college students, they are part of a demographic that has been found to be uniquely prone to stress due to the multiple transitions and new responsibilities of college life (Lin and Huang, 2013). These transitions and responsibilities include financial stress (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, and Miller,
academic stress (Lin and Huang, 2013); shifts in social relationships (Stoliker and Lafreniere, 2015); and the very transition to college itself (Beiter, et al., 2015).

In addition to the stress of college-related transitions, the college years are also associated with a period of development known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007). Arnett, a seminal scholar on the topic of emerging adults, has said the experience of people in their late teens through mid-twenties has changed significantly in recent decades as increasing numbers of people in this demographic have entered college and thereby delayed their settling into more stable adult roles. Conley, Travers, and Bryant (2013) agree, stating that emerging adulthood is characterized by psychosocial risk, resulting in an elevation of psychosocial distress. Making matters worse, student stress is increasing, and in recent years the increase has been described by some researchers as “dramatic” (Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz, 2007, p. 15).

In addition to being students, student leaders are also leaders and “stress and leadership are inextricably linked with one another” (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, and Jeung, 2017, p. 178). In their review of the literature, Harms, et al. found that stress was not associated with primarily one style of leadership, but that the positive correlation between stress and leadership has been well established across a variety of leadership constructs, causing them to assert that leadership and stress are so tightly related that stress is both a consequence and antecedent to leading. They assert that this is so because leaders experience higher degrees of stress, given the higher likelihood that leaders will face challenges and threats. In particular they point to data stating that 88% of leaders indicate that their work is the main cause of stress for them (Campbell, Baltes, Martin and Meddings, 2007).

Adding to the correlation between leadership and stress is the dynamic in which stress increases as one’s responsibilities in one’s organization increases, including responsibilities for
decision-making and managing others (Serhat, Kitapci, and Çomez, 2017). Unfortunately, an increase in responsibility does not necessarily equal an increase in one’s capacity to be in control, and it is the perceived lack of control which determines the degree of stress that a leader experiences (Guedes, Gonçalves, and da Conceição Gonçalves, 2016; Lovelace, Manz, and Alves, 2007). It is not surprising then that DiRamio and Payne (2007) found that student leaders were more likely than their peers to feel a loss of control. The correlation between leadership stress and lack of control over the leader’s own situation was also observed by Minivand, et al. (2013) who studied managerial leaders across a variety of cultures and found that, regardless of culture, they tended to be subject to 5 primary stressors: time pressure, constrained resources, workloads, conflict, and limited authority. This is significant, given that these same stressors are experienced by student leaders (Domingue, 2015; Mulenga, Brouze and Gardner-Lubbe, 2016).

Student leaders stand at the intersection of two major stressors—the stress experienced by students and the stress experienced by leaders. In particular, the stress of students who serve as dormitory hall leaders has been documented in the literature (Belch and Mueller, 2003; Keashly, Hunter and Harvey, 1997). At the same time, meaning-making has been found to be a buffer against stress and the aversive effects of stressful events (Park and Baumeister, 2017). People who have the ability to make meaning from stress have a greater likelihood to sustain lives that they find to be meaningful (Allan, Douglass, Duffy, and McCarty, 2016). In particular, mindfulness practice has been found to increase the capacity for meaning-making in response to stressful experience (McConnell and Froeliger, 2015). Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson (2015) assert that immediately after a stressful event, mindfulness practice can attenuate negative biases, “allowing positive reappraisal to enter into the iterative emotion regulatory process to modulate the impact of a negative event” (p. 296).
However, there is little understanding apparent about the impact of mindfulness in student leaders’ experience of meaning-making. The problem therefore, is that while student leaders are subject to the stress of their dual roles, there is a need to understand the impact of mindfulness practice on the experience of meaning-making as student leaders live in the stress of these roles.

**Significance of the Research**

This research on the impact of mindfulness practice in the experience of student leaders as they live in the stress of their dual roles is significant for several reasons. The first pertains to the well-being of college students who serve in leadership roles. The relationship between college life and high levels of stress has already been established (Lin & Haung, 2013), as has the correlation between leadership and stress (Harms, et al., 2016). This is important for the well-being of college students, given the positive relationship between stress and illness (Roddenberry and Renk, 2010), as well as stress and depression, hopelessness and suicidal thoughts (Baghurst and Kelley, 2014). However, the literature also presents a positive correlation between mindfulness practice and meaning-making which has been found to be a buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017). This research is significant therefore in its potential to help college student leaders mitigate stress through meaning-making as a result of mindfulness practice. It therefore has the potential to increase the well-being of student leaders relative to the stress of their dual roles.

This research is also significant in its capacity to help student affairs professionals deal with a dilemma. On one hand, the development of leaders is a central goal in the education of undergraduates for many universities (Riutta and Teodorescu, 2014), and there is a strong relationship between student affairs professionals and the task of student leadership development.
which often occurs through co-curricular engagement (Haber-Curran and Owen, 2013). This is an understandable priority, given that there is a positive relationship between student satisfaction and co-curricular engagement (Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013). On the other hand, it has been established that being a student leader makes one more likely to feel stress than their peers and more likely to believe that life has gotten “out of control” (DiRamio and Payne, 2007, p. 688).

What then, are student affairs professionals to do? There are expectations that student affairs is to engage in student leadership development (Haber-Curran and Owen, 2013), yet becoming a student leader makes one more vulnerable to the negative effects of stress (DiRamio and Payne, 2007). This research may be helpful by providing information that can help student affairs professionals utilize mindfulness practice as a means to help students engage in meaning-making which has been found to be a buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017).

Finally, this research has significance in its capacity to add to the literature. There is already research documenting the benefits of mindfulness as a means to mitigate the effects of stress through meaning-making (Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson, 2015; McConnell and Froeliger, 2015). This has been studied with cancer patients (Garland, et al., 2015), intimate partners (Gillespie, Davey, and Flemke, 2015), and college students with evaluation anxiety (Hjeltnes, Binder, Moltu, and Dundas, 2015). However, this researcher is not aware of any research on this topic relative to college student leaders. This research therefore, will build on the literature that already exists by exploring a demographic that has not yet been studied—college student leaders.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

As noted earlier, people who are both college students and leaders of college organizations are more likely to feel a loss of control over life and to feel stress more than their
peers (DiRamio and Payne, 2007). It has also been noted that the literature purports that meaning-making can be an effective buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017) and that mindfulness practice has been found to increase the capacity for meaning-making in response to stressful experience (McConnell and Froeliger, 2015). The problem, is that while student leaders are subject to the stress of their dual roles, there is a need to understand the impact of mindfulness practice on the experience of meaning-making as student leaders live in the stress of those roles.

In the face of this problem, the purpose of this study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. With this in mind, the research question of this study is: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises?

**Definitions of Key Terms**

The following definitions are given to clarify the meaning of key terms as they are used in the context of this study.

**Student leader.** Student leaders are undergraduate students who have positional authority (Domingue, 2015; McKenzie, Iverson, Crowe, and Kulics, 2015) and who are typically leaders of campus government or club organizations (Curtis and Burnett, 2017).

**Dual roles.** Dual roles occur when a person carries two responsibilities at the same time, often resulting in stress as they seek to meet the demands of both roles (Terrill, Garofalo, Soliday, and Craft, 2012; Wierda-Boer, Gerris, and Vermulst, 2009; Wong and Lee, 2015).
Stress. Stress is the experience that occurs when a person perceives that a threat to something they value exhausts or taxes their resources and capacity to confront that threat (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leonc, and Jeung, 2017; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Meaning-making. Meaning itself is the significance felt and the sense made of the nature of a person’s own existence and being (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler, 2006). Meaning-making then, is the experience of integrating challenges or ambiguous circumstances “into a framework of personal meaning” (Van Den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schreurs, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2009).

Mindfulness. Mindfulness consists of two components. Bishop, et al. (2004) describes these components as the self-regulation of one’s attention in which focus is maintained on immediate experience; and adopting an orientation toward these experiences with openness, curiosity, and acceptance. Taken together, these two action components mean that “Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible” (Kabat-Zinn, 2015, p. 1481).

Theoretical Framework

This study will utilize the lens of mindfulness theory as articulated by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982, 1990, 2003, 2015) as its theoretical framework. The following paragraphs will introduce mindfulness theory and will explain the concerns of its critics. Furthermore, a rationale for selecting mindfulness theory as this study’s theoretical framework will be described, followed by a description of how mindfulness theory will be applied in the study itself.

Mindfulness Theory
**Origins.** Mindfulness theory has its roots in Buddhism (Bamber and Scheider, 2016) and according to Kabat-Zinn (2003), mindfulness is the basic attention stance that underlies all streams within Buddhist meditation practice. It has also been noted that while mindfulness has its origins in Buddhism, it has a conceptual relationship with ideas found in the philosophies of ancient Greece, as well as in the naturalism and existentialism of Western Europe (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell, 2007). In this regard, Kabat-Zinn, acknowledges the Buddhist origins of mindfulness, but also stresses that “there is nothing particularly Buddhist about it” (p. 145). Kabat-Zinn bases this assertion on the idea that mindfulness has less to do with religion, philosophy, or even culture; and has more to do with being attentive and aware, which is not the exclusive domain of any culture or ideology but pertains to the very nature of our human mind and is therefore universal. It was under the umbrella of the universality of mindfulness that Kabat-Zinn (1982) introduced mindfulness into Western psychological and medical literature, not as a Buddhist practice, but as a practice that targeted individuals with psychiatric and physical difficulties. Since then, mindfulness practice has been applied more widely to people who may not necessarily have physical or psychiatric problems, but whom are healthy individuals who are stressed (Brown, Ryan and Creswell, 2007), such as the subjects in this study who experience the stress of their dual role as students and leaders.

**What mindfulness is.** A first scholarly effort to achieve consensus on a definition of mindfulness was undertaken by Bishop, et al. (2004). They observed that in the 20 years since the introduction of mindfulness into Western psychological and medical literature, there have been numerous studies conducted on the effects of mindfulness, but that the field of mindfulness itself was continuing without a definition. Bishop, et al., therefore engaged in a series of meetings to develop a definition. Their resulting proposal was a model of mindfulness that
contained two components. The first of these components is “the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment” (p. 232). Self-regulation, in this sense, has to do with the non-elaborative awareness of thoughts, sensations or feelings as they occur moment by moment, as well as being able to secure attention on what is presently occurring (Keng, Smoski, and Robins, 2011). The second component in Bishop, et al.’s definition is that of adopting an “orientation toward one’s experience in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (p.232).

While there continues to be no formal, universally recognized definition of mindfulness, the two components identified by Bishop, et al (2004) continue to be seen predominantly in the literature. For instance, Keng, Smoski and Robins (2011) conducted a review of the empirical literature pertaining to mindfulness and psychological health. It was their observation that most of the researchers in the studies they reviewed used the two-component model of mindfulness developed by Bishop, et al.

It should be noted though, that the definition put forth by Bishop, et al., while shared by perhaps a majority of scholars, is certainly not universally embraced. For example, Sutcliffe, Vogus and Dane (2016) reviewed numerous studies on mindfulness within a body of research that focused on the intrapsychic process of mindfulness as experienced by individuals. They found that while most definitions of mindfulness shared similarities, differences nevertheless persisted. To be precise, they found that while the various scholars in their study shared a common understanding about mindfulness pertaining to focusing one’s attention on the present moment (the first component in Bishop, et al.), there were differences in whether or not the definition of mindfulness included other elements besides this, such as being non-judgmental
about what one is focusing attention on (Bishop, et al.’s second component). For example, Ellen Langer (2014) understood mindfulness to include a focus on the present, but also to be “an active state of mind characterized by novel distinction-drawing” (p. 11). The point being made by Sutcliffe, Vogus and Dane is that numerous scholars do not share the assumption that mindfulness includes more than a focus on the present, such as an accepting, or nonjudgmental attitude regarding the present moment. However, it should be noted that even Sutcliffe, Vogus and Dane’s data indicate that half of the studies they researched do, in fact, include an element of acceptance or nonjudgment in their definition.

A review of the literature then, reveals that while there is still no universally embraced definition of mindfulness, there are multiple scholars who have consensus around the two-component model proposed by Bishop, et al. (2004). Notably, Kabat-Zinn (2015), writing 23 years after introducing mindfulness to the psychological and medical literature, echoes Bishop, et al. when he stated that “Mindfulness can be thought of as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible” (p. 1481). It is this definition that is foundational for this study.

In addition to having two major components, there are also two categories of mindfulness. Kabati-Zinn (2015) explains that when mindfulness is intentionally cultivated it is often called deliberate mindfulness. He also states that mindfulness sometimes spontaneously arises, and when it does it sometimes is called effortless mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn points out that effortless mindfulness tends to be experienced when it is intentionally cultivated. Other scholars use the term state mindfulness when speaking of mindfulness as cultivated or being experienced
in a given moment, and trait mindfulness when describing a more effortless, enduring characteristic (Medvedev, Krageloh, Narayanan, and Siegert, 2017).

Kabat-Zinn asserts that while mindfulness may, in fact, be an innate quality of mind, it can and must be refined through regular, systematic practice. Evidence in the literature supports Kabat-Zinn’s assertion. In their study of mindfulness and decreasing stress with college students, Bamber and Schneider (2016) reviewed the literature and observed that it is possible for a person to increase their degree of trait mindfulness through the increase of state mindfulness or, in other words, through repetitive practice of mindfulness exercises. Similar findings were reported by Tsafou, Lacroix, van Ee, Vinkers, and De Ridder (2017). Further research has indicated that while any degree of state mindfulness may not necessarily increase trait mindfulness, individuals who practiced mindfulness meditation and experienced the greater increases in state mindfulness also experienced the greatest increase in trait mindfulness (Kiken, Garland, Bluth, Palsson, and Gaylord, 2015). This ability to increase one’s mindful awareness is in alignment with one of the principles of Kabat-Zinn’s theory, which is “mindfulness is none other than the capacity we all already have to know what is actually happening as it is happening” (p. 1481).

This capacity for individuals to increase in their degree of mindfulness points to an additional aspect of mindfulness theory. That is, mindfulness is not only a quality of one’s mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2015), but mindfulness may be learned (Rice, et al., 2013). In fact, Bishop et al. consider mindfulness to be a form of “mental training” (p. 231) that has the capacity to reduce reactive modes of thinking that can elevate stress, diminish cognitive vulnerability, and reduce emotional distress that can perpetuate psychopathology. To this point, Kabat-Zinn (2003) states that if a person hopes to have an understanding of mindfulness, they must examine the term practice. He states mindfulness is not just an idea that, once a person hears it, enables them to live with a focus on
the present with a promise of lessened anxiety and increased life satisfaction. Instead, Kabat-Zinn asserts that mindfulness is “more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and it is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice” (p. 148). Perhaps this is why Bishop, et al. (2004), in their seminal article devoted to describing a definition of mindfulness, give attention to describing the most common practice that is taught in developing mindfulness. This practice consists of the following: 1) being seated in an upright position; 2) maintaining attention on a specific point of focus, which is mostly often the sensations of one’s own breathing; 3) noticing inevitable feelings and thoughts as they arise; 4) letting these feelings and thoughts go and returning attention to the breath. While mindfulness can include a focus on a number of things other than one’s breath such as eating, walking etc., it is this breathing meditation that appears to be most common in the literature, and is used with multiple groups ranging from students (Gallego, Aguilar-Parra, Cangas, Langer, and Mañas, 2014) to professionals dealing with work-life balance issues (Michel, Bosch, and Rexroth, 2014) to leaders of organizations (Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, and Cunningham, 2016).

In summary, mindfulness theory consists of two primary components—the self-regulating of attention that maintains focus on one’s immediate experience, and an orientation towards those experiences that is marked by openness, curiosity and acceptance (Bishop, et al., 2004). Mindfulness may be either a state or a trait or both (Medvedev, Krageloh, Narayanan, and Siegert, 2017), and while it is a quality of mind, it can also be (must be) developed through practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Mindfulness theory asserts that mindfulness has the capacity to reduce stress through diminishing cognitive vulnerability (Bishop, et al., 2004), while increasing awareness and cognitive flexibility (Bamber and Schneider, 2016).

**Mindfulness Critics**

Critics of mindfulness theory name a variety of concerns, but a review of the literature suggests that these concerns fall within three main categories of critique.
Lack of definition. The first major area of criticism of mindfulness theory, as observed by Singh, Lancioni, Wahler, Winton, and Singh (2008), is the lack of consensus about an actual definition of mindfulness itself. They observe that within the literature, mindfulness is considered at trait, a state, an outcome or a process. Van Dam, et al. (2018) agree, stating that mindfulness is “an umbrella term” (p. 37) that is used to characterize a number of processes and practices that pertain to awareness, attention, and acceptance. They state that not only is there lack of consensus on a definition of mindfulness, but that the field also lacks any agreement on the aspects of underlying concepts to which mindfulness refers. They are particularly critical of how mindfulness, in one study, may be portrayed as the mental capacity for conscious awareness, while in other studies it simply refers to the practice of sitting with a particular posture while paying attention to the breath. This is also a concern of Hanley, Abell, Osborn, Roehrig and Canto (2016) who observed that even when mindfulness is explicitly defined, there can still be confusion about the wide variety of practices that are sometimes found under the umbrella of mindfulness practices that range from yoga to centering prayer, to tai chi.

While the lack of a universal definition of mindfulness theory is a point of criticism, Singh, Lancioni, Wahler, Winton, and Singh (2008) suspect that mindfulness will continue to have differing definitions within the literature of psychological research. They point to the fact that just as it has different understandings within Buddhism, so also it will have different understandings within psychological research, due the fact that mindfulness does not represent a singular, unitary concept and because it is also not void of context. Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007) make a similar observation when they note that the meaning of mindfulness has often been given to it by clinicians who have colored these meanings by whatever their particular clinical approach may be. They go so far as to say that clinical approaches to understanding
mindfulness are problematic for a couple of reasons. One is that clinical approaches may create differing operationalizations and definitions of the mindfulness construct in order to find accord with a specific treatment perspective or desired outcome. A second problem noted by Brown, Ryan and Creswell is that clinically oriented concepts of mindfulness may confuse a description of mindfulness with the methods through which mindfulness is fostered. They note that scholars within Buddhism recognize the diversity in methods that cultivate mindfulness, but they make a “clear distinction between these methods and the meaning of mindfulness itself” (p. 215).

**How data is measured.** A second major area of concern for critics of mindfulness theory pertains to how data is measured within the field of mindfulness research. A frequent concern, in this regard, is the use of self-reporting in some mindfulness research (Grossman, 2011; Van Dam, et al., 2018) To be specific, Grossman’s concern is that a person’s self-rating of mindfulness levels can be biased by the participant’s desires to experience gains, given that they’ve spent substantial effort and time in home practices and course work. Grossman believes that for self-reporting scales to have validity, the items being evaluated must be understood similarly across the populations being compared, or within a specific population over time. He believes however, that such a common understanding is unlikely when self-reporting scales are used. Grossman’s concern is echoed by Van Dam, et al. who posit that if a study utilizes self-reporting, one needs to be conscious of the various nuances associated with the various measures being reported, as well as their relationship to concepts of mindfulness. In addition, Van Dam, et al. are concerned that mindfulness measures may also relate to other general skills or vulnerabilities that a person might possess that could distort research on mindfulness, since these other skills and/or vulnerabilities might not be directly related to mindfulness itself.
Critics of mindfulness theory are not only concerned about problems with self-reporting, but are also concerned about the very instruments used in mindfulness research. They are concerned that the breadth of available assessment instruments is so great that it is difficult for their various measures to be correlated or associated (Bergomi, 2013; Grossman, 2011; Hanley, Abell, Osborn, Roehrig and Canto, 2016). Grossman states that this is so much the case that “respondents may score high in mindfulness on one scale and low on another” (p. 1036). In part, at least, this may be due to the earlier-stated phenomena of mindfulness suffering from a lack of a universally accepted definition, and therefore the tools used to study mindfulness may reflect this diverse understanding (Singh, Lancioni, Wahler, Winton, and Singh, 2008). Another concern expressed by critics regarding instruments for measuring mindfulness is that the instruments’ measures are often validated by samples of people, such as college students and people in the general population, who typically have had either no experience or very little experience with mindfulness practice (Grossman, 2011; Singh, Lancioni, Wahler, Winton, and Singh, 2008). Grossman puts it bluntly: “using samples untrained in mindfulness to validate a mindfulness measure is not a wise practice” (p. 1037).

Confusions between Buddhism and research psychology. A third critique of mindfulness theory, is that it is characterized by a confusion that exists because it contains a convergence of two very different streams of thought—one of them stemming from Buddhist meditation, and the other from psychological theory (Goto-Jones, 2013; Singh, Lancioni, Wahler, Winton, and Singh, 2008). Singh, et al. note that this confusion pertains to both theory and practice, and that while meditation is central to mindfulness in Buddhist thought, there are numerous psychological methods to enhance mindfulness that are separate and distinct from meditative practices. This concern is echoed by Grossman (2011), who states that the construct
of mindfulness arising from Buddhism is the outcome of a 2500 year-old development/
understanding of a particular phenomenological approach that is oriented towards an
understanding of direct experiences. The other, he states, is a construct defined by Western
psychologists that seeks to quantify and objectify mindfulness by using operationalizations that
have been validated and can be comprehended by people with no training in mindfulness
practices. Given the foregoing, Grossman believes that there is a danger of distortion in the
research between these two streams of thought. Goto-Jones (2013) goes even further in asserting
that the separation of Buddhist mindfulness and more secular expressions of mindfulness is an
intentional separation that has been driven by some to help mindfulness find acceptance as a
clinical tool within societies that are predominantly Christian. Goto-Jones however, fails to
adequately account for why seminal researchers are deliberate in pointing out the Buddhist roots
of mindfulness (Baer, 2003; Bishop, et. al, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2015) and who, it appears,
do not seek to promote mindfulness as particularly Buddhist, but neither do they seek to hide its
origins.

**Rationale for Using Mindfulness Theory**

This study seeks to understand the experience of people who live in the dual roles of
being both college students and leaders of college organizations. In their dual roles of both
college students and leaders, student leaders are subject to the stressors of both roles (Mulenga,
2015) is selected as the theoretical framework for this study for reasons which are explored
below.

First, Kabbat-Zinn’s (1982, 2003, 2015) theory of mindfulness has a robust presence in
the literature and has been used in the study of student stress (Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and

Regarding the study of student stress, Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013) studied undergraduates who had taken an abbreviated mindfulness course (MBSR) based on Kabat-Zinn’s (1990, 2003) work. They concluded that even abbreviated MBSR training can result in improvements in student psychological health. Similar findings were reported by Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff and Maron (2015) who also studied undergraduates enrolled in two separate mindfulness courses, both based on Kabat-Zinn’s approach. They found that both courses resulted in significant reductions in student stress. Similar findings with mindfulness and college students have been documented by Messer, Horan, Turner, and Weber (2016), who documented decreased stress levels in students whose mindfulness training was received via the internet.

In like manner, the literature evidences that mindfulness is effective in reducing leadership-related stress. Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, and Cunningham, (2016) studied leaders from both business and higher education, and found that regular mindfulness practice was not only helpful in increasing leaders’ ability to focus, but mindfulness practice also decreased their anxiety and their stress. Pipe, Bortz, Dueck, Pendergast, Buchda and Summers (2009) reported similar findings in their work with nursing leaders in a metropolitan hospital. In their research, they experimented with an abbreviated mindfulness training experience (four weeks instead of the more typical eight weeks), and found that mindfulness practices were effective in reducing the stress levels of the leaders participating in the study. In this study, baseline stress levels of leaders were so much higher than expected, and the results in the mindfulness test group were so
notably different than the control group, that their proposed 12-month study was cut short in order to provide mindfulness training to leaders in the control group.

The literature then, presents numerous accounts of Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness theory to be relevant in regard to the study of reducing the stress levels of both college students and leaders. It seems then, to be a fitting framework to study the experience of persons who stand at the intersection of being both students and leaders.

A second reason for selecting mindfulness theory as understood by Kabat-Zinn is its capacity to provide alignment between the research question and the research methodology. This study asks: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual role of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? This is essentially a question of meaning, and therefore the study utilizes IPA as a research methodology, given that IPA is concerned with questions of meaning and the detailed exploration of personal experiences (Smith, 2011). Kabat-Zinn (2003) suggests that mindfulness practice asks a person to look into their mind, their body, and their own nature in a deep, disciplined and systemic way; and also states that applying mindfulness gives a place for awareness to arise (2015). A theory that promotes such intentional self-awareness seems to be a fitting framework to align a research question and research methodology that are both concerned with personal meaning-making.

Third, Kabat-Zinn’s (2015, 2015b) understanding of mindfulness theory is selected for this study because of its emphasis on the practice of mindfulness exercises and the relationship between practice and how negative emotions are processed and reinterpreted. This aligns well with the research question which seeks to understand student leader experience after practicing mindfulness exercises.
Application of Theory

A theoretical framework is the lens through which the researcher thinks about their problem of practice (Grant, and Osanloo, 2014). Therefore, mindfulness theory, and in particular the understanding of mindfulness articulated by Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015) will be applied throughout this study. One example of this is the study’s research question that seeks to understand if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. Anfara and Mertz (2015) assert that a theoretical framework will allow the researcher to understand and see some aspects of a phenomenon under study, while at the same time concealing others. In this regard, this study’s mindfulness theory lens will allow the researcher to better understand how student leaders experience the stress of living in their dual roles after practicing mindfulness exercises. In particular Kabat-Zinn’s stress on the importance of practice is relevant and has informed the inclusion of “practice” in the research question itself.

Another example of the application of mindfulness theory in this study is the selection of its research methodology. In their review of the literature on theoretical frameworks, Anfara and Mertz (2015) observe the importance of theory having a direct relationship to the research methodology selected for a study. In this study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is being used because of its philosophic fit with mindfulness theory. It has been noted that mindfulness practice has been difficult to understand through traditional western research methods because western worldviews tend to be dualistic whereas the philosophical foundations of mindfulness theory do not have their roots in the west and are nondualistic (Sikh and Spence, 2016). However, mindfulness theory does align with the nondualistic philosophies of Gadamer and Heidegger (Sikh and Spence), whose philosophies have shaped the philosophical foundation
of IPA (Shineboure, 2011). It seems therefore, that IPA is a fitting research methodology, given the theoretical framework of mindfulness theory.

Another expression of the application of mindfulness theory in this study is the literature review itself. Grant and Osanloo (2014) have noted that the literature and theoretical framework are intrinsically connected. This goes beyond topical similarities. The theoretical framework “gradually refines and narrows the topic to an identifiable gap in what is known about the topic (Rocco and Plakhotnik, 2009, p. 124). In this manner, this study will explore the research literature on mindfulness, with special attention being given to the literature utilizing Kabat-Zinn’s (2003, 2015) MBSR relative to student stress and leadership stress. Then, as Rocco and Plakhotnik describe, the study will narrow the topic to a gap in the literature relative to mindfulness and the stress of people in the dual role of being both students and leaders.

Finally, this study will apply mindfulness theory as understood by Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015) in its field research, as subjects in this study will be selected from among student leaders who have taken course work in MBSR-based mindfulness practice. Interview questions with study participants will be shaped by Kabat-Zinn’s theory.

**Conclusion**

The literature is replete with research on the positive correlation between stress and being a college student (Beiter, et al., 2015; Lin and Huang, 2013; Stoliker and Lafreniere, 2015); as well as the positive relationship between stress and being a leader (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, and Jeung, 2017; Serhat, Kitapci, and Çomez, 2017). In addition, meaning-making has been found to be a buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017), and mindfulness practice has been found to increase the capacity for meaning-making in response to stressful experience (McConnell and Froeliger, 2015). While student leaders are subject to the stress of their dual
roles, there is a need to understand the impact of mindfulness practice on the experience of meaning-making as student leaders live in the stress of those roles.

Given the above, the purpose of this study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. The literature documents mindfulness as reducing the stress of both students (Gallego, Aguilar-Parra, Cangas, Langer and Mañas, 2014) and leaders (Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, and Cunningham, 2016). It is to a review of the literature that this study now turns.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

As already stated, the purpose of this research is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. The context of this study is that student leaders are part of a demographic—college students—that has been found to be uniquely prone to stress (Lin and Huang, 2013). At the same time, they are also leaders, and “stress and leadership are inextricably linked with one another” (Harms, Crede, Tynan, Leon, and Jeung, 2017). Consequently, student leaders are more likely to feel stress than their peers (DiRomaio and Payne, 2007). This study is significant in its potential to help student leaders deal with stress and negative outcomes associated with stress (Roddenberry and Renk, 2010). It is also significant in its potential to help student affairs professionals deal with the dilemma of addressing the expected task of student leadership development (Haber-Curran and Owen, 2013) while at the same time knowing that student leaders often feel, because of their dual roles, that their lives have gotten “out of control” (DiRamio and Payne, 2007, p. 688). The problem therefore, is that while student leaders are subject to the stress of their dual roles, there is a need to understand the impact of mindfulness practice on the experience of meaning-making as student leaders live in the stress of those roles.
To address this problem, the following review will explore three primary threads in the literature. The research on the relationship between mindfulness and college students will be examined, followed by a review of the research on mindfulness and leadership stress. Then, because this study is concerned about meaning-making of student leaders as they deal with the stress of their dual roles, the research on the relationship between mindfulness and meaning-making will be reviewed. Finally, a summary will be offered, based on the major conclusions from the literature.

**Mindfulness and College Student Stress**

In the past 20 years, there has developed a robust presence in the literature of research relative to mindfulness practice and the stress of college students. While the literature explores a variety of subtopics on this matter, there are recurring themes in the research. Three themes that are particularly related to this research project are the positive correlation between mindfulness and lower stress; explorations into abbreviated models of mindfulness training; and the study of coping approaches that are positively correlated with mindfulness practice.

**Mindfulness Correlates to Lower Stress.**

The most common theme in the literature about mindfulness and college student stress, is the positive correlation between mindfulness practice and lower stress levels. Bamber and Schneider (2016) conducted a review of 57 research articles that focused on mindfulness and college students. Included in their study, were 23 studies in which self-reported stress was a measured outcome, and of these 23 studies, 18 reported a significant reduction in stress. They also reviewed 11 additional studies in which Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was used and in which stress was a measured outcome. They found that 73% of those studies reported a significant reduction in overall student stress.
Included in Bamber and Schneider’s (2016) review was research conducted by Newsome, Waldo, and Gruszka (2012), who studied college students who were preparing to enter helping professions (such as counseling, nursing and education), believing that the intense nature of their work had the potential for negative effects in the lives of these soon-to-be professionals. Participants in the study engaged in an 8-week course based on Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Participant levels of perceived stress were measured prior to MBSR training, at the beginning of MBSR training, at the end of MBSR training, and one month following the conclusion of the training. No significant differences were found between the first and second measures of perceived stress. However, significant reductions in stress were found at the conclusion of the MBSR training. Furthermore, these reductions were sustained when perceived stress was measured again one month after the MBSR training concluded. Newsome, Waldo and Gruszka concluded that while people may not be able to control their environments, they can learn how to exercise cognitive control relative to their appraisal of their environment and that being engaged in a mindfulness group is a way to do this. This study was significant, not only in that its findings support mindfulness as a means to reduce stress in college students, but also because its findings and approach align with research conducted by Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, and Flinders, (2008) who also found that mindfulness training significantly reduced stress in college students. These two studies, taken together, are important, not only because of their similar findings, but because of their similar findings across two demographics. While over 50% of the participants in Newsome, Waldo and Gruszka’s study were Latino, attending a university in the Southwest United States; participants in the Oman, et al. study attended a private Catholic university in California and were predominately white. Both studies also conducted evaluations one month (Newsome, Waldo and...
Gruszka) and 2 months (Oman, et al.) following the conclusion of mindfulness training and discovered that stress reduction had continued after the conclusion of the training experience. While these studies are insightful, they are also limited it at least two ways. First, they depend on self-reporting measures with no observed or physical data being available, thus relying on the honesty and accuracy of participants’ self-perceptions. Second, Newsome, Waldo Gruszka acknowledge that because participants were in ongoing mindfulness groups, It is unclear to what degree group support dynamics may have influenced the outcomes of the study.

While the foregoing studies utilized face-to-face MBSR training, Spadaro and Hunker (2016) studied the effects of asynchronous mindfulness training. Components from the various weeks of standard MBSR training were identified and offered online to students in the study. Students were only allowed to open one week’s lesson at a time, coinciding with the 8 week period of standardized MBSR training. In addition to the weekly online training, students were encouraged to do mindfulness practice daily and to post their observations and thoughts about their experiences and practice. Spadaro and Hunker found that online MBSR training was effective in lowering stress in the lives of the college students they studied. Furthermore, follow-up surveys demonstrated that participants retained their lower stress levels after 24 weeks. This study is important in that it demonstrates the possibility of effective mindfulness training delivered to students through online methodologies. The results of this study however, do not align with Kvillemo, Brandberg, and Bränström (2016) who also studied the effects of online MBSR training on the depressive symptoms and psychological well-being of college students. Like Spadaro and Hunker, training was delivered in eight weekly modules, and students were encouraged to engage in daily practice. However, Kvillemo, Brandberg, and Bränström found neither the participants in the mindfulness group nor participants in the control group (who were
engaged in an expressive writing course) showed any significant effects of their training and experience. This study, however, should be considered with caution, given that only 39% of the participants in the mindfulness group completed the training program, with only 60% completing the first week.

Yet another approach to studying the effect of mindfulness on college student stress was conducted by Ramler, Tennison, Lynch, and Murphy (2016). In their research, students gave samples of salivary cortisol before and after undergoing mindfulness training. Ramler, et al. explain that researchers use cortisol to study stress because “cortisol is released into the bloodstream following perception of a threat and is associated with several key mechanisms in the stress response process” (p. 182). They assert that the physiological manifestations associated with a stress intervention are of interest because they evidence the potency of an intervention using an objective measure of stress. In this particular study, they found that cortisol levels were lower after students had concluded mindfulness training, indicating that mindfulness training does, in fact, lower stress in students. This study is important because it provides physiological evidence of the stress-reducing potential of mindfulness training. It should be noted, however, that these findings do not align with those of Myint, Choy, Su, and Lam, (2011), who also evaluated the effects of mindfulness training by examining cortisol samples and discovered no significant decrease in cortisol levels, indicating that mindfulness training did not significantly reduce stress in the study participants. Although this study used a much smaller sample than Ramler, et al., it is nevertheless important to note that not all cortisol studies on mindfulness and stress have produced the same results.

Using a much larger sample than the foregoing studies, Pearson, Lawless, Brown, and Bravo (2015) surveyed 941 undergraduates utilizing the technique of latent profile analysis
(LPA). They describe LPA as a statistical technique in which it is assumed that there are distinct latent subpopulations, or classes, of individuals. For example, “if we assume that there are distinct classes of individual in terms of their level of mindfulness, LPA is a technique that can be usefully applied to analyzing mindfulness data” (pp. 2-3). In this study, students completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire developed by Baer, et al. (2006), as well as other instruments measuring depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, affective lability, and distress intolerance. They found that students with the highest levels of mindfulness were also the students who had the lowest levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms and distress intolerance. On one hand, this study is significant because it suggests a positive correlation between mindfulness and lower stress, based on a large number of participants from two separate universities. On the other hand, the study is limited in that while it presents a positive relationship between mindfulness characteristics and lower distress intolerance, it does not speak to the matter of mindfulness practice and the effects of teaching such practice.

Of course, not all of the research literature found mindfulness to correlate with lower stress. Examples already given include Kvillemo, Brandberg, and Bränström (2016) who found no significant changes in depressive symptoms or psychological well-being; and Myint, Choy, Su, and Lam, (2011) who documented no significant changes in cortisol levels following mindfulness training. Other studies had mixed results, such as de Vibe et al. (2013) who found that mindfulness training was effective for women but not for men, leading them to conclude that “mindfulness practice may have helped male students to become more aware of their distress, but may have assisted female students with handling their distress better” (p. 7). These studies which do not find mindfulness practice significantly helpful in reducing college student stress are important, because they point out the need for further study. Nevertheless, the majority of the
research reveals that mindfulness is positively correlated with lower stress in college students (Bamber and Schneider, 2016).

**Abbreviated approaches to mindfulness training for college students.**

Although mindfulness has been found effective in lowering college student stress, there is concern in the literature that some college students do not have the time to take mindfulness training (Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon, 2013; Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron, 2015).

In their study of 72 undergraduate students, Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013) note that although the benefits mindfulness practice have been well documented in the literature, the time commitment typically required, especially by Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) MBSR model, is substantial. They point out that the MBSR model asks participants to meet each week for two-and-a-half hours of group work, as well as a day-long 6-hour retreat. This is in addition to the expectation of daily practice. Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon’s concern was that the time demands associated with the standardized MBSR model represent a serious strain on a college student’s already overcommitted personal schedule, and that these time requirements represent one of the reasons why some students do not become involved in programs such as this. They comment that the time demanded by the standard MBSR model has led both researchers and practitioners to consider the potential benefits from an adapted, shorter version of MBSR training.

Given the foregoing, Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013) studied undergraduates who participated in 2-hour weekly meetings for 5 weeks, vs 2.5 hour weekly meetings for 8 weeks in the standard MSBR model. Participants in the study were also not required to attend the day-long retreat required in standard MBSR training. Researchers sought to understand
whether or not participants in a brief mindfulness training program experienced an increase in self-compassion (an aspect of psychological health) as well as experiencing a decrease in psychological distress. The results of this study were that participants experienced an increase in self-compassion, but did not experience a significant decrease in psychological distress. This study is significant in that it demonstrated potential psychological benefits of shorter mindfulness training programs, but it calls into question whether or not mindfulness is effective in reducing stress. It also should be noted that this study’s finding do not align with a similar study conducted by Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron (2015), described below.

Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron (2015) attest that mindfulness training is well-suited for college students, but also suggest that some college students may not be able or willing to dedicate 45 minutes per day to meditation practice, as required by the standard MBSR model. Therefore, their research explored the effects of two abbreviated mindfulness training models. The first, more formal, model required participants to meet weekly for one hour for six weeks for mindfulness education and formal meditation practice (compared to the standard MBSR model requiring 2.5 hour meetings for 8 weeks). Participants were also asked to practice mindfulness meditations each day on their own for 10-15 minutes following the first meeting, then increasing to 30 minutes by week 5. (Standard MBSR asks for 45 minutes of daily practice.) The second, more informal, model included mindfulness education for 6 weeks, but did not include formal meditation practice. Instead, participants were introduced to brief, 5-minutes mindfulness practices. Unlike the formal group, participants were not asked to engage in formal meditation practice each day, but were simply encouraged to integrate mindfulness principles into their lives through informal practices learned in class. Unlike the research of Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013), this study found that participants in both abbreviated mindfulness training models
experienced a reduction in stress. However, participants in the more formal training group experienced greater stress reduction and greater increases in self-compassion than participants in the informal training group. It was also discovered that 8 of 11 participants in the informal group stated that they had difficulty remembering to practice on their own each day, compared to only 1 participant in the formal group who had a difficult time remembering to practice. This is significant, given Kabat-Zinn’s (1990) affirmation that practicing formal mindfulness meditation is an essential for the cultivation of mindfulness. Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff and Maron’s (2015) work is important because it is the first study to compare interventions for stress that taught mindfulness with both formal meditation training and without meditation training. The weakness of the study is that participants were mostly Caucasian females in their 20’s. It is therefore difficult to generalize the results of the study to other populations.

In a related study Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, and Nicol (2015) affirmed the idea that abbreviated approaches to mindfulness training may be more realistic for college students. In fact, they observed that college students with the greater amount of stressors may, in fact, be more pressed for time than others. Their approach was to abbreviate mindfulness training even further than Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013), and Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff and Maron (2015). Specifically, Shearer, et al. utilized a training model in which participants received mindfulness training in weekly 1 hour sessions for only 4 weeks. Their study is unique in that it sought to measure the effect of mindfulness on the stress of college students by measuring the students’ heart rate variability (HRV). HRV refers to the amount of fluctuation in the intervals that occur between heartbeats and is a “physiological marker of the person’s ability to regulate the stress response” (p. 5). They also compared the results of mindfulness training to the results of a control group that spend time with a therapy dog for four weeks as a means to
mitigate stress. This study found that both groups experienced a reduction in stress. However, it also found that when participants were exposed to cognitive challenge stressors, the mindfulness group evidenced significantly higher HRV, indicating lower levels of stress. This indicates that an abbreviated mindfulness training model can, indeed, be effective in reducing college student stress. This finding supports the finding of Zeidan, Johnson, Gordon, and Goolkasian (2010) who found that even 3 days of mindfulness education for 20 minutes per day was effective in lowering the heart rates of college students, as well as lowering their anxiety and depression. This study however, did not include the introduction of stressors during the experiment, as done by Shearer, et al. who attempted to imitate stressors experienced by students in rigorous institutions. As a result, Shearer, et al. claim that the reduction of heart rates in students practicing mindfulness evidences the effectiveness of mindfulness intervention in reducing the stress of college students. Unfortunately, this study suffered from the loss of data, as its authors stated that loose electrodes and other technical problems caused HRV data to be collected on only 77% of the study’s participants. Likewise, no baseline HRV data was collected prior to participants taking mindfulness training, which would have added substance to the data itself.

While the foregoing studies each sought to explore the effectiveness of different types of abbreviated mindfulness training programs, Cavanagh, Strauss, Cicconi, Griffiths, Wyper, and Jones (2013), studied yet a different form of abbreviated approach. In their research, college students were given access to a self-help mindfulness website for 14 days, and were encouraged to log in to the site on a daily basis to listen to a 10-minute recording that contained a guided, mindfulness-based, meditation. They found that even the utilization of an abbreviated, self-help mindfulness training program resulted in a reduction of perceived stress, depression and anxiety in the students who participated in the study. This study is significant, not only because it
explored what in the literature is a unique form of abbreviated mindfulness training, but because it is the only study (known to this researcher) in which the student participants ranged in age from 19 to 51. Although Cavanagh, et al. acknowledge that there was no significant correlation between age and the attrition of participants, it is unfortunate that no data was collected documenting any differential in the personal experience of older students vs more traditional students.

There appears to be two notable patterns in the literature regarding efforts to abbreviate mindfulness training for college students. The first is the positive correlation between abbreviated approaches to mindfulness training and a reduction of stress in college students. The exception would be Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013) who found that an abbreviated mindfulness training program was effective in increasing self-compassion, but not effective in reducing distress. The second notable pattern is that all of these studies (Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon, 2013; Cavanagh, Strauss, Cicconi, Griffiths, Wyper, and Jones, 2013; Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron, 2015; Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, and Nicol, 2015; Zeidan, Johnson, Gordon, and Goolkasian, 2010) conducted their final evaluations upon the completion of the mindfulness training experience. None of them sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the mindfulness interventions weeks or months after the training programs were completed. This is a limitation of these studies collectively, given that there would be benefits to understanding the long-term effects of abbreviated mindfulness programs on college student stress.

**Mindfulness and Coping Styles.**

In regard to mitigating stress in college students, some researchers have posited that implementing mindfulness practice in one’s life should do more than only reduce stress, but
should also provide a person with specific mental skills to help cope with the challenges of life (Messer, Horan, Turner, and Weber, 2015). In this regard, the literature acknowledges that some styles of coping, such as avoidance, blaming, ignoring, and emotional coping are maladaptive and are correlated with higher levels of stress; while other coping styles such as detached coping, reappraisal, approaching, and problem-solving are more effective in reducing stress. (de Vibe, Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tysen, Hanly and Garland, 2018; Palmer and Rodger, 2009; Womack and Sloan, 2017).

In a study of 135 undergraduates, Palmer and Rodger (2009), speak of the danger of “not being mindful and living on ‘automatic pilot’” (p. 199) in which individuals respond to stressors automatically, without the awareness of how old habits are being activated, including their thoughts, body sensations and emotions. This concept of automatic pilot has been used by Kabat-Zinn (2014) as well, who describes it as taking things for granted and using limited judgements that have been arrived at automatically, with no reflection. Palmer and Rodger state that this includes coping mechanisms that are activated automatically. They affirm the maladaptive nature of some coping mechanisms, such as emotional and avoidance coping. They also sought to discover if higher degrees of mindfulness correlated with lower utilization of maladaptive coping and greater degrees of rational or detached coping, which they assert are associated with lower levels of stress. They found that students with higher levels of mindfulness had a significant positive correlation with adaptive coping styles and a significant negative correlations with maladaptive styles, as compared with students with lower levels of mindfulness. They also found that students with higher levels of mindfulness with low utilization of maladaptive coping styles experienced lower degrees of perceived stress. In light of their findings, Palmer and Rodger posit that mindfulness relates positively to adaptive coping
styles because of its emphasis on being aware of present moment experiences. They point out that mindfulness is helpful in “reperceiving” (p. 199) which may overarch self-regulation as well as behavioral and emotional flexibility which lead to well-being and, their study finds, lower stress.

In a similar study, Messer, Horan, Turner, and Weber (2015) hypothesized that college students participating in a mindfulness intervention would exhibit a reduced utilization of avoidance and emotion-focused coping and an increase in task-oriented approaches to coping compared to students in a relaxation group and a control group. They found that both the mindfulness group and the relaxation group experienced lower levels of stress than students in the control group, but the mindfulness group was not superior to the relaxation group in stress reduction. In addition, the mindfulness group was the only group that evidenced a decrease in emotion-focused coping. However, mindfulness was not found to be effective in increasing task-focused coping or reducing avoidance coping as hypothesized. This study is important because of its findings that mindfulness did not help to decrease (undesirable) avoidance coping nor did it increase (desirable) task-focused coping; therefore evidencing the need for continued research. It should be noted however, that the delivery of the mindfulness intervention was conducted online. It is difficult to determine though, if the delivery methodology is relevant to why the findings of this study indicate that mindfulness practice did not significantly affect coping styles.

Included in the category of dysfunctional coping approaches is the use of alcohol or drugs, and di Pierdomenico, Kadziolka, and Miller (2017) have found that college students who use these coping mechanisms have lower levels of mindfulness. They assert that challenges to productive and healthy expressions of coping become evident in times of elevated, daily stress, such as the stress experienced by college students. In particular they voiced concern about the
tendency for college students to use maladaptive coping and the costly implications of poor coping and high stress in the lives of students, which could include physical health risks as well as psychological distress. With this concern in mind, their study sought to explore the relationship between mindfulness, stress and coping, and they did so through the use of a coping strategies inventory as well as by measuring students’ “Galvanic Skin Response” (p. 126) to imposed stressors. They found that students with higher levels of mindfulness had lower levels of drug and alcohol use as a coping mechanism, and were also able to calm themselves more quickly after a stressful event. This study is interesting in that it provides data on student stress through the Galvanic Skin Response, a method that was not found elsewhere in the research on mindfulness and college student stress. However, the study is weak in that it measured participants’ coping ability through brief physiological responses to a momentary imposed stressor in a controlled environment. They did not consider how mindfulness may or may not be effective in helping participants cope with stressors outside of a controlled setting, neither did they test to see if mindfulness training itself may impact physiological stress measures.

While di Pierdomenico, Kadziolka, and Miller (2017), measured only a brief period of coping with stress, de Vibe, Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tyssen, Hanley, and Garland (2018) investigated the effects of mindfulness and coping six years after mindfulness practice was introduced to 144 students, with 144 other students in a control group. Like the foregoing studies, de Vibe, et al. divided coping strategies into two broad categories of avoidance-focused coping and coping that is problem-focused. Participants in the mindfulness group received training in the Kabat-Zinn (1990) model of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, and were given the option of participating in booster sessions every semester, which 54% did. This study found that after six years, participants in the mindfulness group reported increases in the trajectory of
both mindfulness and coping that was problem-centered, as well as decreases in coping that was avoidance-focused. De Vibe, et al. posit that their findings support the use of using mindfulness interventions to promote student resilience to stress, as well as the stress in their future professional lives. This study is significant because its evaluation of the effect of mindfulness practice over a six-year period. However, the authors noted that some participants in the control group sought mindfulness training independently of the study. This was contrary to the study’s original intent and design, and it is unclear how this may (or may not) have compromised the results of the overall study.

One of the limitations in the foregoing studies on mindfulness and college stress, is that participants are predominately white, creating uncertainties about the degree to which findings can be generalized to other populations. Womack and Sloan (2017) however, measured mindfulness and coping strategies of 300 students at a historically black university. They point out that this study is important because black students must deal with the stress of racial microaggressions, and that the “ambiguous form of such messages that demean, negate, or exclude the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color is often difficult to identify leading to stressors that require adaptive coping styles” (p. 409). In addition, they sought to understand the potential relationships between coping, mindfulness and racial socialization. Racial socialization, they explain, is a set of communications and behaviors between African American children and their parents that address matters of African American cultural heritage and how children should react to racial hostility found within American society (Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002). In their study, they found that both mindfulness and racial socialization messages were positively related with active coping mechanisms. They also discovered that “mindful observation was positively related to all of the
minority and culturally based racial socialization messages” (p. 408). These findings caused them to suggest that mindfulness and racial socialization promote selection of adaptive coping, and have the potential to buffer negative consequences associated with stressors experienced by African Americans. While this study is limited, in that it included only participants from a historically black university, that limitation is also its strength, showing clearly the positive effects that mindfulness can have relative to the stress experienced by African American students.

The literature on mindfulness and coping is consistent in its understanding of two things. First there is agreement that coping styles such as avoidance, ignoring, and emotional coping are maladaptive, given their relationship with high levels of stress; but coping styles such as reappraisal, approaching, and problem-solving solving tend to be more effective in reducing stress. (de Vibe, Solhaug, Rosenvinge, Tysen, Hanly and Garland, 2018; Palmer and Rodger, 2009; Womack and Sloan, 2017). Second, the literature is consistent in its findings that mindfulness is negatively correlated with maladaptive styles and positively related to coping styles that reduce stress (Palmer and Rodger, 2009; di Pierdomenico, Kadziolka, and Miller, 2017; Womack and Sloan, 2017). An exception to this is Messer, Horan, Turner, and Weber (2015), who found that although mindfulness decreased emotion-focused coping, it was not found to be effective in increasing task-focused coping or reducing avoidance coping. The implication of the foregoing, is that mindfulness practice not only has the potential to reduce stress in college students, but also to provide “a specific set of mental skills to cope with life’s challenges” (Messer, Horan, Turner, and Weber, 2015).

Conclusion
While some studies do not support a positive association between mindfulness and stress reduction with college students (Kvillemo, Brandberg, and Bränström, 2016; Myint, Choy, Su, and Lam, 2011), the majority of the research on this topic reveals a strong correlation between mindfulness and lower levels of college student stress. These findings are common across multiple ethnicities, including student groups that were predominately white (Newsome, Waldo, Gruszka, 2012), Latino (Oman, et al., 2008), and African American (Womack and Sloan, 2017). Lowered stress levels and the utilization of positive coping skills were found to be correlated with mindfulness when assessments were taken one month after a mindfulness intervention (Newsome, Waldo, Gruszka, 2012), as well as six years following the intervention (de Vibe et al., 2018). In addition abbreviated approaches to mindfulness training also appear to be effective in reducing stress Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon, 2013; Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron, 2015). Given these findings in the literature, it is clear that mindfulness practice can be helpful in reducing the stress of college students.

**Mindfulness and Leadership Stress**

While the above literature thread demonstrates the impact of mindfulness on college student stress, the purpose of this study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. Because of their dual roles, it is important to review not only the literature on student stress, but also on leadership stress as it relates to mindfulness. In this regard, a review of the literature reveals three recurring themes associated with mindfulness and leadership stress, two of which are closely aligned with the research on mindfulness and student stress. Those three themes are the positive correlation between mindfulness and lower levels of leadership stress; the
relationship between mindfulness, lower stress, and benefits to organizational life; and the implementation of abbreviated mindfulness programs.

**Mindfulness and Lower Stress Levels.**

In a time when organizations are confronted with ambiguous and unpredictable demands, the ability to quell anxiety and deal with stress are two qualities that are essential for leaders who must navigate the multiple demands of contemporary organizational life (Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, and Cunningham, 2016). Mid-level managers who must deal with such workload demands were studied by Zolnierczyk-Zreda, Sanderson, and Bedynska (2016), who state that these leaders tend to be given increased responsibility but fewer resources. They assert that these managers are under pressure to make their organizations more profitable, while also making them more effective, causing higher stress in the managers’ lives. In their research, they studied 158 middle-managers, selected from 30 randomly selected companies. Half of these leaders were placed in 4 experimental groups which engaged in 8 weekly mindfulness courses, and the other half were placed in a wait-listed control group. As a result, it was found that managers in the mindfulness group experienced significant decreases in both sickness-related absences and perceived stress as compared to managers in the waitlisted control group. In addition, they found that mindfulness was affective in decreasing the stress levels of managers regardless of the stressors’ source. One weakness of this study is that all of the leaders participating in the study came from companies in the service and financial sectors such as banks, advertising agencies and insurance companies. It is unclear as whether or not the same results would be experienced by leaders in other sectors. Nevertheless, the study does align well with Ehrlich’s (2017) research which affirmed that several Fortune 500 companies’ use and research of mindfulness because of its numerous benefits, which include stress reduction.
Pipe, Bortz, Dueck, Pendergast, Buchda and Summers (2009) studied leaders who also must deal with multiple competing internal and environmental demands. Specifically, they researched nurse leaders dealing with the stresses of a clinical environment. In their study, one group of nurse leaders participated in mindfulness training for four weeks, while another group of leaders were assigned to a control group. Interestingly, leaders in both the mindfulness and control groups, when being measured for baseline evaluations, evidenced a greater prevalence and intensity of stress than anticipated—significantly greater stress than norming samples that were based on the larger population. Consequently, the level of stress among participants was higher than that of the population in general. The original design of the study was to include measuring the stress of both the mindfulness group and the control group at baseline, after four weeks, and after 12 months. However, at four weeks, the levels of stress in the control group were so high and the reduction of stress in the mindfulness group so significantly decreased, that the study was suspended in order to allow control group members to receive mindfulness training. One of the limitations of the study is the fact that it was suspended and never included 12 twelve follow-up evaluations. Another limitation, pointed out by the study’s authors, is that all participants in the study were highly motivated to learn mindfulness practices, given their high levels of stress. It is unclear mindfulness practices may affect other leaders whose stress level may be more aligned with that of the general population and who may be less motivated.

Regarding motivation, Raney (2014) asserts that mindfulness is more than an idea, but an ongoing practice. In this assertion, she echoes Kabat-Zinn (2003) who affirms that mindfulness is not just an idea that, but is “more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and it is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice” (p. 148). After studying leaders in a community health center, Raney states that financial pressures combine with social anxiety and
increased mental illness severity have created an environment in the health center that is very stressed. She posits that while technical approaches may hold more immediate satisfaction for dealing with these problems, such approaches fail when in the presence of repeated workplace stress. Raney recommends a combination of mindfulness practice and adaptive leadership as the way for organizations and their leaders to thrive under the stresses of current conditions.

Yet a different type of leadership stress was explored by Lundqvist, Stahl, Kentta and Thulin (2018), who studied leaders of the Swedish Paralympic team who expressed concern about the highly stressed work situation that they were in during the year leading up to the Paralympics. The year prior to the Paralympics was described in this study as very stressful, filled with high workloads and unpredictable things where it is “difficult to change, control, or adequately reduce perceived stressors” (p. 14). In addition, Lundqvist et al. commented that conducting stress-reducing interventions with people carrying high workloads can present the problem of participants being motivated enough to prioritize and devote time to the intervention. In this regard, and to make it as convenient as possible, Lundqvist et al. offered a weekly web-based seminar in both mornings and afternoons on each of the 8 weeks of the training, giving participants a chance to choose the time most convenient for them. They hypothesized that Paralympic sport management leaders in the mindfulness training group would show decreased levels of stress, as well as decreases in rumination (associated with stress), improvements in mindful awareness, and improved sleep. They found that while sleep and mindful awareness did not improve, there was a decrease in perceived stress and rumination. This study has value in that is evidences the potential value of mindfulness in decreasing the stress of leaders who are exposed to periods of prolonged, high stress. The study, however, fails to capture correlations between the degree of lowered stress and the amount of mindfulness training received and
amount of personal practice engaged in, both of which were quite varied within the small participant base of 10 leaders.

Whether studying mid-level managers (Zolnierczyk-Zreda, Sanderson, and Bedynska, 2016), nursing leaders (Pipe, et al., 2009, ) or leaders of an athletic organization (Lundqvist, et al., 2018), the literature is consistent in its evidence that mindfulness positively correlates with stress reduction in the lives of organizational leaders. In this regard, the literature on mindfulness and leadership stress is highly similar to the research on mindfulness and student leader stress.

**Stress Reduction for the Good of the Organization.**

Whereas the literature on mindfulness and student stress tends to be motivated by a concern for student well-being and personal success in college (Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon, 2017; Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron, 2015; Kang, Choi, Ryu, 2009), the literature on mindfulness and leadership stress appears to focus more on the benefits of mindfulness-related stress reduction to the organization, or at least to the leader’s ability to contribute to the organization. King and Haar (2017) assert that the desire for improved job performance is one of the motivations that has caused scholars to explore the stress-reducing possibilities of mindfulness practice. In their study of senior managers at a global engineering company, they tested the relationship between mindfulness and the leadership dimensions of self-mastery and organizational transformation. While they did not test specifically for stress, their theoretical framework undergirding their hypotheses about mindfulness and job performance included the affirmation that the lower stress associated with mindfulness practice results in greater problem solving and creativity (Benson, Proctor, and DeMunn, 2003). They found that senior managers who tested with higher levels of self-awareness through mindfulness exhibited greater self-
mastery and greater capacity for organizational transformation. This study could have been made stronger if it would have also tested for levels of stress, thereby providing direct correlations between lowered stress via mindfulness and increased performance, rather than simply affirming mindfulness and stress-reduction as part of their undergirding theory. At the same time, the study is important because it does not rely on self-evaluation, but on the evaluation of supervisors to determine the relationship between mindfulness and job performance.

In a related study, Becker and Whitaker (2017) hypothesized that higher levels of mindfulness would correlate with higher levels of self-efficacy in managers. They understood self-efficacy to refer to a person’s ability to engage effectively in behaviors that result in outcomes that are desirable (Bandura, 1977). To test their hypothesis, they studied data from a survey of 480 Head Start leaders. They observed that these leaders must possess well-developed management and organizational skills which include supervising, communicating, delegating and financial decision-making within constrained budgets. They asserted that these leaders were under stress given these things, as well as the stress of balancing administrative demands and federal performance standards. In relationship to these demands, their research found that managers with higher levels of mindfulness also had the higher degrees of self-efficacy which reflected a greater ability to deal with stress, competing demands, and handle organization aspects pertaining to their work. In response to these findings, they suggest that leaders with greater mindfulness will be able to deal with stress with greater self-efficacy because mindfulness helps in the regulation of emotions. In this regard, this study is akin to the results found by King and Haar (2017) above.
While the above studies focused on the capacity of mindfulness to reduce stress and consequently help leaders contribute to their organizations, Lange, Bormann, and Rowald (2018) explored the correlation between mindfulness, stress, and the avoidance of destructive leadership as well as transformational leadership. Their definition of destructive leadership aligns with Tepper’s (2000) understanding of “Abusive Supervision, as the ‘subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained displays of hostile verbal or nonverbal behavior” (p. 178). In this regard, they also cite Zhang and Bednall (2016), in noting that the stress of leaders is recognized as the dominant predictor of destructive leadership behaviors.

With this in mind, Lange, Bormann and Rowald posited that because of the potential for mindfulness to reduce leadership stress by focusing on the present, mindfulness could therefore prevent leaders from responding inappropriately and destructively to their subordinates in response to stress. To test their hypothesis, they surveyed 60 work teams from a variety of German organizations. 60 participants were leaders and 184 were subordinates. Leaders were surveyed to test for levels of mindfulness, which subordinates were surveyed to anonymously assess their leaders’ degree of destructive vs, transformational leadership. They found that there was a negative correlation between leadership mindfulness and leadership that is destructive. They also found that there is a positive correlation between leadership mindfulness and leadership that is transformational. A weakness of the study is that its measures of mindfulness were based on leaders’ self-reporting, and therefore may be subject to bias. Its strength however, is that its correlations were substantiated by actual subordinates in multiple organizations.

As a result, these researchers recommended that mindfulness practices be used in organizations to reduce stress, and that mindfulness-based programs should be included in programs of leadership development.
The recommendation to include mindfulness training in leadership development programs is echoed by Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, and Cunningham (2016) who sought to understand the impact of mindfulness practice on qualities needed by leaders to lead effectively in times of uncertainty. These qualities included creativity, resilience, tolerance for ambiguity, dealing with stress, and quelling anxiety. To explore this, Brendel, et al. studied both educational and business leaders who attended a weekly mindfulness session for eight weeks. A control group attended a leadership class for that same period. It was found that participants in the mindfulness session experienced a significant reduction in stress, as well as an increase in the propensity for transforming creative thoughts into reality. Neither result was experienced by leaders in the control group. Their study is helpful, in that it presents evidence supporting the positive correlation between mindfulness practice and stress reduction in leaders, which they assert aids the argument for including mindfulness training in organizations who wish to develop innovations. Nevertheless, the research of Brendel, et al. should be received cautiously for at least two reasons. First, participants in the study were only required to self-identify as leaders, with no uniform definition of what leadership meant. Second, participants were required to work in organizations with cultures that not only emphasized, but also empowered a distributed form of leadership, making it difficult to generalize the study’s findings to leaders where other styles of leadership are practiced.

Whether relating mindfulness-related reduced stress to improved job performance (King and Haar, 2017); the ability to accomplish tasks (Becker and Whitaker, 2017); increase transformative leadership (Lange, Bormann, and Rowald, 2018); or increase innovation (Brendel, et al., 2016), the literature on leadership stress and mindfulness seeks to uphold how the reduced stress of the leader benefits the organization. Underlying all of these studies is the
theoretical understanding that mindfulness is related to lowering stress, “an ability that can liberate a leader’s mental resources to deal with unanticipated obstacles and setbacks” (Brendel et al., p. 1070).

**Abbreviated Forms of Mindfulness Training.**

A common theme between the literature on mindfulness and college student stress and mindfulness and leadership stress, is the experimentation with abbreviated forms of mindfulness training. Just as scholars are interested in shortened forms of mindfulness training due to the time demands faced by students (Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon, 2013; Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron, 2015); so also do scholars (Lundqvist, Ståhl, Kenttä, and Thulin, 2018; Pipe et al., 2009; Wasylkiw, Holton, Azar, and Cook, 2015) voice the concern about the multiple demands on leaders when exploring abbreviated approaches to mindfulness for them.

An example is the study of health care managers conducted by Wasylkiw, Holton, Azar, and Cook (2015). They assert that leaders feel the stress of organizational demands as their organizations rely on them to motivate others, endorse organizational goals, and deal with changing policies and fiscal cutbacks. The stated that due to the demands of work and family, leaders might be hesitant to commit to programs that are longitudinally staggered, such as a standard 8-week mindfulness training program. Therefore, leaders selected for a mindfulness intervention group were invited to attend a single weekend of mindfulness training. They found that participants in the mindfulness group experienced significant decreases in perceived stress that was sustained through an eight-week post evaluation, indicating that an abbreviated approach to mindfulness training can have a positive effect on leader stress reduction. This study is limited by its small sample, by the fact that all participants were women, and that they all came from the same company, making it difficult to generalize these findings to other populations.
However, the study is important because it included 360 reports from peers, supervisors and subordinates indicating that they perceived changes in the managers’ leadership following the mindfulness intervention, specifically in the form of leaders being more transparent and willing to seek the opinions of others before making decisions.

While Wasylkiw, Holton, Azar, and Cook (2015) studied the effect of mindfulness training that was abbreviated via attendance at a one-weekend retreat, other scholars have studied different abbreviated approaches. This is true for the studies already considered in this review. For example, Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, Cunningham (2016) studied business and educational leaders who participated in eight weekly mindfulness sessions fashioned after Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) MBSR program. The weekly sessions were 45 minutes long, compared to the standard 2.5 hour sessions. Their description of the study’s mindfulness intervention is prefaced by commentary on the pressures and demands of modern organizations the importance dealing with stress by leaders in order to be effective. They found that the 45-minute weekly sessions were, in fact, positively correlated with reducing perceived stress. Although the study’s weakness is found in letting participants self-determine if they consider themselves to be leaders or not, the study is nevertheless helpful in its demonstration that shorter, 45-minute mindfulness training sessions are affective in stress-reduction.

In the two foregoing studies, the stress-related demands placed on leaders were described as an ongoing part of modern organizational life. However, in the study by Lundqvist, Ståhl, Kenttä, and Thulin (2018) of Paralympic leaders, the high demands and stress experienced by leaders was concentrated into a one-year period preceding the start of the Paralympics. Paralympic managing team members were concerned that in the face of high workloads during this period, they had no ability to reduce or change the demands or stressful circumstances that
they experience. They were particularly concerned about gaining psychological skills relevant to managing stress in circumstances wherein “a high level of cognitive processing is needed, and time for recovery is limited” (p. 3). Participants in the study were asked to engage in a weekly mindfulness seminar for eight weeks, but the seminars were web based and participants were given the choice of taking them in the morning or afternoon. In addition, participants were encouraged to practice mindfulness exercises for 10 minutes each day, rather than the 45 minutes typically requested in traditional MBSR training. Lundqvist, et al. observed that 10 minutes of practice may be more appropriate since daily mindfulness with long duration might be understood by leaders as being highly demanding, particularly during high stress periods during or prior to championships. One weakness of this study is that members of the mindfulness group were all from one nation (Sweden) while all members of the control group were from another (Finland), resulting in making comparisons complicated by the two groups being from two separate cultural contexts. Still, the study is valuable in that it explores the effectiveness of mindfulness intervention on leaders whose high degree of stress is compressed into a defined period of time, rather than ongoing.

A different approach at abbreviating mindfulness training for leaders is the aforementioned study of nurse leaders conducted by Pipe, Bortz, Dueck, Pendergast, Buchda and Summers (2009). They posited that the complex characteristics of the clinical setting puts a burden on the ability of nurse leaders to sustain attention while dealing with competing demands. Therefore, they sought to test the effectiveness of mindfulness training that was condensed from eight weeks to four weeks. As noted earlier in this review, this abbreviated approach was so effective that the study was suspended in order to allow members of the control group to take the mindfulness training themselves, given their alarming high levels of stress. It is unfortunate that
the study was not allowed to be completed, which would have included a 12-month follow up to measure sustained results. Nevertheless, the authors concluded the study by asserting that the “feasibility and effectiveness of this approach are particularly important, given the challenges of implementing workplace programs that are available for leaders with intense time demands” (p. 136).

Of all the research studies considered in this review of the literature involving MBSR-based interventions, only one (Żołnierczyk-Zreda, Sanderson, and Bedyńska, 2016) involved participants in standardized MBSR training of eight, 2.5 hour sessions, plus a retreat. All other studies were abbreviate in the manner listed above. All studies considered the high demands and stress levels experienced by leaders, and often named these demands as the motivation for researching abbreviated forms of mindfulness training. In this regard, the research on mindfulness and leadership stress is very much aligned with the research on mindfulness and college student stress.

**Conclusion**

The literature reveals that much of the study on mindfulness and leadership stress is focused on how mindfulness on the part of leaders can benefit their organizations. This includes improving job performance and transforming the organization (King and Haar, 2017); accomplishing tasks (Becker and Whitaker, 2017); increasing transformative leadership (Lange, Bormann, and Rowald, 2018); and increasing innovation (Brendel, et al., 2016). This is different from the literature on mindfulness and student stress, which focuses more upon the individual well-being and success of the student. Nevertheless, the studies on mindfulness and leadership stress are well-aligned with the literature on mindfulness and student stress, in that both threads in the literature clearly reveal a positive correlation between mindfulness and reduced stress,
even when mindfulness training is delivered in abbreviated approaches. The literature also reveals that mindfulness is effective in reducing leadership stress across a broad spectrum of leaders including business and educational leaders (Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, and Cunningham, 2016); nursing leaders (Pipe, Bortz, Duek, Pendergast, Buchda and Summers, 2009); nonprofit leaders (Becker and Whitaker, 2017); and athletic leaders Lundqvist, Stahl, Kentta and Thulin, 2018). Given this data, the literature is consistent in revealing that mindfulness can reduce the stress experienced by leaders.

**Mindfulness and Meaning-Making**

Meaning itself is the significance felt and the sense made of the nature of a person’s own existence and being (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler, 2006). Meaning-making then, is the experience of integrating challenges or ambiguous circumstances “into a framework of personal meaning” (Van Den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schreurs, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2009). One of the theorized virtues of meaning is that meaning has the ability to be a buffer acting against stress (Mascaro and Rosen, 2006); and an “accumulating body of research has demonstrated that constructing meaningful interpretations is an effective coping strategy for dealing with stressors” (Park and Baumeister, 2017, p. 333). This study is particularly interested in the role that mindfulness practices can have in helping student leaders deal with stress through meaning-making. In this regard, the literature upholds two core elements of meaning making and mindfulness—the positive reappraisal of experiences and the savoring of experiences.

**Positive Reappraisal**

In presenting the “mindfulness to meaning theory”, Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson (2015) emphasize a distinction between hedonic understandings of happiness, which focus on pain avoidance and the obtaining of pleasure; and well-being that is eudaimonic,
referring to well-being characterized by positive, meaningful, engagement with life with a sense of purpose. The process of meaning-making is critical to eudaimonic well-being, and they assert that training in mindfulness nurtures a eudaimonic response to stress that engenders a sense of meaning in life. The mindfulness-to-meaning theory begins with the process of positive reappraisal, an adaptive process in which stressors can be reconstrued as meaningful, benign or growth promoting (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Garland, et al. assert that positive reappraisal, when it flows from mindfulness, can broaden the scope involved in one’s appraisal of things to include appreciation of even those experiences that seem aversive, which can then be vehicles for transformation and personal growth. They posit that this type of reappraisal, made possible by mindfulness, can provide meaningful experience in the midst of stress. How does mindfulness practice do this? Garland, et al. explain that immediately after experiencing a stressor, mindfulness attenuates these negative attentional biases as well as other maladaptive habits, which allows for the engagement of positive reappraisal into the regulatory process of emotion which can modulate a negative event’s impact. This process of reappraisal modifies the impact of stressors by feedforward mechanisms which then change the meaning associated with the stressor. Consequently, “an event that was appraised as threatening may be reinterpreted as innocuous, benign, or even serving some greater purpose for self or others” (p. 297). In summary, Garland et al. affirm that mindfulness works to facilitate reappraisal of stressful experiences and invokes a decentered modality of awareness which allows for a more flexible construction of adaptive appraisals. In so doing, they state that mindfulness may help to generate eudaimonic meaning. This understanding aligns well with Kabat-Zinn (2014) who asserts that functioning senses can actually get in one’s way, and that mindfulness helps one to not be captive what any thing may appear to be when first encountered with our senses. Rather,
Mindfulness helps us to capture new understandings of things that may have appeared one way to us before, but now we understand differently.

An example of this principle is seen in the research of Hjeltnes, Binder, Moltu, and Dundas (2015) who sought to discover meaning patterns in the way that students experienced mindfulness training in their attempt to deal with anxiety associated with academic evaluation. They state that a pattern occurs when a high level of convergence happens between experiences of participants who are within an area, while there is simultaneously a moderate level of difference between them. In this case, 29 college students who suffered from academic performance anxiety were interviewed within one month after completing an eight week MBSR training course. They were interviewed regarding their MBSR experience as well as about their recent exam. The study found that the mindfulness training experience resulted in meaning-making around 5 specific themes in which participants: found a source of inner calm; experienced the sharing of human struggle; were able to stay focused in a learning situation; were able to move from fear and toward curiosity in their academic learning; and, felt greater self-acceptance in facing a difficult situation (p. 5). These findings are a good illustration of Garland et al.’s affirmation that mindfulness assists with positive reappraisal in which a person can find meaning in the midst of stress. One limitation of the study is that study participants were students seeking help regarding their evaluation anxiety, suggesting that they were already motivated to seek change. It is difficult to ascertain if this eagerness on their part may have made them more open to new approaches to dealing with stress than the general population and, as the authors note, this qualitative study does not show evidence that mindfulness training had a causal effect relative to the participants’ performance anxiety. Nevertheless, the study is
valuable because of its clear demonstration of the positive association between mindfulness and meaning-making relative to dealing with stress.

A further example of positive reappraisal in the mindfulness-to-meaning process is found in the study of cancer patients by Meghani, et al. (2018). Cancer patients participated in an eight-week art therapy class which combined approaches to art therapy with core elements found in the MBSR course. Assessment was conducted at baseline, at the fourth week and at the end of the course. Assessment sought to measure symptoms, sleep quality, health-related quality of life, spiritual well-being and sense of coherence (pp. 2-3). Coherence, in this case, referred to a person’s sense of how they managed stress, including their ability to make sense out of new information. It was found that participants in the mindfulness-based training experienced improvements in depression, peace and meaning. This research team posited that these improvement may be due to the fact that in the mindfulness training sessions, participants learned how to reconstruct meanings, which included minimization of over-identifying with their illness and how to negotiate life events and their own experiences on their terms. This study was limited by a small sample size and the lack of a control group. However, it has value in that it is a well-documented example of persons reappraising their life circumstance and finding meaning through mindfulness.

Interestingly, Garland, et al. state that the process of reappraisal has been criticized as being antithetical to mindfulness, because of the emphasis among mindfulness scholars on the principle of being nonjudgmental, and thereby simply allowing things to be as they are without reconstruction of meaning. Birnbaum (2008), on the other hand, states that it is the nonjudgmental aspect of mindfulness that allows a person to maintain an openness that can lead to questions about the purpose and meaning of things. Birnbaum studied the experience of
individuals who were training to be social workers, whom she observed to experience high stress due to the nature of their field work as well as their work in the academy. Participants in the study engaged in an eight-week mindfulness course, based on Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) writing. One of the key findings was that mindfulness practice was helpful to students in meaning-making, especially in regard to their relationships with clinical instructors and their impact on the students’ emerging identities as professionals. An example given was the reflection of a participant who was concerned about not having chemistry with an instructor, but through mindfulness practice was able “to see the true nature of what is going on for me beyond my own projections” (p. 844). Other students indicated after engaging in the mindfulness training, there was no longer separation between their own self and their professional self. While this study is valuable in that it illustrates the principle of positive reappraisal, it should be considered cautiously though for two reasons. First is that Birnbaum states early on that she had a personal relationship with the participants, making it unclear how personal bias may have affected either the participants or the researcher. Second, is that the mindfulness group was a self-selected group of students who wanted to learn about mindfulness, and therefore there was no random, unbiased selection process, nor was there a control group for comparison.

**Savoring**

Lindsay and Creswell (2015) describe the mindfulness-to-meaning theory as involving multiple experiences of decentering accompanied by awareness, resulting in a “cascade of positive growth and meaning making” (p. 343). Lindsay and Creswell go on to emphasize that while a person may amend goals and may need to make sense out of adversity in the context of major events in life, promoting a sense of greater meaning in one’s life does not require major adversity. They propose that there may be more direct paths leading from mindfulness practice
to meaning, and they hold up the fact that the mindfulness-to-meaning theory includes the act of savoring which includes a focus on subtle pleasurable emotions and sensations, rather than adverse experiences. In this regard, Garland, et al. state that the act of savoring includes more than simply paying attention to the most salient aspects of an event or object, but also includes being aware of their subtle aspects and emotional impacts which can allow for an emergence of meaning. This is well-aligned with Kabat-Zinn (2015b) who asserted that mindfulness allows a person to become aware of any thought, impulse or perception that may arise in their mind. He states, in relationship to mindfulness, that “With the mind relatively steady and unwavering, any object we hold in awareness becomes more vivid, is apprehended with greater clarity” (p. 678-679).

In a study of 266 adults, ranging in age between 55 and 94, Smith and Bryant (2016) sought to understand the relationship between life satisfaction and savoring. Participants in the study completed inventories that measured their satisfaction with life, their health, and their ability to savor positive experiences. It was found that relationships between the health of older adults and the life satisfaction of older adults depends on their ability to savor the positive experiences in their lives. To be more precise, participants who demonstrated lower capability to savor associated poor health with lower levels of satisfaction with life. In contrast, those with higher levels of savoring ability had high life satisfaction levels, no matter what their level of health. This same team of scholars, in a separate, but related theoretical article, affirmed that mindfulness training might promote a sense of meaning in one’s life by enhancing one’s capacity for the savoring of positive experiences (Bryant and Smith, 2015). They add the caveat however, that “‘savoring through mindfulness’ is a redundant phrase” (p. 319) since savoring in its very definition involves mindfulness.
In a similar study, Jose, Lim and Bryant (2012) studied the relationship between savoring and daily happiness in college students. Participants completed a set of questionnaires as well as completing a web-based mood diary for 30 days. Measurements were taken for momentary happiness, pleasant events, and savoring. Their findings showed that people who savor habitually are more inclined to maintain a happy mood even without discrete positive events in their lives, compared to others who are not consistent in savoring positive events daily, and they suggest further study on the relationship between savoring and personal meaning. When considered separately, these two studies have a common limitation in that their samples were quite homogenous. Jose, Lim and Bryant studied college students, while Smith and Bryant studied older adults. When taken together however, these two studies become significant in that both research teams found similar results, albeit with two very different populations in two very different stages of life.

While the above two studies examined the experiences of younger adults (Jose, Lim, and Bryant, 2012) and older adults (Smith and Bryant, 2016), a Belgian university provided the setting for a different study that examined the experiences of mostly working adults (Quoidbach, Berry, Hansenne, and Mikolajczak 2010). In this study, 282 people participated in online measurements which they were assessed for positive affect, life satisfaction, overall happiness and the utilization of savoring. Four strategies of savoring were identified. The first, behavior display, refers to the nonverbal expression of emotions. The second strategy of savoring was being present (mindful). The third strategy is the celebration of positive events in one’s life with others. The fourth strategy is the anticipating or remembering of positive events. They found a positive correlation between savoring and happiness, and also found the range of strategies used
by participants affected their level of happiness. “The wider the range of type of savoring strategies participants used, the happier they reported to be” (p. 371).

All of these studies are well-aligned with McConnell and Froeliger (2015) who assert that over time, mindfulness practice can deepen one’s meaning-making capacity which, they state, is the capacity for positively reappraising experiences associated with suffering through the practice of savoring. This, they affirm, can help individuals reframe the contexts of their experiences. In stating this, McConnell and Froelinger provide a direct link between positive reappraisal and savoring—the two major components of the mindfulness to meaning theory. Garland et al. agree, stating that through savoring and reappraisal, positive emotions can evolve to positive meanings. In this manner, they posit, a system of savoring and positive reappraisal is promoted by mindfulness that becomes the expanded swirl “of an upward spiral that broadens awareness and builds meaning toward the growth of individual flourishing and greater engagement with life” (p. 306).

**Conclusion**

The literature reveals that the components of reappraisal and savoring which mindfulness makes possible promote meaning-making. This is seen in studies of students (Hjeltnes, et al., 2015; Jose, Lim and Bryant, 2012); senior adults (Smith and Bryant, 2016); cancer patients (Meghani, et al., 2018), and working adults (Quoidbach, et al., 2010). While the literature on mindfulness and meaning-making is not as robust as the literature on mindfulness and student and leader stress, it is nevertheless consistent across several populations of participants and scholars. That is, mindfulness helps individuals reduce their stress through meaning making.

**Summary**
The purpose of this study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. Because student leaders stand at the intersection of being both students and leaders, this review of the literature has sought to examine the research pertinent to both mindfulness and student stress, as well as mindfulness and leadership stress. In so doing, it is found that both the research on mindfulness and student stress and the research on mindfulness and leader stress is consistent in revealing a positive correlation with lower stress levels. However, this study is specifically concerned with how student leaders experience meaning-making in the midst of the stress of their dual roles. Consequently, this literature review has also included the role of mindfulness in the meaning-making process relative to stress reduction. Here too, the literature is consistent in revealing that mindfulness is effective in helping individuals lower their stress through meaning-making.

The question that this study seeks to answer is: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? Through its robust material on the relationship between mindfulness and both student and leader stress, as well as the research on mindfulness, meaning and stress reduction, the literature provides an ample foundation to support the investigation of this research question. In addition, the literature calls for continued study. For instance, Bamber and Schneider (2016), in their review of research on mindfulness and college students, call for further research to fill the gaps in the literature. To this date, this researcher is not aware of any research conducted on mindfulness and student leaders, hence, identifying a gap. Gauntlett, et al. (2017), in their IPA study of widening participation students, encourages the further examination of the students’ lived world to understand the perceptions and meanings placed in
their experiences. The current IPA study seeks to do that regarding student leaders and their experience of meaning-making while living in the stress of their dual roles. Furthermore, Mulenga, Brouze, and Gardner-Lubbe, (2016), suggest that future research should include qualitative study that would enable in-depth investigating of the nuances of role satisfaction and stress experienced in the lives of student leaders.

Given the richness of literature in regard to mindfulness and student stress, leader stress, and the relationship between mindfulness, meaning-making and stress reduction; and given the encouragement within the literature for further study; there is clear support for the investigation of the research question that is at the heart of the current study: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises?

Chapter 3: Research Design

The intent of this chapter is to describe the research design of the current study. It begins by describing the nature of qualitative research and gives special attention to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis which is the specific research methodology for this study. Attention will then be given to the participants in the study, including the sample size and setting for the research. This will be followed by an overview of the data collection and analysis processes. Finally, this chapter will include a section on criteria for quality qualitative research, and how the researcher seeks to address that criteria.

Research Approach

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with producing data that is descriptive or, in other words, data that is expressed in the words and observable behaviors of people (Taylor, Bodan,
Creswell (2015) elaborates on this, stating that qualitative research seeks to do this by using a small sample size and open-ended questions. The purpose of the current study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. A qualitative research approach has been selected because of the study’s open-ended research question and its intent to produce data that is descriptive through the words and behaviors of participants.

In addition, Taylor, Bodan, and Devault (2015) describe the following four characteristics of qualitative research, all of which the current study seeks to align with. First, “qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning that people attach to things in their lives” (p. 7). In alignment with this characteristic, this study has, as its purpose, the intent to explore meaning-making in the lives of student leaders. Second, qualitative research, in its very nature, is inductive in that it seeks to develop understandings and concepts through patterns within the data, rather than conducting data collection to assess already-established theories or hypotheses. In like manner, this researcher will not be assessing theories, but will seek to identify themes, or patterns, arising from the data. Third, qualitative research views people holistically, taking into account the context of their settings. The current study attempts to do exactly that, seeking to understand participants holistically through the use of thick description. Fourth, qualitative study is concerned with the everyday thoughts and actions of people. This researcher has sought to facilitate semi-structured interviews designed to prompt participants to share stories and thoughts from their everyday experiences in their dual roles. All of these characteristics of qualitative research, as described by Taylor, Bodan and Devault, characterize the current study.

Constructivist-interpretivist
Situated within the context of qualitative research, is the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, in which reality is understood to be constructed in the mind of the research participant (Ponterroto, 2005). Consequently, in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, there is not a single reality for subjects to be in relationship with, but rather it is understood that numerous and valid realities exist within the human experience (Chronister, Marsiglio, Linville, and Lantrip, 2014). Ponterroto explains that in this paradigm meaning is thought to be hidden, but it can be surfaced through a process of deep reflection that is stimulated through the interactive process of dialogue between the researcher and participants. He explains that it is the centrality of this interaction between investigators and the objects of their investigation that constitutes a distinguishing feature of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. The current study falls clearly within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, given that is seeks to uncover the hidden meaning in the experiences of student-leaders, and given that it assumes multiple valid realities in the experience of participants.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The current study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its research approach, which is part of the qualitative tradition, and is shaped by the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

**Source of IPA.** Philosophically, the roots of IPA can be traced to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl who, in the 1920’s, developed phenomenology as a method to study how individuals talk about events and objects, instead of describing them in accordance with predetermined categories or criteria (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Furthermore, Husserl understood phenomenological research as giving attention to how people reflect upon the everyday experiences of their lives (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). While Husserl’s
philosophy was foundational, it was further developed by Heidegger who developed phenomenological hermeneutics and stressed the importance of interpretation, given his belief that phenomenology necessitates the uncovering of hidden meanings (Shinebourne, 2011). Influenced by Heidegger, IPA studies seek to understand the experience of their subjects, and then make the meaning of that experience comprehensible via interpretative activity (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). This concept was further developed by Gadamer who believed that the researcher must be cautious of their own preconceptions prior to entering the interpretative process, because those preconceptions may not be truly known to the researcher until they arise during the interpretive process (Shinebourne). This is important, because it suggests that the researcher’s own discovery of her/his changing preconceptions is part of the interpretative process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

While the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer represent the roots of IPA philosophy, Shinebourne (2011) states that the first time IPA was utilized as a distinct research methodology was in the middle portion of the 1990’s. Shinebourne states that it was Jonathan Smith (1996) who wrote a seminal paper in which he argued in favor of an approach that would allow researchers to document experiential and qualitative dimensions of research, while still being in conversation with psychology’s mainstream. Aligned with Heidegger’s emphasis on interpretation, Smith (2004) would go on to describe IPA as involving “double hermeneutics: The participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world” (p. 40). The sources of IPA then, can be traced from Husserl and Heidegger through the seminal work of Smith.
Description of IPA. IPA has three primary philosophical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). The first of these underpinnings, phenomenology, has to do with the philosophical consideration and study regarding “being”, which includes existence as well as experience (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). To be more specific, Connelly (2010) explains that phenomenology began as an effort to understand lived experience, which is the experience as understood from the point of view of the person experiencing a phenomenon. Phenomenology seeks to understand what it is like for a person to actually live an experience, rather than simply seeking to understand how a person may react to an experience (Munhall, 2012). In IPA, the experiences being studied are not necessarily spectacular or unusual experiences, nor are they only experiences that are of interest to the researcher. Instead, Smith, Flowers and Larkin point out that the focus is upon everyday, ordinary experiences that are significant to participants in the study. They recognize that the researcher is never able to completely access the experience in its purest form, but through the careful listening and facilitating of a participant’s experience, the researcher can conduct research that is “experience close” (p. 33). Smith, Flowers and Larkin also note that phenomenology is interested in both the manifestation of things that may appear on the surface of a person’s discourse, as well as how it may be connected to or be apart from something that may be more disguised or latent—things which the phenomenologist may help to appear.

A second philosophical underpinning of IPA is idiography. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain that idiography has its focus on the particular, rather than making assertions at the level of a population or a group. They point out that IPA’s focus on the particular occurs at two different levels. First, IPA is committed to particularity in its focus on details and consequent analytic depth. Second, IPA is concerned with how specific experiential phenomena are
understood by particular individuals within particular contexts. The principle underneath idiography is the exploration of single cases prior to producing general statements (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). This is contrary to the principles that underlie many empirical studies in psychology, wherein populations and groups are examined in order to theorize that specific phenomena will take place within specific conditions (Pietkiewicz and Smith). Instead, IPA seeks to engage in a detailed analysis of individual cases, which, Smith (2011) states is followed by a search for discernable patterns which occur across the various cases. He states that when this happens IPA is interested in the balance of divergence and convergence within a sample in which shared themes are presented as well how these themes are played out in particular ways for specific individuals. It is truly idiographic, focused on the individual, because IPA “assumes a worldview in which the individual is not a passive recipient but an active interpreter of his or her subjective world” (Wagstaff, et al., 2014, p. 2). This is important to understanding IPA, as it means that the researcher first focuses on what an experience means to the participant and what its significance is for the participant (Larkin and Thompson, 2012).

The third underpinning of IPA is hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain that, in IPA, hermeneutics has to do with a dynamic relationship that exists between the whole of something and its parts. They point out that to understand a given part of something, one must look at the whole; and likewise, to comprehend the whole of something, one must look at the parts. They give the example of how a word’s meaning becomes clear only when it is seen within the contextual setting of a sentence, and, likewise, the sentence’s meaning is only understood if one understands the meanings of individual words. This principle of considering both the part and whole and their roles in helping one interpret one another is referred to as the “hermeneutic circle” (p. 28).
In IPA, theorists refer to the process of interpretation as a double hermeneutic in which “the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith, 2011, p. 10). In this double hermeneutic, the researcher attempts to comprehend what a given experience is like in the perspective of the participant; but the researcher is also attempting to form critical questions that might reveal something meaningful in the participant’s story that may not have been intended as meaningful (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). In this manner, IPA utilizes hermeneutics to make known what can be hidden while looking for meanings that are embedded within the human experience (Wagstaff, et al., 2014). The double hermeneutic has its value in that a given phenomenon is considered from two different perspectives—the perspective of the participant and the perspective of the researcher (Wagstaff, et al.).

**Different from Descriptive Phenomenology.** It this process of interpretation that separates interpretative phenomenology from descriptive phenomenology. Connelly (2010) explains that while qualitative researchers in general attempt to be aware of any personal presuppositions that they might have regarding the phenomenon that they are studying, descriptive phenomenologists seek to put aside (or bracket) their presuppositions so that they will not influence the study. He states that interpretative phenomenologists, on the other hand, believe that their ideas cannot be set aside since they are part of a person and therefore the researcher seeks to be aware of their ideas and how they might affect the study. Donalek (2004) even states that “Research is not truly phenomenological unless the researcher’s beliefs are incorporated into the data analysis” (p. 516). In other words, IPA seeks to be descriptive, but it understands that it must also be interpretative because there is not such a thing as a phenomenon that is uninterpreted (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014).
IPA Outcomes. One of the outcomes of IPA, according to Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006), is the giving of voice to participants. They go on to explain that giving voice to participants involves much more than simply collecting what participants say and then representing them. In fact, they assert that such a simplistic approach actually undermines IPA’s potential to explore and communicate participants’ viewpoints and experiences. They state that the IPA researcher must always attempt to understand the world of their participants, and that giving voice also includes the interpretative component of IPA which contextualizes the participants’ statements within their own environment and culture.

Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) state that a second outcome of IPA study is making sense of participant experience. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) go so far as to state that the exploration of how participants make sense out of their experiences is actually the primary goal of the IPA researcher. They state that, in IPA studies, the researcher tries to comprehend the experience of their participants, and then make the meaning of that experience comprehensible through interpreting it. To be specific, IPA is not primarily concerned with the meaning of unusual or spectacular happenings, but IPA research is especially concerned with what occurs when the flow of everyday lived experience becomes significant for people (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

A third outcome of IPA study is that the researcher needs to be able to describe how the study’s findings are relevant to practice (Connelly, 2010). For example MacNeela and Gannon (2014) conducted an IPA study that sought to understand the experience of college students relative to their volunteer identity and behavior. The themes resulting from their open-ended questions allowed them to describe how volunteering was not only meaningful to the students, but that it also made a positive contribution to their sense of self-coherence and development—
relevant information for practitioners in the student development field. Likewise, Horton-Deutsh, Young, and Nelson (2010) sought to understand the experience of becoming a leader in nurse faculty programs. Their findings caused them to describe recommended components that could be included in leadership development programs. In both of these cases, the IPA studies clearly articulated the themes resulting from their research in a manner that was relevant to practitioners in their related fields.

**Appropriateness of IPA for the Current Study.** The current study seeks to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. IPA is an appropriate research model for this study for both practical and philosophical reasons.

Philosophically, IPA is appropriate for this study since IPA studies focus on the examination of how individual persons make meaning out of their experiences (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014), which is well-aligned with the purpose of this study which pertains to mindfulness practices and the experience of meaning-making by student leaders. In addition, Sikh and Spence (2016) have asserted that mindfulness practice cannot be fully understood through western research methods because western dualistic worldviews cannot comprehend the nondualistic worldview that underpins the philosophy of mindfulness. They state however, that mindfulness hermeneutics do fit with the “nondualistically aligned Western philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer” (p. 1). This is important, since the philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer shaped the philosophical foundation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Shinebourne, 2011). Sikh and Spence (2016) posit that this non-dualistic world view resident in Heidegger’s philosophy is similar to the one found in eastern philosophy wherein the individual as well as the phenomenon being investigated are two parts of a common reality in which one
needs to suspend the dualities in their lives created by one’s language and thoughts (Sikh and Spence, 2016). They state that Heidegger’s philosophy includes an unfolding of understanding and being that is similar to the unfolding of understanding and being that occurs during mindfulness practice.

In terms of practicalities, IPA’s idiographic focus seeks to engage in a detailed analysis of individual cases, followed by a search for discernable patterns which occur across cases (Smith, 2011). This is well-aligned with the intent of the current study, which focuses on the detailed experiences of individual student leaders. The current study does not seek to understand unusual, spectacular, or rare experiences in the lives of student leaders, but seeks to understand if mindfulness practices are helpful in the experience of meaning-making as they experience the stress of their dual roles while living out their everyday lives. This too, is well-aligned with IPA which is primarily concerned with what occurs when the flow of everyday lived experience becomes significant for people (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). In this regard, the principle of the double-hermeneutic in IPA studies is especially helpful in that while the researcher attempts to comprehend what a given experience is like in the perspective of the participant, the researcher also works with participants in flexible collaboration in the process of interpreting relevant meanings in order to make sense out of a given topic (Reid, Flowers, Larkin, 2005).

Finally, IPA is appropriate for this study because there is already precedent in the literature of IPA being utilized to conduct research regarding mindfulness. Solhaug, et al. (2016) used an IPA approach to understand the experience of students seeking to learn mindfulness practice. Other IPA studies on the impact of mindfulness include studies on the impact of mindfulness on Parkinson’s patients (Fitzpatrick, Simons, and Smith, 2010); the experience
couples who practiced mindfulness while expecting their first child (Gambrel and Piercy, 2015); and the impact of mindfulness on clinical psychology trainees (Hemanth and Fisher, 2015).

In sum, IPA is an appropriate research methodology for the current study, given the affinity between the philosophical underpinnings of mindfulness theory and IPA (Sikh and Spence, 2016); the exploration of meaning-making resident in both IPA research and the focus of the current study (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014); and the already-established precedent in the literature regarding IPA research utilized in mindfulness studies.

**How IPA Shapes Questions.** IPA concerns itself with detailed examinations of participants’ lived experiences, as well as the meaning of those experiences to the participants (Smith, 2011). In this regard, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain that the questions asked in IPA research focus on the understanding that individuals have about their experiences. They state that questions in IPA research should be open questions that should be exploratory rather than explanatory, and that they lead toward understanding meaning rather than causality. They assert that the IPA researcher therefore, will ask questions that will help people talk about experiences, understandings and activities that help them to make sense of things. As Moriah (2018) asserts, there are many ways in which the same experience can be interpreted, and IPA is concerned about comprehending participant experiences via their own lenses, believing that only their perspective has the ability to infer their meaning. At the same time, Smith, Flowers and Larkin posit that IPA researchers should approach a research question “sideways” (p. 58). By this, they mean that it is not effective or helpful to ask the primary research question directly to the participant. Rather, they suggest that the interview be established as an experience that facilitates a discussion of topics that will allow the researcher’s question to be subsequently answered via the process of analysis. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state that IPA questions
can ask people to describe things, to tell stories, to talk about contrasts and to evaluate their own thoughts and feelings. Consequently, they recommend the use of semi-structured interview schedules.

**Participants**

**Sampling Type and Size**

On one hand, there is no hard and fast rule as to the number of participants that an IPA study should include (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). Sample sizes are usually small though, for a variety of reasons. Pietkiewicz and Smith state that sample sizes are small because the primary concern of IPA is giving full appreciation and attention to the account of each participant, making samples small in order to enable a detailed, albeit time-consuming, analysis of each case. This is important in IPA because the small sample size allows the researcher to study a phenomenon in greater depth than with surveys, allowing the researcher to be deeply engaged with the study's data, and consequently with the phenomenon (Amour, Rivaux and Bell, 2009; Connelly, 2010). Smith (2011) agrees, pointing out that IPA demands qualitative analysis that is intensive in its detailed accounts of personal information derived from its participants. Larkin and Thompson (2012) add that participants in IPA samples are necessarily small, as they are not only homogenous, but that the IPA researcher is less interested in the quantity of data collected, but is concerned primarily about the quality of data produced by interviews that are detailed, reflective and rich.

Participants in this study were recruited through purposive sampling, typical of IPA research (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). In purposive sampling, researchers recruit specific participants whose life experience includes expertise relative to the phenomena that is being studied (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007; Wagstaff and Williams, 2014). This study explores if
mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. Student leaders have been defined as undergraduate students who have positional authority (Domingue, 2015; McKenzie, Iverson, Crowe, and Kulics, 2015) and who are typically leaders of campus government or club organizations (Curtis and Burnett, 2017). Therefore, participants in this study are student leaders in a private liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States. Specifically, participants in this study are student leaders who are dormitory floor leaders, given that the stress of these leaders has been well-documented in the literature (Belch and Mueller, 2003; Keashly, Hunter and Harvey, 1997), and that at the site university, they meet the definition for student leaders cited above.

Over 100 student leaders received an invitation to participate in an eight-week course in Mindfulness based on Kabbat-Zinn’s (2003) Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). This included invitations to 16 dormitory floor leaders (called House Presidents in the site university) who are the specific subjects of this study. Invitations were extended by the Mindfulness course instructor and the dormitory floor leaders’ staff advisors. The MBSR training was conducted by a member of the university faculty who has been certified in MBSR. After the MBSR course had begun, this researcher contacted the MBSR course instructor, and asked her to announce to House Presidents that volunteers are being sought to be interviewed at the conclusion of the course to talk about their experience as a dormitory floor leader. Interested student leaders were asked to volunteer with the course leader. This researcher did not participate in the invitation or recruiting process, nor did he participate in the conducting of the MBSR training. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) state that professional doctorates should include four to ten interviews, with the assumption that each participant will be interviewed twice, suggesting that between two and five participants is a good number for IPA research. This study included six
participants, which is slightly larger than the sample recommended by Smith, Flowers and Larkin, but is a number supported by the literature in IPA studies of mindfulness (Gauntlet, et al., 2017; Griffiths, Camic, and Hutton, 2009; Hemanth and Fisher, 2015).

**Setting**

In order to access a homogenous sample (Larking and Thompson, 2012), a single site for this study was selected. The site selected is a private liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States. This site was selected for three reasons. First, the university’s student leader program has an optional mindfulness training component, creating a potential pool of student leaders who will experience mindfulness training. Second, the person conducting the mindfulness training at the university teaches the MBSR model developed by Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015), whose theoretical framework this study utilizes. Third, Wagstaff and Williams (2014) speak of the importance of the researcher developing relationships with participants prior to the interview which can allow the participant to share more deeply. In this regard, this site has been chosen because of the researcher’s access to it and consequent capacity to build rapport with participants.

**Procedures**

**IRB Approval**

After submitting and defending this research proposal, and after receiving approval from the dissertation chair, the researcher submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Northeastern University. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher also submitted a required application to the Institutional Review Board of the university where the field research will be taking place. This will ensure that the research project meets the ethical principles for the use of human subjects as understood by both universities.
Data Collection

In this study, data was collected through one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant, in which the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. This is the most common form of data collection in IPA research (Smith, 2011). The one-on-one approach is important because IPA research places primary concern on eliciting detailed, rich, personal accounts of the phenomena and experiences being investigated (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). The researcher is also expected to work with participants in a flexible collaborative manner that is aided by this type of one-on-one engagement (Reid, Flowers, Larkin, 2005). The semi-structured nature of the interviews is critical because it allows the participant and the researcher to experience real time dialogue, which gives flexibility for the investigation of unexpected or original issues when they arise (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014).

In this study, participants were asked where they would like the interview to occur, as advised by Smith, flowers and Larkin (2009), who point out the importance of an interview site that is comfortably familiar for the participant. Each interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. Although the order of questions may differ from interview to interview (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014), a common interview schedule was be used. As noted earlier, Smith, Flowers and Larkin posit that IPA researchers should approach a research question “sideways” (p. 58), in that they should not ask the primary research question directly to the participants. Instead they counsel that the researcher should facilitate a discussion of topics that will allow the primary question to be subsequently answered via the process of analysis. The primary research question in this study is: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? To approach this question “sideways” the following interview schedule in Figure 1
below will be used. It is informed by the advice of Smith, Flowers and Larkin who suggest that interview schedules with between 6-10 questions tend to produce conversations between 45-90 minutes.

![Figure 1: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule](image)

1. Can you tell me about your experience of becoming a House President?
   
a. What has your experience as a House President been like?

2. What have been your biggest successes?

3. What are the biggest challenges that you face?

4. What kind of things are the biggest help to you in dealing with challenges?

5. Can you tell me about a time that you had an experience that seemed negative at first, but then took on a different meaning for you later?
   
a. What do you think helped that new understanding to happen?

6. As you look back over your life this semester, what experiences have been most significant for you?
   
a. What impact did those experiences have on you?

7. Can you tell me about the demands that are on your plate this semester, and what you do to deal with those demands?

8. How would you contrast your experience as a House President now, compared to when you first started?
Data was collected through the use of a digital voice recorder, and verbatim transcripts will be produced, since verbatim transcripts are essential in IPA, given that they retain the participants’ voice in expressing their personal experiences (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). After conducting analysis of data, as described below, additional data was collected as participants were interviewed a second time. Wagstaff and Williams (2014) state that when analyzing the data, one can discover lost opportunities, and that a second opportunity to interview a participant can help the researcher gain richness and greater clarity. Interview questions for these second interviews were created based upon the issues needing further exploration. After conducting data analysis on the second set of interviews, the researcher met with participants a third time. The purpose of this third meeting was member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in which participants had the opportunity to comment upon the researcher’s interpretations of their comments.

Analysis

After the data was collected, analysis of the data was conducted in six steps as outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). In the first step, the verbatim transcript for the first participant was read and re-read. This included listening to the audio transcript of the interview in order to perceive pauses, tones, and other nuances that might not be captured in a written transcript alone. The second step in the analytical process consisted of the initial “noting” (p. 83) of the transcript. Notations include three types of comments. Descriptive comments highlight things which structure the thoughts and experiences of the participant and include key phrases or words in the transcript. These descriptive notations are not the researcher’s thoughts or interpretations, but are the things which “matter to the participant” (p. 84) and make up the content of their world. Notations during this step also include the participant’s use of repetition,
metaphor, tone and use of language. In addition, Smith, Flowers and Larking state that this step includes conceptual notations that include comments that shift away from explicit language in the transcript and toward the possible overarching understanding that a participant may have about a matter. Conceptual notations may also include questions for the participant in order to seek clearer, more detailed understandings.

The third step of analysis used in this study, as outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), is the identification of emerging themes and the order in which they come up. This includes focusing on discrete pieces of the original transcript, but it also includes a review of the notations from step number two. In this manner, Smith, Flowers and Larkin point out that the emerging themes are not only a reflection of the participant’s original thoughts and words, but the emerging themes also reflect the researcher’s interpretation.

Once emerging themes have been identified, the analytical process moves to step number four, which is the search for and identification of connections that exist between the themes that have emerged. This study follows Smith, Flowers and Larkin’s (2009) advice in that it looks for connections between themes that are characterized by, what they refer to, as abstraction, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function. Abstraction refers to the process of putting like themes together and creating a name for that cluster of like themes. Polarization is the identification of opposites or differences between themes, which can assist in organizing one’s analysis. Contextualization refers to temporal, contextual or narrative contexts that may connect themes. Numeration pertains to the frequency with which themes appear, which might be an indication of importance. Function, as the name implies, refers to a theme’s apparent function with a given transcript and may pertain to how meanings are organized in the experience and perception of a participant. Once connections between themes are identified, a
visual representation portraying the relationship and structure of emerging themes will be
developed. This is done through the development of a table that will display the emerging
themes.

Once the structure of emerging themes has been developed, Smith, Flowers and Larkin
(2009) then suggest moving to step five, which is moving to the transcript of the next participant
and repeating the above four steps. This procedure is then followed for all transcripts. After
doing so, they describe step number six as the process of looking for and identifying patterns
across the various cases. In the current study, consistent with Smith, Flowers, and Larkin’s
outline, the tables from each of the participant cases were laid side by side and were examined
for connections that exist across cases, how one case may illuminate another, and what themes
across all cases appear to be most potent or dominant. Ultimately, a single table was created that
shows the connections between all participants. This table is accompanied by a detailed
commentary on the themes and their connections.

Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research

Ethics

When speaking of ethics, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) affirm the importance of
informed consent and participant anonymity. In the current study, seeking consent to interview
was accompanied by informing participants about the type of information being sought from
them (their stories and thoughts relative to their experience of practicing mindfulness while in
their dual roles). Participants were also assured of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.
Tracy (2010) affirms the foregoing and adds the importance of securing interview data as an
ethical practice. In this study interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and backed up
by a second voice recorder. Following each interview, recordings were transferred to secure
digital files, accessible only to the researcher, and the recordings were erased from the personal devices used during the interviews. Digital files of the interviews were then forwarded to a confidential transcription service which produced a verbatim transcript of the interviews. All written transcripts were kept in a secure, locked file, accessible only to the researcher.

In addition, this study followed all ethical/procedural guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board of both Northeastern University and the site university where the interviews occurred. Because IPA research is responsible for giving voice to participants, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with participants, not only to seek additional information, but also to engage in member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in which participants had the opportunity to comment upon preliminary interpretations or earlier comments. In this manner, the researcher sought to avoid any misrepresentation of participant voice.

**Credibility**

This study’s credibility is determined through a variety of means. Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm the importance of prolonged engagement in a given field in order to understand the phenomena being studied. This researcher has observed and has listened to the stories of college student leaders for over 25 years in multiple settings. Tracy (2010) adds to this by saying that the longer a researcher is present and watching, the greater the likelihood that cultural values will be noticed. This researcher has been engaged with student leaders in a liberal arts setting for over 5 years. Tracy goes on to say that credibility in qualitative study is achieved through thick description and multivocality. In the current study, thick description (Geertz, 1973) was used extensively through detailed, semi-structured interviews. In alignment with Tracy’s advice, the participants’ thoughts and experiences were captured in such detail, that readers will hear the
participants’ voices and will be able to appreciate their own conclusions on a matter, rather than the researcher telling readers what they must think. Regarding multivocality, the voices of 6 participants are expressed in the current study, resulting in themes arising from their multiple voices.

In addition, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) affirm the importance of assessing the validity of qualitative research generally, and IPA in particular, by using the four criteria presented by Yardley (2000). This study evidences the first criteria, sensitivity to context, by allowing participants to select the location of the interviews, and by ensuring that participants’ voice is heard and understood. The second principle, commitment and rigor, will is seen in the study’s thoroughness, including its internal audit. Coherence and transparency, the third principle, is seen in the clear connection between themes and how clearly contradictions and ambiguities are dealt with. The fourth principle, importance and impact, will be evidenced in the findings and their relationship to both scholarship and practice.

**Transferability**

As noted above, Tracy (2010) stresses the importance of thick description (Geertz, 1973) for credibility. In like manner, Lincoln and Guba (1985) hold up thick description as an important element of transferability, since the detailed description of a phenomena can help the researcher evaluate the degree to which conclusions can be transferred to other situations, settings, times and people. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explains this concept further by saying that in IPA research, one can think of theoretical transferability instead of empirical generalizability. They state that the IPA researcher needs to provide a contextualized, rich, and transparent analysis that will enable the reader to assess the study’s transferability to people in other contexts which are similar. They go so far as to say that “the effectiveness of the IPA study
is judged by the light it sheds within this broader context” (p. 51). The current study maximizes transferability by capturing participant story and thought in details rich enough for participant voices to be heard by the reader who, in turn, can discern the study’s transferability to other circumstances and populations.

**Internal Audit**

While it is important to present research findings in a manner that has clear implications for both future scholarship and practice (Yardley, 2000), it is also important that the research path leading to those findings is clearly described (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Therefore, the current study has maintained an internal audit which will allow the reader to follow the process and details of the research step by step (Shenton, 2004). In IPA research, according to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), such an audit could include interview schedules, annotated transcripts, and tables describing emerging themes and the project’s final report. The current study maintained an internal audit so that the reader will be able to follow the research process and be enabled to see the clear relationship between the rich detail of participants’ experiences and the themes presented. In this manner, it is hoped that this study will be characterized by transparency and honesty, which Tracy (2010) asserts is one of the purposes of an internal audit.

**Self-Reflexivity and Transparency**

The purpose of this study is to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. This researcher recognizes that he does not approach this matter in a vacuum, but that his interest in the topic arises out of his own professional and personal background. To avoid bias in the research, it is important for the researcher to examine his own background and professional life, so that potential biases can be identified and avoided (Reason and Broido, 2005).
Therefore, the researcher has sought below to identify and self-disclose potential personal biases, as well as describing how the impact of these potential biases can be minimized.

**Positionality**

**Upbringing.** I was raised in suburban areas of both the Midwest and southern United States. I understand that my parents had a profound impact in shaping my life, including statements of my father who frequently reminded me about the value of hard work and the importance of pursuing things that I thought were important. This encouragement was coupled with my mother’s encouragement to not lose sight of things that were important to me and that I enjoyed. As I went to college, these two strands of advice no doubt influenced my decisions to invest my energy in projects and leadership roles that I believed in and gave me joy. However, I had not yet learned the importance of balance, and I soon encountered the stress associated with the demands of my academic work combined with the demands of leading college organizations. Although too immature to realize it, these stresses were joined by the stresses of transitioning into an emerging adult. As a result of the stress, both my grades and my overall well-being suffered. It is important for me to remember that the stresses associated with my dual roles in college may not be at all relevant to the stresses experienced by study participants. I must remember this because, as Briscoe (2005) asserts, misinterpretations can take place when one brings their own personal experience and history to bear when attempting to understand a new situation. Therefore, I have sought to be intentional about focusing on the research data itself, and listening to the experiences of participants, without inserting perceptions that might be fragments of my own personal experience. Knowing this will help me avoid unnecessary bias.

**Professional Experience.** In the 25 years previous to working in higher education, my professional experience was in an international, faith-based nonprofit organization. My
responsibilities during my first several years with the organization focused on giving administrative, personal, and training support to volunteer leaders in various areas of the United States who worked in a variety of professional roles outside of their volunteer leadership roles. I was struck with the variety of ways in which these leaders dealt with the stress of their dual roles. Some seemed to live lives that were well-balanced between their leadership role, their professional lives and their family life. Most, however, spoke of being overworked, and expressed concern about the toll that the stress of their multiple roles were taking on their relationships, energy, and overall well-being. I remember experiencing a strong desire to help them find ways to deal with their stress in order to find greater degrees of balance, peace, and well-being. While this may have been a well-motivated desire, I have attempted to not let my own desires for people result in bias that might influence the present study. I have sought to maintain a focus on the participants and what is meaningful to them, rather than on any desires that I might have on their behalf. Being aware of this is helpful in avoiding potential bias through staying focused on proper methodology and upon giving voice to the participants (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

During the last 10 years of working for the same organization, my responsibilities focused on giving strategic, administrative and leadership training support to organizational field officers located in multiple nations. This required extensive international travel that typically involved living in the neighborhoods, villages, and homes of the field officers during the course of our leadership development sessions, which often included discussions about dealing with stress. Participants in these training events were both full-time professional leaders, as well as volunteers, all who came from quite diverse racial, national, political and socioeconomic backgrounds. All of them however, were familiar with the stresses of leadership and dual roles.
Some dealt with the stresses of living in the midst of war and were attempting to keep their families safe while leading efforts for peace. Others dealt with the stress of seeking to build inter-faith relationships between major world religions, while living in places where inter-faith dialogue was discouraged. Some dealt with the stresses of leading companies while raising families and leading local charities. All of them had rich experiences in living in the stress of dual roles, including their leadership roles. These experiences taught me a great deal about how cultural and familial contexts can shape a person’s attitude about living in stressful conditions. I also learned how important it is for leaders to be able to discover and articulate their own motivations for dealing with stress, rather than presenting a uniform understanding about leadership and stress that everyone would be expected to resonate with. This was especially true in places where it is not culturally appropriate for a leader to admit that his/her leadership role is creating stress. This experience has been helpful to me as I interviewed student leaders who also come from a variety of subcultural backgrounds. I have not assumed that their relationship with stress is uniform, but have allowed themes within and between their stories to emerge however they will.

For the past 5 years, I have served as the Vice President for Student Life at a private liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States. I know that I have been profoundly impacted by a statement made to me by one of the university’s professional counselors who told me that approximately two-thirds of the university’s student leaders seek counseling at some point due to the stress associated with their dual role as student and leader. This, combined with concerns expressed by the professional staff who advise student leaders, has caused me to be deeply concerned that emerging adults may be poorly managing the stress of their dual roles in the formative years of cultivating their personal leadership styles, which could lead to problems
in later leadership roles. This aspect of my professional positionality is helpful, in that it gives me a heightened awareness of these young leaders’ context (Tracy, 2010; Yardly, 2000). I cannot assume, however, that I know their personal stories or have an understanding of their experiences and perspectives. Therefore, I have attempted to let them speak for themselves in as much rich detail as possible, so that their thinking is what becomes evidenced in the data, whether or not it aligns with my interests and concerns held prior to this study.

Although I recognize my personal interests, and consequently my potential bias relative to the current study; Finlay and Gough (2015) and Tracy (2010) affirm that exercising reflexivity in which one maintains critical self-awareness of how one’s background can impact the research process is, in fact, a way to isolate and reduce the impact of such bias. I am dedicated to this discipline, and I am also dedicated to following sound IPA research processes (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009) in order to allow the participants’ voice to be heard in the clearest sense possible.

**Limitations**

This study seeks to explore if mindfulness practices are helpful to student leaders in the experience of meaning-making as they live in the stress of their dual roles. It is anticipated that the design of the research project itself will result in at least four limitations. The first is its small sample size. Because the study seeks to understand meaning-making within a specific population, student leaders, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is being utilized as the research methodology. IPA, by its very nature, calls for a small sample (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). While a small sample size is recognized as a limitation, it is the intent of this researcher that the use of thick description will result in the experiences of participants being captured in
such detail, that the reader will be able to assess the study’s transferability to people in other contexts which are similar (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

A second limitation is related to sample size. Specifically, all participants in this study held a common leadership role—dormitory floor leader. It is unclear if the stresses and circumstances of other student leadership roles are sufficiently different to result in different findings.

A third limitation of the study is that while there are multiple approaches to mindfulness training (Bamber and Schneider, 2016), the approach of Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015) provides the theoretical lens for this study. Participants in this study therefore, will have been limited to taking coursework specifically in Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR approach to mindfulness practice. It is impossible to know, therefore, how results may differ in the experience of other student leaders who may experience a different approach to mindfulness exercises.

A fourth limitation of this study is that it does not take into consideration any previous experience that participants may have had stress mitigation practices which could shape the manner that participants deal with their dual roles. However, it is also true that regardless of their exposure to stress mitigation techniques in the past, this study seeks to understand their experience after practicing mindfulness exercises.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study seeks to explore the research question: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings that emerged from interviews with six student leaders at a private university in the Midwestern United States.
The chapter begins by presenting an overview of participant profiles. It then presents the findings from interviews with participants as they shared their thoughts and stories relative to their lived experience as full-time college students who also serve as student government leaders.

Those findings are described in three themes and six subthemes that emerged from the interviews. The first theme is the development of new habits in the lives of participants since their participation in a mindfulness class. This theme includes two subthemes: 1) the use of newly-learned mindfulness practices; 2) creating private space for mindfulness and self-care. The second theme is the experience of perceived stress relief that participants experienced and associated with mindfulness practices. This second theme includes two subthemes: 1) stress relief accompanied by relaxation; and 2) stress relief through personal organization. The third theme is the reduction of stress through meaning-making and includes two subthemes: 1) savoring; and 2) positive reappraisal. The chapter will conclude by summarizing findings in relationship to the research question and the project’s theoretical framework.

**Participant Profiles**

Participants in the study were 6 undergraduate students serving as dormitory floor leaders at a private university in the Midwestern United States. At the site university, these student leaders are referred to as House Presidents. To be selected for this role, a student must have at least junior class status. They are elected by their peers, hired as employees of the university, and charged with program coordination for and oversight of dormitory floor units, referred to as houses. Each house consists of 30-40 undergraduate students, ranging from freshmen to seniors. House Presidents are both overseers of their dormitory floor, and also representatives of the administrative branch of university student government.
As House Presidents, participants in the study are responsible for managing an appropriated budget; coordinating academic, social, and other initiatives; serving as mandatory Title IX reporters, and administering university conduct policy. In addition, each House President leads a Council of 5 elected peers, with whom they collaborate to develop inclusive environments in their house, all of which include student populations from diverse ethnic, national and socioeconomic backgrounds.

House Presidents are selected by a process that includes a preference vote of the people in their house and board interviews with a board of Residence Life professionals and former House Presidents. If selected, House Presidents experience over 100 hours of position-specific leadership training prior to beginning their term of service. Once their term of service begins, they are enrolled in a weekly for-credit leadership practicum. Participants in this study, in addition to the leadership practicum, attended an 8-week Mindfulness Meditation course, based on John Kabbat-Zinn’s (1982, 2003, 2015) Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The course was taught by a faculty member who had received certification in MBSR.

Participants included three women and three men. There was one senior and five juniors. All participants were between 20 and 23 years of age.

**Jillian**

Jillian is a 20 year old junior who is studying Biology. During her first two years of college, she was a varsity track and cross country athlete, but during her junior year decided to focus her energy on the leadership opportunity she was given to serve as House President. Jillian applied for the position primarily because of the previous House President’s example which inspired her to apply. Jillian considers herself to be an introvert, so the role’s demand for availability has been a challenge. Nevertheless, she has enjoyed the experience. Jillian had no
previous mindfulness experience, and her previous way of dealing with stress included talking with close friends and physical exercise, especially running.

**Nate**

A 21 year old junior, Nate is studying Business Administration and Sports Management. During the data gathering process for this project, he was selected in a campus-wide election to serve as the university’s Intramurals Director the following year. Nate has always been attracted to leadership roles and has served in smaller scope roles in the past. Like other participants, he saw his House President predecessors as admirable people, but unlike the other participants, it was not the influence of his predecessors that inspired him to apply for this position. Instead, Nate found himself in the House President role due to the influence of seniors who encouraged him to apply for the position in order to lead the house in new directions. Nate had no prior mindfulness training, with the exception of some mindful body scan training. His previous ways of dealing with stress were talking to other House Presidents, going to movies, and watching videos.

**Emily**

In addition to being a 20 year old junior studying Elementary Education, Emily is also an accomplished musician who performs in various ensembles on campus. She acknowledges the demands and late nights of the House President role, but has found it to be an empowering experience—making her a more confident person. She wants to help people and witnessed the opportunity to do so in the examples of previous House Presidents, whose examples prompted her to apply for this role. Emily had no prior mindfulness training, and her previous ways of dealing with stress were journaling, listening to music, prayer, playing her violin, or talking to her mom whom she holds to be a wise adviser.
James

James is a 23 year old senior who is studying Business Administration and Sports Management. He had no inclination to be a House President until he was recruited to apply by his predecessor. He has more responsibilities now than he would like to have, but he has also found his experience rewarding because of his opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives. He also acknowledges the role as an important step in his overall professional development. James had no previous mindfulness experience, and his previous ways of dealing with stress included talking with current and former House Presidents, refreshing himself through sleep, and video games.

Caitlyn

A 20 year old junior studying Agricultural Business, Caitlyn originally did not want to serve as a House President because of how much work it entailed and the late hours it required. She also considers herself to be a very private person who was challenged to be in a role in which she is so often is in demand to meet the needs of other people. However, she has found this leadership experience to be one that has built her self-confidence and helped her grow in her self-understanding. Caitlyn had no prior mindfulness training, and her previous ways of dealing with stress were reading a book, taking a hot bath, or running.

Jackson

Jackson is a 21 year old junior who is studying Biology. He came to the university on a baseball scholarship, and played ball for the first two years in college. However, he became interested in the residence life program of the university and was inspired by his own House President who was of personal help to Jackson and others. In response, Jackson concluded his involvement with baseball in order to “give back” to the residence life program. Like Caitlyn, he
was uncertain about becoming a House President at first because of the role’s demands, but he has valued his House President experience as an experience of professional growth. Jackson had no prior mindfulness training, and his previous way of dealing with stress was to slow down and step back from the stressful situation, evaluating what to do next.

**Themes and Subthemes Arising From the Data**

Participants shared rich information in stories and thoughts about their experience as full time students and House Presidents. Emerging from that information are three themes and six subthemes. These themes and subthemes are examined in the following paragraphs, but a synopsis of their responses appear in table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.1 Patterns in the Data.**

In the table below, “yes” indicates that a participant spoke affirmatively about the theme/subtheme; “no” indicates that a participant stated that the theme/subtheme was not part of their experience; “NC” indicates that a participant had no comment at all on the theme/subtheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Subtheme #</th>
<th>Theme/Subtheme</th>
<th>Caitlyn</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Jillian</th>
<th>Nate</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Jackson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Development of new habits</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.a</td>
<td>Use of newly-learned mindfulness practices</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.b</td>
<td>Creating private space for mindfulness and self-care</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Perceived stress relief</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.a</td>
<td>Stress relief accompanied by relaxation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.b</td>
<td>Stress relief through personal organization</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Stress relief through meaning-making</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.a</td>
<td>Savoring</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.b</td>
<td>Positive reappraisal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1. Development of New Habits**
While all participants spoke of the stress they experienced in their dual roles of being full-time students and leaders of student government organizations, five out of six participants identified new habits for dealing with stress that they have incorporated into their lives as a result of attending a mindfulness class. These habits are the use of newly-learned mindfulness practices, and the creation of private space for self-care and mindfulness practice.

**Subtheme 1.1. Use of newly-learned mindfulness practices.** All participants shared unique stories and perspectives regarding how they deal with the stress of their dual roles. All but one participant shared that they have incorporated into their lives the use of at least one of the practices that they learned during the mindfulness class that all participants attended.

For instance, Caitlyn spoke about implementing mindful breathing into her life—something that she learned in the mindfulness class. She talked about how the stress of her academics and leadership role caused her to lose sleep, and how sometimes she had trouble going to sleep even when she went to bed. To address this problem, she has adopted the practice of mindful breathing. Caitlyn described this practice as a “focus on your breathing. If memories come in, just push them out.” She has found this practice to be so significant in her life, that she has recommended it to family members who are under stress:

> I went home. My little brother—he’s kind of stressed at school—isn’t going to sleep. I was like, ‘well, when you go to bed at night, lay there, lay on your back and just focus on your breathing. Just try that, because that works for me’.

Caitlyn practices mindful breathing at other times than bedtime as well. She finds that it helps her to take 15 minutes for this practice whenever she wants to. In addition, Caitlyn has combined mindful breathing with the stretching exercises that she learned in the mindfulness
class. She describes the yoga stretching exercises as a “type of release” that she finds to be very calming. She says, “I mean, it hurts and then you're like ah, this feels good and you can actually feel it. It's more physical than mental kind of thing. And it's also nice just to know that you're kind of helping your body”. Because Caitlyn finds mindful stretching to help her focus and be quiet, she finds it to be similar to mindful breathing.

The foregoing is similar to Jackson’s experience. He spoke about how, as a House President, he was constantly dealing with crises, ranging from small fires in the dormitory to interpersonal conflicts. Jackson understands that these are all things that he has to address as a House President, but he states that meeting these needs and the needs of his academic demands is a stressful challenge. To help cope with this, he has begun using mindful breathing in his life—a practice that he also learned in the mindfulness class. To Jackson, “mindful meditation is breathing; it’s taking that minute and slowing down to take a minute.” He said that sometimes he’ll take time for himself by just sitting in his room and breathing. In regard to breathing, he said:

It's something so simple that we don't consider it, but we all have to do it, and sometimes there's not much rhythm to it. So when you are conscious of it, I think it's easier to create a rhythm and be conscious--I'm using that word a lot because it's really the core of what I'm saying—it’s a real consciousness of the physical activity that you're doing at that point.

He says that it helps him to “remember where I’m at now and then work out what I have to get done before I can move on to the next thing.” Jackson said that the practice of mindful breathing helps a person to “take that minute to re-center yourself”. He does it because when he does it...
feels “like a weight is off your shoulders in a sense, or it’s almost when you lie down in bed after a long day and you start to relax.”

Emily also voiced appreciation for the mindful breathing practice that she learned, and she spoke about incorporating that practice into her life, along with the yoga exercises that she learned in class. Emily shared that doing this helped her deal with one of the biggest challenges that she has faced—the challenge of balancing her House President responsibilities with the academic responsibilities that she has as a college student. She stated “the homework load has been especially heavy for me this year, so adding the House President responsibilities has been a little bit overwhelming”. For her, mindful breathing and yoga helped her deal with the stress. She also said that the breathing and the yoga “overlapped”. She described having to stretch in a particular way, then breathe in, and then stretch in another way and breathe out. She said that when you’re doing this, “you're moving your body and focusing on your breathing, you don't think about anything else; so I think that yoga kind of is mindfulness in a way.” Her favorite time of day to practice is at night before bed time. She said that

Being able to take that time out of my day intentionally to focus on doing the yoga and practicing the meditation practices was really valuable to me because I felt like it was some sort of self-care that I was throwing into my day which felt right.

James likewise experienced mindfulness as a form of self-care and chose to implement the practice of mindful body scanning into his life. James described himself as being “spastic” and how hard it was for him to be calm, but he said that it helped him to take about 20 minutes out of his day, usually at 4:30 in the afternoon, lay on his bed and do the body scan. He said that he would think to himself “how do my legs feel?…how about my arms?” He said that he knew that the body scan would help him because as you think through the various parts of your body
this way, “you have a feeling almost like numbness…that’s what it kind of felt like every time I focused on a body part, and that helped me out quite a bit.” James described the demands on his plate as “insane” and said that his mind tends to go to different places in which he “happens to worry about some little things that I really shouldn’t.” He says, “How the body scan helped me is just kind of clearing my mind and just focusing on the one part.”

For Jillian, like the other student leaders, learning about and experimenting with mindfulness was a new experience. She says that learning about mindfulness:

Was just kind of opening like a different door that I had never really looked into and then it was like ‘wow’; and then it made me notice how much thoughts and things that you dwell on or think about can impact your attitude and your day-to-day living.

In Jillian’s day-to-day living, she used the mindful practice of “acknowledging things and then letting them go” more than any other mindfulness practice. In regard to this practice, she said:

I think it was just good to be aware of what you are consciously thinking about and doing, because, like she [mindfulness instructor] said in the mindfulness activities, we’re constantly getting information and taking things in and I think just taking a minute to process everything and then just let it go is helpful, for sure.

Jillian shared that the practice of “acknowledging things and then letting them go” was especially helpful for her in her role as House President and as a student because “there’s a lot of input coming in from both of those sides of things”, including “feedback on assignments” and “people telling you all kinds of things on your house”. Jillian did not have a designated time or place for her mindfulness practice. She said “I don’t think, ‘Oh, I’m going to use my mindfulness practice
now”. Instead, she described her practice as being “more in the moment”—just doing it when she thought of it.

**Subtheme 1.b Creating private space for mindfulness and self-care.** During the first round of interviews, all participants commented on the stress they experienced due to the expectation that they should be available to the residents in their dormitory floor both day and night. All participants talked about the stressor created by the expectation that their door be open as a signal of their availability. However, during the second round of interviews, as they talked about their experiences with mindfulness practices, four out of six participants talked about how they have developed the habit of closing their door for the purpose creating private space for mindfulness practice or other self-care practices.

For instance, James spoke about the constant flow of people who come to his room. He describes his room to be like a restaurant and his open door to “be basically like a welcome sign.” He said that whenever the door is open, people just keep coming in, bringing a variety of needs with them. When asked what he does to take care of himself and not be overrun with everyone else’s needs, he says that he closes his door for 20-30 minutes. He said:

> Just carving that time out, yeah. Sometimes I don’t get it, but I always try to make it known that I have a specific time during the day, other from the time when I go to sleep or wake up, to myself. I just need that tiny little window, but it does help me from going completely insane.

James uses that 20-30 minutes for several things, including video games and relaxing by himself, but he also uses this time to practice the mindful body scan he learned in the mindfulness class.
Emily shuts her door for the same reason—it’s a way to give time for her own self-care. She said

I constantly have people just wanting to see me for any number of reasons. If they have a question or they want to talk to me about their day or they’re just lonely or having roommate problems they just come to me…It’s a demand that I enjoy because I really, really love helping people, but it can be draining after a while.

Emily has learned the habit of shutting her door in order to care for herself. She even posts a short list of self-care things that she can do on the back of her door so that whenever she closes it she is reminded of the need for self-care and what she can to care for herself. With the door closed, this is a time when Emily can practice what she has learned in the mindfulness class, especially mindful yoga and mindful breathing. “The door means a lot to me” she said. One reason is the opportunity it gives her to create privacy so that she can engage in mindfulness activities.

Jackson’s experience was similar. He talked about “retreating inwardly” wherein he would shut his door and push aside his responsibilities. He added:

If my door’s shut that’s when I need my me time, whether it be a personal reflection or I need to really focus on something or I just want to be alone. That door being shut means this is my me time. That doesn’t mean that people can’t knock and see if I’m available. It just means that I’m in a place of being intentional about dedicating this time to me.
For Jackson, this dedicated time of “retreating inwardly” includes doing inward work, which for him includes shutting the door and practicing mindful breathing which he identifies as one way of dealing with stress.

While Nate did not talk about mindfulness practices in his room, he did talk about the importance of the closed door for his own self-care and well-being. While talking about the stress of the House President role, he said “I need some distance; that’s where it [the closed door] comes in.” He recalled his bedroom back in the home where he grew up. It was away from the rest of the family and a place where he could relax and be alone in his “own personal bubble”. Now, while serving as a House President, he says “when the door closes, that’s my basement. That’s my bubble”.

**Theme 2  Perceived Stress Relief**

All participants spoke about the mindfulness class itself being a time and place they could go and experience stress reduction. Five out of six participants said that the information gained in the class helped them to experience a decrease in their stress when outside of the mindfulness class. This was experienced in two ways. Participants experienced an increasing in relaxation and decrease in stress; and participants experienced a decrease in stress due to an increase in personal organization. According to participants, both of these were results of the use of mindfulness practice in their lives.

**Subtheme 2.a  Stress relief accompanied by relaxation.** Previous paragraphs describe how participants included new mindfulness practices in their lives after attending a mindfulness class. In addition to these new mindfulness habits, five out of six participants also experienced an increase in relaxation that accompanied a decrease in stress.
Jackson shared that one of the challenges in his life is that he is constantly being called to deal with crises, and that he has grown accustomed to being in high stress situations. However, he stated that one of the results of mindfulness practice—and especially the practice of mindful breathing—is that “it’s easier to process the stress and demands on your plate because you’re not seeing them as stresses in a sense. You’re seeing them as things to learn from, things to grow from.” He describes his own experience with mindfulness as feeling “like a weight is off your shoulders in a sense”. He says that experiencing mindfulness is similar to lying down in a bed at the end of the day and you just begin to relax. He said “It's not just a mental state of relaxing, that's also a physical state of relaxing”. As an example, he shared an experience in which he had been practicing mindfulness and then went to his dormitory floor and discovered people being loud and “rowdy”. He said that while in the midst of the rowdiness, “I’m just sitting there with a big smile on my face, because I’m just mellowing. It doesn’t matter what else is going on because I’m relaxed in that setting”. He attributes his being relaxed to his mindfulness practice.

This is akin to Caitlyn’s experience who talked about how some of the tasks she faces are associated with high levels of stress for her. She shared that after practicing mindfulness though, she had a great sense of being able to handle the tasks, and that being mindful “just lowers the anxiety of it”. Caitlyn has often gone running to reduce stress, but stated that mindfulness breathing has actually been more beneficial, “because you can run and it gets rid of all the stuff that’s, I know, balled up, but then it doesn’t completely refresh you.” Mindfulness breathing, she explained, is more beneficial to her because it relaxes her. She said

I’ll set my alarm clock, and then just lay on my floor and focus on my breathing for 15 minutes, and then go. And that helps a lot, because it’s resting, and it’s just letting all the stuff that I have to do go for 15 minutes, which is very necessary I found out.
Caitlyn started to use the word “calm” to describe her experience with mindfulness, but went on to say that “calm” was not an adequate description of her experience. She said that what she experiences during mindfulness is “nothing”, which she struggled to explain. She said, “you really don't do anything similar to it ever in life” and tried to explain it by sharing that “It's like when you focus on something so hard you just kind of, well, zone out everything else”.

Like her peers, Emily experienced mindfulness practice—especially mindful yoga and breathing—as relaxing. She talked about the academic and leadership demands on her plate, but said “When I come out of that mindful place, it’s slower, which I think feels better and more relaxed.” For Emily, the experience of relaxation associated with mindfulness was so significant that she speculated about the possibility of tapping into previous experiences of mindfulness and drawing them into current moments of stress. She said “So maybe there’s a way you could pull that kind of stillness from that experience that you had, and take it to the more stressful experience that you’re in.” For Emily, mindfulness is “just very peaceful, and you don’t have any stress; you don’t have any worries or fears.”

Jillian also spoke about the relationship between mindfulness and dealing with the stress of leadership and academics, which she describes as “constant”. In particular, she found the mindfulness practice of letting a thought come in, acknowledging it, then letting it go to be especially helpful in dealing with both leadership and academic stress. In regard to this practice she said:

You can acknowledge the things that you want to change but just don’t dwell on it because that’s not going to help it. I mean, sure, do something differently if that’s what you need to do, but dwelling on the things and people that you can’t control or change aren’t going to really do much for you, so that’s kind of why I appreciated
Jillian affirmed that if one can use this practice to acknowledge what is around them and not focus on what they can’t control then the practice is actually “a relaxing experience”.

James also experienced relaxation through mindfulness practice, and resonated especially with mindful body scanning. He stated that mindfulness made him “clear” and helped him to relax, because when he practiced mindfulness things in his life “flowed” and he found that he didn’t need to worry about things. Even the men in his house saw the difference. He said:

To be completely honest with you, I was spastic. I was crazy, I was panicky all the time. Then after I did that [mindfulness], even some of my guys, like my HoCo [House Council] said ‘You've gotten a lot calmer.’ ever since I started going to the mindful meditations. ‘You've gotten a lot calmer, you haven't been panicky as much, you've been making the right decisions, making the right calls. You've been doing a good job ever since that class.’ So I was like, so then I kind of realized like maybe I just need to relax and kind of go with the flow.

**Subtheme 2.b  Stress relief through personal organization.** The foregoing indicates that participants experienced reduced stress after using mindfulness practices learned in a six-week mindfulness class. In addition to reducing their stress in the moment, four out of six participants experienced an increase in personal organization after practicing mindfulness, which they also attribute to lowering their stress due to their capacity to get things done more efficiently.

For instance, James talked about how his mind tends to go to different places at once, and that he can worry about small things that he doesn’t believe he should worry about. This is in addition to the larger academic and leadership assignments that he needs to complete. Consequently, he describes his mind as a “cluttered desk”, in which the clutter is made up of
thoughts about planning and running meetings, thoughts about organizing programs, and thoughts about what he needs to do to succeed in his classes. However, he describes mindfulness practice, and in particular the mindful body scan, as “me time—so I don’t have to go to an asylum and go crazy.” For James, practicing mindfulness gives him the “me time” that he needs because he says that it “clears my mind and gives me a new light on things.” After practicing mindfulness, he states that he is more able to organize his life and to say “this is my time for my HP stuff. This is my time for my homework stuff. This is my time for me. I feel more organized.” As a result, he affirms that he feels less rushed and less stressed.

While James described a mind that was like a cluttered desk, Jackson described his experience of high stress as being like a headless chicken that runs around with no purpose or direction. He said that “it sort of seems somewhat random and aimless. You’re just out of control.” However, he said that when he practices mindfulness, especially mindful breathing, it’s like “taking the reins or retaking control and getting on top of the situation.” He said:

When you’re breathing, slowing down, taking stock of where you are; you can refocus on the path where you originally set out to go on or alternatively establish a new direction that you need to go in.

Jackson stated that it just helps to slow things down in this way because it allows him to approach things with greater direction and intention, and consequently gives him a greater sense of “order” to all that he’s dealing with. This reduces his level of stress.

Caitlyn’s experience was similar to the foregoing. When asked what mindful breathing does for her, she said that it helps her to “take a step back” and sort out what she should do next. She said that the “stuff” of her life—her leadership role and her academics—keeps piling up.
The result of which is that she feels “jumbled” inside and can have a hard time knowing what tasks to address first. After mindfulness practice though, she finds it easier to figure out what to do first and then move on to the next task. Caitlyn says that “It’s very rewarding, and it’s like you’re doing something, like you’re getting stuff done instead of just leaving it to build.” She says that it’s also a “refreshing feeling” when you know that “you can do stuff; get it done.”

Emily had similar thoughts. As she thought about her experience with mindfulness, she talked about how she believed that mindfulness could help her to slow down and sort out what might really be most important in the midst of multiple demands. She talked about the importance of mindfulness helping a person to think about what is really important in the here-and-now, and how it can help one to let go of everything else in order to tend to the situation that they are working on.

**Theme 3 Stress Relief Through Meaning-Making**

The literature suggests that meaning-making can be helpful in dealing with stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017); and that the two core elements of meaning-making and mindfulness are the elements of savoring and positive reappraisal (Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson, 2015). Five out of six participants experienced at least one of these elements after implementing mindfulness practices in their lives.

**Subtheme 3.a Savoring.** When describing their experience with mindfulness, four out of six participants mentioned an awareness of pleasant emotions and an appreciation for things around them, including the subtle aspects of those things. This matches the description of savoring as described by Lindsay and Cresswell (2015) and Garland, et. al (2015), who describe savoring as part of the experience of mindfulness as it relates to meaning-making.
Jillian talked about an experience in the mindfulness class when she was asked to eat a raisin, but to eat it mindfully—focusing only on the experience of eating the raisin, with all of her senses. She said that after that she attempted to eat mindfully outside of class a few times and that it helped her appreciate things in a new way as she intentionally noticed not only the food’s taste, but it’s smell, touch, and visual attributes. For Jillian, the same was true of experiencing a sunset, which she says that she not only experienced with her eyes, but also with her other senses. She said that things like sunsets “you see every day but you don’t always think to stop and really appreciate it”. When asked what difference it made in her life that she sometimes appreciated the things around her more deeply, she said “It wasn’t just the sense of eating the food and taste but it was like the smell, the touch, the visual aspect of it too, the main thing was just the act of being more present, and like in tune with what is going on around you or what you’re doing specifically.” When asked shortly after that to describe what being present was like, she said:

I'd say the experience is more one of relaxation and not worrying as much, which it's impossible to not think about the future and past and everything like that; so not saying you don't think about those things, but if you can use the practice to acknowledge all the things around you and direct your focus not towards those things that you can't control and that aren't pressing at the moment, then it's a relaxing experience.

Like Jillian, Jackson also associated being in the present moment with the experience of having a deepened appreciation for things around him. He said that for him, being in the present is associated with appreciating things because when a person is not dwelling in the past nor
celebrating things in the past, they are able to take things in and recognize them for what they are. He said:

I would say that no one can live in the present moment 100% of the time. I would say that lots of people struggle to do it for a fleeting moment of every day. But I think that it's a beautiful thing in a sense, if someone can achieve that, to be in the present moment is to take things in, process them and appreciate them for what they are. So if we can do that in terms of our relationships and everything that's around us, then we're seeing things of value in everything around us.

Jackson said that this is so because, in his experience, there is a correlation between what a person experiences inwardly and what is happening around them, and that this experience of deeper appreciation makes it “easier to process the stress and the demands on your plate”.

James talked about how being in the present moment has helped him enjoy his job as a House President more. He said that being in the present moment is rare for him because he’s always thinking about what he did in the past that was wrong, or thinking about what he was going to next. Learning to live in the present moment is, he believes, one of his “biggest issues, just because I think too far ahead and I don’t live in the moment now.” James said that “as I progressively grow I live more in the moment and live more in right now” which, for him, is characterized by the ability to enjoy what he is doing. He said that it changes his tasks from “a job” into “enjoyment”. When asked how it feels to be in the present moment and enjoy what he is doing, he stated that “feeling becomes irrelevant”.

James’ observation that “feeling becomes irrelevant” is akin to Emily’s experience. She said that being in the present moment could be described as “nothing”—an experience in which there is no good or bad emotions felt, but a time of “resting in between them”. After practicing
mindfulness, Emily noted that she felt “a lot calmer and more peaceful”, but also that she was able to notice the subtle attributes of people more quickly. She said:

Whenever I meet another person I feel like a part of me is like trying to instantly read them, and kind of decide like what facial expressions do they have. Are they happy? Are they sad? Are they stressed? Are they wanting to talk to me or are they wanting to avoid me? So all those things I would read from them. I think when I'm doing that throughout any other time of the day, it's like, it has to be really quick, because I see them so fast. But I know that when I come out of kind of that mindful place, it's slower. Which I think it feels better and more relaxed and I feel more able to respond to however they're appearing to me.

Emily believes that she is able to have this experience after practicing mindfulness because all of the other things that were previously on her mind are gone after dong mindfulness work. She says, “It’s like a fresh start”.

**Subtheme 3.b Positive reappraisal.** The second core element of meaning-making and mindfulness is positive reappraisal (Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson, 2015), which is an adaptive process in which stressors can be reconstrued as meaningful, benign or growth promoting (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Four out of six participants experienced positive reappraisal after utilizing mindfulness practices.

For instance, Jackson was speaking about what it is like for him to be in the “present moment” when he shared that when he is practicing mindfulness, he understands the demands on his plate in a new way, in which he no longer experiences them as stressors. He says of himself: “You’re seeing them as things to learn from, things to grow from, things to better you as a person. You’re not looking at them from a negative light.”
Caitlyn also responded to questions about being in the present moment when she noted that things that originally gave her anxiety seemed not so negative after practicing mindfulness. She compared it to a time in which she was very upset about the behavior of another student leader—to the point where she was crying and went to speak to a supervisor about the issue. She was shocked when the supervisor laughed and simply told her to “take a step back” and to quit taking things so seriously. Caitlyn said the supervisor’s reaction helped her put a negative situation in a new light, and that is what mindfulness can do for her as well. She said, “it’s crazy how like it makes you feel so different, and you’re like, okay—it’s not that bad.”

This is akin to James’ experience who said that when he’s dealing with the stresses of his House President role, he finds that he’s experiencing his role as a job, without enjoyment. After practicing mindfulness though, the same tasks that were causing him stress are experienced by him in a positive way.

Jillian’s experience was more physical. She loves running and especially enjoys running outdoors. As winter set in though, she was forced to run on a treadmill, which she has hated to do in the past. In fact she said that she will even talk to herself while on the treadmill about how much she hates it. She then described doing a mindful body scan while running in which she turned her attention to her legs, her lungs, and how her body felt:

Oh man, this is awful. I hate running on this treadmill. I want to be done and running is hard, I don't like it," and then if I'll actually stop and think about how do my legs feel right now, how do my lungs feel? How does my body feel? It's really like, "Hmm, it's really not that bad. 
The result was her realization that what she initially experienced as a negative thing had taken on new meaning as something that she described as “really not that bad” that allowed her to stay in shape during the winter.

**Positively reappraising availability** was yet another way that four out of 6 participants experienced positive reappraisal. During the first round of interviews all participants named the expectation of being constantly available as a source of the stress that they experienced in their dual role. In this regard, all participants named the need to keep their “door open” as an expression of this stressor. Subtheme 1.b (above) describes how participants developed the habit of closing their door to create space for self-care and mindfulness practice. In addition however, four out of six participants experienced a reappraisal of their “open” door.

For instance, during the first interview Jackson talked about the stress of availability and how his open door made his availability so accessible. However, during the second interview, Jackson talked about another meaning that he has come to associate with his open door. He said that when the men in his house see his open door and take advantage of his availability, it signals to him that he is both appreciated and wanted. He said that this kind of affirmation actually helps him in dealing with the demands on his plate. He stated that “everyone wants to be wanted” and that it’s comforting when someone reaches out to you because it’s an expression of them wanting to “communicate or build a relationship.” He said “It’s almost reaffirming in the sense that when people are coming into your room, you’re doing your job”. In fact, he went on to say that people coming through the open door “drives you to want to do better and build community to a greater level”. Jackson shared that this new way of understanding his open door has helped with deal with the stress of his leadership role.
James echoed the foregoing. He talked in the first interview about how his availability, made possible by the open door can be stressful. However, he stated during the second interview that when people take advantage of the open door it’s affirming because it demonstrates that people trust him and that the people he is responsible for leading enjoy the little things, such as spending time with him and one another. At one point in the interview, James paused to think about this issue for a moment and then talked about how the open door creates an environment for a support group. The support group created by the open door is mutual in that he is providing the space for support by leaving his door open, but he is also a recipient of the support as people gather in his room. This availability, made possible by the open door, can be stressful. However, James finds it to help him deal with stress due to the affirmation and support he receives.

During the second round of data gathering, Caitlyn was asked about the “open door” that she spoke about during the first interview. When asked what meaning the open door had for her she said:

A lot more than I thought it did, honestly. I go home and I’m like, ‘Oh mom, they just come in if I leave my door open’; and she goes, ‘you’re going to have to find something kind of like that next year, otherwise you’re going to miss it so much.’ I said, ‘dang it, you’re right, I really am.’ But no, it’s actually really meaningful, and not only for me; for them.

Caitlyn described the experience of people coming into her room, although stressful, to actually be very flattering. She said that the experience of people taking advantage of her open door is actually a confidence booster because it shows that people see her as someone that they want to talk with. To Caitlyn, it means “that they think I’m okay”. Caitlyn says that this affirmation helps her deal with the stress of being a student and a House President.
Emily also expressed appreciation for being asked about her open door. “Yeah, the door means a lot to me” she said, and “I’m glad that you brought that up again, because I can see how important it has been to me now that I’m reflecting back on it.” For Emily her open door is a way to connect with people that helps her fulfill her House President duties, but she also describes it as a means of self-care because of her desire to be around people. In Emily’s case, the door itself is a medium of affirmation because the women on her hall use the door’s whiteboard to write messages of appreciation for what she does as their House President. Messages like “We love Emily” and other notes of encouragement cause Emily to feel affirmed in her role. She says that whenever she comes back to her room it “always warms my heart just to see that”. Because of the positioning of the white board, whenever her door is open she receives the double affirmation of seeing the encouraging notes, along with the affirmation of having people walk through her door which often helps her deal with stress by enabling her to be with others which she finds affirming, even though the demands of availability are stressful.

**Conclusion**

The central question of this study is: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? In response to the research question, the findings in this chapter have illuminated three major themes (each with 2 subthemes) that reveal the experience of student leaders relative to mindfulness practice and dealing with the stress of their dual roles. Each of these themes/subthemes have been viewed through the lens of mindfulness theory as understood by Kabat-Zinn (1982, 1990, 1994, 2003, 2015).

First, participants found mindfulness exercises to be significant enough that five out of six persons developed new habits regarding the exercises. These five incorporated the exercises
into their lives and sustained their use of these exercises for three-four months after the conclusion of the mindfulness course. Participants did not all find meaning in the same exercises, but shared stories about their use of particular exercises that were most meaningful to them. In addition, four out of six student leaders were deliberate in creating private time to practice the mindfulness exercises that they found to be most meaningful.

Second, five out of six student leaders experienced stress relief that they stated was associated with mindfulness practice. Each participant shared stories and observations regarding how this stress relief was experienced. While each person experienced stress relief in ways that were unique to them, each of them observed that their experience of stress relief was accompanied by relaxation, and associated with the mindfulness exercises that they had been practicing. Also, four out of six student leaders experienced a heightened sense of personal organization after practicing mindfulness exercises. In their stories and observations, participants shared that mindfulness practice helped them achieve greater control over their personal situations which, in turn, relieved their stress.

Third, student leaders experienced both savoring and positive reappraisal—the two core elements of meaning making relative to mindfulness (Garland, et al., 2015). Participants were quite diverse in their descriptions of savoring experiences, ranging from noticing the nuances of people to the nuances of objects and experiences. While there was also variety in participants’ experience of positive reappraisal, there was also a commonality. That is, five out of six student leaders experienced the positive reappraisal of their “open door” which at one time represented the stress of constant availability, but came to be understood as a representation of affirmation.

In summary, this study has found that after practicing mindfulness exercises, student leaders experienced stress relief caused by their dual roles. Likewise, it was found that the
experiences of savoring and positive reappraisal were factors in the meaning-making process that contributed to this stress relief.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications of Findings

This study has explored the question: How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? The study is an exploration that was conducted using the theoretical framework of mindfulness theory as understood by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982, 2003, 2015). To explore this research question, the researcher interviewed six student-leaders at a small, private, liberal arts university, all juniors or seniors who live in the dual roles of being both full-time college students and leaders of student government organizations. All of the student-leaders had taken an 8-week mindfulness class at the beginning of their term in office. The mindfulness class was based on the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) model developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015), and was conducted by a faculty member who had received certification in MBSR. All participants were interviewed one month after completing the Mindfulness class near the end of their first semester as a student leader, and then again 3-4 months after completing the class.

This chapter seeks to accomplish three primary things. First, it seeks to discuss the findings documented in the previous chapter which emerged from the interviews with student-leaders. The study was conducted using an IPA research methodology, and one of the intended outcomes of IPA study is a description of how the study’s findings are relevant to practice (Connelly, 2010). Therefore, a second purpose of this chapter is to present implications for how the study’s findings can impact student-leaders and the individuals who are responsible for their development. Third, there is much in the literature about mindfulness and college student stress,
as well as mindfulness and leadership stress. However, there is little research on mindfulness and its relationship to student-leaders stress. Therefore, this chapter will present recommendations for further research on the relationship between mindfulness and how student-leaders deal with stress. The chapter ends with a conclusion that summarizes the project.

**Discussion of Findings**

Three primary themes and six subthemes emerged from the two rounds of interviews. Each are discussed below.

**Development of New Habits**

Student leaders incorporated and sustained mindfulness practices into their lives which they found to be meaningful in helping them deal with the demands of their dual roles. In the first round of interviews, the semi-structured interview schedule deliberately did not include any direct inquiry about a participant’s use, non-use, or familiarity with mindfulness practices. This was intentional in order to see if mindfulness practice had become significant enough to participants for them to mention it without being prompted to do so. This approach is consistent with IPA research in which IPA researchers are to approach a research question “sideways” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 58), meaning that the researcher should not ask the primary research question directly. Rather, Smith, et al. suggest that the interview be established as an experience that facilitates a discussion of topics that allow the researcher’s question to be subsequently answered via the process of analysis. In the current study, all participants spoke about the stress of their dual roles when asked about the challenges they face. Participants were then asked “What kind of things are the biggest help to you in dealing with challenges?” In response, all participants named a variety of things that they do to deal with stressful challenges,
and all participants named “mindfulness” as being helpful. To be specific, participants developed two habits in regard to mindfulness exercises. Student leaders adopted a specific mindfulness exercise that they personally resonated with; and student leaders created personal space for practicing mindfulness and self-care.

**Use of newly-learned mindfulness practices.** Student leaders used at least one mindfulness exercise which they personally found meaningful, and sustained that practice for at least three-four months. Participants in the current study learned a variety of mindfulness exercises exemplified in Kabat-Zinn’s (2003, 2015) MBSR approach. These practices included mindful eating, breathing, and walking; as well as mindful yoga and body scanning (the act of focusing one’s attention progressively through various parts of the body, relaxing each part along the way). Participants were not held accountable for practicing these things outside of class, but they were encouraged to do so by the class instructor.

In first and/or second interviews, five out of six participants reported that they used at least one of the mindfulness practices in their daily lives outside of the class. While none of them implemented all mindfulness techniques into their lives, each of the five participants who included mindfulness practice in their daily lives reported that they used a particular practice with which they resonated. This is relevant to Kabat-Zinn’s (2015c) observation that, at the beginning of a person’s experience with mindfulness (if not always) there is a need for not only meditation instruction, but for a variety of meditation techniques and methods. The findings of the current study point out the wisdom of Kabbat-Zinn’s observation, given that each participant was able to address a variety of mindfulness practices and then identify the particular practice that they had found to be most meaningful, as opposed to encouraging or forcing all participants to utilize the same practice. The freedom to select the mindfulness practice that resonated most
is reinforced by Burke’s (2012) observation that an individual was more likely to engage in meditative practice and to maintain their engagement in it if they had a sense of proper fit and self-efficacy about the practice they were engaged in.

Among the six participants in the current study, mindful breathing was most popular and was used by three participants. One participant frequently used yoga and stretching in addition to mindful breathing. Other participants used mindful body scanning, and the practice of recognizing their own thoughts and then releasing them. When participants spoke about their preferred practice, they did so in the present tense, indicating that their utilization of mindfulness practices had continued beyond the conclusion of the mindfulness course, which had concluded three-four months earlier. This supports Burke’s affirmation that “Individual preference for type of meditation could potentially lead to a better match between individual and method and an improved compliance with practice” (p. 238).

**Creating private space for mindfulness and self-care.** Student leaders sustained their practice of mindfulness exercises, in part, by creating private space for practice and other expressions of self-care. In the current study, participants were not given a prescribed amount of time to practice outside of class, but were simply encouraged to practice. In mindfulness theory, a willingness to take time for practicing mindfulness is critical. In fact, Bishop et al. (2004) consider mindfulness to be a form of “mental training” (p. 231) that has the capacity to reduce reactive modes of thinking that can elevate stress, diminish cognitive vulnerability, and reduce emotional distress that can perpetuate psychopathology. To this point, Kabat-Zinn (2003) states that mindfulness is “more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and it is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice” (p. 148).
In the current study, five out of six participants included mindfulness practice in their day-to-day lives, finding these practices helpful in dealing with the stresses of their dual roles. While participants practiced mindfulness at various times and in various places, four out of six participants each reported that they used a common, simple, methodology for creating private space for mindfulness and self-care. That is, they shut their door. What makes this interesting, is that during the first round of interviews, all six participants talked about the stress they experienced due to the perceived expectation that they needed to keep their doors open as much as possible in order to be available to the members of their dormitory floor. The fact that four participants were willing to counter the expectation of constant availability by closing their door for mindfulness practice and self-care aligns them well with a recurring theme of Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015, 2015c) who stresses the importance of practicing mindfulness techniques as vital to experiencing mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn states that if a person is going to understand mindfulness, they must examine the term “practice”, stressing that mindfulness is not just an idea, but is something that can only be developed through practice. It would be difficult to overstate Kabat-Zinn’s emphasis on the importance of practice.

On the other hand, some researchers posit that college students may be well suited for mindfulness training, but may not have the time for traditional mindfulness practice given their busy, sometimes overcommitted schedules (Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon, 2013; Hindman, Glass, Arnkoff, and Maron, 2015). In addition, Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, and Nicol (2015) observed that college students with the greater amount of stressors may, in fact, be more pressed for time than others. This concern is relevant to participants in the current study, whose time commitments are multiplied by the dual roles of being both students and dormitory floor leaders—roles that Belch and Mueller (2003) have documented as being highly stressful.
Given the concerns voiced by Bergen-Cico, et al. (2013), it seems important that student-leaders in the current study not only intentionally arranged time and space for practice, but did so by closing their doors, even though keeping an open door was understood to be an expectation. This indicates that the participants placed a priority on mindfulness practice which aligns well with Kabat-Zinn’s (2003, 2015), claim that regular practice is essential if one is to experience the benefits of mindfulness, including help for dealing with stress.

**Perceived Stress Relief**

Student leaders found significance in mindfulness exercises as a means to relieve the stress of their dual roles. The very name of Kabat-Zinn’s (1982, 2003, 2015) approach to mindfulness practice—Mindful Based Stress Relief (MBSR)—speaks to the emphasis that he places on stress relief as a possible result of mindfulness practice. Kabat-Zinn speaks repeatedly about the essential aspect of attending to one’s present experience—the present moment—as being central to mindfulness practice and stress relief. Following an eight-week mindfulness class, based on Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR approach, five out of six participants in the current study spontaneously reported that they experienced stress relief after incorporating mindfulness practices into their daily lives. There were two ways of experiencing stress relief after practicing mindfulness that were most frequently identified by participants. One was stress relief following mindfulness practice that was accompanied by a sense of relaxation. The other was a heightened sense of personal organization which participants identified as stress relieving.

**Stress relief, accompanied by relaxation.** Student leaders who incorporated mindfulness exercise in their life experienced stress relief that was accompanied by relaxation. All six participants reported that they experienced stress relief accompanied by relaxation during the mindfulness course itself. However, the central research question for this study is: How do
student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? Consequently, the primary concern pertains to how they experience the stress of their dual roles after engaging in mindfulness practice, and not during the course itself. With this in mind, interviews with participants were held one month and again 3-4 months after completion of the mindfulness class, but while participants were still living in their dual roles.

As mentioned earlier, five out of six participants reported that they incorporated mindfulness practices into their day-to-day lives, and these same five experienced stress relief that was accompanied by relaxation. It should be noted that participants did not describe in detail what they meant by relaxation. They simply used the term as a common descriptor to describe the stress relief they experienced. This is the first time, to the knowledge of this researcher, that mindfulness research has been conducted on college student government leaders. Therefore, it should be noted that the findings of this study are consistent with the literature on mindfulness and the stress reduction of college students in general (Bamber and Schneider, 2016); as well as being consistent with the literature on mindfulness and the stress reduction of leaders (Zolnierczyk-Zreda, Sanderson, and Bedynska, 201; Lundqvist, et al., 2018). It should also be noted that the term “relief” from stress is being used intentionally, rather than referring to a “reduction” in stress. The current study did not attempt to quantify the stress of participants which may have indicated actual levels of stress—reduced or otherwise. Instead, this IPA study seeks to explore the lived experience of student-leaders.

The student leaders who experienced stress relief did not all utilize the same mindfulness exercises, and neither did they practice at the same time or place each day. Nevertheless,
participants indicated that their mindfulness practice helped relieve the stress of both their academic and leadership responsibilities.

In addition, participants shared that their relief of stress was not only an absence of worry or stress, but that their stress relief was accompanied by the experience of relaxation. This coincides with Amutio, Martínez-Taboada, Hermosilla, and Delgado, (2015) who found that mindfulness was positively associated with enhancing relaxation after study participants participated in an eight-week mindfulness training course. Amutio, et al.’s study was based on Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) MBSR approach to mindfulness, as was the mindfulness course taken by participants in the current study.

It is interesting to note that just as 100% of participants experienced stress relief during the mindfulness course, 100% also experienced relaxation during the course itself. However, the class was a controlled environment and these findings focus on the experience of participants after practicing mindfulness. Therefore, the findings are inclusive of only the stories told by participants about mindfulness practices helping them to relax while they were in the midst of living their lives, sometimes right in the very midst of otherwise stressful circumstances. This is important, given that, as college students, these individuals are part of a demographic that has been found to be uniquely prone to stress due to the multiple transitions and responsibilities of college life (Lin and Huang, 2013), and the value of mindfulness practice as ultimately experienced in the midst of one’s regular life, rather than in the relative seclusion of a class.

It is noteworthy that the only student leader who did not incorporate mindfulness practice into their daily life is also the only person who did not comment on any stress relief in his life outside of the mindfulness class. There is no hard evidence that correlates this participant’s lack of daily mindfulness practice with his lack of stress relief. This is simply an observation that the
only participant who did not experience stress relief was the only person who did not incorporate mindfulness practice in his day-to-day life. This is consistent with Kabat-Zinn’s (2015) observation that the benefits of mindfulness are experienced only through deliberate, regular practice.

**Stress relief through personal organization.** Student leaders experienced a heightened sense of personal organization after practicing mindfulness exercises, which contributed to their stress relief. Given the breadth of information in the literature that documents the association of mindfulness and reduced stress for both leaders and college students, this researcher was not surprised when the current study found that participants experienced stress relief after incorporating mindfulness practices into their lives. This researcher, however, did not anticipate that participants would associate mindfulness practice with a greater sense of personal organization which four out of six participants spoke about, stating that it helped them to deal with the stress of their dual roles.

While the literature does not have a robust amount of material on the topic of mindfulness and personal organization, Leland, (2015) did find that mindfulness training may have a positive correlation to academic performance in its capacity to help students become more organized and to plan ahead. This same study references the work of Broderick and Jennings (2012) and their finding that mindfulness training helps a person cultivate a calmer view of present circumstances, and thereby can improve a person’s organizational skills and planning. This appears to be consistent with the current study in which student leaders described mindfulness practice as helping them to slow down, feel less rushed, and sort out what they needed to do. Jackson expressed it well when he said that mindfulness practice helped him to
experience a greater sense of order in his life whereby he found himself “taking the reins or retaking control and getting on top of the situation.”

This ability to feel more in control and able to sort out one’s situation is especially important when considering that the degree of stress that a leader experiences is determined by their perceived capacity to be in control of their situation (Guedes, Gonvcalves, and da Conceicao Goncalves, 2016; Lovelace, Manz and Alves, 2007). Making this even more significant, is that student leaders are more likely than their peers to feel a loss of control in their lives (DiRamio and Payne, 2007). It is important then to note, that four out of six student leaders experienced relief from their stress when using mindfulness practices because it helped them to experience an increased sense of personal organization and ability to step back and handle the tasks in front of them.

Of course, there is another possibility. De Petrillo, Kaufman, Glass, and Arnkoff (2009) found that individuals who participated in a mindfulness training group reported feeling fewer demands from their organization than people in a control group. It is uncertain whether student leaders in the current study felt greater ability to organize the demands on their plates because they felt greater degrees of calm in facing their challenges; or if they felt more able to organize themselves to face their challenges because they felt diminished organizational demands after engaging in mindfulness practice. Whatever the case, participants were helped to deal with their stress by the heightened sense of personal organization that they experienced after mindfulness practice.

**Stress Relief Through Meaning-Making**
Student leaders experienced the two core elements of meaning-making that are associated with mindfulness—savoring and positive reappraisal (Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson (2015)—and found both elements helpful in relieving their stress. Meaning-making is the experience of integrating challenges or ambiguous circumstances “into a framework of personal meaning” (Van Den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schreurs, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2009); and meaning-making has been shown to be an effective buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017).

However, the population of student leaders is a population about which little is known relative to the impact of meaning-making on stress. In this regard, the current study found that student leaders who attended a mindfulness course experienced both savoring and positive reappraisal after using mindfulness practices in their lives.

**Savoring.** Student leaders experienced a deepened appreciation for the subtleties of people and things after practicing mindfulness, and they associated this experience with stress relief. Lindsay and Creswell (2015) stated that mindfulness-to-meaning theory includes the act of savoring, which has to do with paying attention to the subtle aspects of an event or object (Garland, Stainken, Ahluwalia, Vapiwala, Mao; 2015).

It was, in fact, these subtle aspects of things that participants in the current study said that mindfulness helped them to notice and appreciate. This ranged from noticing/savoring the subtleties in their interactions with people to noticing physical things in a new way. For instance, Emily noticed the subtleties of people’s faces and what they might be experiencing on a deeper level after practicing mindfulness. Jillian talked about appreciating the nuances of food in a new way; and Jackson spoke of perceiving things for what they really are and appreciated them on a deeper level. James talked about living in the moment and learning to enjoy little things about his work. Participants described this capacity to appreciate subtleties on a deeper level to be
associated with the ability to deal with stress. They indicated that this was so because their stress was relieved as they experienced an increase in appreciation for the things around them. This is consistent with a study conducted by Jose, Lim and Bryant (2012) who found a correlation between savoring and the daily happiness of college students. These results were mirrored in a study of working adults by Quoidback, Berry, Hansenne, and Miolajcak (2010). The importance of savoring, according to McConnell and Froeliger (2015), is that it links with positive reappraisal to help individuals reframe the contexts of their experiences. This idea that the experience of savoring can help individuals to reframe the context of their experience certainly aligns with the experience of participants in the current study.

Although Kabat-Zinn does not use the term savoring (at least not extensively), he does describe the phenomena of savoring with helpful clarity. He says that mindfulness allows a person to become aware of any thought, impulse or perception that may arise in their mind and goes on to state that “With the mind relatively steady and unwavering, any object we hold in awareness becomes more vivid, is apprehended with greater clarity” (2015b, p. 678-679). Kabat-Zinn’s comments here are an excellent summary of how student leaders in the current study experienced savoring.

The foregoing is important because it indicates that mindfulness practice has the ability to help student leaders experience savoring—one of the two core elements of mindfulness and meaning-making, which has been found to be a buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017).

**Positive reappraisal.** Student leaders experienced a reinterpretation of negative experiences after practicing mindfulness exercises. The second core element of meaning-making and mindfulness is positive reappraisal (Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson, 2015), which is
an adaptive process in which stressors can be reconstrued as meaningful, benign or growth promoting (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

During the first round of interviews, participants were asked if they could recall a time in which they had an experience that seemed negative initially, but took on a different meaning later. Every participant could relate such experiences. Participants were then asked to what they attributed the new understanding. In response, participants offered a variety of responses, with only one pattern being discernable. That is, no one mentioned mindfulness.

The fact that mindfulness was not mentioned in regard to helping participants finding new meaning in the wake of negative experiences caused the researcher to believe that the data collected thus far did not lend itself at all to suggesting a correlation between mindfulness and positive reappraisal. However, during the second round of interviews, as participants spoke in greater depth about their experience with mindfulness, five out of six shared comments that revealed that they did associate mindfulness with finding new meaning in things that they previously experienced as negative. In other words, although participants did not specifically articulate mindfulness when queried in the first interview, they nevertheless described mindfulness as helping them find new meanings in negative things while they were responding to other interview questions in the second interview.

One possible explanation is that when participants were asked about a time when a negative experience took on new meaning for them, all six participants named experiences that happened very early in their experience as House Presidents (or before becoming House President), and prior to their completion of the mindfulness course. Another possibility is that while mindfulness may have influenced the positive reappraisal of some things in their lives, mindfulness may have had nothing to do with the reappraisal of other things in their lives. What
is clear however, is that five out of six participants experienced some positive reappraisal that they associated with mindfulness practice.

The experience of reappraisal is important in Kabat-Zinn’s (2014) thinking, who asserts that our functioning senses can actually get in one’s way, and that mindfulness helps one to not be captive to the first impression that anything may bring when one first encounters it. Rather, mindfulness helps us to capture new understandings of things.

**Implications for Practice**

One of the intended outcomes of IPA study is a description of how the study’s findings are relevant to practice (Connelly, 2010). The following seeks to accomplish that in relationship to the current study.

**Help for student affairs professionals through implementation of Mindfulness Training**

Student Affairs professionals have a dilemma. On one hand, there is a strong relationship between student affairs professionals and the task of student leadership development (Haber-Curran and Owen, 2013). This is an understandable priority, given that the development of leaders is a central goal in the education of undergraduates for many universities (Riutta and Teodorescu, 2014). In addition, universities understand that student retention is highly influenced by student satisfaction, and that there is a positive relationship between student satisfaction and co-curricular engagement (Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013). Therefore, student affairs professionals find themselves charged with the responsibility of developing student leaders. On the other hand, it has been found that college students are uniquely prone to stress (Lin and Huang, 2013) and that being a student leader makes one more likely to feel stress than
their peers, and that they are more likely to believe that life has gotten “out of control” (DiRamo and Payne, 2007, p. 688).

What then, are student affairs professionals to do? There are expectations that student affairs is to engage in student leadership development (Haber-Curran and Owen, 2013), yet becoming student leaders makes an already vulnerable population even more vulnerable to the negative effects of stress (DiRamio and Payne, 2007).

One implication of the current study is that this dilemma can be addressed, at least in part, by incorporating mindfulness training into the training of student leaders. Doing so could help student affairs professionals equip student leaders with a set of tools (mindfulness exercises) that can help student leaders deal with the stress of being in the dual roles of both students and leaders.

There are, however, some addition implications from the current study that student affairs professionals should consider. One, is that student-leaders should be given the freedom to incorporate into their lives whatever mindfulness practice resonates most with them, rather than insisting that all student-leaders utilize specific practices. Burkes’ (2012) observation has been pointed out that that “Individual preference for type of meditation could potentially lead to a better match between individual and method and an improved compliance with practice” (p. 238). In the current study, student-leaders were allowed to utilize whatever practices seemed a best fit to them, and five out of six student-leaders gravitated to exercises that they sustained in their day-to-day lives for at least three-four months after the mindfulness course completed. Student affairs professionals may need to work in advance with mindfulness instructors to make sure that the freedom to choose one’s mindfulness exercise(s) of choice is communicated clearly, to avoid any miscommunication to the contrary.
Help for student leaders themselves

A second, and perhaps most important, implication of the current study pertains to the well-being of student leaders themselves. The relationship between college life and high levels of stress has already been established (Lin & Haung, 2013), as has the correlation between leadership and stress (Harms, et al., 2016). Student-leaders stand at the intersection of these two populations and are subject to the stresses of both. While there is still much research needed in order to have a better understanding of the relationship between mindfulness practice and student leader stress, the experiences of student leaders in the current study suggest that engagement in a mindfulness course, followed by day-to-day mindfulness practice can relieve the stress experienced by student leaders and can help them to reappraise their experiences and gather new meanings from them. While the literature contains concerns about college students’ ability or willingness to practice mindfulness, the current study demonstrates that at least one group of student leaders were willing to do so, and they believed that they received the benefits of so doing.

Recommendations for Further Research

It has already been noted that while the literature has a breadth of information regarding mindfulness and college students, as well as mindfulness and leadership, the current study is the only one known to this researcher that focuses on mindfulness and persons who are in the dual role of both full-time college students and leaders of student government organizations. Consequently, there is much room for additional research. The following are four areas where additional study would be helpful.
First, the current study utilizes an IPA research model which, by its very nature, calls for a small sample of homogeneous participants (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Because of this small sample, an understanding of how mindfulness may or may not help student-leaders deal with stress would be enhanced by increasing the number of student-leaders who are subjects of mindfulness study. However, there is not only the need for a greater quantity of study participants, but there is the need for a greater variety of participants. In the current study, all participants were dormitory floor leaders in a single liberal arts university that understands dormitory floor leaders to be part of a specific student government structure. What about other types of student leaders, such as members of student senates, athletic leaders, or others? What about student leaders in State universities or universities in urban locations? In addition, the current study included both male and female participants, but all participants were white Americans or Australian. An understanding of mindfulness and student-leadership would be deepened if explored through the experience of student-leaders of color.

A second opportunity for further research pertains to the type of study conducted. Utilizing an IPA approach, the current study seeks to understand the experience of student leaders through a qualitative research model. Further understanding of the effects of mindfulness on student-leader stress could be achieved by employing quantitative approaches in order to measure the degree to which mindfulness may effect student-leader stress in comparison to a control group.

A third opportunity for further study relates to the opportunity to explore the effects of mindfulness on student leaders as they enter the workplace. There is currently no research, or at least none known to this researcher, regarding what the efficacy of such training would be over time as student-leaders enter the workforce, or even the degree to which student-leaders may
sustain mindfulness practice into their professional lives. Therefore, an understanding of the efficacy of such training would be enriched by a longitudinal study to explore whether the same mindfulness practices that student-leaders found helpful while in college continued to be sustained and helpful to them once they entered the workplace.

Finally, the current study found that four out of six student leaders described mindfulness as helping them gain an enhanced sense of personal organization which they believed helped them deal with their stress as it helped them sort things out and have a greater sense of control. This is important since it is the perceived lack of control which determines the degree of stress that a leader experiences (Guedes, Gonçalves, and da Conceição Gonçalves, 2016; Lovelace, Manz, and Alves, 2007). With this in mind, and since Leland (2015) did find that mindfulness training may help students become more organized and to plan ahead, further research could be initiated in this area. Specifically, further study could be done to see if other student-leaders experience a heightened sense of personal organization after incorporating mindfulness practices into their lives.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to explore the question, How do student leaders experience the stress of living in the dual roles of college students and student government leaders after practicing mindfulness exercises? The findings of this study suggest that this question can be answered in at least 3 ways.

**New Habits**

Student leaders incorporated and sustained mindfulness practices into their lives which they found to be meaningful in helping them deal with the demands of their dual roles.
mindfulness theory, according to Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015, 2015b), it is the sustaining of regular practice that places a person in a state wherein they may experience the benefits of mindfulness, including stress relief. It is critical then, as Kabat-Zinn observes, for individuals to not only learn about mindfulness, or even understand the idea of mindfulness, but to actually practice mindfulness. After receiving mindfulness training, student leaders found mindfulness exercises to be beneficial enough in regard to helping them cope with the stress of their dual roles, that they voluntarily incorporated them into their daily lives. Student leaders were allowed to select and utilize whatever mindfulness exercise most resonated with them, which may have contributed to the participants’ ability to sustain their use of mindfulness practices for at least three-four months after the conclusion of the class (Burke, 2012). Student leaders found the practice of mindfulness exercises to be significant enough to create private space for practice, even though closing their doors to create that space was in contradiction to the expectations of their leadership role.

**Stress Relief**

Student leaders found significance in mindfulness exercises as a means to relieve the stress of their dual roles. Student leaders experienced stress relief in two ways. They experienced a relief of stress, accompanied by relaxation, after practicing mindfulness exercises themselves. In addition, they experienced a heightened sense of personal organization in which they felt more in control and able to deal with the stresses of their roles. They associated this heightened sense of organization with the utilization of mindfulness skills.

No attempt was made in the study to measure student-leader stress, and therefore it cannot be stated that the stress levels of student leaders decreased or increased. However, it was the intent of the study to understand the experience of student leaders through their sharing of
their own thoughts and stories, and the perception of the student leaders in the study is that they found relief from their dual role stress after utilizing mindfulness practices.

**Elements of Meaning-making**

Student leaders experienced the elements of meaning-making associated with mindfulness and found those elements helpful in relieving their stress. It has been found that meaning-making can be a buffer against stress (Park and Baumeister, 2017). While student leaders never used the term buffer to describe their experience, they nevertheless experienced both savoring and positive reappraisal—the two core elements of meaning-making through mindfulness (Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson 2015). Student leaders described the stress relief they experienced as they savored the subtleties of experiences and people, resulting in a deepened appreciation for things which they stated helped them to deal with stress. Likewise, their stress was relieved as mindfulness exercises helped them to reappraise things that were previously understood by them as stressors.

In addition, mindfulness theory, as understood by Kabat-Zinn (2003, 2015, 2015b, 2016) has been a helpful lens through which to look at both the research question and the findings of this study. Kabat-Zinn’s strong, recurring emphasis on the importance of practice helped the researcher understand the critical nature of that aspect of the student-leader experience. Likewise, Kabat-Zinn’s emphasis on paying attention to the present moment in a manner that helps a person gain new understanding of the thoughts, emotions and things around them, provided helpful understanding of the principles of savoring and positive reappraisal which was an important aspect of student-leader experience.
It is the hope of the researcher that this study will not only make a valuable contribution to the literature, but that it will be of practical help to scholar-practitioners who support student leaders and have an interest in their well-being. Most of all, it is hoped that student-leaders themselves will benefit from this study as the scholar-practitioners who recruit and train them include an introduction to mindfulness practice in their training.
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### Appendix A—Internal Transcript Audit

The following transcript audit provides information that will allow a reader to see for themselves the relationships between participants’ actual comments and the findings that were drawn from those comments. All references in the table below are highlighted in the following verbatim transcripts.

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Caitlyn Interview 1

Interviewer: Well thanks again. I really appreciate this. Let me start off with just a real simple question, because as you know, I'm just really interested in your experience as a house president. And I guess I'd like to start off kind of from the beginning, and that is, can you just tell me about your experience of becoming a house president? What was happening there?

Caitlyn: Actually, I was like no, I'm not gonna be a house president. I did not wanna do that. 'Cause it's a lot of responsibility. And then closer to the end of last year, Melissa Sherer said “you have to become the house president”. Aponivi is a strong house, and you'd keep it strong if you ran for house president. So she talked me into it of course. So then I actually made my decision like a week before the due date for the application. I'd have to blame her for becoming house president. No, I really considered it for myself. 'Cause I wasn't gonna do it if I didn't feel like I could do it. But I definitely felt like I could do it. I think the thing that kept me from wanting to do it was how much work it was and the late nights and having to not be a mother to 30 people, but kind of be a mother to 30 people. I guess that was the main thing, but yeah. Melissa was a great house president for me. So I just kind of wanted to be like her, and that helped a lot, I think. I guess that's it, I don't know.

Interviewer: No, no, that's very good. So what's the experience been like for you in general?

Caitlyn: Good, in general. I've learned a lot already. I've learned about myself. One thing is, that I have to really work on explaining things, because it's just come easy for me, so I just keep the little steps of things. So that's something I've had to learn, I have to really explain it for some people, and then patience is another thing. I barely have patience, and now I think I have more patience, but not as much as some people I've noticed. I really like it.

Interviewer: Is it patience with yourself, or patience with other people or with the system?

Caitlyn: Really with myself because I see myself getting tense or as the conversations on that I don't wanna be a part of or something like that, I'm not interested in, or they're asking me questions that they should know, but they don't, because I've told them three times already. But it's fine. So yeah, that's, I don't know.

Interviewer: It seems to me that you used the expression being a mother to all these people, because what you're describing about telling them 100 times, that sounds similar to what moms say.

Caitlyn: Yeah, I'm sure. But I do like it because I've already, the freshman I feel like I've talked to every one of them, there's some that of course I'm not close enough to, but yeah. We get along, and they ask me questions, and I'll have my door open, and I'll need to be doing homework, but I'll have it open for 10 minutes and somebody's in my room, which is flattering, but also sometimes can be hard because then I don't get my stuff done. But
I still like, because last year I, sorry I didn't like really have my door open, and people did not come in unless they were my friends. It wasn't everyone on the hall. So it's definitely different, because I'm also a very private person when it comes to my room. I don't want everyone in there. But this year's changed that to where I'm okay with people coming in. It's good though, because I needed to be more open to that I think.

Interviewer: So you mention the door being open and students coming in needing to talk with you, and yet you've got homework to do, tell me about that tension, between the academic stuff and them seeking you out because of your leadership role.

Caitlyn: Sometimes they'll either not have anything to do, and they want someone to talk to, or they just wanna procrastinate or something like that, and so I don't know, for me, I kind of need to have my door closed a certain period of time, or be in the library or someplace else studying. I also took less semester hours because Max Pitt was like Abby, the first semester's gonna be a lot, so just take like 13 hours or something. I'm really thankful he told me that, 'cause that helps a lot. Sometimes I just have my door closed until I get that assignment done and then I open it up. Or if it's like an assignment that I can do while people talk, that's different too. I've kept up with my work, so it's good.

Interviewer: You've found a way to make it work.

Caitlyn: But then, late nights is one thing. And I have an 8 AM, which really stinks, but I take naps, which is nice. Tuesday after house meeting, I didn't get to bed until 12:30, because the girls were just hanging out in the hallway right in front of my door, and I'm not gonna close it to go to bed. I could, but I'm not going to, because I enjoy it too. But that sometimes is hard for me, too. Because I'm like I should be sleeping, but this is okay too. And it's only for a year, so I can do it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well it sounds to me like you found a way to balance some of that.

Caitlyn: Right, I try to.

Interviewer: So, as you look at your experience as a house president so far, what would you think have been your biggest successes?

Caitlyn: Getting to know the freshman. I feel like I've done a good job at that, not perfect of course, but I feel like I've done an okay job with that. Also, the last two years were kind of quiet on the hall, which is fine, but this year, they're just interacting more so I feel like, but maybe that's because I wasn't always on the hall last year like the HP has to be this year. I don't know, I just feel like the halls open, the doors are open, people are just interacting more. That could be just because I'm in the middle, instead of on the end.

Interviewer: Right, yeah, so location can matter. So what about challenges? What are the biggest challenges that you face or that you've had to face as a house president?
Caitlyn: Okay, you'll like this one. Mental health I think is the most, because can I tell stories about ...

Interviewer: Oh please, I would love for you just to tell lots of stories.

Caitlyn: I have three that I'm thinking of. So it was only like two weeks into school. A girl brings a guy up, just a friend for five minutes before visitation hours. She just had to get something, and Jane the AHD saw her, and so she came up, she's like Abby, if you see her let me know. So I was like okay. I saw her, and so she came up and gave her the yellow slip of paper that was like this is kind of a warning, just talk to Dianne if you have any questions kind of thing. And she busted out in tears, was like you just made my day 10 times worse, bla, bla, bla. I came here to start a new life, and just restart basically. I've had problems in the past, and just unloaded. Started crying. So then I went back out and she was just telling to Jane. So then I went back out, sorry, I don't know what's happening.

Interviewer: Do you want some water?

Caitlyn: It's okay for now, but thank you. So then I went back in there, and i was like can I come in for a second? She was like yeah. And then I was like, I can take the slip of paper, and she's like you don't understand. That was really hard for me, because I really didn't know what to do, but I wanted to help her. And so she just unloaded, and I didn't know anything about that until I went and I just said hi. And so then I called Dianna. I was like Dianna, I need help. Because I don't know what to do. But she clearly needs cooled down, because she was really mad, and upset. So she came up and we sat together and talked to her. And Dianna helped a lot, just watching her, and by the end of it, she was good. Better, anyways, when we left. No hurt feelings, I don't think. We've talked since then, of course, but that was the first thing, I was like wow, I'm like a counselor also. And I think it's the fact that Dianna was older too, and Dianna just could relate better to her. Because some of those things haven't happened to me, or I haven't been through. So that was one thing that I think helped that situation also, because I'm a similar age to her. If somebody came and tried to talk to me, I might do the same thing.

Caitlyn: The next story is about Air Band. Getting rules for Air Band. Some people always get hurt, but they don't get the part. But this one just had a chain reaction of events with one of my [inaudible 00:10:42] members. She was just like well, the girl that we chose to be the lead role, the girl in my Hoko said she's always in the lead roles, why don't we put a new face, which is great. Did not disagree with that. But also she hadn't had a lead role, and she's worked her butt off for Air Band, and she had seniority. So that's why we chose her as the lead role, so then after that it just went downhill. Now she's not on house council anymore. Because it's just led to one thing after the other, and then she was very rude, and sassy, and I was very patient with her. Very understanding, she couldn't come to house council meetings because of work. So she Skyped in, which is not ideal for me. But I let it happen because she's on house council, and she wanted to Skype in, which is good.

Caitlyn: And I would like to reschedule, but she didn't tell me until the day of. So then she Skyped in, and then I was talking to her, and then she hung up. And the girls on my Hoko
were like what was that? And so then we called her back, because we wanted feedback from one of our functions, and then she hung up again. The girls were like what? And then I had a conversation with her, and she would never meet up with me. Never, I'd be like hey, are you free at seven, she's like yes, we'll meet at seven. 10 minutes before, she's like I'm not gonna be there, sorry. Something like that. She'd just never wanna confront me. Never talk face to face, which is really, that's another thing that's very upsetting, but is also how a lot of people are right now. People my age.

Interviewer: Not willing to confront face to face.

Caitlyn: Right, all through a phone. And so I had to, after house meeting, we were at Chevelle Chapel with our brother house. And I was like hey Kashona, can I talk to you for a second? She's like no. Starts walking. I said okay I'll just follow you. I'll just follow you to talk to you. Because she texted me before, sorry, I'm all going back and forth. But she texted me before that house meeting and said I'm done with house council, but I'll still do my Kosa thing, and I was like that's not how it works. You can't ... but so then, I was like you can't be in Kosa if you're not on house council. Part of house council is being on Kosa. Basically she was just like fine, and throws her binder. She's not on house council anymore, which worked out in the end, because honestly, if I'm being real, that's what I wanted, because she was being rude and just her attitude is like I don't wanna be there. Like I'm better than everyone else kind of thing.

Interviewer: That's never pleasant to deal with.

Caitlyn: No, and it's hard, and I can't really, I feel out of place if I'm trying to correct her, how she is. Because I'm younger than she is too, so she would have just been like you don't know me, whatever, kind of thing. That was really difficult for me. And then the last one is from another house member. And she's older than me, and she's had drug problems and depression, and serious things. For example, she came to house meeting just in a sports bra. And I was like okay, that's okay 'cause it's just us girls. And then the brother house came over to play Jeopardy. And she was still just in her bra. And I said do you mind putting on a shirt? I don't want people to feel uncomfortable. And she's like yeah. But then leaves. Is mad about it. So then I text Amanda, was I out of line? Because I don't like making, but it's the same girl that is so easy to kind of insult?

Interviewer: It sounds like she's easily upset.

Caitlyn: Very much so, yeah. So then Amanda's like yeah, you might have been out of line because, it wasn't a big deal it's just like, how I grew up, that's not acceptable. But then how she is, she's like it's fine, which I can see both sides, so then I was like hey, I'm sorry, I was out of line. Please come back and play. And she did. With a shirt on, which was good. I'm still, both sides of me are like, I don't know about that. It's just like how easy she gets upset, and that was like another Air Band thing. She didn't get the part, and she's also very, before Air Band, she had an anxiety attack, which would not have worked out well if she was the lead role. And I knew that, I knew she, just Dianna and I talked because she'd had problems with blacking out, so that's another reason. That's just some of the things.
Interviewer: Yeah, no those are great examples. One of the things that strikes me about the examples, is that in all three cases, anger was there, right? With all three of those young women that you had to deal with, kind of a common theme there was anger. Do you feel like you have to deal with other people's anger pretty frequently?

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. That is a challenge. So let me ask you, so you started off by saying that this has to deal with mental health, and then you gave three really good examples of people who were exhibiting, maybe there was some mental health issues afoot there. As a house president, how has that affected your own mental, and by mental health I mean your wellness. Your sense of vitality, has that been challenging at all?

Caitlyn: Yes, yes. Because I've had to, like Dianna. Call her and talk to her about it. And then my mom and dad, I've talked to them about it, which helps, those three people help a lot. I've definitely, after that house meeting, I had a huge pimple on my forehead. Sleep, I would not sleep as good, it'd take me a while to go to sleep, and then finally I'd go to REM sleep, REM cycle. It's definitely, or like I'm just mentally exhausted. Not physically, but mentally I'm like don't, I can't do that right now. I have to take a nap. And that's another thing I've learned that if I feel a certain way, like exhausted, I might go take a two hour nap, which is very long for a nap, but it's something that I need. And that's something I've learned. I just feel a certain way, and then take that two hour nap and feel better.

Interviewer: Sounds like you're pretty self aware in terms of how to respond to some of those things. Not always, right?

Caitlyn: I try to be. It's definitely different. I haven't had anything really like this. I've had president roles, but they've always ...

Interviewer: PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:19:04]

Caitlyn: ... had like president roles, but they've always worked really close to the advisor. So, if there was a problem, the advisor would just be like, "Don't act like that." That kind of thing, which I wish I could do, but I feel like it's not the right situation.

Interviewer: I think I'm hearing you say, it's different here, because you're on the frontline. And that advisor's not standing right next to you every time you're having to deal with this stuff. And then there's the anxiety it's causing in your life.

Caitlyn: Yeah, and they live on the hall. I can't just be like, "Don't act like that." I see them every day. I need to actually think through how to deal with it long term, basically.

Interviewer: So, when you think about the challenges that you're talking about, and dealing with the stress that you're describing, that would be understandable for anyone's life, is having to deal with these things. Have you found any particular thing that's helpful to you in dealing with the stress of those things?
Caitlyn: Yeah. Really like, taking hot baths, and reading a book, because that just clears my mind, and then I go to sleep better because of it. Definitely stretching helps, or running. If I'm really upset, I just run it out. Really, any physical activity, because I'm one of those people that really need movement, I guess. So, then I don't think about it constantly in a circle.

Interviewer: So, when you're running, or when you're taking the hot bath, what are you thinking about? Or, are you not thinking about anything? What's going on in your mind during those times?

Caitlyn: When I'm running, most of the time I think about it and I get more mad about it. Telling myself, "Be mad about it." And then that helps as I'm running. And then I get exhausted, so then it's gone. That's kind of how it goes, but kind of not. Kind of letting it go when I'm out. And in the bath, I'll read a book and it'll just cycle. I'll be reading, and then it'll come back to me, or something will jog the memory. So, it leaves, too. Just lessens, I guess. But, I don't know how else to explain it.

Interviewer: So, in dealing with your own stress, the hot bath, the running helps, reading the book. You said sometimes taking a nap.

Caitlyn: Yes.

Interviewer: What about dealing with the challenges themselves? So, now, not thinking so much about the challenge of your own sense of stress, but what about actually dealing with those challenges themselves? Is there anything that you've discovered that is helpful, to help you deal with that?

Caitlyn: Like, as I'm talking to the person, kind of?

Interviewer: Either, as you're talking to them, or processing it later? Or, just dealing with that overall challenge of having to deal with angry people?

Caitlyn: Usually I'll talk it out with somebody on how it went, and then I'll see like, "Crap, I should not have said that." Or, "Crap, I should've done this instead." Or, "That was good." Kind of thing. And then, I'll just tell myself to calm down, because most of the time there's no need to get so uptight about it, or nervous about it, and just take a step back and kind of calm down about it. That way I don't do anything that I wish I didn't say, or something. Which is not very easy, but it's definitely necessary. Oh, my goodness. Just, thinking about it twice or something.

Interviewer: Want some water?

Caitlyn: Yes.

Interviewer: Here, let me get you some.

Caitlyn: Okay, thank you. Sorry, I don't know ...
Interviewer: No, that's okay. The air is really dry, and so [crosstalk 00:23:32].

Caitlyn: I getting over being sick. Thank you.

Interviewer: You're welcome. So, anything else you can think of, that you'd want to name, that helps you deal with the challenges that you face? Either the literal challenges that you face in doing the job, or the challenge of dealing with the stress that invokes in your own life?

Caitlyn: Friends.

Interviewer: Friends?

Caitlyn: Friends. That's one I did forget. Yeah, because the other HPs, for example, they're going through similar things that I'm going through. So, just conversing with them helps a lot. Yeah, I guess.

Interviewer: Okay, good. So, let me shift just a bit, can you think of a time where you had an experience that seemed negative at the time, but later on it took on a different meaning for you?

Caitlyn: Oh, my. Well, I guess the thing was one, because it brought new energy to the hall whenever we got an interim.

Interviewer: Okay, let me make sure I understand. So, when you had somebody who had to leave POCO, and you had an interim, that new person, that fresh person, that would add new vitality, new energy to the ...

Caitlyn: Right.

Interviewer: Okay.

Caitlyn: That was one. But, your question is difficult, because, at the moment I'm not thinking of anything that pops up in my brain. I've definitely had the thought like, "Well, something good came out of that." I think I understand your question, I just can't think of one right now, but I've had the feeling, that came out better than I thought. Like, that was good.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you remember having those experiences of, "Oh, my gosh. I understand this differently now." But you're waiting for the specific memory-

Caitlyn: Right.

Interviewer: So, that's okay. They may come to you later, and we can certainly go back to them. I'll make a note to do that. So, as you look back over your life this semester, what experiences have been the most significant for you?

Caitlyn: Well, there was confrontations of those people. That's one of the things that I learned from. Another thing is, just getting to know the freshmen, just the environment. And
then, being constant with house meetings, and just being level, like not fluctuating. Like, "This house meeting I'm super excited about." And then the next house meeting be like, "I don't want to be here," kind of feeling. Can you ask the question again? I think I have more thoughts about it.

Interviewer: Yeah. As you look back over your life this semester, and this will be counting the whole of your life, and not just the house president role. But as you look back over your life this semester, what experiences have been most significant for you?

Caitlyn: I don't know. I think like what I said, and getting to know the school more so. I mean, that's part of the HP thing. And just seeing how I deal with it is really significant to me, because of school, and then social aspect of it, and then the HP aspect of it truly taught me how stressful it can be. The last two years I've really enjoyed, and they weren't so stressful, but there was a different kind of stress, because I had softball at school, and then a social life. So, it definitely flopped, but I've learned a lot from it, which I think that's pretty significant. And then, just dealing with people, how important that is. That's really impacted me.

Interviewer: Say a little more about the stress?

Caitlyn: The school, social, and HP stress?

Interviewer: Yeah, any. It's kind of like one big package anyway. I mean, we experience life as it comes to us. Sometimes, with our student hat on, sometimes with our family hat on, sometimes with our leader hat on. But, it comes to us however it comes. So, as you look at the big, whole-

Caitlyn: Big picture? Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah, just talk to me about the stress of life this semester?

Caitlyn: Well, there's a lot of things I need to be doing, and I want to do, like internships. I've got to apply for internships. I'm trying to get my private pilot's license.

Interviewer: Oh, cool.

Caitlyn: That's just another thing that adds on. Not necessary, but I want. And then, keeping up with classes, and social aspects of having my own friends, but also being friends to the freshmen [inaudible 00:30:11]. The friends that moved off campus, or off the residence halls, I'm not as close with, just because all that energy needs to go on the hall with the new students, which is good because you just branch out more so, I guess. And then, what else was I going to say? Yeah, and just making sure I keep the relationships that I want. I find myself not having time for certain relationships that I should be more focused on, but I just don't have the time, or the energy sometimes. Or I just don't see it, because I'm busy with other things. So, that's kind of stressful sometimes.

Interviewer: There's a lot of stuff then, isn't there? I mean-
Caitlyn: Yeah, if you actually put it on a piece of paper, then it just breaks down to smaller things. Like my allergy shots. [inaudible 00:31:16]. Remember to get that once a week. But, it's all like, if you actually think about it, it's not that bad.

Interviewer: Yeah, so there's family, there's studies, there's health, there's things you want to do, like the pilot's license. There's the homework, there's the house president role. All that stuff, that just kind of-

Caitlyn: Adds up.

Interviewer: Yeah, it adds stressors to the plate, that's for sure. So, you mentioned that, when it comes to dealing with the job related stresses, I mean, you mentioned the books, and the running, and the hot baths. When you take the whole of life semester, has there been anything in addition to those things, that you have found to be helpful in any sort of stress management, stress relief?

Caitlyn: Yes. The mindfulness, actually, I really enjoyed.

Interviewer: Has that been helpful?

Caitlyn: Yes. It was actually just an hour a day, on Wednesdays, that I knew I was going to calm down. It was funny, a lot of the HPs, we'd do the body scan, and a lot of them would fall asleep. And I would hear them, so that I'd laugh [inaudible 00:32:43] quite, then I feel embarrassed that I'm laughing. But, no, it was really good. Every single HP that was there, because I went [inaudible 00:32:58] every one besides the first one. And so, I think they fell asleep, and I'm really tense. I don't relax easily, and so I was like, "I probably won't be able to do that. It's not enough time for me, I don't think." And then the last one, I was exhausted, and I think I went for a run before or something like that.

Caitlyn: And the last one, I remember scanning my back, and then not remembering anything until she said something really loud. And so I jerked. And I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I just went to sleep." But, it was good. And I really liked the yoga a lot. And then just calming down, and letting it go. And the last one, she was like, "Picture people that you love, like a family member, or friend. Wish them to be well, and comfortable, and happy, and at peace." And then she went to like, "Picture somebody that you've had a disagreement to, or you're not very good friends," Or something like that. That was challenging, but it's important to do that, because it makes it better for you.

Interviewer: It sounds like that was helpful because, I think I hear you saying, it gave you a place to relax, and to have that time-

Caitlyn: For an hour.

Interviewer: For an hour. Has it been helpful to you in any other way, during the course of your day, your week? Did you do any personal practice during the week?
Caitlyn: Yeah. Before I go to bed, or if I'm about to go to sleep, I'll just try to focus on my breathing, which I kind of did before that. If I had trouble going to sleep, I'd just try to focus on my breathing, which is just, I don't know. But it helped that she was just like, "Focus on your breathing. If memories come in, just push them out." Then, just stretching. I've thought about it more, just to think about breathing whenever you're stretching. Yeah, it's definitely helped.

Interviewer: Has that made any impact in terms of your life, and your role? Or not so much?

Caitlyn: I think so, because if I notice that I'm being really tense, or something's bothering me, I'll be like, "Okay I need to do something to stop how I'm feeling right now." So then, I'll just stretch or something, or just lay down. Sometimes I'm exhausted, and I have class in 20 minutes or something. And so, I'll set my alarm clock, and then just lay on my floor, and focus on my breathing for 15 minutes, and then go. And that helps a lot, because it's resting, and it's just letting all the stuff that I have to do, go for 15 minutes, which is very necessary, I found out.

Interviewer: I'm really curious about something. Let me ask you this. You seem to be a person who's pretty self aware about the kind of things that you need to do to stay refreshed?

Caitlyn: Yes.

Interviewer: And so, in regard to the challenges that you face when we're talking specifically about your job, you talked about the baths, and the running, and the reading?

Caitlyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: When we talked about life as a whole, not just the job, but the job coupled with being a student, coupled with being a family member, coupled with all those things, that's when you mentioned mindfulness. Any thoughts as to why mindfulness arises in your thoughts when you thought about the whole of life, as opposed to it rising in our thoughts when you were still thinking about only the job related things?

Caitlyn: Well, I don't know, because it's going to go past just this. It's not just for school, it's actually beneficial for you to-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:38:04]

Caitlyn: Just for school. It's actually beneficial for you to do this. And I think, I don't know, it's really important for people to just be okay with themselves kind of, or just relax. Not relax, because I don't relax. But, just calm, kind of.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Caitlyn: And, I think, I don't know, just being mindful is really important past overall to me.
Because, you're helping me here with an insight, that I'd never thought of before. And, that is your ... I think I'm hearing you saying, et me check this out with you. I think I'm hearing you saying that when you think about the given compartment of your life, the stress related to work, that it was easy to think about very specific things you do to relieve that stress.

Yes.

But, when you think of the whole of life, that's when mindfulness came to mind, because I think I heard with you saying, because mindfulness itself off is more holistic. Is that what?

Yeah, I think that's exactly right. Yeah.

Does it help bridge the parts of life, or cause the parts of to be more integrated, or does it just bring calm, to the whole of life?

Yeah, because I get caught up in all the things that I'm going need to do, or do in the future, which is really not healthy, because then you just worry about things which people worry too much already. So, just kind of makes me calm down about all of it. I guess, I don't know, sometimes when I am just laying there, everything will come, and do a cycle in my brain, kind of. Like, "Oh I'll have to do this, and I'll have to do this." But, then also in that kind of pushes away though. So, I think that's what helps just being mindful about it, but that pushing it away kind of if that makes sense. I don't know.

I think you're saying some things that are very important. You're helping me understand some things here that are pretty cool. Actually the next question I was going to ask, I think you've actually gotten to it and that is, can you tell me the demands that are on your plate this semester, and what you're doing to deal with those. And, I think you've already kind of named those, and some things you're doing to deal with them.

Yeah.

So, let me flip back for a moment, to the question that you said you definitely are aware that you've had experiences that seem negative at first, but then they took on a different meaning for you later. You said, "Yeah, that sounds familiar."

Yeah, I definitely have that feeling, but-

"But, specific memories were hard to come by."

Yes.

Anything come to mind at this point? And, if not, that's okay.

No, I mean I still don't have anything off that's coming, but-
Interviewer: What about any of the stressors that you've named in terms of the demands. Whether it's the family, or the allergies, or the warranty of the pilot's license, with the dealing with difficult people in the hall, or the studies, academically? Have any of those stresses taken on, or any of those things that are taken on different meaning for you, or not so much? And, maybe not. I'm not trying to suggest anything. I'm just brainstorming a little.

Caitlyn: Yeah, I get it. Let's see. There is, I know there is, but right now let's see. Like was my private pilot's license.

Interviewer: That's very cool by the way.

Caitlyn: Thank you. There's a lot of stuff like that comes with it, and it's a lot of work, but it's also like a whole new world. And, the flight instructor I have, he's not, this is totally off topic, but he's not very good at communicating, which I've learned this semester.

Interviewer: Which is stressful in its own right.

Caitlyn: Right. And, so I'm just like, yeah. But, it's kind of hard, and kind of like just negative feeling to have to deal with that, but also like good comes from it, because he is a good instructor. I feel safe like when he instructs me, but this is weird. I don't know. I guess good's come out of it, because I know how to fly now. I can take the plane, and go anywhere in a 25 mile radius kind of thing. That's just like a really simple one. But, let's see. That's, I don't know. I'll have to get back with you, and do some thinking on this one, because there is-

Interviewer: And, that's okay. Because, if nothing comes to mind, nothing comes to mind.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, let me ask you a different question. You are, believe it or not, you're just about halfway through your year, and I would be curious, how would you contrast your experience right now as a house president, compared to when you first started?

Caitlyn: Well, I feel like I'm a lot more confident already with how I do things. Because, you have to be in this job, otherwise people aren't going to see you as someone they can go and talk to, or ask questions about. And, so I think that's really helped me. Yeah. And, I don't know. I just, I definitely see a difference. Mom and dad are already saying, they're like, "Abby, what are you ... That's teaching you a lot of stuff, isn't it?" I'm like, "Yeah, it is." Because, they can see a difference when I go home, just communication skills. I think I've improved, because I have to lead house meetings. So, of course I have to explain stuff better, or just communicate in general about all the stuff that's going on. Which at
At the beginning of the year, I was not as developed at I guess, because it takes practice. It definitely does.

Caitlyn: I mean, I've run organizational meetings, but it's different. It's different, because there're advisors there. If you forget something, they'll tell you. So, it's very different. And, then yeah, just knowing more stuff, because you definitely, like the second ... If I did this job again, I'd be really good at it, but it's just like learning it. And, I've already learned so much how Graceland is, and how to deal with students. Because, I'm sure second semester I'll have more stuff, student wise too. But, yeah, I think-

Interviewer: What do you think has made the biggest difference, as you think about, you talking about you have more confidence now? What have been the biggest factors do you think in shaping that, that difference between now, and when you started?

Caitlyn: I feel like the people I've been around, like the other HPs, and also having to work closer with the RezLife team. And, then just having to do it basically, not just the position I'm in. It's not expected, but kind of really expected just to, yeah. And, then I had still, I remember Melissa doing this stuff, or Amanda doing this stuff, and so it's just kind of like, "I want to do it, so I'm going to do it." Kind of thing.

Interviewer: So, partially the confidence is born of just the fact that you've done it, you've got the experience.

Caitlyn: Yeah. It's just like, "Wow, I did that." So, I mean, whether it's good or bad, I've gotten through it kind of thing, and it's just like, you learned from it or you made a mistake, and you don't do that again kind of thing.

Interviewer: What about dealing with the challenges that come with being a house president, and why not just a big-

Caitlyn: Pressure?

Interviewer: Well, yeah. Okay. Yeah, there you go. Yeah. The pressure, and you've named what those pressures are. It's the house presidents, the study, this whole ... Is how you deal with the pressure any different now, than when you first started?

Caitlyn: At the beginning, definitely. Because, at the beginning I was more, I don't know. I just feel like I was a lot tenser about everything, and I just took everything like, "Oh, I got to do it this way. Oh I got to do it this way." Kind of thing. And, now I'm kind of like, "Everyone's different. I'm not going to do it how Melissa did it." Everyone has their own ways. The hall's not the same as when Melissa did it at all.

Interviewer: Because, you're your own unique person.

Caitlyn: Right. And, then the people on the hall are totally different. It's just a different atmosphere. So, she had a different [inaudible 00:48:43] than I did, like not as much diversity. So, that's something that I've had to deal with. And, so I've just kind of ...
mean it's still there, it's definitely still there. But, I'm trying to just do it, what I think is
best for the whole kind of ...

Interviewer: So, what's made the biggest difference in terms of-

Caitlyn: Realizing that I need to ... Well, honestly I think it's from seeing another house president
put tons of pressure on themselves. And, then I don't know. And, then they come and
talk to me, because they're like, "Oh, I basically just need somebody to talk to." Kind of
thing. So, I'm also like, "I can't deal with that right now." But, no, it actually helped me.
That's actually one of the things that's native, but actually good in the long. That's one
of them. So, I had a house president come and he ... Well, anyways he was like, "Can we
meet today at like 4:00?" I'm like, "Okay." That's fine, because we're working together.
That's fine. And, so then he'd come, and be really uptight about something. And, I'd
calm him down. By the time he's left, he's like, "Thanks. I needed to talk about this."
And, so then he asked me again the next week, or four days later, and I'm like, "Ugh."
But, no. And, so then I just told him straight up. I was like, "You need to kind of take a
step back, because you're being really harsh on yourself." Which is ironic, because that's
how I am.

Interviewer: With yourself?

Caitlyn: Right. And, so I was just like telling them to take a step back, and kind of in a sense relax.
Just calm down. That helped me. And, so I mean it was negative, because I was me, he'd
want to meet up so much. And, I was, or he texts me about little things that are our halls
could do, or something. And, I was really patient, but then I was like, "Just stop with the
little things." It's like, "What color are we wearing today?" When that's the IM job, like
the intramurals rep job. Just little things. And, that was negative in that aspect.

Caitlyn: But, then in the end, we worked better together because of it. We kind of helped each
other. I don't think he realizes that he helped me, but I feel like he did just because I
realized I feel exactly like he does. But, I just don't show it like he does. And, so I just, I
was like, "Well, I need to deal with it." And, then telling him to calm down, kind of
helped me calm down in a way, because I realized how much I was being like him just
not showing it basically.

Interviewer: That's an excellent example. So, you said you have a tendency to put pressure on
yourself as well.

Caitlyn: Very much so.

Interviewer: And, that you have discovered that you're doing to try to help yourself with that.
Because, that's a whole different kind of pressure.

Caitlyn: So, not Putting pressure on me. How to find not.

Interviewer: Yeah. How do you deal with it, when you realize, "Oops, I'm putting pressure on myself."
Is anything helpful in terms of relieving that?
Either doing the thing that I'm putting more pressure on myself for. Either doing it, or
being like, rationalizing why I'm doing it, or if it's actually necessary. If it's important to
actually put that much pressure on myself, which is difficult because I go back and forth
with it, but usually I'm just like, "I'll get it eventually." Kind of thing. Like, "I'm going to
do it. I just, right now, I can only do this." Or, something like that, if that makes sense.

That makes all kinds of sense, sure. So, let me just kind of ask you that, you've just
provided so much really helpful information. I really appreciate that. Is there anything
else that you would want to share with me relative to your experience as a house
president, or in dealing with all this stuff, that you think would be important for me to
know? We've covered a lot of ground.

Yeah. I don't know if I answered all your questions right, but-

No, just, I think having something that HPs can go to a mentally, is really important.
Whenever the HPs came to our CHP meeting once, a while back, Tam was like, "Well, I
have, last year I kind of had my door closed more than I wanted to, because I had to
take care of myself. And, if you can't take care of yourself, you're not going to be able to
take care of a hall." And, which makes total sense. And, sometimes I like think back to
that and I'm like, "It's okay that I have my door closed right now, because I need to do
this." Or, "I have to figure out how to deal with this kind of thing." And, so that, I mean,
just having her tell us that, I mean, I think I heard it at training too.

So, something that the HPs can go to a mentally, or to help them mentally. You're
thinking of things like ... You have an example of ways that HPs have learned to take
care of themselves. Any other examples of things that HP should go to help them
mentally? I just want to feel you thinking of self help things, or were you thinking of
events, or trainings, or classes?

Just basically things that teach them how to deal with what they're going through, kind
of thing.

Got you.

Yeah. Because, I think the mindfulness, it helps. Because, then I'm like, I don't know.
Yeah, just took the time I needed kind of.

Okay. So, you found the mindfulness training to be helpful for the HP? Or, if you were
just to put in a sentence, but if you were just to describe, if a house president were to
tell you, "Why should I go to that mindfulness thing?" What would you tell them?

So, then you can rest for a little bit. Not Sleep, but actually calmed down. Not
reenergize, but renew yourself kind of thing. Just stop for an hour, which it doesn't feel
like an hour when I go. The body scan, it goes super fast, and it's like 15, 10 minutes. I
don't know. But, I'll just tell them, "Come and try at least once." Kind of thing. And, I mean, I'm sure it's not for everyone, but everyone should try it. Yeah.

Interviewer: Good. Well, I'm glad that it was helpful for you.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: And, I got to thank you again for your willingness to talk with me. This has been extremely helpful, and I really appreciate it.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Anything else you want to mention before we close?

Caitlyn: I don't think so. I'll let you know if I [inaudible 00:56:52]. Because, there's so much that happens, but yeah.

Interviewer: Well thank you.

Caitlyn: You're welcome. Thank you.
Caitlyn Interview #2

Interviewer: All right, so thank you once again for meeting with me. I appreciate it. Last time, I wanted to mention to you, I walked away from our meeting with a whole lot of new insights and so I really appreciate that and I'm sure today will be the same for me. So in our first discussion, you talked about the various demands that were on your plate as a student and as a leader, and there were two or three times along the way where you mentioned that mindfulness practice was helpful in dealing with the stress of those demands. And I was just wondering if you could tell me a little more about that.

Caitlyn: How it helped me handle sports better?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Caitlyn: Well, I don't know, I still laughed about how some people fell asleep during it, and I still didn't until like the very last one, and it just took me that long to realize that I'd just have to calm down, kind of, and try not to think about stuff. Which is hard, which is really hard for me not to think about everything at once, but-

Interviewer: Me too.

Caitlyn: Yeah, and so I don't know, it was just figuring out how to do that and then once I did do that, the last one once I did actually zonk out for four minutes, and probably not even that long, seconds probably, but, I don't know, it felt good and definitely a stress reliever. Yeah, it made me want to do it again for how it made me feel. So I do, I tell ... well, I went home, my little brother, he's kind of stressed at school, isn't going to sleep. I was like well, when you go to bed at night, lay there, lay on your back and just focus on your breathing. Just try that, because that works for me. And we're similar, so I told him that ... and I mean, I haven't asked him if he does it yet, but mom does it too because she heard me say it.

Caitlyn: She's like, 'Oh, that's what you do?' She was taking a nap one time and I was just like yeah, 'Just focus on your breathing,' and pretty soon she's snoring so I was like well, it works.

Interviewer: It relaxed her.

Caitlyn: It does. It does.

Interviewer: So in terms of focusing on your breathing, because you had mentioned the breath work in our first conversation, that's one of the things that you had mentioned. Because I had asked you are there any specific ones that you practiced, and you mentioned two in particular, and breath work was one of
them. So when you do the breath work, or when you do any of the mindfulness practices, in terms of helping you deal with the stress ... so it causes you to relax in the moment. I'm hearing you say that. And then what does that do for you, then, when you kind of re-engage with life?

Caitlyn: It makes me take a step back and figure out what I should do next instead of getting all jumbled up, like I was before, kind of. I don't know, it's just easier to ... this is what I'm going to do now, this is what I know I can do, and I get it down and then move to the next one, pretty much. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: Okay, that's actually very helpful. Let me just check a perception with you, I want to be sure I'm hearing this. So I think you're saying that there are times that when you do the breath work, or after you do the breath work, that it helps you ... I want to make sure I capture how you said that. It helps you kind of-

Caitlyn: Take a step back.

Interviewer: Take a step back, that was it. And then kind of do things-

Caitlyn: Step by step, instead of ... I mean, there's just stuff that keeps piling, you know? And so then it's like oh my gosh I'm so jumbled right now I don't know which one to do. And so that happens a lot and yeah, and then if you just kind of step back and you're like well, this is what needs to get done right now kind of thing-

Interviewer: Yeah, I feel sometimes like there's a dump truck that just backs up and dumps stuff in my head.

Caitlyn: [inaudible 00:04:16], it just keeps coming. Yep, yeah.

Interviewer: So taking the step back and then the ability to see it step by step.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Caitlyn: I guess that's one way to put it.

Interviewer: And what does that feel like inside as you're experiencing that, as you're experiencing not so much the mindfulness practice what do you feel like, but you're done and now you've stepped back and you've started to deal with the step by step, what is that experience like for you?

Caitlyn: It's good. It's very rewarding and it's like you're doing something, like you're getting stuff done instead of just leaving it to build, I guess.

Interviewer: Okay.
Caitlyn: So yeah, it's just kind of refreshing also, like a refreshing feeling that you can do stuff, get it done. Did that answer your question?

Interviewer: No, no, refreshing's a great word. It really is. Okay, I may want to come back to that, but that's actually very helpful. So to be specific, in our first conversation you said that you had found two things to be especially helpful. One was the breathing work, and one was yoga.

Caitlyn: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And so you told me a little bit about the breathing and why that's meaningful to you. Can you say a little bit more about the yoga or the stretching?

Caitlyn: It feels good to stretch because sometimes ... I mean, it hurts and then you're like ah, this feels good and you can actually feel it. It's more physical than mental kind of thing. And it's also nice just to know that you're kind of helping your body kind of, and it releases, it's good for you. It's just good for you to stretch and you're supposed to stretch before you go to bed so you can sleep better, so I don't know, yoga's just calming, kind of. It's like if you run, it's kind of like that, it's just a different type of release, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah, so yoga is calming for you, and the breathing is like taking ... is the breathing calming also?

Caitlyn: Once I get there.

Interviewer: Once you get there.

Caitlyn: Yeah, but I mean physical things are a lot easier to get, you know, but I don't know, I feel like the mental thing, the breathing thing, is actually more beneficial. Because you can run and it gets rid of all the stuff that's, I don't know, balled up, but then it doesn't completely refresh you, in a way.

Interviewer: I see.

Caitlyn: I don't know, it's weird, I don't know.

Interviewer: So the experience of refreshment and calming is different, perhaps, in your experience, between-

Caitlyn: Yeah, a little.

Interviewer: -the yoga and the breathing.

Caitlyn: Yeah, it's just different. I don't really know how to explain it.

Interviewer: No, that's okay because these things are kind of hard to describe sometimes.
Caitlyn: They are. Yeah, and I'm not great at it anyway.

Interviewer: No, you're doing fine. And that's one of my interests in this is to kind of get down into the personal experience of it. And sometimes that means that we just don't have the words for it, and so we kind of have to-

Caitlyn: Figure it out.

Interviewer: Yeah, right. So you're doing fine. So when you're doing the yoga, what are you experiencing inside your life?

Caitlyn: To be quiet and focus on that, kind of. So it's similar to the breathing, I guess, in that aspect.

Interviewer: The distractions kind of go away as much-

Caitlyn: Right.

Interviewer: Or they're not as bad.

Caitlyn: Yeah, because you're supposed to breathe also, as you stretch. So it kind of I guess goes together, but yeah I guess-

Interviewer: Okay, okay, that helps. So we'll come back to mindfulness later but there's another question I wanted to ask. I'm remembering that in our earlier conversation you talked about your open door. Physically, this open door on your room, and you talked about it in a way that gave me the impression that that open door was important.

Caitlyn: Definitely.

Interviewer: Maybe even meaningful, and it really stuck with me and I made several notes in your transcript where it just says door, door, door, door, door. And so I wanted to follow up and just say tell me more about the open door, especially what meaning does that open door have for you?

Caitlyn: A lot more than I thought it did, honestly. I go home and I'm like, 'Oh, mom, they just come in if I leave my door open.' And she goes, 'You're going to have to find something kind of like that next year, otherwise you're going to miss it so much.' I said, 'Dang it, you're right, I really am.' But no, it's actually really meaningful and not only for me, for them, because sometimes they just ... a lot of the times they just procrastinate and I'll be like no, go get your homework if you're coming in here or something like that. And then it's just nice to ... Like you live so close to them and they just come in and start talking.

Caitlyn: And pretty soon more people come in, like before a house meeting, a girl just comes in, sits on my futon, starts talking to me. Pretty soon, another one comes
in. Sits on the futon too. Then three more come and they're like why don't we
just have house meeting in here. I was like, 'No, no.' But no, it's actually very, it's
flattering too, it's kind of a confidence booster because they see you as
someone they want to talk to, and go into your room.

Caitlyn: They even jump on my bed after house meeting, two of them, and I'm like that's
the one thing I'm kind of a big no to. But then they were ... they just laid there,
so it wasn't like a huge deal. It's also just what I can take and learning about
what I'm okay with and not okay with and dealing with that, I guess. Which I'm
okay with because I do like them, so yeah.

Interviewer: So you've done a really nice job of painting a vivid picture of this open door and
the people coming in and everything. What does it mean to you? I mean, if you
were to attach meaning to this open door thing, what does it mean to you in
here?

Caitlyn: That they think I'm okay.

Interviewer: Okay.

Caitlyn: And that they like hanging with each other, they need kind of that spot. And I
don't know if looking up is the right term, but just since I'm older, it's just a
place for them to hang out kind of thing, I guess. I don't know, I don't really
know. I will miss it, though.

Interviewer: What will you miss the most about it?

Caitlyn: Just having somebody be like, 'You in your room? Yeah. Can I come in? Yeah.'
And just coming and talking for not really any reason. And sometimes people
are like 'Abby, you have a thermometer? No, I don't have a thermometer.' And
then they're like, 'Can you sew my pants? Yeah, I guess I can.'

Interviewer: So they're coming to you for everything?

Caitlyn: Yes, and I'm like, 'Mom, I feel like a mother.' And she's like, 'Yep, that's kind of
what mothers have to do.' So I don't know, and they call me grandma. Did I say
that last time?

Interviewer: So is the door like you? Are you like the door? Does that represent you?
Caitlyn: You mean having it open, like letting people-

Interviewer: Yeah, because to keep your open, that says something about availability.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: I don't know, it might say other things. Positive things about you as a person. So does that door kind of represent you in some ways or not?

Caitlyn: Well, definitely because sometimes I just don't have it open so I'm just like I've got to do this stuff, leave me alone kind of thing, so I can get my stuff done. And then other times I'll open it because I want people to come in kind of thing. And I want people to come talk if they need to come talk. But yeah, I guess that works.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Well, I just know that when we talked the first time, it just seemed to be important.

Caitlyn: Yeah, and I've noticed like it definitely changes how the house is. If the HP's are actually in their room and have it open, and then the girls go in there. It really does matter a lot more than I thought it did or want to say, but it does.

Interviewer: So was that a surprise, how much-

Caitlyn: Yeah, yeah, it was because the years before I did notice that it definitely matters.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Let's shift to another mindfulness related question. When we talked the first time, you talked about breathing, you talked about yoga. You talked about stretching, you talked about doing these things in your room and when you laid down, and then you talked about that. But then you also said something that caught my attention. I got the impression from you that actually going to the mindfulness class was an important thing to you.

Interviewer: Not just the stuff you learned about mindfulness, and not only the mindfulness exercises, but actually the act of going to the class-

Caitlyn: Physically getting there.

Interviewer: Physically getting ... and being a part of this thing that was happening. That seemed important to you and I wanted to check that out and say did I misread something or was the act of going to class significant to you?

Caitlyn: Just getting there?

Interviewer: No, not so much for getting there but if we put mindfulness stuff in two categories, two big buckets, and if one bucket is the practices, the breathing,
the yoga. You can do that any time you want. You can do that in class, well
maybe not the yoga, but the breathing. You can do it in your room. And you
talked about that and the meaningfulness that that had. Then there was also
attending the class.

Caitlyn: Setting that hour aside.

Interviewer: Setting that hour aside in which that includes the practices ... yeah, sorry about
that, that's my crazy heating system.

Caitlyn: That's really loud. That's funny.

Interviewer: But the actual experience of attending the class, not so much how you physically
got there, but the experience of attending the class, that seemed to be an
important experience to you.

Caitlyn: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And why was that, because ... why was that meaningful for you? Because
there's lots of ways to learn mindfulness stuff-

Caitlyn: Internet's free, like I don't have to leave kind of thing.

Interviewer: Internet's free, but you went to a class every week. Why does that hold meaning
for you?

Caitlyn: I don't know, it's kind of like when I came here people were like, Abby just
showed to IM games, like none of her friends came, she just came. And I was
like yeah, because I like IM's, like I knew that was something I wanted to do in
college and I don't know, I kind of like doing a lot of things and I like to ... like if
there's a class that I'm a little bit interested in, I really want to go and see if I like
it. And I liked it. And so I wanted to go back and I knew it was good for me, and I
needed it. And I should go.

Caitlyn: And then, I don't know, I just wanted to so I did kind of thing. And then I don't
know, it was just something that I was like well, I'm going to do that kind of
thing. I don't especially know why, I guess. I just knew I wanted to do it.

Interviewer: But you said you went and you knew you needed it.

Caitlyn: Right. Because, I don't know, school's a lot. HP is a lot, so I know sometimes you
just need to do stuff and that was one of those things that are really good for
you. And so I was like okay I'm going to go to this. It might help me, it might not,
kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah, and so did it fulfill the need that you had?
Yeah. Yeah, I miss it. I either want yoga or mindfulness, or both, but yeah.

It's coming back this semester.

Yeah.

So, good.

I don't know if I answered your questions.

Oh no, you're doing great. You're doing great. If you didn't, I'd keep probing.

Okay, good.

So did it matter that other house presidents were attending the class with you?

No, no, I was going to go anyways. I mean, yeah, Cami was like, 'Oh, you going
to go to this?' ‘Yeah, I'm going to go.' Or, I don't know, I'd be on the fence and
something else would come up and then I'd be like yeah, since she's going, I'll
go. But we didn't go all the time together or-

So it wasn't particularly meaningful that this occurred with other HP's, I think
I'm hearing you say it would have been meaningful to you if it was no HP's.

Yeah, I would have gone ... I just would do it if I want to do it kind of thing. I
don't know, yeah. No, it didn't matter. It didn't matter if no one else went.

And if you were able to put in a sentence ... because you said you had this need
and you recognized that it could meet the need that you had, if you could put
that in a sentence saying, here is the need in my life, the mindfulness class
addressed, what need would that be?

In one sentence?

Yeah, or just however. Don't limit yourself to one sentence, I guess.

Basically, I don't know if calm is the right term. That doesn't really fit me. Kind of
just take a step back.

It would make sense. If that was the need for calm, and if that helped you
experience that, then that makes total sense.

That's true. Yeah. And it did. Kind of just take a step back and not ... I mean, I
went to something, it was a class kind of thing but it wasn't like ... it was just for
me and just. I guess relaxing would fit, too. Just kind of a take a step back and
breathe kind of thing, I guess. Yeah, I would definitely just say take a step back
and breathe is my sentence, kind of thing, if that makes sense.
Interviewer: It makes total sense. And it not only makes total sense but it leads right into the next question. You talked about how mindfulness practice, whether it was in the class or whether it was doing the practices itself, helped you to focus, relax, be calm. You'd used the word calm in the first one, kind of being in the present moment, if you will. And so you described a few moments ago what that did for you. You described how it helped you take a step back, how it helped you take one step at a time and kind of tackle things once piece at a time.

Interviewer: But while you were in that present moment, while you were in that place of calm, what was that like?

Caitlyn: Nothing.

Interviewer: Nothing.

Caitlyn: Yeah. I mean-

Interviewer: I think I know what you mean.

Caitlyn: Yeah, you really don't do anything similar to it ever in life, you just ... it's nothing, which is weird because that doesn't ... like it's not easy to get. They're like oh, if you meditate, that's easy to do. No, not if you ... no, it's really hard to do it correctly or actually just to meditate. But I don't know-

Interviewer: I love your word nothing. I'll have to tell you why later on, but I love that you're describing your experience as an experience of nothing. But before I tell you why, which I will do later, and this would be very hard to find language for, can you describe what nothingness is like in terms of maybe what it does not include? Because if it's nothing, it's nothing, right?

Caitlyn: Right.

Interviewer: So how is nothingness different than other points in the day?

Caitlyn: I don't know, you just ... you're just there, present moment kind of thing. Like nothing to go beyond. It's like when you focus on something so hard you just kind of, well, zone out everything else kind of thing. I don't know how to explain this. I want to say it's like a white light thingie, it's just like ... it's just nothing, but it's not really white light. I don't know.

Interviewer: Nothing but presence.

Caitlyn: Yeah, kind of thing. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's really excellent.

Caitlyn: I don't know.
And when we've concluded this, let me tell you why I think that's so significant that you're saying that. So it's different than other moment, then, and you told me earlier that when you would finish some of these exercises you would be able to take things one step at a time. I would just be curious, is your relationship with those things, whatever they may be, whether they be tasks or objects or experiences, is your relationship with them any different after taking the step back and doing the breathing? Or are the relationships pretty much the same? Is there-

Any difference at all?

Is there any difference at all in terms of how you might relate to a task or a person or an object or an experience?

Yeah, yeah, afterwards it would just ... like sometimes you get so much into it you're like ah, this is a big deal. And it's like nothing kind of thing. And after this you'd be like, yeah, I could do that kind of thing. I'll just do it right now, kind of.

So the thing itself can be ... it's reframed in terms of its-

Yeah, it just lowers the anxiety of it, I guess. Kind of.

Okay. Does it affect at all your relationship with good things, with non-anxious things?

Probably, I don't know, it just makes them better kind of thing. Kind of like, I'm like oh, that's actually a really good thing.

Okay. Okay, not this is very cool, what you're saying. And thank you for letting me probe and push you on this, because when you say that things, that they can feel better, look better, what is that like, like what does better mean? Does that mean you understand it more, appreciate it more-

Definitely appreciate more.

Okay.

Or you're like no, that's actually really good kind of thing, instead of oh, that's fine or you feel good about something or getting something done. Instead of like no ... or you're not so negative on things, I guess, is one way. Which I have a problem with sometimes, but yeah.

Okay.

I guess.

Okay, that's-
Caitlyn: I don't know, I don't know, Dave.

Interviewer: What you're saying is really important. It really is, because I think what I'm hearing you say is when you're swept away in all this stuff that's on your plate, then the way you understand and relate to those things is one way.

Caitlyn: Right.

Interviewer: But if you take a step back, enter into that calm space, then even relating to those things is a little different in terms of whether it's ... well, all the things that you mentioned.

Caitlyn: Go on, yeah. Like specifically, I had trouble with that [Hoko 00:27:59] member, the [inaudible 00:28:00], in the fall. And I got really upset. I was crying and I went down to Diana and she's like, 'Come in, come in.' And I'd tell her what was going on and she starts laughing. And I was upset and it kind of really took me by surprise because the only other person that has done that to me is dad, And so I was like whoa, I'm taking this way too serious. Because I was like, I don't know, she just laughed and she said, 'Caitlyn, take a step back.' It's just really funny, actually, because she was acting very immature and I was like, 'You know what, you're right, she is.' And it just surprised me that Diana did that. This is an off-topic kind of thing. But that's just kind of like the feeling of it, I guess.

Interviewer: It's the feeling you have when you get-

Caitlyn: Right, kind of thing. Yeah. And that was just ... it's just like it's crazy how like it makes you feel so different, and you're like okay, it's not that bad. I can cool it, I guess. But yeah.

Interviewer: That's actually quite helpful, thank you. You shared some stories last time, in fact one of them was the person that ... but you shared some stories with me last time in which you had an experience that first seemed kind of negative, but then later on it took a different meaning for you. And you had mentioned the story you just alluded to, you'd mentioned your flight instructor, etc. And so the capacity to discover meaning in things that ... in which the thing kind of gets reframed for us, you know, it starts off negative and then later on we ... well, it may not be a positive still, but at least we see new meaning-

Caitlyn: To learn from it, right.

Interviewer: Exactly. I want to follow up on that and ask you are there things that you do in your life that you believe are helpful to you in discovering meaning in things that first might strike you as negative? Are there things in your life that you think kind of help you do that reframing, or is it something that just kind of happens?
Caitlyn: I don't really know. I don't know, one thing that comes to mind is kind of weird, but like presentations I don't especially like, and then once I do them, I'm like you gotta do them, and then afterwards I feel good. Like it's like a relief kind of thing. I don't know if that's really the thing, but I mean that's negative in the beginning for me and then it turns out positive, but that's really short term. No, I don't know.

Interviewer: No, that's honest. That's honest.

Caitlyn: I don't know, I mean it just kind of happens. Like I know, like there's a lot of things, like mom used to make me do stuff in 4H that I hated to do. I hated it. And she's like, 'Abby, you've got to do it.' And then afterwards I'm really thankful she made me do those things. And now I see why. It's important to do the things you don't like to do so you're grateful for the things you do like to do. But I don't know, I just kind of ... I'm like oh, I need to do that kind of thing and try to do it, make myself do it if it's really-

Interviewer: So it's an act of the will-

Caitlyn: So.

Interviewer: And then you do it, and sometimes you have different perspectives when it's done.

Interviewer: Okay, good. All right, let me toss one more question your way. So during our first meeting you talked with me about the various parts of your life. There's the student part, there's the house president part, we talked about your successes. You talked about some major challenges, being a student leader, all that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: So at that time we talked about the parts. I'd like to ask you if you could reflect on kind of the whole of your experience and ask you this: as you reflect on the whole of your experience as a student leader, with all those elements, what has it all come to mean to you at this point in your life? As you look at your experience, what does it mean to you now?

Caitlyn: A lot more than I wanted it to.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Caitlyn: No, I don't know, it means a lot that I had this opportunity and then to be able to work with this many students, like freshmen, and kind of help isn't the right word, but kind of show them how the hall is kind of ... and I'm going to miss it. But no, it's ... what it means to me. I don't know, it's really flattering that people are like yeah, Abby can keep [inaudible 00:34:10] how [inaudible 00:34:12] kind
And sometimes I'm walking and it'll hit me, I'm like wow, I have one semester left and right now I'm HP.

Caitlyn: And I was like well, it went fast kind of thing. And I'm really glad I did it, I'm doing it. I don't know, I don't know what else it means to me, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a big question.

Caitlyn: It is.

Interviewer: So I asked it to you in an interesting way, I said if you were to reflect on the whole of your experience as a leader and as a student, what has that whole experience come to mean to you? Let me ask you about how you reflect on things, like people reflect differently. How do you reflect?

Caitlyn: How? That's hard. How well I did it?

Interviewer: That's what you ... are you asking me to clarify the question?

Caitlyn: No, that's kind of how I gauge it, is how well I did it, or how well I think I did it and how ... I mean, sometimes it's like yeah, I wonder what they think of me doing this this way or something like that. But then in the end, I'm like nope, at the time that's what I thought was best. How I reflect?

Interviewer: And so when you do that, is that primarily an intellectual exercise where you think through how did I do it rationally, or is it primarily a feelings exercise-

Caitlyn: Oh, it's definitely both.

Interviewer: Okay.

Caitlyn: Yeah, because sometimes I'll feel like god, that was not good at all and then people would be like ah, that was good, Abby, that was fine kind of thing. So then I didn't feel so bad about it. But I mean, I still didn't like it. Just don't do it again, kind of thing. But yeah, I don't know, that's hard, I don't know really how I measure how I reflect it kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a hard question. It's one that ... I mean, usually whenever we're asked that question how do we reflect on things-

Caitlyn: I don't think I've ever been asked that or thought about it that way because I've just done it. Usually, I'm-

Interviewer: So you have this one semester left, and if you were to pause and step back and if you were to just kind of picture your experience as a student and as a leader almost like a scrapbook, if you will, and as you let those different images come to mind, which images would you cherish the most?
Caitlyn: The [inaudible 00:37:18], which is a lot. Definitely this year, it's all the HP stuff, because I'm a lot closer to the freshman than I thought I would. That's one thing Melissa said, she's like yeah, you should really grab onto a freshman you like, kind of, and be friends with them and then, yeah, definitely HP year. Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: Well, it's obviously meant a lot to you.

Caitlyn: It has, a lot more than I thought it would.

Interviewer: What do you think it's done for you?

Caitlyn: Taught me a lot about myself, if not how other people are.

Interviewer: So let me ask you one more probing question. What did it teach you about yourself?

Caitlyn: Lots of things. That I'm very lenient than most people, than a lot of people are with certain things. But I'm not somebody that people walk over or anything.

And speaking sometimes is horrible. Just sometimes I'll say a weird word, like I'll look at word and then be thinking of something else, and I'll combine them kind of thing, and I'll just say it and people will just start laughing. But I mean, it lightens the mood I guess, but yeah, that's one thing. And then patience I guess. I'm a lot more patient with people and I think that goes along with lenient sometimes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Caitlyn: And then I don't need as much sleep as I thought I did.

Interviewer: As you thought you did-

Caitlyn: I mean, I don't get enough but I can still function okay without it, I guess.

Interviewer: And is there anything else about this whole HP student experience that you think I need to understand?

Caitlyn: I don't know, people are like oh, HP that's a lot of work. Which it is, but it's definitely worth it and it's not that bad. Sometimes people are like ah, no and I'm like no, you should do it. It actually teaches you a lot. And I get told all the time, and they're like yep, I use what happened in my HP year 10 times more than what happened in classes. I'm like, well that's why I'm doing it.

Interviewer: Well, last time we met you told me a lot about your experiences, and I really appreciate this time you letting me probe a little deeper and going down into what those experiences were like for you on the inside of your life, so thank you for your time.
Caitlyn: You’re welcome. It was not easy. Well, time is fine but yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Caitlyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: All right, thank you.

Caitlyn: You’re welcome.
Emily Interview 1

Interviewer: Okay. Well thank you again, I really appreciate this. As you know, I'm trying to explore and understand the experience of house presidents. So your willingness to talk with me is really helpful.

Interviewer: So let me just start with just a really general question, and that is tell me about your experience in becoming a house president. I know how the process works, I know what voting looks like, and I know what the boards look like. But tell me about your experience in becoming an HP.

Emily: Yeah. My freshman year I was really, really impressed by my house president that I had coming in, and how much she cared about people and knew her job, and was always willing to help others. So I think right from the beginning of my Graceland experience I had positive interactions with house presidents, and really looked up to them and the role that they were so willing to perform to help other students. So as the years went on and I was older, as a sophomore I didn't even think of becoming a house president, it was not even in my thought process at all. But towards the end of the year when it was time for us to apply and have [inaudible 00:01:39] and things like that, I just noticed that there wasn't a lot of action on other people's parts to want to step up to take that role. And I thought being a house president seems like such a great opportunity, and I didn't know why anyone else wasn't taking it.

Emily: So I was like, "Maybe this is something just the universe is telling me, 'Mariah it's your chance to step up and do something for yourself that would impact you in the future.'" So I was really excited to apply, and then everything just went really smoothly through that process. And the whole time, once I said yes in my mind, it was just all green lights the rest of the way. So it was a good experience.

Interviewer: That's cool. I'm glad. Just kind of in general, what has it been like for you?

Emily: Amazing.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: Good, good.

Emily: There have been a lot of late nights, but the relationships that I'm building and the way that other people look up to me in times when they're stressed or worried has really empowered me, and has made me a more confident person as a whole. So even the really difficult times are worth it in the end. And I can already see in retrospect how great of a decision this was for me to become a house president while I'm at Graceland.
Interviewer: Good. So you feel good about it then, obviously?

Emily: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: Good. So tell me, as you think about your experience as a house president, what have been your biggest successes do you think?

Emily: Probably in the beginning when I was getting to know the girls that were on my house council team that I got to work with and kind of mentor them through the beginning of the year. Just seeing them, how they started to develop their belief in themselves and see them begin to really fit into the roles that they signed up for, and see them become successful as well was really inspiring to me. And to see our group kind of just become closer as the year has gone on. From the beginning when all the freshmen are there, they're all scared, and they don't really know what they're doing in college.

Interviewer: Yeah, good.

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: Good. Those are pretty important successes, obviously. But with every job there are challenges as well. What are the biggest challenges that you face? And that could be either challenge strictly as a house president in your role, or the biggest challenges that you face as a house president in addition to being a student and such.

Emily: Yeah. I would say one of the biggest challenges probably is the pressures that come from some of the people that I am serving, or some of the people that have gone before me that look back and kind of have these expectations of what the next house president will do. So the seniors right now are reflecting on their early years and saying, "Oh well I loved this house president 'cause she did this for us." So it's kinda like a hint as to what I should be doing this year. So I'm trying to kinda balance between the goals that I came into this year with, and the goals that other people already had in their minds that they're kind of throwing out to me throughout the year where they want me to do certain things, and act certain ways that I maybe hadn't considered.

Interviewer: So let me make sure I'm hearing this correctly.

Emily: Yeah.
One of the pressures, and hence one of the challenges, is that you have people in the house who are in essence comparing you to predecessors, and dropping you hints about how you should be or how you should not be. Is that right?

Yes, yes.

Okay. Okay. And then you said something about sometimes even predecessors have provided some challenge or some pressure. What’s going on there?

Yeah. Well obviously if they were successful in their role in their time here, they might try to... Not forcefully, but hint at me ways to do things that worked well for them. And I do use some of those, just as helpful strategies. But also the people are different that are in the house each year and that are... The most involved group of people changes from year to year. So they’re going to need different supports from the house president. So I can’t use all of the advice that I’m given, because it doesn’t apply to the people that I’m working with.

Okay, okay, yeah. Yeah. So you talked about current members of the house and predecessors, you used the phrase dropping hints about what should be or not be.

Our house, Shalom House, has a really great Facebook group that we've kept up for I don't know how many years, it's been a lot. But our alumni are on that page. So while I'm this year posting updates daily, sometimes multiple times daily about what we're doing, sometimes I'll have the alumni comment on my posts and be like, "Oh, that's so great, I'm glad you're doing that."

And most of it is all very positive. The thing that I did notice more constructive criticism on was when I started the process of ordering house apparel. So we've got some crew neck designs, and we're designing some stickers as well for current members and alumni to order as well. So this is my first time through the apparel process, and it's a daunting one at the beginning. So I'm thankful I've had some help from alumni that have private messaged me on Facebook and just given me hints of what they've done during their time, which has been good. But some things shift and are different now.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So that's helpful. So what about any other challenges that you've faced? Anything come to mind?

Probably balancing house president related responsibilities and goals that I have with the responsibilities I have as a student, and continuing to get good grades and develop relationships with my professors. And be a good student in that
way as well. So the homework load has been especially heavy for me this year. So adding on the house president responsibilities has been a little bit overwhelming here in the beginning. But I'm definitely getting the hang of it now, getting about to the halfway point, which is good.

Interviewer: Yeah, I can see how that would be a big pressure. Describe that for me. Tell me about your experience with trying to deal with that.

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: As you try to address the needs that you have academically, but also the needs of the job. Talk to me about that.

Emily: Yeah. Well first I would say the summer before this year, my junior year, when I knew I had been elected as a house president and I was preparing for house president training I had this huge long list of goals that I had and I had written out reasons why I'm excited to be a house president, and things like that. So my mind was very focused on that house president aspect of my junior year. And I think I kind of forgot that I'm also gonna be a student and I need to prepare more for those classes as well, because I was so excited for this new responsibility that I would have. And I just had my head in the training mindset to learn how to be a good house president.

Emily: And then once the training was over and school was starting, I had my books, I had my binders and everything. But I went to class and in the back of my mind I just kept thinking about house president things. And I wasn't thinking about the class and that oh, I need to really be focusing on this as well. So I think I might've let myself get a little too involved in the HP stuff in the beginning, whereas I should've equally been paying attention to and preparing for my classes as well.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Emily: So it was mostly just a mindset thing for me. I wasn't balanced up there. So when it came time, like in the evenings I would rather be meeting all my new freshmen, instead of finishing this chapter review I was supposed to do. I did finish all my assignments, but there was definitely more intentional distractions taking me back to HP stuff in my mind.

Interviewer: Yeah. Wow. So was finding that balance difficult? Once you realized it did it become easier, or has it continued to be a struggle?

Emily: Yeah. I think-

Interviewer: 'Cause the demands of both haven't gone away.

Emily: Right.
Interviewer: Right?

Emily: Yeah, it's true. It took me a few weeks I would say to actually identify what this problem was that I was having, because I felt like it was always crunch time for all my assignments. I'd be turning them in at the last minute before they were due, and maybe not editing that paper as well as I should have before turning it in. And I was just reflecting one day and I was just thinking why am I doing poorly on my academic responsibilities right now? And then I realized it was because I just have been so excited to be an HP, I needed to take more time to work on school.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense.

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: Really does. What kind of things are the biggest help to you when you think about dealing with these challenges?

Emily: Self reflection is probably one of the biggest ones that helps with me. I like to keep a journal.

Interviewer: Oh, talk to me about that.

Emily: Yeah. So I like to keep a journal and when I have time, when I'm not working on assignments and HP things I like to just write about what I'm thinking about, what I'm focusing on, what I'm excited for, looking forward to, things like that. And when I look back through that journal, it kind of reminds me, "Wow, in this first week of school I did not write anything about my classes. I was only writing about the people in my hall that I was getting to know, around my house that I was getting to know." And then later on I could see I was writing things about, "Wow, that paper, I should've put more time into that." So looking back through there kind of helped me to see what I had been thinking of.

Emily: And then as I look into the future, I can kind of imagine what I might write in that journal just throughout the day. So then I can kinda check myself as to what I should be focusing on.

Interviewer: Yeah. So have you always been a pretty reflective person? Or is this a practice that you've picked up more recently, or that you've deepened more recently, or how does that work?

Emily: Yeah. No, I've been keeping journals since about fourth grade, actually, when I started homeschooling. My mom really encouraged my sisters and I to do a lot of writing. She thought it was very important for us to be aware of our thoughts and our actions. So she encouraged us to keep journals. Not really for a grade or anything, but just for our own benefit. And that has stuck with me. And I love
hand writing things. So keeping a physical book, no technology involved is really something that I enjoy.

Emily: So I think this year, when I have time I definitely continue to write in it. I've noticed that there's sometimes a week in between my entries. But when I do write, it's several pages, and it's very in depth, which is how I roll when I get going.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Very cool.

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: So journaling is something that helps you deal with the challenges that you've named.

Emily: Definitely.

Interviewer: Anything else that's helpful to you?

Emily: I would also say something that would be helpful is just being in touch with my mom, who's a very grounded and wise person, that I draw a lot of advice from daily, often times. And she never hesitates to answer my phone calls and just listen to the joys that I have, or the concerns, and things like that. And she's someone who's not directly connected with Graceland that I feel like I can talk about those things with, where she won't judge what's happening. She'll just take it as it is, and be able to talk to me honestly about how she thinks I'm dealing with the situation, since she knows me really well. She can tell if I'm in tune with my actions or if I'm just acting out of stress. She's able to identify that, and kind of be my mirror and reflect that back to me, which is really helpful.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you named stress right then. How do you deal with stress?

Emily: Music is one of the big ways for me. Either just listening to songs, maybe as I'm doing homework. If I have a lot of other distractions on my mind turning on some instrumental music helps me ... Between the music and my homework I can just stay focused on that. At other times if I am stressed enough to a point where I need to step away from a situation, if I have that time, I would probably get my violin out or find a piano on campus and just play that and pour myself into that practice, which helps me to step away from the situation enough that when I go back to it I have a new mindset. And I'm usually able to deal with that situation in a better way.
Interviewer: Yeah. So when you think about pouring yourself into that, what does that feel like? What is that experience like for you to pour yourself into a singular thing?

Emily: It's amazing. There's so many times just as-

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:18:04]

Emily: There's so many times just as a college student where you are pulled in so many different directions and in the back of your mind there's always something else going on or something you feel like you should be attending to. So when I separate that time and just focus on letting my emotions out or my frustrations out through the music, then I'm not really worrying about all the other things, I'm just being, which is a really great practice for me because I think oftentimes I'm spread out in too many different places and I don't take the time that I should to just be present in the moment and focus on how I'm feeling and how I need to feel in the future.

Interviewer: So you talk about just being present in the moment and music obviously is one way that you do that. Are there other ways that you do that? Are there things that help you be present?

Emily: I like to pray, so that's one thing I do. Usually this year it has been at night. I turn all the lights off in my room and I just sit on the floor and just listen to nothing and that peacefulness usually helps me to relieve stress or just focus on what I'm doing in that moment and just calming my mind before I go to sleep usually helps me in many ways.

Interviewer: And is this something that you've done for a long time? Is it something that you have done more recently or has the regularity or the depth of your practice shifted at all in time or how's that been for you?

Emily: Yeah. I've always considered myself to be a pretty spiritual person and in my mind it's not always allowed, but I'm always saying, “Oh God, thank you that happened.” Or like, “Oh God, please help me with whatever it is that I'm going through.” So those are just little thoughts I usually have throughout the day in my mind, I'm talking with him but at night usually I can verbalize that to myself since no one else is around, I feel more comfortable doing it in that space while I'm alone. So I'd say this year it's been pretty regular for me that I would take that time before I go to sleep. I like to do a little bit of yoga too. I'm not a professional at it by any means but-

Interviewer: Where did you learn the yoga?

Emily: Probably from a mindfulness classes.

Interviewer: From the course here with [inaudible 00:20:57].
Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: And that's been helpful?

Emily: Yes, it has been. I went to all of the sessions except the last two and I have conflicts.

Interviewer: And so what was most helpful about those sessions? Was it the yoga, was it something else? Was it multiple things?

Emily: I would say the yoga really spoke to me through those sessions because there's no other opportunity that I've had to really practice it and especially you could always pull up a video on YouTube and do that. But it's not as real as being with another person or in this classroom, multiple people that are all just going through the actions together. And I appreciated having someone else take time out of their day to teach that to us, which feels very special in my mind. I like to be with people.

Interviewer: So I think that's all very cool. Let me shift just a bit. Can you tell me about a time where you've had an experience that seemed negative at first, but then after a while it took on a different meaning for you? Have you ever had any experiences like that this year?

Emily: I know there's definitely things that have happened whenever it's just something in the moment that's negative, sometimes it drains me, but then if I come back to it later I can see that as a challenge that I overcame which makes me feel good about myself and realize how capable I am of overcoming negative situations or even interactions with people that frustrate me. Seeing how I was able to deal with that and then move on and reconnect with that person afterwards has been a really eye opening experience.

Interviewer: And what do you think was in your life that enabled that new understanding to happen? Is it just something about you? Is it something that you practice? Is it because you had this experience where something was negative and then time it took on new meaning? What do you think helped that new understanding to be able to happen?

Emily: I would definitely say it was how I was raised. My mom especially, my dad as well, but my mom mostly has just always been in my mind as very enlightened person who's always thinks of the big picture and being able to see any situation from an outside perspective helps you to get through that. So just knowing that whatever's happening in this moment no matter how stressful it is, it will pass and then you can move on and reflect on it and just if you want to feel proud about how you overcame it.
Interviewer: Good. So let me kind of go back a few moments to where you mentioned the mindfulness course and the yoga and the being present there. How has that shaped, if at all, your experience as a house president?

Emily: I really enjoyed being able to go to those sessions on a weekly schedule and I took it as if it were one of my classes. That is the amount of appreciation that I had for it and the value that I placed on it. And so just knowing I wouldn't purposely schedule any meetings during that time because I wanted to be there. So being able to take that time out of my day intentionally to focus on doing the yoga and practicing the meditation practices was really valuable to me because I felt like it was some sort of self care that I was throwing into my day which felt right.

Interviewer: So was that helpful in terms of either your role as a house president or your role as a student or perhaps just kind of in general all the stuff that's on your plate? How did you experience that in terms of how it helped you as either of those roles or overall?

Emily: Well, anytime after I would walk out of one of those sessions, I felt completely peaceful, which was great because no matter how I felt going into it, I walked out with all those other people and I felt together we were just like this bright shining light of peace. I don't know if that's how it appeared to anyone else, but from being with those people in that space and then moving out, I just felt like I had connections with them as well because we all went through that same experience and we were all able to be peaceful together. So I felt like once we're out in the grace land community, we could possibly be more peaceful together as well if we could remember what it felt like to be back there.

Interviewer: And then any of the things that you did in the class, you mentioned that you would practice some yoga also later on. Any other dimensions of the class that you had practice later?

Emily: No. I would say it was probably just the yoga I've done a few times in my room outside of that class and then the mindfulness as well. I try to just throw that in whenever I have time for it honestly.

Interviewer: Just during the day?

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: And both the yoga and the mindfulness practice, does that make a difference at all in the course of your day or not so much or?

Emily: Well, anytime now after I do yoga kind of remembering the different moves, I don't know if that's the right word, that she taught us to do. Anytime after I would do that my body felt stronger and I think fitness is something that I
I haven’t placed a lot of emphasis on this year, so that was my one opportunity to focus physically on how I was doing which feels very good after I do that.

Interviewer: Alright, that’s helpful. So as you look back over your life this semester, just your life as a whole with all those different parts in it. We’ve talked about experiences that have been successes, we’ve talked about experiences that have been challenges. But overall, what experiences you believe have been most significant for you?

Emily: Let’s see, there are so many honestly. One of the more recent ones was probably our last house meeting that we had when we try to get women on the hall and women that live off campus together just at 10:00 PM on a Tuesday night. This last house meeting we had at one of our off campus girls’ houses. So we drove three cars of women from on campus to the off campus location and we all sat on the floor in their living room and we had snacks and just seeing the look on everyone’s faces at some of the stories that we’re sharing reflecting on events this semester mostly new ones in November. We just had basically a big story time and it was like I put my agenda way there for about 15 minutes and we were just talking and people honestly weren’t looking at their phones that much, they were just enjoying each other’s presence which was really great to see because that doesn’t happen as often as I wish it did.

Interviewer: So obviously that was important, what impact did that experience have on you?

Emily: Personally I felt the reason that that experience was so successful for everyone was because I was helping with the little things, with the details of like knocking on doors 30 minutes in advance and inviting people to come and then organizing who was going to ride in whose cars and then driving everyone over and then making sure everyone felt comfortable in that space. All those little things that I did in advance to that moment is what kind of led up to allowing it to happen. So it doesn’t seem like it wasn’t a huge planned out event, but just every little moment that I spent preparing for it helped it to become what it was.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Anything else that you want to name as being something that was really significant for you this year?

Emily: Probably also our inductions at the beginning of the year when we welcomed the freshmen onto our house and we had all of the upper classmen pair up with a new student before they even met them and throughout the week they would send notes in their mailboxes, we called them secret sisters. So the older student would give gifts or letters to the new students in preparation for that event and then we all came together and I just like seeing people happy and enjoying the community that Graceland can provide with the house system. So that really paid off in that moment.
Interviewer: Good, I'm glad. So we've talked a little bit about some successes, challenges, some significant things that have happened. This question is related to that, but I think it's broader than that and that is what are the demands that are on your plate?

Emily: A lot, oh my goodness. Being a house president to me just means that I am the go to person to answer every single question that someone might have. So I deal with this by trying to be as available to the women on my house as possible. So anytime that I'm in my room and not very intent on studying, I'll have my door open and I constantly have people just wanting to see me for any number of reasons. If they have a question or they want to talk to me about their day or they're just lonely or having roommate problems, they just come to me and I really like being able to do that, but it is definitely a demand that at the end of the day I'm finally glad to close my door and say, all right, I'm going to sleep now. So it's a demand that I enjoy because I really really love helping people, but it can be draining after a while.

Interviewer: At the impression that's a pretty steady demand. Is it every night or every day or?

Emily: It's definitely every day. I have times in between classes and dinner and usually I leave my door open because that's usually when I see most of the people living on the hall physically because they're coming back from classes, just finishing, going to practice and things like that. And I have my desk turned in a way that I can see straight out the door. So anytime someone walks past I say hi, and then I call them by their name to acknowledge them and that was something that I intentionally did at the beginning of the year to learn everyone's names and it has continued and I don't think I'll stop.

Interviewer: So that's a significant demand. What are the other demands on your plate?

Emily: Probably living up to the experiences that other house presidents have had in terms of them having a successful Shalom Yorkshire, which is a formal that we have every year and my house council team and I are in the process of planning for that now. So there's definitely some stresses in my mind like is this going to live up to the past your chairs that our houses had? Knowing that our seniors this year experienced yorkshires that I had never been to. So in my mind I'm trying not to directly copy ideas. Also trying to be original and create an event that they will have fun at and make memories that ... Because they're expecting this out of me.

Interviewer: Very good. So keep going. I'm just interested in learning what are all the demands on your plate and some of them are going to be hp related, but there are others that are probably not hp related. Tell me if I were to look at your plate and all the demands that are on there I would see the people who need to talk with you that you mentioned earlier. They'll come under the room at all hours of the day and night until you shut the door. There is the living up to the
expectations of previous events like Yorkshire. As I move on down that plate, what else is there?

Emily: There's definitely more personal demands too because I'm continue-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:36:04]

Emily: Personal demands too because I'm continuing to grow as a person through this, not even looking at my house president activities that I'm involved in. I'm very, very close with my family back home in Des Moines and so this year I've tried not to leave campus as often unless if I had a valid reason to so it doesn't look like I was trying to avoid my responsibilities here. But I have two younger sisters at home that I've grown up extremely close with and we've always gone to each other's concerts and plays and sports games and things like that. So it's difficult to be away from that at college, while I know that there's things happening every weekend at home that I could be going to. So one of the demands that I put on myself is just wanting to stay connected with my family while I'm here living a completely separate life it feels like, so trying to stay in touch with my sisters and continually supporting my parents also in their endeavors as well from afar.

Interviewer: Okay, good. So people come by the room, Yorkshire, [Millia 00:37:21] demands. Other demands?

Emily: Probably, I could look at schoolwork as well becoming ... I'm hoping to graduate, I will graduate with an elementary education major, so I'm looking into the future and see that second semester here I'll be doing my practicum, getting closer to that and then senior year I'll have a student teaching and then boom, I'm out into the real world, which is crazy. The clock is ticking. So I'm really trying to dig in deep to all my studies as well and make sure that I'm learning everything I need to learn so that I can be more prepared when I leave Graceland and start my job.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a lot on your plate. Anything else?

Emily: None at the moment.

Interviewer: Those are kind of the big ones, right?

Emily: Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So with all those demands on your plate, what do you do to deal with it?

Emily: I would just say I'm quite passionate about all the things that I'm doing right now, which doesn't make anything feel like I'm drudging, that's not even a word, but I'm dragging myself to do it. So I think having that passion kind of motivates me to continue doing all of the things that I am doing and I just know
that I'm growing so much as a person right now, being involved in all these
things, all these experiences I could not have even dreamed of having a few
years ago while I was still in high school.

Interviewer: Is it stressful dealing with the demands?

Emily: It is, but-

Interviewer: [inaudible 00:39:19] that makes sense.

Emily: Yeah, I think my mindset allows me to see the bigger picture so I'm able to
appreciate even the stresses that I have right now, just knowing that I'm going
to overcome them and they're just putting more memories and more skills in
my tool belt, so.

Interviewer: So does that relate at all to the earlier question about things which might seem
negative at first, but they kind of get reframed into something. Is that an
equivalent of that?

Emily: Definitely.

Interviewer: How you relate to stress.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, in relationship to dealing with the stress of all those demands, you've
talked about kind of your attitude in terms of throwing yourself into those
demands to address the specific demands. What have you found most helpful in
terms of dealing with the stress of having multiple things on your plate?

Emily: So, like what I would benefit from it or?

Interviewer: So you have named the demands. You've said that while while they're
opportunities for growth, they are nevertheless stressful.

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: So I guess I'm asking you, what are the things that help you deal with the stress
of these multiple things? There must be something you're doing that ... Well, I
guess I'm just asking. Are there things that you're doing that you find helpful?

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: You may have already named some of them.

Emily: The things I do to help me through stress would probably be self reflection,
releasing some of the negative emotions that I have maybe through music or
through talking with people and those shared connections, knowing that I'm not
alone in what I'm going through is there are other house presidents and just
other people in general that have a lot on their plate. Yeah. It's mostly just
internal I'd say that allows me to deal with these things.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, no. I appreciate that. So internal things, such as reflection. Any
other internal things? If that's where you get the greatest sense of coming to
peace, anything else other than the reflection?

Emily: I would say that's the majority of it. I would consider myself to be an introvert,
which I think plays into this a lot. So there's always conversations going on in my
mind about what I'm doing and what I should be doing and just being able to
process all of that helps.

Interviewer: Yeah. So let me ask you a question about that. So people who go inside, who
turn inside for reflection, they get there different ways.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Sometimes there are things that help different people get into that reflective
space. Are there things that you do that seem to help you get into that reflective
space? Does that make sense?

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Emily: Yeah. I think for me, I can be reflective at any moment in the day. It's usually
easiest when I feel like I'm alone or that people aren't watching me. People
watching me is the big one. So if I am in my room with the door shut, I feel very
comfortable, like sitting on the floor or writing in a journal and just knowing that
it's just me and my thoughts, just getting them out. It's easier that way.

Interviewer: Is that why you do some of the other practices at night in the room that you've
mentioned her?

Emily: Yes. Yeah, yeah. I think I am definitely more reflective at night. During the day,
I'm doing all these things and then at night is my downtime where I'm doing
homework and I'm also remembering everything that I did and I think about, I
definitely think about my actions and what I could've done better.

Interviewer: So you named prayer and you named journaling.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: You name Yoga and you name mindfulness practice.
Emily: I'd throw music in there as well probably.

Interviewer: Music, yes. So when you look at those things that you've made, can you tell me a little bit about more of what your experience is when you engage in those things? Maybe let's just kind of take them as you've named them. So when you do music, what is that experience like for you inside?

Emily: It's amazing. It's very hard to describe because I feel like I am involved with music in a way that is different from how anyone else would involve themselves with music because I play by ear, so I don't necessarily read the written notes on the page. I can just sit down with the piano or Ukulele or a violin and just make up melodies in my head and as I play them I feel like I am expressing myself through those emotions and feelings that I have. It's very challenging to explain because it comes so naturally to me when I'm in that moment doing it.

Interviewer: So, it does have to do with being present in the moment.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: You've earlier used the phrase pouring yourself into it.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So that's how you experience music then. It's this pouring, it's this focus. It's this, and then you talked earlier about the journal quite a bit.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you say something about the yoga? When you do yoga, how do you experience that? Is it similar to the music or is it different or what is that like?

Emily: The yoga is still, it's a work in progress for me because I feel like I've just started very recently this semester, but just looking back on what I have experienced when I'm focusing on my body, it is a kind of mindfulness in a way and being present because I am figuring out how to twist my body this way and that way and that takes up most of my thought in that moment, so.

Interviewer: No, that makes total sense.

Emily: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you have you thought at all about how this, because one of the commonalities in what you're saying is focus, whether it's music or journal or yoga or mindfulness, have you been able to think at all about how those things are not necessarily changing but affecting your experience as a person with all these things on your plate?
Emily: I think they keep me sane. I think they remind me of the person who I want to be, which is a more calm, grounded, present person and also with the presence element, I also just recently was ordained into the Community of Christ as a teacher and that whole role is focused on being a minister of presence and there's just so many things happening in my life right now that draw me back to that and how important it is to be present and authentic and just things like that. I feel like it's all just coming together right now. It's very neat to observe.

Interviewer: So when you say it's all coming together right now, you mean the right now, at this point in your life, all of these things are beginning, the dots are beginning to connect in ways that perhaps they haven't quite as fully before. Is that what I'm hearing?

Emily: Yeah, definitely. Just thinking like when I was younger, things like music and writing were, like they were more forced upon me. In school, they teach you to write and they teach you to read and to develop these skills, and in my head as an elementary school student, I'm not thinking about how it would benefit me in college and I'm also drawing on my experiences with taking violin lessons, which I really did not enjoy was younger and I tried to quit several times, but my mom said, "No, you started this, you're going to finish it," and really there is no finishing it because I just got to it, was more gradual, but I got to this point where I just really enjoyed playing violin now and it wasn't a chore or a task and I understood the instrument well enough that I didn't have to stress about playing it. I already had those skills, same with writing, I already had those skills. So then I could express it more as an art form, like making music or writing fluently.

Interviewer: Sometimes when we're actually in the midst of an experience, it's hard to really articulate the experience. But, let me just ask you this.

Emily: Sure.

Interviewer: So these practices that you're talking about, music, mindfulness, journaling, prayer, yoga, you've said that these things seem to be helping you enter a time in your life in which the multiple parts of your life are beginning to come together. Do you have any idea for how those practices are helping with that or is it just your sense that they are.

Emily: I think it is a sense that they are just trusting mostly that everything will work out and I know looking into the future, more things will be added onto my plate and I feel more prepared to balance them because of all these things that we've been listing out that helped me to deal with new situations. Eventually, I think these new situations will become experiences and skills that will become easier to me and I'll just add that to my collection of abilities.

Interviewer: Very good. That's very good. Let me ask you one more question.
Emily: Sure.

Interviewer: Okay. How would you contrast your experience now as a house president compared to your experience when you began?

Emily: In the beginning, I think I had this very perfect vision of everything that was going to go. I had a lot of plans written out, a lot of goals and I was just thinking, "Oh, people are going to always listened to me. They're always going to enjoy participating in the ways that I imagine that they would," and now that we've moved on a little bit throughout the year and I've gone through some of those struggles, I can see that no matter what perfect vision I have planned in my mind, it's not always going to play out that way. Sometimes it's better, sometimes it's worse, but it's really good. I can see that it's really good to plan and have those ideas to draw on, but as you go, you kind of have to pay more attention to the people around you and see how they're responding to the events that you're planning or responding to your leadership style and you need to be able to adjust how you are responding to that.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense? Yeah. You got some experience under your belt. Yeah, is there anything else you would want the say to me about your experience?

Emily: I'm just really glad that I'm having this experience.

Interviewer: Good. Well, I am too. I'm glad it's been a good experience for you. Again, I am so grateful that you've agreed to sit in here and chat with me about this. This has been very helpful and you've said several things that are very insightful that I really appreciate.

Emily: I'm glad. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you.
Interviewer: All right. Well thanks again. The first thing I wanted to ask about was a mindfulness related question. In the first interview you had mentioned that the mindfulness class was helpful to you in dealing with your roles and responsibilities. And what struck me as interesting is that when you and some of the other HPs talk, you talked about kind of the stuff you learned in the class, but then you talked about the class itself. And so I'd like the just talk for a moment about the class itself. And was just wondering, can you tell me a little bit more about how the class was helpful to you? And what was meaningful to you about that?

Emily: Yeah. So let's see. I really enjoyed having the class at certain days of the week. So I just knew in my mind that it was coming up and I could kind of prepare for it. So it was kind of a structured time in my schedule where I knew what was going to happen. And so when I would go to the class, it was kind of the same setup every day so it was predictable. I liked that aspect of it. And then I didn't feel judged or anything for anything else that had happened outside of the class. When we all came together we were all just intent on focusing on the purpose of being together in a mindful way. And so I just like the way that the class was led. And it was structured but also very calm and peaceful once we go there.

Interviewer: Okay good. So you mentioned the preparing for the class. What does preparing for the class look like? Was that like getting your head ready in a particular way? Or what did you mean when you say you'd prepare for the class?

Emily: Yeah so, when we were preparing for it, I knew that we would be doing a little bit of yoga too, so I got physically ready. I put clothes on that would be comfortable for that activity. And also I was just excited too, because I knew that whatever had happened in that day before the class, once I got there I could kind of set that aside and relax in that moment. So it was a little bit of like just knowing what would happen once I got there. That was kind of the preparing that I did for it.

Interviewer: Okay good. And so one thing you'll discover today is that I'm going to probably probe a little bit on a couple things, just to make sure I'm getting a good understanding of your experience. So let me dig a little deeper on just one thing you said. You said that kind of no matter what had happened the day before, that when it came time for the class, that that would be ... I forget what your phrase was, but it would help. Can you say any more about that?

Emily: We could always just say that there would be stressful things that would be going on beforehand. But in the back of my mind, when I knew that the class was coming up, either the next day or that evening, I could just say, well I know in a couple hours then I'll be able to kind of set that aside so I can focus on.
myself again, instead of whatever situation I was dealing with. So that was just kind of a good reassuring feeling I guess, knowing that it was coming up.

Interviewer: Okay good. So what were those stresses? The ones we talked about last time that ... I don't need to go into details on what they were, but related to the roles that you occupy, being a student, being house president?

Emily: Yes. Those roles definitely played a part in the stress that I was excited to get away from for a little bit.

Interviewer: So was the class kind of a me time kind of thing? I mean it sounds pretty important.

Emily: Yeah. What I like about the class is that there would be many people. There would usually be several people there at least. But we wouldn't be talking with each other. We kind of sit in our own space on the floor, and we're not focusing on what the other people are dealing with, we're just kind of focusing on ourselves in that moment. It was a cool relationship just to see how we could all come together, yet we didn't even have to talk to each other. We could just be present. That was a really good experience.

Interviewer: Okay. So you mentioned that it helped relieve some of the stress that you brought into the class from your dual roles and probably other roles in life as well. Is there anything else you would say about how the class helped you to deal with the demands on your plate? And maybe there isn't, I'm just wanting to make sure we’re checking.

Emily: Yeah. I think it did help, because I was able to practice that mindfulness in that structured space. And I wouldn't say that necessarily outside of that time I would sit down for a whole hour and do that mindfulness, and the yoga, and the stretching. But the skills and just experiences that I was having and learning about in that class, I would say that it did transfer over to my time just whenever. Like if I would be alone in my room I could do some of those things as well. Probably not to the same extent, but in some shape or form I was kind of taking what I learned from the class and doing it on my own.

Interviewer: Okay. So the class helped you sharpen the skills that you would later do on your own. I think I'm hearing you say that helped with dealing with all the stuff.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. What did it mean to you if anything, that you attended the class with other house presidents? Did that matter at all?

Emily: It did. I've been very close with the house president group this year, and so any chance that I get to interact with them outside of our scheduled house president meeting time or other structured activity it was really good to see
them in another place. And when they were there I knew they were there because they chose to come, which to me means a lot. It's not something that they're forced to go to, but they were open to it, and willing to go try it out. And so that excited me because that was something that I also really enjoyed doing. So when I saw other house presidents there we had a connection.

**Interviewer:** That's really cool. Did you guys ever talk about it?

**Emily:** We would usually talk about it for as long as it took for us to walk out of the building. So it wasn't a long deep conversation, but we would usually comment a little bit about how that particular class went.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Would it be fair or unfair to say that you ... I don't know how to say this. Did it help at all that there was already a bond between you because you're house presidents, or did this increase the bond between you as house presidents, or neither, or both?

**Emily:** I would say both. It definitely helped already having connections with some of those people. So once I saw them there, I was like oh I know you, this is great. And then once we left that space, I do recall having conversations with those HPs outside of that class, where we would comment back on what happened. We wouldn't necessarily have a long talk about it, but we had an additional connection of an experience that we had together that some other HPs and I did not have.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Okay very cool. In our first interview you mentioned the particular experience of yoga was meaningful for you. You also referenced some other mindfulness things, such as some breathing and such, but in particular yoga you kept coming back to. And you talked about that was especially important to you. Can you tell me more about your experience with yoga and maybe why it was helpful to you, or maybe how it was helpful to you? Either one.

**Emily:** Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I was really excited to have the opportunity to practice yoga with an instructor in person. Because if I ever try to do it on my own it's usually with my phone down there on the floor, and I'm just watching someone else do it. So it's definitely not the same experience. But I thought it was just very meaningful that someone else would take the time to come and teach us how to do that, because it was a skill that I was really interested in and I still am interested in. So it was just good to be able to practice it there and with other people.

**Interviewer:** Good. And are you able to figure out ... Now I'm thinking kind of going outside the class. Because remember how I said earlier, we kind of look at this in two buckets. There's the class itself, and then there's the practices. So if we go outside of class now and go just to the practices independent of class, are you able to identify how the yoga was helpful or what it did for you?
Emily: Yeah, I would say that I haven't been working out a lot, so my body hasn't been exercised in a way that it probably should have been exercised in, so that was a good chance to make my body do some stretches and things that it was not used to doing. So it was a good challenge just for me personally. I don't know if anyone else had that same experience, but it was just good to be able to challenge my body in that way.

Interviewer: Good. And some things that we do kind of help us in the moment that we're doing them. Other things that we do actually help us kind of after we do them if you will. It's kind of in a larger sense. Was the yoga more immediate relief from some of the demands? Or did the yoga in any way help you deal with demands later on? I truly don't know.

Emily: Yeah. That's a good question. I would say in the moment it was definitely very helpful because like prior to that class my body had not been working out in that way, so once I was able to take that time to intentionally stretch and breathe in that way and kind of strengthen different parts of my body that had not been moving in a while, it was a really good chance to be able to do that. And then I could tell like outside of the class, those skills that I had learned to do yoga with were very helpful I think. One of my friends on our house was doing some yoga as well, and so we were kind of able to have a shared experience there too. Because she had learned some of the moves that I was learning in the class, so we were able to talk about that as well.

Interviewer: Okay good. And you made a passing reference to yoga and the mindfulness stuff. So yoga and the mindfulness stuff. Does the mindfulness stuff refer to ... Was it the breathing work? Was it just the focusing on the present work? What are you thinking when you refer the the mindfulness stuff?

Emily: Yeah. I would definitely say it was the breathing, and then also just like trying to be present in the moment. But I think yoga and mindfulness from my experience overlap a lot, because when you're doing yoga, you don't have time to think about anything else other than stretching your body in the way that you need to and then also to continue breathing. So there were different poses or postures ... I forgot what they're called. You would have to stretch in a certain way, and then breathe I, and then stretch in a different way and breathe out. And when you're moving your body and focusing on your breathing, you don't think about anything else. So I think that yoga kind of is mindfulness in a way.

Interviewer: I think that's well said. Did you every attempt to do any of the breath work, any of the present moment stuff separate from the yoga during the course of your day?

Emily: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, my favorite time to do it is definitely at night. Before I go to bed I always like to do some sort of stretching. So some of the skills that I was learning in that class I was also able to do back in my room before I would go bed.
Okay. So in our first conversation you had mentioned a number of things that you do to help with relieve some of the stress and some of the demands. I mean you mentioned music, you mentioned conversations with people, and then you also mentioned yoga, you also mentioned some breathing. Let me ask you kind of a different question. In terms of meaning and the meaning that we attach to things, was there any sort of difference in the meaningfulness or in the meaning that you associate between music, yoga, breathing, conversations? Or are the meanings similar or the same across the board? Do any of those things strike you as being uniquely different in terms of what they mean to you? Especially as they relate to dealing with demands and such.

Right. That's a good question. I think any of those stress relieving activities that I would do where I could interact with other people were definitely very beneficial to me. But there's also a lot of times since I kind of like to be alone as well, the music is something that I would say is probably one of the most important to me, because I've had that skill or that passion pretty much my whole life. So it's something that I can continually go back to because it's always been a constant for me and I'm very comfortable with it. So if any of the other methods fail, I just know there's at least one I can go back to. And then with the conversations, relationships are very important to me. So whether that be with my parents, or my grandparents, or my sisters, or my good friends here at Graceland, I think those are very important to me and my continued well being is always somehow related to connecting with people.

So is the difference in meaning between those things the sense of history and discipline that are associated with those for you? For example, you talk about conversation with parents and grandparents, and how that perhaps has different meaning than say yoga or mindful breathing. Is the difference in meaning defined by the familiarity and the history, or is the difference in meaning defined by how effective they are comparatively? Or is there other some nuanced way that you differentiate the meaning between say music, conversation with family, yoga, breathing? I'm not asking you to rank them, but as you experience them, the meaning that you attach, how are they different for you?

Yeah.

It's a hard question.

It is. It's good though. I agree that I think familiarity is very important to me, because the things that I'm comfortable with I'll probably continue to go back to more often. So with those relationships and the music I would probably put kind of in the same category, because I'm very comfortable with them so I know that they will work. And those other things, sometimes even relationships with friends, you can go back to them but sometimes those friends aren't in the right place mentally to help me if I am stressed. Sometimes they need some stress relief themselves, so I can't always go to them if they're not available in that way. So yeah, probably trying to find things that I know will work and I know I
can count on, and with the meditation or the mindfulness and the yoga, those are still kind of new to me. So I feel like I've been practicing them mostly this year and possibly a little bit last year, but not a ton. So since they're still new to me, I might go to them occasionally, or if I'm feeling confident enough to try something new then I might go to those but otherwise it's probably what is most familiar and what has worked in the past.

Interviewer: Yeah. So if you were to describe the meaning then that ... And you've already picked up on the difference between meaning and effectiveness, so that's good. If you were to describe the meaning of the yoga and say the mindfulness meditation, the breath work, how would you describe that? If music and conversation has meaning because it anchors you to familiarity and to practices that, they're very much apart of you, but these other things are newer. How would you describe the meaning that you attach to those at this point?

Emily: I don't think the meaning would be as great with the new things that I've been working on. But I know that as I get older it's always good to ... I like learning new things. So it's always good to pull some of those skills and those idea into-

Interviewer: Into what you already know.

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: So if you were to say, here is what yoga, here's what mindfulness meditation means to me at this point in my life, what would you say?

Emily: I would say that it's something that I've found can work really well if I'm in the right mindset for it. So I guess getting to that place is the most important thing before I can actually do it. But I'm very appreciative that I've learned those things, so that I can dwell on them whenever something else isn't working, or I just need to try something different. Because if I called my mom every time I got stressed, it would become less effective I think, because she would probably start to possibly get annoyed with me calling her all the time. So it's good to have like different things to go to, but it's also nice in the back of my mind to know what has worked, so I could go back to that if I needed to.

Interviewer: So don't let me put words in your mouth, but am I hearing you saying that the greater depth of meaning would reside with the music and the conversations, but part of the meaning for the yoga and the mindfulness is that it's available? That you can't call someone every time, but you probably can breathe every time. Is that what I'm hearing?

Emily: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. That's helpful, thank you. All right. We'll come back to mindfulness at least one more time. But I want to shift gears here a bit and just say that I'm remembering in our earlier conversation, you talked about your open door. And
you talked about that literarily. It was the door to your room and it was open, or a
time that it needed to be closed. And that really struck me because others
mentioned it too. And what really struck me about it is that when you described
your open door, you described it in a way that made me think that's an
important thing. And so I just wondered if you can tell me more about the door,
be it open or closed. And what does that door represent to you? What does it come
to mean to you?

Emily: Yeah, the door means a lot to me. I guess you could say I'm glad that you
brought that up again, because I can see how important it has been to me now
that I'm reflecting back on it. But whenever I'm in my room I try to have my
door open to show that I want to be available and that I want to see people. So
one of the things that I do whenever I'm in there, if I'm not super busy, is that
whenever people walk by I'll say hi to them and try to have a conversation with
them if they have time, or if they're interested in it. But I think it's very
important in my role as a house president to see other people and to recognize
them, because it's very easy if you don't feel appreciated to just kind of take
steps back and become less engaged in things. So if I'm able to see people and
say hi to them and call them by name, I think that makes them more interested
and they feel more appreciated here. So that's one of the things that I like to do.
So I don't have it closed very often, which can be a little tricky for me personally
when I'm trying to do things, but I think in the end it's always worth it.

Interviewer: So it's a vehicle to help you express appreciation.

Emily: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Is the opposite true? Are there positives for you in keeping the door open?

Emily: I think there are. It's good for me to be able to see people and know kind of how
they're doing a little bit, because I do like to check in with them. And then also I
don't like to be closed off very much. I've been used to having a roommate
these past two years, which was someone who was almost always in the room
with me, and we could have conversations any time and kind of share interests
in music and other commonalities that we had. So now that she's living in the
apartments off campus a little bit, it's nice for me to have my door open so that
other people can come in and I can kind of remember what it's like to have
someone there with me.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay okay. Is the door ever used as a tool to manage demands?

Emily: Yeah. I have a dry erase board on the outside of my door. And on that I write
where I am and when I plan to be back in my room. So that if people intended
to talk with me, hadn't set up a meeting or anything, they could see when I'll
probably be back in my room, so they know when I'm coming. Then there's a
marker available on that board too, and I've had a lot of people write nice notes
on there, just saying that we love Mariah, or she's awesome. So they write
encouraging things. So whenever I come back, that always warms my heart just to see that.

**Interviewer:** So the door’s affirming?

**Emily:** Yes. Yeah. It has been a really good thing. And then on the back side of the door, one of the things that I did with Brickelle, the hall director, in our one on one meetings was talk about ways that we could relieve stress. Kind of what we’re talking about now. But like self care items I think was what was on that list. And so I have that taped on the backside. So if my door is open, then I’m seeing people and the dry erase board, and when I close the door ... I don’t know if this means anything, but I’m thinking about it now. On the back side it has like self care things. So it’s kind of like when I’m enclosed in that room, it's either I’m working really hard studying, or it has self care things I could do like by myself.

**Interviewer:** So the door closed is one way of providing some self care. Door open says hey I’m available.

**Emily:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Emily:** Which is also another kind of self care, because I like being around people. So I’m kind of okay either way. But I think the more personal self care that I do is when the door is shut.

**Interviewer:** To what degree do you like the door?

**Emily:** Just in general?

**Interviewer:** Yeah. If at all.

**Emily:** I like it. I like that it has the ability to close, because there are definitely times when I need to breathe and not worry about other people watching me. But I like having it open as well.

**Interviewer:** And when you say there are times that you like to breathe and not have people watching you, I think what I hear is breathe is a metaphor. In other words I just have time to ... Just to, you know. Is it also time where you do some of these practices we’ve been talking about then?

**Emily:** Mm-hmm (affirmative). It definitely is. I would not do yoga in front of other people like when the door’s open, because I never know who’s going to walk by. So if I’m ever doing yoga or if I ever try to meditate or do mindfulness activities that is always with the door shut.
Interviewer: Okay. That's really helpful. I've just been fascinated with this image of the door as I've heard HPs describe it. And it just seems to me like it's more than just a physical object.

Emily: I think it is. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Anything else about the door you'd mention?

Emily: Other than the fact that on our hall and on many others, I think we have the door tags, which are very intentionally placed and created just to have the person's name all over their door. So it's just a way also to make them feel appreciated. And the people that make the door tags put a lot of work into them. So they feel that they are also recognizing all the people on the hall and we try not to leave anyone out with that.

Interviewer: And your door tag is on your door then?

Emily: I have a lot of door tags. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. I want to switch back one more time to a kind of a mindfulness related thing. In our earlier conversation you talked with me about one of the advantages of the yoga or the breath work was being in the present moment. And so this is a question I'm really fascinated with, and it's not necessarily an easy question to answer maybe, but what is it like for you to be in the present moment? How would you describe that experience?

Emily: It's a hard experience to get to I think, because there's so much else going on around me. But once I can get there, I feel like it's really healthy for me to kind of forget what I'm looking forward to or what I'm not looking forward to, and things that have gone on in the past that are still kind of dragging me back and reminding me of things that I could have done better, or situations that I should have been more involved in but I wasn't. So there's always kind of like thoughts of, maybe even regret for how things have gone in the past, but when I'm able to forget about that and not look in the future, then it's a good feeling to just kind of sit where I am and just think about nothing.

Interviewer: Yeah. So I really appreciate your use of the word nothing. And when this is over remind me to tell you why that's so important. Maybe it's impossible to describe this. What did that feel like? What does the experience of nothing and just being there, what does that feel like? Are there words?

Emily: I wouldn't think about words when I'm in that moment of course but, I think it's just very peaceful. And you don't have any stress, you don't have any worries or fears. So all those negative things are kind of gone. You're also ... If you're really being in the present moment, you're probably not thinking a lot about expectations or maybe not even really good emotions either, but you're somewhere in the middle between the good emotions and the bad ones, and
you're just kind of waiting. And it's good I think to rest between those, because
it can be exhausting to switch back and forth or to always be in one or the
other.

Interviewer: So being in a place that's nothing sounds like a pretty good place.

Emily: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Emily: I think it's important to experience all of it, so that you can also come back
to that spot in the middle and appreciate it more.

Interviewer: Yeah. So when you do that, when you have this experience of being in the
present moment, how does having that experience, or does having that
experience affect your relationship with people or things? And by things I mean
physical things, tasks, whatever the case may be. How does the experience of
truly being in the present moment ... Does that have any affect on your
relationship with stuff?

Emily: I think it definitely does. Because when you're in the present moment you're not
worrying about anything else. Trying to figure out how to word this but, I know
there's ... Any other time of the day when I'm not intentionally trying to be
present in the moment, there are a million thoughts racing through my head,
and I'm always experiencing something, so my hands are probably doing
something, and my eyes are seeing things, and I'm hearing, and smelling. And so
I think it can be overwhelming not to be present at times. But it's good to have
something to compare it to. So then if you ever are in a situation where there's
a lot of things being thrown at you in the moment, you can kind of remember,

I remember that one time when I was completely mindful and I didn't have
to think about anything. So maybe there's a way you could pull that kind of
stillness from that experience that you had, and take it to the more stressful
experience that you're in, and think about well, what's really important here?

Interviewer: Yeah. I appreciate that. So you mentioned just now that when you're going
about the everyday stuff, you're seeing, you're hearing, you're smelling. You
mentioned the senses at that point. When you come out of the experience of
just being fully in the present moment. When you kind of come out of that
mindfulness practice and you continue seeing, smelling, hearing, all those
things, does it affect at all how you see, hear, smell, etcetera or does that go
back to normal pretty quick?

Emily: I would say when you're being mindful like that, it's almost like being asleep in a
way. Because I know when I'm sleeping I'm not thinking about everything that's
Going on. So if you're kind of just not aware of anything else, when you're being
mindful, when you wake up from that ... The way that they wanted us to do it in
the class was to come out of it kind of slowly. So I think you would start to
notice things at different times. So I would remember that they would say like ...
There was a time when we were laying flat on our backs, and so when we were
waking up kind of out of that, she would tell us like to clench our toes and our
fingers, and like start very slowly waking up from that, and so then we wouldn't
have our eyes open at that point. So there was visual stimuli that we were
encountering. But we would think about our body and then maybe what we
were hearing as we were listening to her directions. And then maybe other
senses would wake up slower but I think it was very intentional, the way that we
tried to come out of being mindful, which was better than just like snapping
your fingers and standing up and being completely awake and aware.

Interviewer: Okay that's good information for me to have. So let's say you were doing some
yoga in your room, and you're doing the mindful breathing while you're doing
the yoga, and you kind of complete the session that you're having in your room,
and then you step out into the hall and you encounter a person, or you see an
object or whatever. Are you pretty much encountering that person,
experiencing that person, and that object pretty much like you would at any
other time, or has just coming out of that practice affected in any way the way
that you would experience them? And I'm not suggesting that it should, I'm just
curious is if it does.

Emily: I think it definitely does. I would feel a lot calmer and more peaceful. Whenever
I meet another person I feel like a part of me is like trying to instantly read
them, and kind of decide like what facial expressions do they have. Are they
happy? Are they sad? Are they stressed? Are they wanting to talk to me or are
they wanting to avoid me? So all those things I would read from them, I think
when I'm doing that throughout any other time of the day, it's like, it has to be
really quick, because I see them so fast. But I know that when I come out of kind
of that mindful place, it's slower. Which I think it feels better and more relaxed
and I feel more able to respond to however they're appearing to me. If that
makes any sense at all.

Interviewer: That's fascinating. Let me try to understand that a little more, because that's
very interesting. So it's like the experience slows a little bit you said. And you're
able to do some of that reading perhaps more thoroughly I think I heard you
saying. Is there ... I don't want to suggest language. Are you more aware of
people or things? More aware of their nuances? Is there any sort of a deepened
sense of awareness or appreciation, or appreciation for details I mean? Say a
little more about it, because that's intriguing.

Emily: Yeah. I think I would definitely notice more about them if I had just come out of
a more mindful state, because every other thing that I was previously thinking
about is gone. So it's like a fresh start. And I know I've had this feeling before,
like even when I haven't been meditating. But if I wake up and one of the first
things I do is go outside ... I'm thinking about this in the summer. But I would
immediately feel ... I would like notice how the sun feels on my skin. I would see
how bright the colors are of like the grass and the trees and the blue sky, which is in my head right now. But I think I would definitely be more aware of that.

**Interviewer:** Is that kind of what it's like? You're encountering this person. Is that kind of what it's like except instead of blue sky and sunshine on your day, you're experiencing more of-

**Emily:** Yeah, I think I'd be experiencing more of the person probably and being more capable of understanding more quickly like how they're doing, possibly without even asking. But that's just if I'm paying close enough attention, which I think I would, once of that because you also have to be very attentive when you are being mindful. It's hard because you're not thinking about anything intentionally, but if a thought comes to you, I think you're just supposed to release it. That was one thing that was taught. Like if a thought comes to you, you pretend it's on a cloud, and then it floats away. So you're not judging it, you're just letting it go.

**Interviewer:** So you're speculation of how you might experience that on a summer day is kind of intriguing. Did you ever have any similar experience leaving the class on Wednesday nights and encountering nature outdoors? Did you have any similar experiences then? Or was it just too cold to be pleasant?

**Emily:** I think the thing that I'm thinking of right now is that the class would always end and it would be dark outside. So I think there wasn't as much to pick up on then. But I could definitely think that if there was stars in the sky I would have noticed those. And then also just the people I was walking out with. I felt like we were all very, just calm. And there was almost like a kind of heaviness to us as well. Because I don't know what that means exactly, but I definitely felt more grounded once I came out of that.

**Interviewer:** Heaviness in terms of ... Because there's different ways we can think of heavy right?

**Emily:** I'm not thinking of weight, but probably maybe that more connectedness or groundedness. I felt even sometimes that the way that I was walking was different. But I know that was because we were laying down on the ground horizontally when we came out of that. And then she would tell us to roll on our side, and then slowly sit up. So it was all very gradual, and nothing was rushed. So we could do it at our own pace. But I think we were very aware of ourselves once we were coming out of it. So then once you go out and you walk you notice how heavy your backpack is, and if your shoes feel comfortable once you put those back on.

**Interviewer:** Okay. All right thank you. When we talked the first time, you had shared some stories with me about times in which you had an experience that first seemed negative but then later on it took on a different meaning for you. So I'd just be
curious, what is it that you do to find meaning in things that might first seem
negative?

Emily: So kind of how I could take a negative experience and appreciate it more?

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah that's a good way to say it. Because each of us have experiences that
initially are negative, but some people, and including yourself based on the last
time, are able, maybe not every time but occasionally, to say you know what,
either right then or as time goes on, that experience takes on some meaning
that didn't totally understand when I first happened. Now it still might be a
negative experience. It might not be that oh that's positive now. But it takes on
some new meaning.

Emily: So like how does that happen?

Interviewer: Yeah. Are there things that you do that enable you to find meaning in things
that at first don't seem very positive?

Emily: I think one of the things that I do pretty often is journal. So whenever I write in
my journal I would in the moment, at the end of the day, as soon as it's
happened I haven't had a lot of time to think about it, so I just write out what
happened, and probably my initial responses or reactions to it. But then I always
have fun going back through there and reading what happened and thinking
wow, that was really like a bad situation when it happened. But then I could tell
like how more prepared I'd feel. If something like that were to happen again I
could kind have that hindsight. Like knowingness of how I could react to it in a
different way. So I think it's the whole process of just like having something
happen, and then later on even like in a conversation with someone, if you were
just talking it over you might use different words to describe what happened.
Instead of initially you would've been like, I was so upset, I was angry. And then
later on you might have just ... You could use words like I was confused. I didn't
really know what was going on. You might have had opportunities to talk with
other people that were involved in that situation. And kind of see how they
came out of it as well and what they took from it.

Emily: I don't know. I think the meaning of those negative events could definitely
change as you have more time to process it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah that makes sense. That makes a lot of sense. Okay let me ask you
one more question. So as you reflect on your experience as a student and as a
leader, and when you think about what has helped you in dealing with the
demands of those roles, of the student and leader roles, what advice would you
give to student leaders who are just beginning? Because you've got almost a
year now of being a house president, and when you think about what has
helped you the most in dealing with the demands on your plate, and how you've
got a chance to give some advice to the newly elected house presidents, what
would you tell them?
Emily: I would definitely recommend that they take time to write down things that have happened to them. Because they'll either forget or they will gain a new appreciation for that experience later on. So that's definitely something I would say. And then we all go into the house president year having a lot of goals for ourselves, and I think it's really easy once you get into the year, to kind of set those aside because different events come up, and you're like well I have to react to that, or I have to respond to that. And then eventually those goals and those ideas that you had kind of go to the side, because there's more pressing matters that need your attention. So I think it would be important to have maybe even just like checkpoints in your plan, or something like ahead of you, where you would go back and look at that list and see. And your ideas might change once you get the feel for the people that you're leading. They're probably going to need different things from you. But if some of those ideas and those goals still apply, you should take time to do them, because the year is not as long as you think it is, and the time will get away from you and you may not have a chance to do whatever function or activity you wanted to do.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah that makes sense. And if a new batch of house presidents came to you and said, I didn't realize how much this would be demanding of me. I've got academic work, I've got the house president stuff. How do we deal with all these pressures? What do you say?

Emily: I think they should think about the things that they have enjoyed doing before they came HP. So whether that be some sort of art, or reading, or watching movies, or spending time with certain friends, those stress relieving activities or just like activities they can use to reconnect with themselves, minus the house president role. They could probably still reapply those in their house president year, and that could help give them a break from whatever they're dealing with and just remember who they are and what they want to do.

Interviewer: So that relates very much to then doesn't it to your earlier comments about for you, music, conversations with family, because that's what you were doing before you became house president. Those were your go to stress relievers, and that's what you've continued to ... So you'd give similar counsel to these folks.

Emily: Yeah. And they should still be open to new things because you do grow and change a lot through your house president year, but you're still kind of the same person. So that's why I would say those things that you've done before that have worked might still work. But if you also want to try new things, like how I've tried more yoga and mindfulness, you can just keep adding those to your tool belt, so to speak and just have more things you can do for yourself later on.

Interviewer: Very good. I think that's good advice. They should call you and ask you. Well this has been very helpful. And I really appreciate it. You've given me some continued additional insights. And so thank you.

Emily: Thank you.
Jackson: Interview 1

Interviewer: Well, like I said, I thank you for this and thank you for your time.

Jackson: Not a problem.

Interviewer: And as you know, I'm interested in exploring what the experience of the past presidents in [inaudible 00:00:20]. And so I've got a series of questions here I wanna ask you.

Interviewer: But, we're not gonna worry about movin' through those in order. We're just gonna let the conversation meander. I'll be eager to hear your stories and your thoughts and reflections. And we'll just eventually get through it.

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewer: So, the first thing I wanted to ask you is ... Can you tell me about your experience of becoming a house president? Tell me about that.

Jackson: Can do.

Jackson: So, I originally came to Graceland as an international student. Primarily I came over for baseball when I first left Australia. I've never been outside of the country before but I wanted to travel. I wanted to extend my education in a tertiary form and I wanted to play baseball at a competitive level and see where I could take that.

Jackson: So, I did that for the first two years and that was great. And then during my time in those two years, I became hooked into the residence life side of things, and I wanted to explore a little bit more about residence life and give something back, in a sense.

Jackson: And it's almost a cliché in a sense, but baseball wasn't exactly ... I wouldn't say it's not what I was expecting but I wasn't getting the same enjoyment from the game that I originally was.

Jackson: And I felt like I wanted to pursue that house system at Graceland a little bit more. So, I ventured into becoming a house president. My freshman year, I was quite inspired by my house president at the time. And he was almost that image with the glowing background behind him, in a sense. It's weird to think, 'cause I look back on it and I go, "Well, what was really that great about him? What was so special about him?" But it was just every little thing. He might not have seen what he was doing to an extent, but it was inviting everyone to go and do
things, constantly planning activities and just being that person that I could turn
to when I needed something.

Jackson: And that was really impactful for me.

Interviewer: That sounds pretty cool.

Interviewer: So, if I'm hearing you right, you were really inspired by him and inspired by him
... Am I hearing, to actually openly run for HP yourself?

Jackson: He was a big impact.

Jackson: When I first came to America, there was some difficulties getting to Graceland.
And I just had a story this morning with another gentleman who had an
interesting experience coming here, as well. But when I landed in the airport, I
lost my phone on the international flight. I'm gonna assume that someone took
it while I was sleeping with it in my lap, however I don't really know.

Jackson: So, I didn't have my phone with me. And when I landed in Kansas City for my
connecting flight, I came to realize that I don't really know what the next step
from here is. I've booked the charter bus from Kansas City to [inaudible
00:03:38] but I don't know where I need to go.

Jackson: So, I go on to the free call phone in the airport, and I called the charter bus
service and they said, "Well, I'm sorry. We don't have that bus. That bus doesn't
exist [inaudible 00:03:55]." I was like, "Well, what now? I'm in Kansas City in an
airport, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know anyone here. I don't have my
phone, I'm very jet-lagged." So, it took me about 20 minutes to realize that I
actually had my laptop in my bag and I could use that as-

Speaker 3: Chips and the-

Jackson: That's mine.

Speaker 3: They're right. Which is ... 

Jackson: Thank you.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Jackson: It took me 20 minutes to realize that I had my laptop in my bag and I could use
that to communicate to people. So, I'm glad I had my laptop. Started emailing
anyone and everyone. And I contacted my mom. I said, "Mom, I don't know
what I'm doing." I contacted [Diana 00:04:36] at ... Diana? No, I hadn't been in
touch with Diana at the time.
Jackson: I contacted the administrations person at Graceland to get in touch with. And I contacted my house president, who was sent out an initial letter introducing me to what president's life was briefly.

Jackson: Most of it was jargon that I didn't really understand and things that I didn't understand. But I was ready to explore what that was. And my baseball coach was the other person that I contacted.

Jackson: My baseball coach replied sometime later that he was not by his email at the time and that he couldn't get in touch. And the person who actually picked me up was my house president. So, the first person to go two hours, four hours out of their way to do something for me was the house president. And that was a strong impact from the beginning.

Interviewer: Alright, I think that is very cool.

Interviewer: So, I have a suggestion. And that is since most of the time, this is going to be you talking to me and telling me stories, why don't we just pause for a bit, eat our lunch, and then come back to the other questions in a bit?

Jackson: We can do that.

Interviewer: Does that work?

Jackson: Yep.

Interviewer: Okay. So you told me about your experience in becoming a House president, just kind of in general, what is your experience been like as a House president?

Jackson: Full on. I think it's a good way to abbreviate it. I knew that there would be a lot involved in being a House president, but my actual experience as a House president has been a roller coaster, like ups and downs and things in between. But not in the sense that it's been unenjoyable or anything of the sorts, I really enjoyed my time as a House president and experience.

Jackson: I've seen things in a lot of different ways, and I've had different conversations with people and peers, has forced me to have professional conversations with people my age, which is something interesting to enforce policy when something's not running as it should be.
Jackson: Even if I don't necessarily agree with their policy, even in some cases is something interesting, but there're the rules that are established for us. I think it's been a growing experience so far.

Interviewer: So good. When you think about the year so far, what do you think have been your biggest successes?

Jackson: Biggest successes? Efforts, functions. So a function is when you go and plan something, and we go and do something is that as a group member. We decided as a House council, for me and my team, we go together and were like, what do we want to do? I'm one of the guys whose like, I've got a nice house in Kansas city or near, we get over there, and we're going to have a pool party, we're just getting a pool build.

Jackson: Yeah, that's a great idea, we could get to know each other, and introduce that freshmen to try and show them what was they like, what role a part of. I remember the night before freaking out thinking, oh my gosh, I am not ready for this. I have not done enough, not prepared. Woke up the next day, and I had a few people say, “oh, I'm not going to go on, and I didn't feel like it today”. But we just pulled up on his house and just remember seeing the house and I'm like, “wow, this is a nice house”. We invited a sister House, so I know the pairing, another group of people with us, and it was just a really nice relaxing experience.

Jackson: I just don't feel like it or sorry I can't make it, something else has come up and say, “uh no, this isn't what I wanted”. But we just pulled up on his house and just remember seeing the house and I'm like, “wow, this is a nice house”. We invited a sister House, so I know the pairing, another group of people with us, and it was just a really nice relaxing experience.

Interviewer: Good, very good. So what about the challenges, what are the biggest challenges that you face?

Jackson: Balancing as a student at college here as well, there's times where I have to verge to my education, and put forward to my studies, and some of my classes are in intensive loads, so I have to put a large amount of time for them. Then those times when someone might need help with something or someone just needs a friend, and that's my responsibility to be that for them.

Jackson: Then I also need to schedule in time for myself where I can online and be like, okay, this is the me, this is what I need. In terms of specific challenges is, having those tough conversations as well. You mean, do you really need to be doing this right now, what are you gaining from this?

Jackson: It's sitting down and having awkward conversations that you wouldn't otherwise have if you weren't in a position of...
Interviewer: Behaving inappropriately [crosstalk 00:04:09].

Jackson: Correct.

Interviewer: So you mentioned the whole balance idea.

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: I mean that sounds like a pretty major challenge, because you mentioned being a student, your leadership role. I'm assuming that we have a people coming to you to meet you because you are a pure ...

Jackson: 100%.

Interviewer: But then also making time for you. So, this sounds like a pretty big challenge.

Jackson: It's something that you're constantly working on, I don't think there's a correct formula, or there's a specific way that works for everyone. I think it's understanding who you are as a person, understanding how you work, and setting aside time for things.

Jackson: Because if you don't set aside time to do things, they weren't good done and sometimes things that are over their allotted time, and you've got to deal with that and say, “okay, I need to do this now, but later I'm going to do this then” I think it's just understanding who you are as a person and working out how to work with that.

Interviewer: So when you're thinking about facing those challenges, what's been helpful, have you found things that actually help you in dealing with all that?

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Sometimes you just got to slow things down, they just get too quick. So it's taking a minute to breathe and being like, okay, it's re-centering yourself in a sense or taking a step back, and realizing that despite what's going on, I need this time for myself.

Jackson: It's shutting the door to your room, even though you want to keep it open because you want to be accessible, and you want to be there for people, and you want to do the best of your job as possible. It's shutting your door for a second, lying down, taking in a big breath of air, letting it out and being like, “okay, this is me time”.

Jackson: I need to recenter and start looking straight ahead again and work out where I need to go from here.

Interviewer: Have you found things that have helped you, with the slowing down, with the taking your breath, or is that something you've had to teach yourself? Tell me how that was.
Jackson: That was something that was introduced this semester in mindfulness meditation, and that's something that I was a little bit curious about. The idea of let me leave first the House president training, yourself came in and taught just a brief session on ...

Interviewer: Eating.

Jackson: Yeah, and we slowed down, and we had a grape, we hadn't eaten grape in a lot of time. It's the most bizarre thing to eat a grape slowly, but just to concentrate on the grape and free your mind of whatever else is going on, and shout things out that don't need to be there. Just constantly clearing your head and thoughts keep popping into your minds.

Jackson: Then I got to do this homework or this is due tomorrow kind of thing, you got to take them away. I mean like that's not what I'm focusing on right now, because if you're caught on what's going on tomorrow or if you're caught on what's happened today, then you're missing what's going on right now.

Jackson: Aside from that, other things for me has just been sometimes facing out and wasting time, which obviously isn't the best thing to do, but sometimes it's what I feel like I needed to do. So just sitting down, and watching TV, or playing video games and just clearing ahead of what's going on.

Interviewer: Just to decompress?

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: That makes total sense to me. So let me ask you a question, have you ever had an experience in which something happened that at first seem like a negative experience, but later on, even though it seemed negative first, it took on a different meaning for you later?

Jackson: In terms of my position or just in life in general or?

Interviewer: Just in life in general, I mean, certainly as an HP that'd be great, but whatever comes to mind because things happen to us that are negative, and then something happens, and the meaning of it changes.

Jackson: 100%, the biggest thing for me is my brother was ... This is the example that pops to mind, the biggest is my brother was diagnosed with a mental illness. I remember the toll that it took on my family and my parents and as a young, I wasn't a teenager at the time. Seeing him go through this and seeing my parents go through that, I remember screaming into a pillow, why, what's going on here, why? Wishing it not to happen.

Jackson: Then looking at it sometime later, my brother's a little bit better and handling things better, even though people said he wouldn't. Looking back and just being
like, I grew from that experience, my parents grew from that experience. Life isn't necessarily as perfect as it could be or it's not how it would have been had this not happened, but I grew from this experience, and there were benefits to me.

Jackson: That taught me that despite wrong in the world and things going wrong, that there is always something to be gained from it, and that's the biggest example that from me.

Interviewer: Yeah. That boy, that's a huge example. Thank you for sharing that. You're not going to find a bigger example in your life.

Jackson: No.

Interviewer: What about when you look at the HP experiences, there have been anything that in principle is similar, not as big obviously as your brothers diagnosis, but I mean, have you had any negative experiences that ended up taking on a new meaning?

Jackson: I'm trying to think. I think occasionally we'll have a little hiccups with things or disagreements within my team or whatever. There might be a little bit of tension between two people, because they don't necessarily agree on something, but when we agree on everything, then we just following each other. We just sheep when there's that tension, all of that argument, we should do it this way, or we should do it this way instead.

Jackson: Then we can see things from different lenses. I think that with regards to planning things, those arguments sometimes seem quite negative, or they might not be beneficial, but in the end we can come to an idea that we might not have originally considered if everyone just agreed with what everyone else said.

Jackson: To explore that a little bit deeper, the house that I am the House president of, very traditional orientated, having not been around very long. We're still traditions are our primary focus. We have people who challenge tradition who don't necessarily agree with the idea of tradition, and that allows us to do things outside of tradition that, some people might not agree but we'd never be exposed to without that understanding or exploration.

Interviewer: That was, I mean, all great examples. So some people when they have a negative experience, they're just kind of stuck there, and they never quite reframe it, they never quite get past of that and forever attached to this negative thing, and it really interpreted with new meaning, but you've been able to do that. What has taught you to be able to do that?

Jackson: That's the big question.

Interviewer: Yeah.
That's a massive question. I think in some ways you've just got to see it through sometimes. What I mean by that is, it's taking a step back off if something's happened, and reevaluating what actually happened, and what is the result of it.

So as a student and the House president, as you're going through those times where, like you said, sometimes you just got to get through it, are there other things you do that help you get through it, or is it just kind of grinding it out as an individual?

I was going to say grinding, in a sense, when you get something checked off that list, it's a little moral victory to yourself, in a sense like when something's gone, there's less that you can look at things clearer.

I'm a very chronological person, when I get one task done from start to finish, the whole task is done for me. Whereas if I'm halfway through a task, it still makes me feel like I need to get the whole thing done, or that's still a boulder that's bigger than the actual role that's in front of me that I need to move or get out of my pile up.

So you've talked a little bit about some of your successes, you've talked a little about some of the challenges, let me ask you a related but different question. When you look at this past semester, kind of above the whole of your experience as a student as a House president, what experiences have you had that been most significant for you?

Handling crisis.

Tell me about that.

We've had a fire on the residence hall, it wasn't a massive fire.

But it's still a fire.

It was a fire, I had someone walk into my room while I was taking some me time and my door was open, and they go, there's smoke, I go smoke? And he goes, yeah, I think it's a fire, I go a fire, and he says but it's just smoke and I'm like smoke. And like trying to make sense of what he's saying is that it's like a toaster, I'm like a toaster.

I go is it on fire and you guys will go, no, and I'm like, oh, okay. He's like, I think you should come take a look at it. I'm like, alright, so I leave my game reluctantly. And I walked down the hall and sure enough, this is toaster oven. These two men have unplugged and there's this black smoke just seeping from the outsides of it, and we don't know how to toast ovens on the residence halls for that very reason, the heating elements.
Jackson: But just dealing with that situation, some people would be like, what do I do, where do I go from here? One of their reactions was to come into the House president because he'll know what to do. So it's stepping into that role from that position you like, alright, what are the steps that I need to take from here?

Jackson: So for me it was a game plan, like some unplugged, okay, we need to open it to make sure that there's not an actual fire, and obviously there's a wolf of Lexmark. I'm like, alright, and then flame start this box or go to keep breathing, slowing things down. I walk off, get some water into a little bowl that I had sitting in my room and just dump the water on the toaster oven and the alarm immediately beeps off, straight off to that of course.

Jackson: So right go to call the on duty foreign and lift the whole director who's on duty or why the smoke alarms going off and, and respond from that. So immediately after that I got everyone to stop a fanning the smoke, opening up windows and different things and just essentially responding to the situation in a methodical way and taking charge, which is something that frightened me.

Jackson: I remember as a freshman being in a crisis situation, I felt like I could respond to something like that, but when you're actually in the situation, it's different than what you think the situation is going to get.

Interviewer: I get the impression, and correct me if I'm wrong, that the fire is just one example.

Jackson: Correct.

Interviewer: This comes to me like you're just accustomed to dealing with crisis.

Jackson: Constantly, like whether it just be something as simple as someone being loud outside of regular hours, it's taking the methodical steps to be like, aren't you can't do this now. This is why and explaining to them what's going on there or even other examples with the fire alarm.

Jackson: When people have overloaded a washing machine, it's going through the procedure to try and uncover what's going on there, or just different instances like that. This is a reoccurring theme in a sense. It's stepping into that role and having a complete direction on what you need to go from there.

Interviewer: So being in this position where people are always coming to you for things, and you're the person has to intervene in the crisis time being the that guy, what impact has that had on you?

Jackson: It's challenging at times, but at the same time it's rewarding in that, I feel and I can look back on and see that person over there, which goes back to the looking at something negative and taking something positive from it, I see that personal
growth. In terms of personally impacts, people look at you differently when you're in a leadership role, even though they're your peers.

Jackson: I've had people say to me, I think that a non HP, non House president, always be fun with kind of thing. It's realizing that sometimes people look to you to plan things that when they're just doing something small like going off to the gas station, to go and buy food that they might forget to invite you, because they perceive you differently than they would.

Jackson: So I guess in a sense my relationship with some people, is different than what it would be if I wasn't in that position, and not something that's both challenging and insightful to see in the position.

Interviewer: So the relationships are a little bit different because of the role you occupy?

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Are the relationships deeper, not as deep, mixed, something else?

Jackson: I think it's a little bit mixed in that, some of them are deeper in different ways. Like I have an understanding on what my peers academics are like, and know where they might be struggling with. Whereas I wouldn't have so much of that connection if they were just my friends.

Jackson: I'd be distracting their own academics being at that nuisance and always a complainant, but I think it's more of a professional understanding on where they are at life and I know certain things that I wouldn't necessarily know about that people wouldn't necessarily think to know.

Jackson: Looking at it from an outside perspective and people constantly ask me why is this the case, or who did this kind of thing. It's been like, well, is it really important that we know this information, and just I guess a sense of confidentiality and in a sense, but their respect too.

Interviewer: So it sounds to me like there's this really fun loving part of you and there's also this professional ...

Jackson: correct.

Interviewer: Part of you, and you are living with all those things.

Jackson: It is sometimes like a conflict, people will have this crazy idea and they're going to do something ridiculous, and you're like, no, we can't do that and this is why. Then the other part of me is like, man, I wish we could do that.

Interviewer: That'd be really fun.
Interviewer: Let me ask you this, and we've kind of scattered around this, but now let me ask you this directly, what are the demands that are on your plate?

Jackson: The demands?

Interviewer: I mean, yeah, just kind of in general, not only your HP role, but in your life right now. So if you were to come and build a list of demands that are on your plate, what would they be?

Jackson: Obviously there's a personal life, whether that be family relationships, girlfriends, friends, the likes, and sorts like that. There's an educational demand and expectation that I need in my grades, and part of that is being brought upon me by my role as the House president, that's an expectation that I achieve academically.

However, that's not the reason that I pushed those things, that's because I want to succeed in those fields. There are also expectations within my role, including but not limited to being a friend for people in need, a friend, being that person that people look to in times of crisis, organizing and planning fun things and functions, and events that people go to and attend.

Planning weekly meetings, participating in weekly meetings, including ones with a whole directors, group meetings with all the House president and so the leaders in my role.

Interviewer: That's a lot of sense.

Jackson: Yeah. I'm lost within the rounds essentially, myself and another person on the residence life team, usually a House president, assistant whole director and House manager will walk around and ensure that everything is functioning as it normally would.

Ensuring the safety of people on campus, enforcing policy when different issues and situations arise. The list is quite substantial, but I think that the most encompassing thing within the role would just be insuring the safety of my peers and myself around the college campus.

Interviewer: That's a lot for a person to have on their plate, a lot of demands. It's kind of a category you've mentioned a little bit of greater detail. Personal...

Jackson: 100% active.

Interviewer: Academic...

Jackson: Yeah.
Interviewer: As a House president role?

Jackson: I'm 100 percent certain that I've missed things within all three of them.

Interviewer: I'm sure. So what do you do to deal with all, what do you do to kind of keep your own sense of centeredness or how do you deal with it?

Jackson: Scheduling, understanding what my role are, knowing where I have to be when I have to be there. I haven't done this until earlier, but even something as simple as having my class schedule and my friend tells me where I have to be, when I have to be and when I have time for things.

Jackson: So like, okay, I have time for lunch now, this is when I got to eat lunch. Okay, this assignment is due tomorrow or another day after that, and I don't have time to work on it tomorrow, I better work on that tonight.

Interviewer: You had mentioned earlier taking time to breath. Is that helpful in dealing with these things as well, just as you referred earlier?

Jackson: I think so. If it was just constantly inputs, these crisis situations and things that I'm dealing with, like fires and whatever else. Extreme example again, that'd be no time to process or actually work out what's going on.

Jackson: So there's no output, it would become in a sense overwhelming without taking time for oneself to process what information is traveling at them.

Interviewer: So, the thing that you're saying is, it's important taking the time for yourself, and when you take time yourself, what do you do?

Jackson: Those are the times when I shut my door at my room and I'll even just take a nap, or relax and watch TV or just breathe and sit and think about what's going on in the day, remember where I'm at now and then work out what I have to get done before I can move onto the next thing.

Interviewer: You mentioned just breathing and earlier you mentioned mindfulness. Do those two come together for you?

Jackson: Yeah, in a sense.

Interviewer: Does it make a difference in some manner that's helpful or is it not so?

Jackson: Yeah. To me mindful meditation is breathing, is taking that minute and slowing down to take a minute. And there was scheduled sessions through the semester where it was an hour just to get away from things.

Interviewer: That's on ...
Jackson: On Wednesday night, 7:00 PM, weekly for most of the semester. I attended those, there were two of them that I missed because I wasn't taking mindfulness in it, and I wasn't falling down all my inputs and I just got caught up in other things, but those sessions were really where I got to slow down, and relax.

Jackson: Sometimes I ended up falling asleep in the session because it was just that relaxing, and I hadn't had time to slow down and breathe and take them into. My body was exhausted, but I didn't realize it, because of the information that was coming out of me without me processing.

Interviewer: It sounds like you use some of that, even when you were not in just as you've mentioned.

Jackson: Yeah, I think a lot of those techniques that people, are things that people might use without not necessarily realizing it in some ways. However, I think there's also power and awareness, all of those techniques because sometimes you don't necessarily prioritize them or necessarily realize that you do need to take that minute to recenter yourself or you do need to take that minute to process what's gone on.

Jackson: Or you do need to take that minute just to take away your head from what's going on in the day, the week or in whatever time.

Interviewer: So what does it do for you, what you do, does it produce some sort of a drop in your life?

Jackson: Correct.

Interviewer: What does it do for you?

Jackson: I think the best way to answer that question is sort of explain how I feel when I walk away from those Wednesday sessions, just spending an hour practicing mindfulness meditation with someone, or within a class almost setting, not class, but a scheduled sort of time with someone leading it. Relaxed, you just feel clear.

Interviewer: Is that similar to what happens when you just practice it on your own?

Jackson: Similar, maybe not to the same extent. It's not just a mental state of relaxing, that's also a physical state of relaxing, you just feel like a weight is off your shoulders in a sense, or it's almost when you lie down in bed after a long day and you start to relax. You can feel your muscles unwinding in that sense.

Jackson: It's like that but essentially you've done that for yourself to then go on and do a little bit more every day, you can go on off to taking that however long time you will in that hour, in this instance.
Jackson: I remember going back to the hall, back to my responsibility as a House president, often that people are having fun being rowdy and loud or whatever and I'm just sitting there with a big smile on my face, because I'm just mellowing. It doesn't matter what else is going on because I'm relaxed in that setting.

Interviewer: To that mindfulness practice, shutting the door, to watching a little TV, taken a nap sometime, those are all things that help in terms of dealing with all the stuff in your closet.

Jackson: Yeah. To expand on that a little bit more as well, I think it's important to note that this time is different as well for me from playing video games, or watching TV, in that there's still inputs coming at you from there. And I remember describing what mindfulness meditation was to me, to one of my peers in a similar context.

Jackson: He said, well, I don't know why you'd go to that because I'd rather just sit down and play video games, and I said, well, that's good for you in a sense, because that's how you relax and unwind. However, I still see value in this because that's not an input, whether it be something as simple as ...

Interviewer: I think that's fascinating.

Jackson: Whether it's as simple as images on a screen or whatever, it's removing the inputs and the outputs and just being in that moment. I'm sorry, I'm very input output for this because this is how I perceive things as a biology and scientists major.

Interviewer: Just know that's helpful. So let me ask you one more question.

Jackson: Of course.

Interviewer: Kind of looking back over the things, how would you contrast your experience with the House president now, with the experience as House president when you first began?

Jackson: When people started getting here, I was not assured of myself. I was not aware of the responsibilities or necessarily what was involved in being House president. I wasn't confident in what my responsibilities were, but now like this still that disconnection from what I might need to do and the situation at hand, but I know the steps that I need to take to connect the two.

Jackson: I feel confident that if there is a situation that I can deal with, not to say that I feel like I can take on the world or anything, like there is support within the role and those might be the steps that I need to be taking to connect the two, but I just feel more confident and assured that if there is a situation, I can handle it.
Interviewer: It’s just a confidence?

Jackson: Yeah. I think confidence is a good word.

Interviewer: What do you chalk that up to?

Jackson: Living at?

Interviewer: You've been in that role?

Jackson: Yeah. Having actually been in the role, being their head on and seen what's going on and what's involved, and having those high pressure situations that I talked about, and going through the steps, it helps to slow down the actual process and things that are going on there. Just living at.

Interviewer: Good, very cool. I've got to tell you, this has been fun for me, but you've really shared some things that were quite insightful. I really, really do appreciate it. Anything else you think I should know about the HP experience before we wrap up?

Jackson: There is something I think it's interesting when you talk to first House president about their thoughts on the role. When I was first starting out, whether this is something that I want to take on, because it is a very demanding and encompassing role. The amount of people that told me they wouldn't do it again, but they were glad they did.

Interviewer: Good, very cool. I've got to tell you, this has been fun for me, but you've really shared some things that were quite insightful. I really, really do appreciate it. Anything else you think I should know about the HP experience before we wrap up?

Jackson: It was astounding, and I think it's interesting to see how many people have been two year HPs, and how many people have been one year HPs, and sometimes people don't have the best experience in the role. I think it's really astounding to see how many people who are grateful for having done the role, but wouldn't do it again because of the demands and the expectations that we place on it.

Jackson: For me personally, I feel like at the end of this year, I will have done my role in a sense, and I'll be ready to hand over the reigns to someone else. Now, if that wasn't a leader in that position, then I would be a little bit more compelled to step on and take it on.

Jackson: Despite it being a massive responsibility and role, but just the simple fact that I find it very interesting. That sometimes people won't take on a second year because whatever reason.

Interviewer: Good. Well, I thank you again.

Jackson: You're most welcome.

Interviewer: I really appreciate it. I don't think I have any more questions for now.
Jackson: Good.

Interviewer: All right.

Jackson: Thank you very much.

Interviewer: Thank you.
Jackson: Interview #2

Interviewer: Okay. Well, in our first interview, you said that the mindfulness class was helpful to you in dealing with your roles and responsibilities and what, one of the takeaways that I had from my first interview was that if we put the mindfulness class or the mindfulness experience rather kind of in two buckets, there's the mindfulness exercises that you could do any time, anywhere that you want to do. Then there's also the experience of the class itself of actually getting together on Wednesday nights and be in a class.

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And so I wanted to ask you about the class part first before we get into the, what you did on your own outside of class.

Jackson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you just tell me a little bit more about, how the class itself was helpful in dealing with the demands that are on your plate? Just reflect on that.

Jackson: In terms of like what happened in the class or in terms of what the class was to me or ... Kind of what was it to you? Why was the class experience meaningful or effective?

Interviewer: Effective. Okay. I think it was really good because it was a scheduled time. My schedule was very busy and to have that set hour period where it was, this is my time to go and do this really affirms that, that was the case for what I was going to be doing during that time period. It’s easier to push things aside when you don't have a blocking schedule or commitment with a group and that's one of the biggest ways I thought it was effective for me because if I was using that time on my own, I might put it towards something else, whether that be socializing, recreational use of time more so than focusing on how I'm feeling and sort of that inward response to anything else.

Interviewer: Okay. Did it matter when during the week it was, did it help having a midweek or that not have made off any difference?

Jackson: That's hard to say not having it at any other time during the week. I think the midweek was good in the sense that you're not coming into a new week. I think that either the middle of the week or the start of the week just thinking about it probably makes the sense because you're coming into this side of the week and your brain's going through these cycles as to mapping out what you're going to do, when you're going to do it.
Jackson: In the middle of the week is effective because you're going through those cycles and sometimes you're getting caught up in them and things are getting jumbled up and it's not as systematic as it was at the start of the week. But then at the end of the week, I think that, that's when you can sort of hit the reset button and a little bit easier than either of those other two time slots. I think the middle of the week is probably the most effective, but the start, I think there could be value in that as well.

Interviewer: Okay. Was going to the class then helpful to you in terms of dealing with the dual role that you have, kind of the student house president responsibility?

Jackson: I think so. I definitely went back into that dual role environment where people are, this high energy people are around just trying to have a good time. And then I'm wanting to study at the same time particularly. But dual role in that instance simultaneously in a sense. But I remember one instance coming back from that lesson and being very at peace with what was going on around me, even though I had things to get done. I would say yes it did help.

Interviewer: Yeah. I remember you mentioned going back to the whole one night, and you said the guys were kind of rowdy and you just sat there and smiled because you were at peace.

Jackson: That's the instance I'm referring to.

Interviewer: Very nice. Did it matter that you were attending with other house presidents? Did that make it particularly meaningful or not necessarily?

Jackson: I think it's more of an inviting environment when you're around people that you know. With that being said, it's a very inward experience. Ultimately if you can zone out what's going on around you and focus on yourself, then it shouldn't matter as much.

Interviewer: So the fact that there were other HP's there help make it inviting and welcoming, once you're in there-

Jackson: [inaudible 00:05:20]

Interviewer: You're inside yourself no matter who is there.

Jackson: I would agree with that statement. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Did house presidents ever talk about it?

Jackson: Perhaps a little bit. I definitely remember a couple of instances just talking about how he felt about it leaving the actual place. And what was weird, what we liked, what we didn't like. But I wouldn't say that we went beyond sort of the general open ended discussion when we were leaving the place.
Interviewer: Okay. That’s helpful. I know that in the Mindfulness course there’s several different things that were the word taught and different people who resonated with different aspects of the course of both. You had mentioned in the first interview that the particular experience of focused mindful breathing was helpful to you and the other stuff might’ve been as well, but that’s the one that seemed to kind of rise to the top in the last interview. Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience with mindfulness breathing and why that was meaningful to you?

Jackson: It’s something so simple that we don't consider, but we all have to do it. And sometimes there’s not much rhythm to it. So when you are conscious of it, I think it’s easier to create a rhythm and be conscious of what’s on ... I’m using that word a lot because it's really the core of what I'm saying. It's a real consciousness of the physical activity that you're doing at that point.

Interviewer: Okay. So, that’s interesting. There’s an intentionality to it.

Jackson: Right.

Interviewer: And you talked about there's a conscious at that point, did that, when did you experience that point of doing it? Was it in varied times or at circumstances? Can you do it anywhere, everywhere? Where there specific times where you like to do it?

Jackson: I think that there would definitely, when I relate this back to the cost as a whole, there was some nights where it was easier to do than others and perhaps that was because there was more going on or is how I was feeling at that point. I think that it's something that you can perhaps incorporate in different places. However, with a set time period, you're going there with an intentionality prior to that consciousness. So it's even more set in stone that this is what you're going there to achieve.

Interviewer: Okay. That makes sense. So let's say if we get out of that class bucket now.

Jackson: Okay.

Interviewer: And if we kind of go into the rest of your experience, the rest of your life day by day, tell me about the breathing in that context and the mindfulness exercises in that context. What did that or why was that I guess, meaningful to you and what did it do for you?

Jackson: Yeah, I mean it's something that I could incorporate more into my life now, like even still, but it's when you're in those high stress situations and things aren't going through there cycles, it's not systematic in a sense. It's almost like taking the reins or retaking control and getting on top of the situation. Whenever you're doing that it’s slowing things down and bringing it to, I don't want to say
what's important, but what's required or like what you have to do. I didn't know if that makes much sense but ...  

**Interviewer:** Yeah. I'm taken with your language about the exercise, helping you to take control.

**Jackson:** Okay. Yep.

**Interviewer:** And to slow things, say more about that. That's important.

**Jackson:** When you get into a high stress situation, the expression like a headless chicken you're running around like a chicken with no real direction or purpose. It's sort of seems somewhat random and aimless. You're just out of control.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Jackson:** When you're breathing, slowing down, taking stock of where you are, you can refocus on the path where you originally set out to go on or alternatively establish a new direction that you need to go in.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Yeah. And it sounds like you were able to do that.

**Jackson:** I think so. I think that this has helped me particularly in an academic setting and I haven't had as much of a [alert 00:10:29] in terms of classes this semester, which has been nice. I haven't had to use that as much, but to be able to slow things down and approach it with intention and direction gives a little bit more order to it all.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So when it, I want to probe just a little bit here because I'm taken with your use of the word order. When you say it takes, it helps put more order to it. Is that more order to your day, to your inner life, to your-

**Jackson:** The task at hand in the sense is what I'm thinking of like, I'm a very systematic thinker. Like I'll approach things, not necessarily one at a time, but maybe three different linear thoughts sort of in a straight line I guess is the best metaphor. When I say order, it's keeping those lines straight rather than letting them deviate away from where you want to go with them.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And is keeping the lines straight, does that relate to the control question?

**Jackson:** Yeah, I think so. Yup.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. And so if you had to label those lines that you're keeping straight, what are those, are those parts of your life? Are they thoughts, are they-

**Jackson:** All of the above, the task at hand, thoughts, what's going on, what you need to get done. Basically anything that you're thinking of cognitively.
Interviewer: Okay. That's very good. That's actually very helpful. Thank you. I want to switch gears, I want to come back to another mindfulness piece a little later, but in our earlier conversation you mentioned your open door, and you talk about the door of your room being open. And as you talked about that it just sounded important. And that image of an open door kind of stuck with me and I thought, "Okay, I know he's literally talking about a door that is open." But the way he's talking about it almost makes me think that I don't understand what that door totally means, what that door totally symbolizes because there was some weight to when you were talking about that. I was just wondering, if you could just share a little bit more about the open door. What does that open door thing mean to you?

Jackson: I know where that weight's coming from and while it is a literal open door in a sense, it's this idea of accessibility which is something that I value a lot in terms of a leadership position and of the status of the house president. I've seen other people in the position and one of the biggest complaints that my peers have, myself as well has, when it comes to a house president is the difficulty to access them at times. The open door in a sense is just making myself as accessible as I can be at all times so that if someone needs something, it's that little bit easier to get to me. And I think it could go even beyond that and be an open door in terms of communication as well.

Interviewer: Say more about that.

Jackson: When you are retreating inwardly you can shut the door or you can just push aside your responsibilities. You can retreat inwardly behind the door but when I'm talking about open door communication it's, I guess allowing for a relationship or allowing for communication to go both ways.

Interviewer: Okay. There was a lot there in what you said. You said that when you want to retreat inwardly you can do that with a closed door. And you had talked about earlier, kind of the inward focus of some of these mindfulness things. Does the door both opening and closing is, does the door become a way to help manage some of the stuff on your plate?

Jackson: 100% if my-

Interviewer: And say about that.

Jackson: If my doors shut that's when I need my me time, whether it be a personal reflection or I need to really focus on something or I just want to be alone. That door being shut means this is my me time. That doesn't necessarily mean that people can't knock and see if I'm available. It just means that I'm in a place of being intentional about dedicating this time to me. And it's something I've noticed as well, particularly this semester is sometimes I'll catch my door being shut when I've gone from that place of intentionality and personal reflection to wanting to be available. But I've just left my door shut full for whatever reason.
Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. You mentioned the door can be shut for inward retreat and you had mentioned the inward work that you do in the class. Was the door sometimes shut to actually do inward work?

Jackson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. In addition to home work and other than you just needed some. Okay. I think in the first interview you had mentioned that sometimes it's when the door was shut. No, it wasn't either. You said that sometimes you do some of this breathing stuff in the room.

Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Did you have the door shut when you worked on that, was the shut door opportunity to work on that?

Jackson: Yeah. Of course. When I'm shutting the door, that was when I'm doing that personal reflection. It's not something that I would do with distraction since it's limiting that.

Interviewer: Some of the mindfulness practices and the breathing and such.

Jackson: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, good. So then the door goes open and you mentioned that's part of this communication that's happening. Say a little more about what that door is communicating when it's open.

Jackson: My room is a place where people are welcome to come into. I want you to come into my room so that we can just sit down and talk, so we can just hang out, so you can ask me questions. The door being open is a signal of availability.

Interviewer: Okay. And then when they actually come in and take advantage of that availability, what does that communicate then to you.

Jackson: To me. In terms of what specifically?

Interviewer: When you have guys see that open door and they come in and take advantage of it, what does that say to you? What does that mean to you? That they take advantage of that.

Jackson: It means that they, for one, appreciate me being available, for another thing, want me to be available. And for a third thing in a sense that I'm wanted. I think that, that would be freer than the main things. To speak on all of this a little bit more as well.

Interviewer: Please.
Jackson: Something that someone said to me recently was, I'm not accessible as I used to be. And in my mind this doesn't make sense. I'm like, "I'm as accessible if not more than I was last semester or perhaps even during the start of this semester." But then when you take stock and think about it, I spent a lot of time in the library recently because I've been getting into some of those busier weeks and then that's just those weeks where they happened to be looking for me that I'm not available. And that reflects poorly on the whole thing. In a sense, someone's saying that they want me to be in my room is a cry for me to be available.

Interviewer: Yeah. You mentioned, and I'm not gonna remember the exact word, when they come in that communicates-

Jackson: Accessibility.

Interviewer: Accessibility. And then it was a third one that you mentioned.

Jackson: That I'm wanted.

Interviewer: That you're wanted, that's it. Everybody has an need to be wanted, right? So for the door to be open and them come in, that affirms that, how does that help or hurt you dealing with the demands that are on the plate and the distress that HPs have to deal with? The whole idea of, of being wanted.


Interviewer: Yeah No, 'cause that's a hard question.

Jackson: No, it is.

Interviewer: And I appreciate you letting me probe a little here.

Jackson: Of course.

Interviewer: When we talked about the demands that were on your plate last time and we've also talked about what you do to deal with the stress of those demands and how that open door is one way to help manage those demands, who can come in when it's time not to come in. When it comes to being wanted. I'm just wondering if there's a relationship between being wanted and how you deal with the demands that are on your plate. In other words, does the experience of being wanted, does that in some way exacerbate the demands or does somehow being wanted actually help with the stress of those demands?

Jackson: I would say it helps. First of all, of course everyone wants to be wanted. It's really comforting when someone reaches out to you rather than you having to reach out to them because we recognize that as a need for, sorry we recognize
And in a sense it's some sort of, not implicit but exquisite feedback. Sorry. It's almost reaffirming in the sense that when people are coming into your room, you're doing your job because if you weren't doing your job and people were feeling negatively towards you, they might be less inclined to reach out to you.

Jackson: I mean, that's not a hard, fast rule. People might think that you're doing a good job, but just not have the relationship to go into your room and communicate that with you. But as a general statement, I think that, that's somewhat true. To expand on it more, I think it also drives you to want to do better and build community to a greater level in a sense from that side of things. I don't really know how to touch on it more than that. It's a very difficult question, but I think-

Interviewer: That's very well said. What you've said.

Jackson: As a general statement. It helps.

Interviewer: Okay. I think you've said it very well.

Jackson: Okay. Thank you.

Interviewer: I do. Okay. Well thank you that ... It's just that, that image of that door just really stood out to me from the last conversation.

Jackson: I think it's interesting that you identify that because that was the primary thing that I was intentional of coming into this position was accessibility.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jackson: I value that really highly, up to seeing it not work and seeing it work.

Interviewer: Yeah. And so this same object of door representing availability but also your willingness to use that as a way to care for yourself.

Jackson: Yeah.

Interviewer: When you need to is, 'cause I think pretty important.

Jackson: Those are powerful.

Interviewer: Yeah they are. Let me switch gears here and go back to another mindfulness inquiry. In our earlier conversation you talked with me about the experience of being relaxed, of being in the present moment in the [inaudible 00:24:44] if you will, when you were doing some of the breathing work and maybe some of the other mindfulness stuff as well. I'm curious, for you what is the experience of
being in the present moment like? When you're there, how would you describe that?

Jackson: That's another difficult question.

Interviewer: Yeah. It is.

Jackson: First of all, I'd say that it's really difficult to be in a present moment because quite often we're processing what's happened in the past and we're also looking to the future and establishing what needs to be done and what we want to do. Being in the present moment to me, it feels like, no, I wouldn't use the word nothing, but I think that, that's not quite the appropriate word in a sense.

Interviewer: it is interesting. You use the word nothing. When we're done with this interview, let me tell you why I think that's very important.

Jackson: Okay.

Interviewer: 'Cause I think it's a good word.

Jackson: I think that it's a good word, but I don't think it's quite the correct word in terms of the presence. I think that being in the presence for me specifically is sort of an appreciation for everything. Because you're not dwelling on the past or celebrating the past, you're taking things in, processing them as they come and recognizing them for what they are.

Interviewer: That strikes me as extremely significant. When you say what you said about kind of taking things as they are. I guess I'm wondering, how does that experience of being in the present moment, how does that affect your relationship with, or your appreciation of the things and people around you.

Jackson: You see everything in about a lot. I mean, it's difficult to do. I would say that no one can live in the present moment 100% of the time. I would say that lots of people struggle to do it for a fleeting moment of every day. But I think that it's a beautiful thing in a sense, if someone can achieve that, to be in the present moment is to take things in, process them and appreciate them for what they are. So if we can do that in terms of our relationships and everything that's around us, then we're seeing things of value in everything around us.

Interviewer: Wow. So you're perceiving value in different ways when you're doing that. That's very cool. What does that experience do for you? I mean, you're taking things in, you're seeing their value, you're appreciating them on a deeper level.

Jackson: I think that there's a correlation between what's going on around us and what we're experiencing inwardly. If we're appreciating things around us, then we're
appreciating it ourselves more and we just viewing everything that's happening in our life in a more positive light.

**Interviewer:** The relationship between appreciating things more and the demands that face you?

**Jackson:** Yeah, I would say so.

**Interviewer:** How does that effect that.

**Jackson:** I would almost say that, that ties into the need of being wanted in a sense? Maybe to an extent. Could you ask that again?

**Interviewer:** Yeah. The experience of appreciating things on a deeper level, seeing the value in something that maybe was not quite appreciated before, as you're in that moment or as you emerge for that moment, I'm wondering that appreciation does for you. Does it make a difference in terms of the stress on your plate, the demands on your plate or is that unrelated?

**Jackson:** I'd say it's easier to process the stress and the demands on your plate because you're not seeing them as stresses in a sense. You're seeing them as things to learn from, things to grow from, things to better you as a person, you're not looking at them from a negative light. You're seeing them perhaps for more, more for what they are or in my opinion for what they are like ... I guess that's also a difficult concept to explain a little bit more, but it's not that all this is something I have to do. All this is something I have to learn from.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Good. When we talked the first time, you shared with me some stories about times in which you had an experience that first of all, the experience seemed negative to you, but then later on it took on a different meaning, might not necessarily have taken on different meaning that ended up being, "Hey, this is a good thing." But it took on a different meaning. It wasn't just strictly negative. Are there things that you do in your life that you believe help you to discover meaning and things that at first seem negative.

**Jackson:** That's almost a philosophy for my life as a whole. I had some negative childhood experiences in a sense not perhaps awful to me directly, but they affected me as a whole. My brother went through some stuff and that was really hard for me to see him go through those things.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. You said he'd gone through some mental illness.

**Jackson:** Correct?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.
Jackson: I think that you can still view them as positive things for what they are. You can see them in a positive light when you're looking at them from a perspective of what's now, not what's the future or what was. Perhaps you can for what was as well to see where he is now but.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jackson: I would agree with this statement 100%.

Interviewer: Okay. And what is it in your life that helps you to reframe things that way?

Jackson: Reflection. If you darn process what's happened, then you can't necessarily establish a positive thought or connect a positive thought to something you might see as negative. It's putting in that negative thought feeling or emotion into your life and you're not changing it.

Interviewer: Okay. Good. One more question here for you. As you reflect on your experience as a student, as a leader and what has helped you the most in dealing with the demands that those dual roles present? Think about the stress of that dual role. Think about the things that have helped you the most in dealing with the stress and the demands, what advice would you give to student leaders who are just now beginning.

Jackson: At times leadership can be a bit of a lonely road in a sense, like you expect to get in a position and be getting all of this positive and negative feedback which is not necessarily the case. In fact, quite often a lot of the feedback you're getting is negative because people don't think to tell you about what they like about things, they don't think to tell you about what they enjoyed, but they'll tell you when things are wrong. They'll tell you when they don't like something. It's difficult to grasp in that perspective, as to perhaps how you're doing or what's going on there.

Jackson: In terms of tools and things you have to, to coping with those things is that reflection that I just spoke on and in internalizing and seeing what good things did come out of that. Whether it be, "Oh we know not to do this again."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jackson: And the other that I would say is probably the biggest tool is the people around you. While leadership is lonely in a sense, there's also an understanding that you don't have to take on the world by yourself. There's not one real position or thing that I can think of that you can't ask for help from someone else. Like if you're trying to be a leader by yourself, you're not going to take anyone else with you.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. And if someone were to say, how do I do the reflective piece? How would you advise them?
Jackson: You've kind of gotta, you've gotta look at things for what they were, not necessarily what other people have told you about it, not necessarily what you thought about it. But I think you've just got to come to that place of being in the present. Because if you're looking at things from the past, perhaps you want to recreate that all, perhaps you only feel a negative emotion related to it because of a negative experience. I think you need to come to a position of the present and find some appreciation for it, whether that be what you've learned from it or I guess what you've learned it. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. Well as last time, this is extremely helpful. You said some very insightful things that are extremely helpful to me and really looking forward to getting the transcripts and reading through it. And so thank you.

Jackson: Of course no problem.

Interviewer: I really appreciate it.

Jackson: Not a problem.

Interviewer: Yeah
James: Interview 1

Interviewer: Okay. Well, thanks again. I appreciate it as you know, I am interested in this research project on really understanding at a much deeper level of the experience of the house president and because you are one, you are uniquely qualified to share with me some things. So, let me just ask you, can you tell me about your experience in becoming a house president in the first place?

James: In becoming, you mean once I got elected?

Interviewer: Yeah, like why did you choose to run for HP? What was that whole experience like of actually being elected? And I mean, I know what the processes are, but what was it like for you to [crosstalk 00:00:55]

James: For me? Well, it all kind of started when the HP of the previous year talked to me about it and he realized that no one else is really gonna step up for it, so then I kind of thought about it. I was thinking about going for a bigger to a GSG position, but then I added a very complex minors.

James: So I then I thought to myself, what would I do? That situation, then I was thinking, kind of a light bulb came on. When's it said become a house president? So then the HP, that particular HP told ... Kind of told me what to do, go to this meeting and then fill out an application and stuff like that.

James: And then it Kinda just flew from there. Then bear pitts' were interesting for me because one of the things that I did, was that ... Well, one of the questions if I remember correctly, was how would I resolve conflict? And from a semi adult TV show, I use the term of smashing mattresses together, running from hallway to hallway and then running and smashing matches to each other.

James: Which that got a big laugh which I thought it was kind of funny, which at that moment I thought is that, I thought to myself, "Oh! Crap, what did I do?" Said, "Oh! Boy, I don't know what it did." But then the hardest thing for me throughout that process was the interview. Because I was extremely nervous and one of the hall directors and ... Kept like coming after me with like this hard, serious questions.

James: And he kept pushing harder and harder than I ... And that kind of showed me that the seriousness and the professionalism, professional part of this job, like how it's serious and like what job rules and regulations you have to follow. It kind of made me think different from being an outsider looking into the house president position to now, I see it completely different.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, good. And so kind of like the experience of being HP just in general, how has it been for you so far?
James: Well, I would say, it's had its ups and downs, the peaks have been insanely wonderful but the downs have been kind of like, I wouldn't want to say heartbreaking but hard.

Interviewer: Yeah, so I'll probably ask you about those in a bit. Let me ask you, as you look back on it, what have been your biggest successes so far?

James: Well, I would say personally my biggest successes is involvement, because on day one I started and we did our dragging tamer, which is our woman of the week. And we got our sister house involved with us from day one, and they've been involved all the way up 'til today basically.

Interviewer: Yeah, so I'll probably ask you about those in a bit. Let me ask you, as you look back on it, what have been your biggest successes so far?

James: And that's kind of been like my biggest thing, is involvement and trying to get people involved in doing stuff. Like sometimes you have to kind of push people a little bit more than you would others, but I feel like I've done a somewhat decent job this year.

Interviewer: Yeah, how do you push them when they need pushing?

James: How do you push them? What I do is, I use my favorite technique I've learned over training, delegate.

Interviewer: Okay, you give them the responsibility?

James: Yep, I delegated to either the person or I delegated to one of my HOKA members say, "Hey, you talked to this person, you tried to kind of encourage them, talk to them, kind of get to know him and report back to me."

Interviewer: Very good.

James: And that's helped me out quite a bit, kind of figure out like the different personalities that I have.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you've had some successes it sounds like, especially in terms of building the involvement and the relationship, that's not just on the floor here, is saying it's also with your sister house?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool, tell me about the challenges. What are the biggest challenges?

James: Oh! Boy, one of the biggest challenges is participation by far, because on my house, I have a bunch of athletes. So the first thing I think of is intramural soccer. The hardest thing is to try and get the exact amount of people who have to do that and plus sometimes people just don't want to do anything.
And sometimes even I don't want to do anything, I still get up, I still go out there and do it just because ... Like my guys have told me that it shows them that I enjoy what I'm doing, that if I go and try to go to as much stuff as I possibly can.
The funny thing is they see me as a dad. I'm not sure if that's kind of what most HP's look like, but on my house they always see me as like, I get called Dad sometimes.

Because like they ask me for a bandaid if one of them got cut, it's like "Hey do you have a bandaid?" Yeah, yeah. So then I bandage them up like, "Thanks, Dad." No problem. So yeah it's kind of a lesson in parenting.

But I'd say, going back to the challenges, it'd be the biggest one is the, not necessarily the involvement, but participation, and like, we had some sort of problems with air band, which my Ho Co- My house counselor- came in clutch for me. Because five out of the six of them that I have, had main parts.

Not counting myself. So that was big, so kind of just having them kind of talk to me and work through stuff. If we have any issues we just discuss it and talk it out.

So the biggest challenge, one of the biggest at least, has been participation and in terms of tackling that challenge, not so much what did you do, but what was it like for you to face that challenge? What was it like, you know, inside?

At first, it felt like, not necessarily like, almost like heartbreak. Because you build this relationship with these guys day one, and then you get them to go to stuff, and then it's just, they don't show up. It's kind of like heartbreak.

But after a while I started to realize, that you're, a former HP of mine, I was talking to him about this. What he specifically told me was that "Don't try to get everyone to go, just if they want to go, and try to make the most out of the moment with the people that are there."

That's kind of what I've learned throughout this process, and what I've kind of progressively done, and my house participation is starting to go up again, because I have a lot of football players who participated and they played throughout the entire football season, and then so on and so forth.
Interviewer: And now it's off season so they're free.

James: Yeah. Yup.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So that's a pretty big challenge. What other challenges do you face?

James: The biggest one for me, is that house meetings can kind of rowdy sometimes, they get kind of crazy.

Interviewer: Yeah. So is that a challenge because you're trying to conduct a meeting and people are just kind of-

James: Yeah, I would say it's a challenge because people are chaotic and people are destructive. Very destructive. So I have to, like at one point we had a broken TV in there and one of my guys had an old piece of PVC pipe from air band a couple years back, and he harpooned it into the TV. Yeah. And he tried doing it a second time, I stood in front of him and I almost got hit with the harpoon.

Interviewer: Good grief.

James: So it opened his eyes a little bit.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: So yeah, it's just, I love it, but it's absolutely insane. Sometimes I just can't control it.

Interviewer: Yeah, so maintaining control of house meetings is-

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Pretty crazy. Wow.

James: Yeah, that's an understatement.

Interviewer: So what's been helpful in dealing with the challenges?

James: I would say one of the biggest things that's been helpful with me, is communication with the HP at my sister house.

Interviewer: Okay.

James: Because I've, in like the past month or two, I've kind of talked to her and kinda seen her perspective on any issues. Because in the beginning- Am I allowed to say like names and stuff?

Interviewer: Yeah, I'll just-
James: Okay.

Interviewer: I'll probably just redact them-

James: Okay.

Interviewer: From the final transcript.

James: Alright. Because in the past, Fons and Aponadee were paired together beforehand, which they had an experience was kinda shaky, so in my head I was kinda worried I was like I don't wanna do that, I wanna try something different. And she, being the Aponadee house president, I'm gonna try to keep names out of it, was telling me that like "everything's gonna be okay, we're gonna be a lot better than they were."

James: Then I kind of had this big almost semi meltdown, like I'm so worried, and I'm worried that we're not gonna work well together, it's like, Relax. She kind of told me, "Relax, we're gonna be fine. We're gonna be good. We're gonna be better than before." At at that moment I kind of realized, this is different. This is different. And it made me realize that she's got my back, I got hers, and we're in this together.

Interviewer: Yeah, so just having someone who's not only, I think what I'm hearing in that, is not just a friend, not just a peer, but someone who also is an HP-

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Understand, So having-

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. So, we've got participation as a major challenge, we've got maintaining control of house meetings as a major challenge, any other challenges you're grappling with?

James: One of the bigger things is that, for me personally, I'm not a fan of delegating stuff, because I've delegated some things I've delegated for some guys. But if I delegate something big, like a big task, for example: like reserving a room, and I ask them the day before if they reserved it, and they don't have it reserved. So I-

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

James: So it's kind of, I don't want to say trust, but it's kind of like a responsibility. Like I'm having to take more responsibility than I want to.

Interviewer: Because of the people haven't-
James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Followed through.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. So you've got the responsibility, you've got the participation, you've got the maintaining control. And one thing that's been helpful is talking to your sister house house president. Any other thing that's been helpful in dealing with the challenges?

James: Another thing that I would say would be helpful with me, is I nap a lot, so whenever I have time I just take a random nap out of nowhere, and I normally wake up and I feel like I've risen from the bed but I actually feel refreshed. And one more thing to kind of add on top of that is just the fact that I have a friend who is a former house president that I can talk to if I questions about anything. So that's always kind of nice.

Interviewer: Okay so it's not just your sister house HP, it's a friend who is a former-

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: HP who understands.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay very good. So let me shift gears a bit, I'm gonna ask you a question that's a little more difficult, maybe, I don't know. Can you think of a time in which you had an experience, that at first it seemed negative but then as a little time went on, it kind of changed meaning, or at least it took on a different meaning for you. It doesn't mean necessarily that it turned positive, but something happened that's negative, and you hang in there with it for a while and it takes on some new meaning. Anything like that ever happen?

James: I would say, because throughout the semester what I tried to do as an HP is have an activity after each house meeting, and to start things off we played dodge ball in the gym, which was insanely chaotic if you know what dodge ball is.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh yes, so much fun.

James: And then that kind of started off like really kind of, that night started off like we did our woman of the week, we went over to our sister house, we sang to the sister house house president without her knowing, so that was always a good thing, kind of a surprise factor. Which that was the start of a pretty good night. Then afterwards we came back, we had our house meeting, as chaotic as every
first house meeting is. Then we went to play dodge ball in the gym. By that time I lost my boys. Which, that was an interesting experience.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: So we played different games of dodge ball, and I thought it was kind of, I invited the girls over, I thought it was kind of a bad, like oh crap did I step over my boundaries a little bit? And low and behold, who walks into the gym? The women walk in, it's like yes, thank you. This is gonna be great. Then as the weeks progressed, we played a couple games outside, we've done a game, like we always do like Fons Jeopardy, which is our version of Jeopardy, which kind of silly, kind of, it's fun.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: And then as time progressed more and more the women started coming over with us. The first time we had three, the next time we had six, after that we kind of went to seven, and then we had the same seven come, and then we had eight, then we had nine, then we had like nine, we had nine and 13, which is like 22 people, playing a game like spud ball-

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: Is fun, and then at the last time we did an outside activity, we had 13 guys, 15 women. That is where I saw myself, like I felt like I won the Super Bowl.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

James: Because it felt great.

Interviewer: That's kind of back to the participation thing.

James: Yeah, it just kind of evolved as time went on. Because what happened was, was that, how I saw the relationship between the sister house HP and myself, was that like I would like throw the activity, I'd give the activity to one of my guys, like one of my guys would do Fons Jeopardy, the other one would do like, do spud ball, the other one would play kick ball, the other one would have a game tournament one night.

James: Then, we'd do activities like that, then I'd go and say, I'd always text the female HP like "You ladies are more than welcome to join us, if not that's okay." And the best message I got from her, "Where's it at?" It's like, okay, we're here, we're over here. We'll be there in five minutes. Thank you.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So that whole participation engagement thing is critical for you.

James: Yeah.
Yeah I really appreciate that. So anything else in your experience where something started negative, who knows, maybe even it finished negative, but yet the meaning changed, at one point it was, "Oh, God, this is awful!" And at some point later it was this meant something different to you.

Yeah. I have a couple of these.

Okay.

I'm gonna start with the first one, it's the relationship between my sister house HP and myself.

Okay.

It kind of, it started off rough, because I was kind of worried about the whole messing up reverting back to the past, and then that conversation I stated earlier that we had, kind of helped me open up and realize okay we can do this. And-

Yeah.

It made me open my eyes.

Yeah, that's a great story. It really is. Okay.

And then the second one, was air band. Because to start air band we had the, it was just a bad experience for me to start with because I posted a poll about all of the roles, then I had 15 guys sign up for a female role, I was like "Oh my goodness, why?"

Yeah because your relationship with the sister house-

Yeah.

Was shaky-

Yeah It was kinda shaky, like I'm trying to get this to work, I've got the movie I've got everything good to go. And it's like oh my God, why? Then we watched a movie, which there wasn't that many people so we got the movie done, then we kind of figured out the roles, and then we started like getting the choreography down and everything.

Probably one of the biggest things that kind of turned my experience of air band around, was that I specifically delegated my air band, because you know in the past air band HPs let it? I delegated, I gave the control, basically the keys to my closer up.
Interviewer: Oh, good!

James: Which that helped me out a lot, it made me kind of enjoy it. Kinda made me think like okay I see why air band is fun. And you know one of our hall directors says is "Whenever you're participating in air band you should always have fun with it, if you're not having fun you're not doing it right."

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: And I kind of took that to heart.

Interviewer: Yeah that's good advice. So when you talked about that experience with, well with both those stories that you just shared, what do you think enabled you to be able to interpret a negative experience differently? Was it something you did, was it a way that you thought, was it something somewhere in here in your life? What do you think enabled you to take a negative and have it reframed with new meaning?

James: To me, I would say it was kind of my thought process, because going into the new semester, I was kind of worried like oh my God, oh my God, I don't know what I'm doing, I'm going into this completely blind. Then after kind of having those discussions with the sister house house president, and then I talked to the previous house presidents who kind of helped me out a lot, and I'm starting to get that relationship with my guys in air band out of all things, it kind of just made me think and sit back and realize this is how they did it, I'm not trying to be like them, I'm trying to be me.

James: And it kind of changed my mindset because I was trying to mimic other house presidents, and then after like the second or third week I kind of realized, I gotta be me.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, so just the realization that you have to be true to yourself?

James: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Interviewer: Not somebody else? Okay, very cool. So as you look back over the semester, not only limited to your experience as an HP, but just kind of the whole of the semester. What have been the most significant experiences for you?

James: Significant...

Interviewer: Yeah, but by significant I mean these experiences really had some deep meaning for me, and maybe you've already named one or two of those, or maybe there's something you haven't named.

James: I did name this one, I have a couple in mind. The one that I named is air band because it kind of gave me a whole new meaning of what air band is, in the past
it's just something where we get together and have fun, as an HP it's like... my
house did this. It's like, my guys and our girls came together and we created
what was a freaking masterpiece. It's like, wow I can't believe we did it.

James: And the biggest thing that I'm most proud of out of that, is we won it last year
with a three house pairing...

Interviewer: Oh, yeah!

James: and we got second with a two, so I'd take that as a win any day of the week.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess. I guess. That's good. Anything else come to mind that you'd
wanna mention?

James: I would say, what else would be something significant... the after house meeting
activities. I feel like it's kind of brought the guys together. Brought the guys and
the girls together.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, good. Okay, now I've got a question, I'm just really interested in
this. And here again, this is not just your role as HP, this would be the whole of
your life this semester okay?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: What are the demands that are on your plate?

James: As I laugh at this, this is absolutely insane. Obviously you have the role of HP,
the role of leading meetings, coming up with an activity, leading people to
sporting events, stuff like that. One thing that I just start last night is we're doing
Fons Friday, so if you have any Fons apparel you wear it on Friday.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

James: That's something new. Another thing that I'd say would be demanding would
be, just kind of being an ear. That's what I've, that's kind of helped me evolved
my mindset in the role of house president. Just kind of listening to people
because people, like I always leave my door open and I occasionally play the
occasional football game.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: People come in and ask how I'm doing, I always hand them the controller and
kind of ask how they're doing. And you either see people throw interceptions in
video games, or you see them do very well. But it kind of made me, it's kind of
opened my eyes to the whole idea of becoming HP.

Interviewer: Yeah.
And another thing that's demanding is intermediate micro economic theory.

So your academic life?

Yes! That's the one class, that is by far the most demanding.

Wow, so you've got all the stuff with HPs, you've got your academics, especially micro... say that again... micro-

Intermediate micro economic theory.

Yeah okay, see it would take me a week just to learn how to say it. So there's classes, that's a lot. Anything else on the plate?

I would say, what I always try to do, is whenever there's an event like a wrestling match, football games, soccer game, JV soccer game, orchestra concert, jazz band concert, I always try to be there.

So, just being here? Being-

Yeah.

Being a student and participating and stuff.

Yeah. And then there's always at least one of two of my guys doing stuff, so I wanna be there.

Yeah.

And then whenever I say "good job" to them they always give me kind of a shocked look it's like, "You made it!" It's like... yeah, yeah I made it. I saw the entire thing. And they're like, "Thank you, I appreciate that." So it's kind of like, it's a warm fuzzy feeling.

Yeah. That's very cool. So all of these demands, alright. What does that, I mean when you pile them all up that's a lot. You've got your classes, you've got your HP demands, you've got your just being here and participating as a student, you've got the supporting your friends and the guys and the homies that you've mentioned.

All that kind of stuff is on your plate. What does that feel like to you, I mean does that feel, just describe it! What does it feel like to have all that stuff?

It feels overwhelming at first, but as the year's gone on, I've kind of, excuse me, I've kind of developed like a system so that if there's any concerts or anything... my goodness. I have a schedule, there you go, so like Tuesdays are absolutely
chaotic for me because of the meetings and stuff like that. But any other day, I always try to make like a little widget of time-

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: Where I spend time with my guys. Like dinner is always a big thing, we always have a tradition for... I have a frog in my throat today.

Interviewer: Need any water?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Here we go.

James: Thank you!

Interviewer: You bet.

James: Okay, what was saying? Was it about how does it feel?

Interviewer: Yeah, what is like to have all these demands, you said it feels overwhelming?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's, does it, I guess just... so tell me a little bit about overwhelming, does that mean it's like it's lose really large, and oh my gosh how am I gonna do all this?

James: It's, what I mean by overwhelming, I mean, you do one thing, you get done with classes, you realize oh crap I've got this going on, you go to the next thing, and oh crap I've got this going on, and then that and this and that and this, so it kind of piles up but what I've kind of done is I've scheduled like a 20 minute time window.

Interviewer: Okay.

James: To kind of clear my head.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. And so that kind of gets me into the next question, which is, dealing with all of this stuff on your plate, what do you do to deal with it? You talked about taking time to clear your head for those 20 minutes, what do you do in those 20 minutes?
What I do... excuse me, what I do in those 20-30 minutes, is sometimes I have a little bit longer time span, so I can always take like a 30 minute nap.

Which it kind of refreshes my mind. Another thing I do, is I play the occasional video game every once in a while. Just to get my mind off of all of the work and all the stress. Just focusing on that game. And another thing, what really helps me kind of relax, is the mindful meditation.

What that has done, is just, what's the word I'm looking for... it just kind of cleared, kind of made me relax, just kind of think I'm doing a good job, everything is flowing almost perfectly, it's just you don't need to worry about anything else, just kind of focus day by day.

Rather than thinking, oh in the next week or two, oh boy oh boy, I got a function coming up. Rather than thinking that far ahead, just thinking okay what's on my plate today? I gotta do this, this this, and maybe that... and then just doing that, and then if you have any free time just kind of just relax.

Okay, Good. So it sounds to me like you actually, you know I went to the sessions on mindfulness meditation training, it sounds to me like you also attempted to implement that stuff in your life.

Yeah, I was, to be completely honest with you, I was spastic. I was crazy, I was panicky all the time. Then after I did that, even some of my guys, like my Ho Co said "You've gotten a lot calmer." Ever since I started going to the mindful meditations. Like "You've gotten a lot calmer, you haven't been panicky as much, you've been making the right decision, making the right calls. You've been doing a good job ever since that class." So I was like, so then I kind of realized like maybe I just need to relax and kind of go with the flow.

Yeah. Yeah, that's really insightful, what you're saying. Where there elements of the mindfulness meditation training that were particularly helpful? I mean I know there were several parts-

Yeah.

You know, there's, well you know what the part are.

Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer: Were there parts that you particularly resonated with? That you found more helpful, or all of it, or?

James: Probably the part that helped me, was I think the it was the bodies, body scan, there we go.

Interviewer: The body scan.

James: It was just because my mind would always go in different places, and then it was like okay. And I, at one point, one time, the last class I dozed off.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: Which, it was really comfortable, which it felt really nice.

Interviewer: Good, so were you able to kind of do a brief body scan every now and then during those twenty minutes of the day?

James: Yeah, what I kind of did, I just kind of like laid in my bed and just kind of thought to myself... how do my legs feel today?

Interviewer: Ah.

James: They feel great. How about my arms? And I knew it would work because when you do those body scans, I'm pretty sure you've probably done it-

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

James: You feel like a numbness, as you move up a part you have like a feeling of almost like numbness, then you have like kind of a... you know the feeling that like if your foot falls asleep?

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: That's what it kind of felt like every time I focused on a body part. And that helped me out quite a bit.

Interviewer: Okay, that's really cool. So would take time during the course of your day and you would do some of the body scan work?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: The actual session itself, was held on Wednesday nights, did you enjoy those sessions as well? Did you find being there helpful? Or no so much?

James: Yeah, I found being at the sessions really helpful, it kind of got me away for the next like 50 minuts or so, you're not an HP, you're just a person trying to relax.
You're not a house president, you're just trying to relax, get the stress of your plate, you're just in that room in that one consolidated space.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, that's really helpful. How would you contrast your experience as an HP now, compared to your experience when you first began?

James: Now to when I first began... oh boy. That was a big change. And there was some times when I was beginning, I was thinking what did I get myself into? I don't think I can do this... like I just panicked constantly just thinking that oh my God am I gonna make the right decision for the house? Am I gonna do the right thing? Am I gonna be as good as the previous house presidents? Am I gonna be as good as the one I had my freshman year?

James: So all of those kind of questions, about, just basically a lack of confidence, is what I had in the beginning part. Then now, I feel like I'm more confident, I can handle myself in a large group setting, which is always nice, especially around rowdy guys.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: Especially around rowdy guys you can handle yourself. And then it's just my organization and my planning has gotten a lot better.

Interviewer: So where did all that come? Just doing it? Just experience? Or where did all that sense of confidence and skill and all that, how did that develop?

James: It kind of developed, like the first bit started once I had the conversation stated early, about stating my worries and my frustrations, not necessarily my frustrations, just my worries, about the house pairing and the HP of my sister house, she's telling me just "Shut your mouth, we're doing fine. Don't worry about anything."

James: And then as it kind of progressed I just kind of realized yeah, if people complain to me they can come to me, if people don't like what I'm doing, they can come to me, and do it, then the HP of my, of last year, told me something very kind of like, hit me right here. Like, "This is your house. This isn't mine, this isn't anyone's from the past, this is yours, you do what you want with it." Like, yeah it is.

Interviewer: Yeah that's cool. So let me just make an observation that just strikes me, and that is in your story, your story is not one dimensional.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right?
James: Yeah.

Interviewer: And of the multi dimensions to it, I'm fascinated with this integration, if you will, between the conversation about participation, about managing the rowdy meetings, about all this engagement with people, and then on the other hand, the quiet time, the mindfulness practice, the body scan, and so we kind of got both of those going on. Are they related at all? Or?

James: They're actually perfectly related.

Interviewer: How the hell is that?

James: Because, Tuesday nights are always chaotic, so it kind of stresses me out after, if I think a house meeting went bad. The guys and girls would always tell me, "Oh my God, it was a blast! We had fun." It was like ugh, well okay. I guess so. Then once the mindfulness comes along it's like... alright, last night wasn't so bad, it was actually really good. We had fun, it was chaotic, we had a blast. The next morning someone found a dart in one of their classes. Then someone else found another dart, it's like yeah maybe we need to start picking up darts more.

James: But just to kind of summarize it up, it's just like the Tuesday into the Wednesday helps me out a lot, just to kind of get a fresh start.

Interviewer: Sound like it might have brought some balance?

James: Yeah, it did.

Interviewer: Okay, okay good. Very cool. Is there anything else that you can think of that I ought to know that would help me understand more about your experience?

James: I would say, give me a second to think on this... my experience as a house president... I would say one of my experiences, what I've kind of heard from other house presidents is the people in some of the houses, like the house councils are kind of like split on some things.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

James: About mine, what I feel, is I feel like I'm lucky, because my guys always like come together and do stuff together as a group, and they're always together. And like my guys and myself always like include, like bring different people into our, I don't want to call it group, but like our group. Because we're always doing everything there is to do, wheterer it be working out, the house meetings, going to wrestling meets and watching some more guys wrestle, basketball games, stuff like that.

James: It's just that I feel like I'm lucky because a lot of the stress of trying to get people to come to things, kind of back to the participation, like rally people to go to the
like the sporting events and support other guys. My Ho Co sees like I don't want him to do all this by himself, it's like alright hey what are you doing right now? It's like hey do you want to come to this? Like, "Sure, let's go."

James: So, it's kind of delegation has helped me, and the fact that my Ho Co is probably one of, I would personally say, is probably one of the best here on this campus.

Interviewer: Yeah, good.

James: Because of the interaction they have with basically everybody.

Interviewer: That's good. That's very good. Hey let me just ask you one more kind of random question.

James: Okay.

Interviewer: That class you take that I don't know how to say...

James: Oh yeah, intermediate micro?

Interviewer: That's the one. So you would reference, the things that you do to help with stress, and you mentioned two or three including the mindfulness thing. Do those things also help you with the academic stress, or do those things help you with any kind of stress? Or is it mostly stress just related to the HP stuff?

James: About, for my academic stress, I've had some times where I've gone into the mindfulness meditation, and come into it nice and relaxed and afterwards I check on my phone and I have a reminder, micro exam tomorrow. Then micro exam on Friday, not tomorrow since it would be a Wednesday going into a Thursday. Then I'd realize... oh, crap. Then the stress would kind of go back up, but then I start to kind of think to myself, I start to relax.

Interviewer: Okay.

James: I don't necessarily panic anymore, I used to have those instances where you go like oh boy, oh boy, what did I do, what did I do. But it's just like-

Interviewer: So the panic has subsided with like-

James: Yes.

Interviewer: With the implementation of the mindfulness stuff-

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Not only with your HP role, but-
James: Academics. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, I think that's pretty important. So let me ask you one other question, earlier on in our conversation, you mentioned your door being open. And I know that might sound strange what I ask about that, but what does that door mean for you? The fact that it's open, does that...

James: How I see, like if my door is open, people can come in, it's like, it's basically like a welcome sign, if you kind of see like a welcome or an open sign in a restaurant-

Interviewer: Okay.

James: Which is kind of weird I'm using a restaurant to reference this, but just like if the door's open, I'll always just see people come in like, "Hey, do you mind if we watch this for a little bit?" It's like, sure I don't mind. Then I sit there and I watch an entire TV show with one of my reps and two of my freshman for three hours on end.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: Then I realize, oh crap, it's 1:30 and I still haven't done my homework yet.

Interviewer: So is the open door, and the reason I'm asking is because in the past I've heard other HPs talk about their door.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: But I've never, I guess what I'm curious about is does that door in any way shape or form when it's open, represent to you what this opportunity at the function, to support your guys, etc.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: But you also said that sometimes you look up and it's two hours later and it's oh my gosh. Is that open door both a burden and a blessing? Or just not so? Is it just a think that's open or closed, or?

James: How I do my door, is if I swing it wide open, that's when I'm always free, like if I crack, that's when people kind of know like he's in there, he probably wants some peace and quiet. But once I shut it, they know I'm napping.

Interviewer: Okay.

James: Because I've had people call me before, this instance, I'm embarrassed to say this, I missed a 2:00am round because I slept, because I closed my door and I was so tired. So it's just a matter of whether I'm up to doing, whether I'm free, I have free time, it all depends on if I'm just hanging in my room. Because if I'm
hanging in my room, my doors open. We just have a lot of athletes who always play football.

Interviewer: So the wide open door is [crosstalk] come on in, I am available. The closed door, is boy... don't. I need some-

James: Go away.

Interviewer: Good, go away.

James: Go away.

Interviewer: The slightly cracked door is yeah knock if it's important.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: But, okay.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's what I was wondering about.

James: It's kind of like, if you absolutely need something, come in, but if not, I just kind of need some me time right now.

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: Just to kind of deal with stuff.

Interviewer: Well that sounds pretty important to me.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because it sounds to me, like being a house president is an opportunity for a lot of great experience, but also an opportunity for a lot of vulnerability.

James: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Interviewer: So...

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: And by vulnerability I'm thinking your schedule your-

James: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Interviewer: Your time. Being able, just being able to live your life.
James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, hey thank you again-

James: Yeah no problem.

Interviewer: For this. This has been very helpful, you've said some things that have really helped me, I feel like I know more now about the HP experience than I did. And some of the things you said I'm gonna really reflect on, because you had some real insights there, so that you so much.

James: Yeah, no problem.
James: Interview #2

Interviewer: All right, thanks again. As I mentioned, there are some questions I wanted to follow-up on, some things that you had mentioned and some things that others had mentioned that formed some patterns. One of the most common things talked about was the relationship between stress of being a student and being a leader, and mindfulness practices. That tended to come up an awful lot in the interviews. I just wanted to ask you, in our first conversation, that you had talked about the demands that are on your plate as a student and as a leader. You said that the mindfulness practice was helpful in dealing with the stress of those demands. I'm just wondering if you could say a little more about that?

James: How I took the mindfulness meditation is because after a normal Tuesday, all the meetings and stuff, they kind of just boil up and almost leads you to ... almost ignite a fuse to make you explode.

Interviewer: Are we just talking about all the stuff that happens during the course of a week that adds up?

James: This is just a Tuesday.

Interviewer: Oh, just a Tuesday, okay.

James: This is just a Tuesday, all the meetings that add up, plus all the planning that I have to do. It kind of adds up, and then all of a sudden you have this big ball of stress and pressure, and then if that is about to explode the best thing ... is it how did the mindfulness help me, if I'm right?

Interviewer: Yeah, in general yeah. You thought that the mindfulness practice was helpful in dealing with all the stress, I just want to know more about that.

James: Okay. What it kind of did for me personally is kind of cleared my head, gave me a new life, new look at things. Because during the early part of the week you always see you have to get this planned, you gotta get this done, you gotta get this done. Then once I go to the mindfulness meditation, just relax and just focus on the next thing forward. It cleared my head, if that makes any sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, it makes a lot of sense. So all the stuff that piles up, was that mostly House President stuff or was that a combination of House President and academic stuff?

James: It was kind of a combination, but on Tuesday it's House President stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, because on Tuesday is that when you have house meetings?
James: It's when we have our CHP meeting, followed by we always do a Woman of the Week thing, so we do that, followed by a house meeting and then an activity afterwards.

Interviewer: Okay, so it's just one thing after another.

James: Yeah, it's no break.

Interviewer: You said that the mindfulness stuff helped clear your head. If you were to describe what it feels like, how you experienced the clearing of the head, what was that like?

James: How I see it, it's like taking the weight off all my shoulders basically. I'm gonna use a sports analogy to this. If you were squatting 400-some odd pounds and you had the satisfaction of going down, coming up and putting the weight on the rack. It's the satisfaction of putting the weight on the rack and actually doing it.

Interviewer: Okay, that helps. That makes sense. You have mentioned in our first interview that you found the body scan to be an especially helpful practice. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience with that specific practice?

James: The body scan?

Interviewer: Yeah, and why it was meaningful for you.

James: I feel like it was meaningful for me because I have a habit, my mind happens to go to different places sometimes. It kind of happens to worry about some little things that I really shouldn't. How the body scan helped me is just kind of clearing my mind and just focusing on the one part, and then kind of just relaxing. At one point I think I fell asleep, so I think I was pretty relaxed.

Interviewer: That's pretty relaxed. To be able to do that, because you had mentioned that you not only did that in class, but you had mentioned that you also do that on your own.

James: Yeah, it takes like 20 minutes or so.

Interviewer: Yeah, so what does it mean to you that you ... I mean, you've described what it does for you, what meaning does that have for you that you can do this and you can have this experience?

James: Personally, the meeting ... can you go a little bit more in-depth on that?

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess so. You described that the body scan helps with the relaxation, so you do it. But what I'm wondering is, what does that mean to you in terms of does it have meaning for you, that you have this thing that you can go to, that
you can implement, that's valuable to you? Does that mean something in
addition to this kind of utilitarian, hey I can do this?

James:  Okay, I get that. I understand now. The meaning that it has for me is I need
some time to myself, because in this job I see people, I interact with people all
the time. This kind of mindfulness meditation always give me the opportunity
just to have my me time so I don't have to go to an asylum and go crazy. I just
need some me time, and that's kind of what it gives me. It just kind of clears my
head and gives me a new life on things.

Interviewer:  Okay, so does that mean life feels less rushed? Are you able to focus?

James:  I'm gonna use an example. It's kind of like, for me before ... what's the word?
Kind of like having a cluttered desk, if you think of it that way, that's how I see it.
A completely cluttered desk, my minds like my thoughts here, my thoughts
there, my thoughts on house meeting, my thoughts on getting the Woman of
the Week stuff going, my thoughts on trying to do well in my classes. Then once
I hit mindful meditation it's just like, this is my time for my HP stuff, this is my
time for my homework stuff, this is my time for me. I feel more organized.

Interviewer:  That's a great example. That's a great example. Do you find out that you ... does
it affect your appreciation of those individual things, or not so much?

James:  I feel like ... I'd say it makes me value them more because I see it from a
different perspective. Because when I think of it, when I'm cluttered and rushed,
I think of it as a job not as an enjoyment.

Interviewer:  I see, okay. Okay, that makes total sense. That makes total sense. In fact, you
helped me with an insight on there, thank you. The next question I want to ask
you is one that I'm really intrigued about. That is, you and the other House
Presidents talked about your door being opened. And I can remember when we
talked about it, you didn't say a ton about it, but you mentioned it two, three
times, about your door being opened. It sounded like that open door was
important, so in my notes here on your transcript I've got open door, open door,
written two or three times. I just wanted to come back and say what does that
idea of an open door, what does that mean to you? What's that about?

James:  What it kind of means to me, how I see it is it tells the guys that I'm here, come
in and hang out. Because at one point I had 12 people in my room, and you
know those rooms are pretty small and it gets pretty crowded.

Interviewer:  Yeah, they are.

James:  I've had 10 or 12 people. And the meaning behind it is it shows me that the guys
want to enjoy the little things, like hanging out and stuff like that, and not just
that Tuesday night is the only night that we get to get together. There are other
nights and other day times, if you're bored come on in, play the occasional video
game every once in a while, chit chat if you have a stressful day. I'm always an ear for you. It kind of shows me that they're trusting me.

Interviewer: So the door, is the door a representation of you then? If the open door and them coming through it shows that they're trusting you, does that door represent you and your leadership in some way?

James: I feel like it does because there are very rare times whenever my door is shut. The only times I ever shut it is whenever I do homework. Other than that, my door is always open. People are more than welcome to come in, talk. If they had a stressful day, I can listen, which I've had a lot of those issues. Back to your point, I feel like it kind of does represent me as a leader because some of the HPs, I've noticed some of them, whenever they're stressed and I just as what's wrong, and they talk to me about it.

Interviewer: Okay, yeah. I think that's so interesting because all the HPs mentioned the door, so I was just really, really interested in learning more about it. If the door represents in some ways you and your leadership, is there anything else that you would want to say about that door as a symbol, as a metaphor? And maybe there's not, I'm just so interested in the door thing.

James: Yeah, I understand. I have to think about this for a second. I'd say to me the door would be almost like a ... what's the word I'm looking for? I don't like this metaphor that I'm gonna use for this, it's just kind of like a support group. If you think of a support group, they're welcoming, they come. First thing, it may be awkward at first, but after a while people come in more and more. I don't like that, but I feel like that's the best way I could describe it.

Interviewer: Yeah, because I'm wondering if that door being opened, and people walking through it, it obviously says something about your availability. I'm wondering if it says something in addition to your physical availability. Does it also say something about your personal availability to them? Opening a door kind of makes us vulnerable to what comes in, right?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: So do you experience that as a House President, because when they come in they bring their stuff, don't they?

James: Yeah, it gets kind of crowded sometimes. How I kind of experience that is ... well, a buddy of mine always comes in around 5:00 or so, because we always go to dinner at 5:30 as a house. He always comes in, always lays his bag down, turns on my gaming system, and he plays a video game. So how are you? And it's like, yeah. Then he tells me, God I had a bad day, do you care if I play ... the game is Fortnite. Do you care if I play Fortnite for a little bit? It's like, no go right ahead. It just kind of shows. You can tell when someone's stressed once they
get overly excited about shooting someone in a video game. It's kind of funny, but it's just like, man you must have had a bad day.

Interviewer: Yeah. So I'm just curious, what do you do ... when your door's open so often, what do you do to take care of yourself?

James: Take care of myself?

Interviewer: Yeah, just to make sure that you're not overrun with everyone else's needs?

James: I set like a 20 to 30 minute time window, just to relax and for me. Whenever-

Interviewer: Is that when you do the body scan stuff?

James: Yeah, that's when I do the body scan and stuff in my room. I close the door for 20 minutes, so it'd be like 4:30 in the afternoon to about 5:00 is where I have my personal me time.

Interviewer: That's really wise.

James: Just carving that time out, yeah. Sometimes I don't get it, but I always try to make it known that I have a specific time during the day, other from the time when I got to sleep to wake up, to myself. I just need that tiny little window, but it does help me from going completely insane.

Interviewer: That's really wise, I wish more people would do that. That's a great habit to have as you prepare for your professional life.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: When we spoke last, you had said that not only was the body scan helpful, but the actual act of attending the mindfulness class was important. And I think you mentioned a little bit earlier, if I heard you right, why that was, that it kind of helps you clear the head, right?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did it mean to you, if anything at all, that you attended that with other House Presidents? Was that also meaningful, or did it matter at all?

James: To me it was pretty meaningful because other House Presidents are so adapt at doing activities with their houses, it's like the one little time that you get to see them. It's like, hey how are you doing man? It's like, great to see you, how's your house going? Kind of to catch up a little bit, because every other House President is so involved with their house that the House Presidents as a group really don't get to see each other that much.
Interviewer: Okay, so just an opportunity to connect with peers.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was there anything ... I understand the importance of connecting with peers, because they get it, right?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: So in some ways, you may have had that good feeling about connecting with them no matter what you may have been doing.

James: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Did it make any difference that this was a mindfulness course you were attending? Did that mean anything in particular, or was the reason that brought you together unimportant?

James: I personally feel like the reason was unimportant. Just seeing each other there, it's nice.

Interviewer: Just the act of being together.

James: Yes, it's just the act of being together. Because last semester, I call her my partner in crime, my House Parent that I was paired with, the HP of my sister house was there all the time, my partner in crime. I always got to see her and talk to her a little bit, which is always nice.

Interviewer: So if I'm hearing you right, the value of being together was not so much what you were learning, the value of being together was just being together, is that right?

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, gotcha. In our first conversation, I've just got one more question about that mindfulness here. In our early conversation you mentioned that the practice was helpful because it helped you to focus, to relax, to be in the present moment. And you've talked today a little bit about what that was like, and I really appreciate some of the metaphors you've used, the squat rack idea, the cluttered desk, and all of that. The ability to be in the present moment, is that a rare thing for people?

James: I feel like it is rare. Personally, it's rare for me because I'm always thinking either what did I do wrong in the past, and then what am I gonna do next. So I feel like personally that's one of my biggest issues, just because I think too far ahead and I don't live in the moment, now. That's the biggest thing with some of my house meeting activities, because I always want to plan ahead and do stuff ahead of
time rather than just enjoying the fact that I got people there, people are having fun doing something. If something doesn't work, my guys always improvise. One of the examples is we have an activity and the building's locked out, so they just had a snowball fight. I feel like living in the moment, personally is what I'm trying to improve on. I feel like as I progressively grow I live more in the moment and live more in right now, just enjoy it. There we go, enjoying it.

Interviewer: This is a topic that I'm extremely interested in, this idea of being in the moment. You've described the cluttered desk idea and how it helps you focus, when you're in that moment though, when you actually get there, what is that like?

James: I have a quote from the new Hall Director. In our first meeting. He asked me the question, what time is it and where are you. So first time doing it, thinking I looked up the time. He told me, no you're right here, right now. You live in the present moment, you do things right here, right now, so you don't try to focus on different things. I feel like that was a big eye opener for me. You say how does it feel like whenever you live in the actual moment?

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: It feels fantastic because for some things, like a house meeting, it can go really well. I have a habit of improvising a lot, which is always fun, if you know, it's great. I'm just kidding, it's awful. But just living in the moment, I feel like living in the moment depends on the people you're with. If you're with a good group of people that you know are down to have a good time right then and there, it'll make it more interesting. How I see it is, if you're with a group of people that have negativity on their side, living in the moment is just like you gotta get out.

Interviewer: Okay. What does it feel like, you've done a really good job of describing some examples, is there a feeling associated with it or does feeling become irrelevant?

James: Personally, I would say feeling because irrelevant.

Interviewer: You're really in the moment then, because not even feelings are distracting you.

James: No, it's just you enjoy the moment.

Interviewer: Wow, so enjoy, you said enjoy a couple times now. I appreciate you allowing me to probe a little deeper because this is interesting. Say more about enjoying.

James: Enjoying? Well, with my particular house we have a group of, I wouldn't call them maniacs, they're wild children, if you want to call them wild child, because they're crazy. How I see it is I'm gonna use the house meeting as example, because every Tuesday night it's absolutely total chaos. It's kind of like the guys get to be themselves, they get to release some energy out, which is always fun and it's always good to see because whenever you walk by students,
how I see them, is they're always down. They're always like, ah I have so much homework to do. But whenever it comes to that house meeting moment it's back to that squat rack. You set the weight up and you just enjoy it. You have the time of your life with guys that you know, because my house is kind of classified as a brotherhood, so you have fun with your brothers. Then you just live life. In whatever you do, you just live life. There's no judgment, you just have fun.

254 Interviewer: So there's no judgment. It sounds like you're describing a kind of freedom.

255 James: Yeah, I'd say freedom would be the best way to describe it.

256 Interviewer: Wow, you've described that really well. That's really helpful. Thank you, because I'm really interested in that present moment phenomena. It sounds like it helps you enjoy, there's a sense of free, there's no judgment. Excellent. Okay, let me shift gears a little bit.

260 James: Okay.

261 Interviewer: In the last conversation I'd asked you if there had ever been a time that you'd had an experience that first seemed negative, but then with some passing of time it kind of took on a different meaning for you. May or may not have been positive, but at least it began to take on some sort of meaning.

265 James: Yeah.

266 Interviewer: I wanted to follow-up on that. Are there things that you do in your life that you believe enable you to discover meaning in things that might first seem negative?

268 James: I'm sorry, I'm gonna keep using examples-

269 Interviewer: No, that's great.

270 James: -because I feel like examples are the best way to describe it. I'm gonna use our pairing for our sister house this semester. The girls had a quote unquote "reputation" of not being active and not being participating in stuff. That kind of took a negative correlation on the guys-

274 Interviewer: If I recall, participation was really critical for you.

275 James: Yes, for me and my house. It kind of took on a negative connotation of the guys because with the previous sister house, what we did was we were the first ones to get them. We got them active, and once we got them active they did something every single week with us, which is nice because it's a good way of stress relief and I feel like it created the closer bonds. I think I'm off topic, what was the question?
Interviewer: Are there things, and I don't want to assume that there are, but are there things that you do in your life that you believe help you with the ability to reframe things and see things that maybe once were negative now that have got some different meaning attached.

James: Oh, okay.

Interviewer: Does that just kind of happen, or are there things that you actually do in your life that help you ... that enable you to be in a position to see meaning in things that are negative?

James: All right, I know where I was. I think it was this past week, during the hellacious blizzard, I believe you saw me carrying eight pizzas, if I remember correctly.

Interviewer: Yeah, I remember.

James: That was to our first joint-house meeting, which there was some negative thoughts like, oh God we're meeting with them. But then after a little bit of time they started interacting and then we played a game, which the game was really fun and got people involved and interactive. How I saw it is I sat back and had the realizations, this isn't as bad as I thought it was, this is gonna work.

Interviewer: So is it the sitting back that helps you do that?

James: Yeah, kind of the sitting back and the realization of, all right. Kind of the realization of, we can do this, we can make this work. It's not gonna be total chaos, it's not gonna be total failure. We're gonna do this, and we can do it right.

Interviewer: I'm trying to get a feel for that. When you sit back, when you step back and sit back and look at it, what's going on inside you?

James: Inside of me, I would say it's kind of like, I'm gonna go back to the word enjoyment. Like a sense of ... I don't want to say belief. A sense of completion, there we go. Completion, because I feel like my job as a House President, I feel like is creating that first step of interaction with people. Step one is meeting you, hi how are you. Once I create that, once I feel like I've gave my guys that first step, it's like they can just make moves for however long they want to. They can make the moves ... not necessarily the moves. What's the word I'm looking for? They can make the next step in creating those bonds and those relationships.

Interviewer: So stepping back ... let's pretend that you're doing something that's important, and all of a sudden something's not going well. Maybe it's not even a program you've put together, but something's happening in your life, in your leadership, in your studies. Something's not going well, it looks like it's a negative. You said that what you do is you step back. You step back, and then when you step back
what's happening inside of you? Are you just stopping, are you ... what's going on in here?

James: If it was something to be negative, I'd say whenever I always step back and think it's like, what can I do better. What can I do to improve it? Because if something were bad, if something were to happen for instance with guys, the men and the women don't necessarily blend on the first time, that's the first time, but it's like what can ... I kind of think of it as what can I do to improve the experience.

Interviewer: Okay, so stepping back means you step back, you begin to look and say what can I do to solve this, what can I do to make this better.

James: Yeah, kind of like a reflection.

Interviewer: Okay, so you reflect on it then.

James: Yeah.

Interviewer: So for you, what does reflection include?

James: Whenever I'm ... I did this a lot last semester. Whenever I'm reflecting I think of different activities, different ways to make us bond, because obviously different houses have different styles. Last semester my sister house was very, I don't want to call them aggressive, but they were more athletic. They were more athletically-based, so they do all the athletic stuff. You never see people do ... have you ever heard of the game spud-ball?

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

James: Where you pass around a volleyball and you spike it in the middle?

Interviewer: Yeah.

James: You'd never expect women to do that and go absolute ham on that volleyball, and they don't even apologize. How I see it is different houses you've gotta think of doing different things. Then because ... and the representation of these houses goes back to the House Presidents, because the House President last semester was more, I don't want to call her aggressive, but more like the active, more active and more up ... what's the word I'm looking for? A go-getter. Do you know what I mean by go-getter?

Interviewer: Yeah, I do.

James: Yeah, she was a go-getter. She was like, go, go, go.

Interviewer: Someone's who's really highly motivated and going after the goal.
James: Yeah, they're going after everything that they try to do. Then the person this semester is kind of laid back. In my mind, it makes me think if she's laid back, that means I'm gonna have to step up a little more to try to create that bond that with had first semester. But the problem I see with that is homecoming. Homecoming is always a big thing.

Interviewer: Yeah. So for you, reflecting, it sounds to me like it includes looking at the personalities that are involved in it and figuring out how are they gonna interact with each other.

James: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay.

James: Because my guys are ... I have a lot of personalities at my house, a lot of different personalities that seem to blend really well, shockingly. So I kind of see it as, if people are gonna sit back and let those personalities shine, because as a House President, most House Presidents just step up. How I've seen it in the past is most House Presidents overpower those personalities, where I'm a little bit different. I kind of let them shine a little bit, because if you let them shine it makes ... going back to this present moment, it makes the present moment more valuable because it gives the people and those personalities and opportunity to showcase what they can do for the house.

Interviewer: Okay, so there you just caught my attention with something, you talked again about the present moment. It makes the present moment more valuable. So your reframing of these negative experiences has to do with helping other people value the present, is that what you're saying?

James: Yes, basically in a nutshell. Sometimes I have a habit of doing this, I care about other people more than myself, sometimes. But I feel like that's ... basically you hit it on the head.

Interviewer: Okay. That makes sense to me because you talked earlier about how in the present moment there's enjoyment, there's all those things. So what I think I'm hearing you say is that you reframe this because you want to help people be in that present moment.

James: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Gotcha. And are they receptive to that? What do you do to help them be in the present moment when they're just kind of rolling along with life?

James: How do they recept to that? I'm gonna use the example of the Tuesday nights because the Tuesday nights is where we all get together, that's the most present moment before a really stressful week. How I do it is I always let them
say whatever they want. I call on a random person and say, what
announcements do you have? Then they just say whatever they feel like.

Interviewer: So it helps them enter into that experience right there, rather than be-
James: It gets them involved.
Interviewer: Rather than being passive.
James: Yeah, it gets them involved.

Interviewer: Okay, good. All right, well I've got one more question I want to ask you. Last
time we talked you talked to me about the various parts of your life, your
academic life, your House Present life, we talked a little bit about your
successes, challenges, being a student, being a leader, all that kind of stuff. As
you reflect on your experience as a whole up to this point, you've had this
experience with all those different parts academically, leadership-wise, etc., as
you look at the whole, what's it all coming to mean to you at this point in your
life? What does your experience thus far really mean to you?

James: Mean to me? I feel like my experiences, because I started as a shy, awkward
freshman, everyone starts as a shy, awkward freshman, I wouldn't do anything,
coming all the way up to being the one getting people to do stuff, I feel like that
experience shows me the growth that I've had throughout the progressive
years. Because I was rep, I was a board member, and it's kind of unorthodox to
be House President your senior year, but I'm doing it. But the meaning behind
that is that it just shows me that I've grown from this ... I feel like it's more like
I've grown into a man, grown into the man that I know I can be, compared to
the shy, awkward person who sits in the corner. I can go up and talk to people.

James: I'd say I feel like the meaning behind it is that ... it's hard to explain. The
meaning behind it would be that it shows me that I can do things that I would
never expect myself to do. I never expected to come here and lead, I never
expected any of that. I just expected to come here, go to classes, do class stuff,
maybe occasionally play some intramurals, but that's it. I never expected myself
to lead, to be a representative of an organization, to be a board member, to
lead my own even, which Scholar Showcase was my big thing last year, and then
to lead a house. I'd never expect myself to do anything like that.

Interviewer: So what does that feel like then, to reflect on that?

James: Now that I think about it, it's eyeopening because it's like, my God. I look at
myself in high school and I think, I don't know how you were so different in high
school compared to when you were now. It's eye opening, but in a good way it's
eye opening, because it cracked me out of my shell.
Interviewer: Okay. When the shell cracked, what did that feel like? Was that exciting, scary, fascinating, petrifying?

James: Well, the feeling once my quote unquote “shell” cracked, was that it was exciting, to be completely honest with you, because it’s almost like a new life. Now opportunities were open, new things were ... I was able to do more stuff with my house the second semester because it was so fun, I got to know more people, people that I still know today, that I still talk to. I got to know more people, I got to actually get out of my room and do things that I’d never expect myself to do.

Interviewer: That’s very cool, I really appreciate you sharing that with me. This whole thing that you have done to help you enter into present moments, whether it’s body scan, or mindfulness, or whatever the case may be, is there any relationship between that and you’re reflecting on the whole of your life? Or is there no connection between that right now?

James: I feel like as I’m getting closer to graduating there’s more reflection. How I see it is I sit back and I think, where was I about three years ago? What was I doing? I was basically a little baby breaking into the world, and now I feel like I feel like I reflect every year. Myself when I was a rep, what was I doing? I was being more active, I was getting people to come to stuff, I was having people back me up. My junior year when I was a board member. Board member, I get more responsibility, more power in doing things. Then I think to now it’s like, I’ve experienced a lot. I’ve experienced a lot of different things, whether it be ups or downs. I kind of think it’s like, I’ve experienced a lot, but I’m still here.

Interviewer: Yeah, so the experience of reflecting, again I heard you say it involves stepping back, so it sounds like that’s a consistent thing. If you’re gonna reflect, you step back. And then would you describe your reflecting ... I guess how would you describe your process of reflecting? It sounds to me like you reflect by just kind of reviewing your experiences in your head, is that right?

James: Yeah, I’d say that’s about right. I kind of just look at what I’ve done and then how it got me to this moment in time. Then I think to myself, I did it. I just have the realization, I’ve done it, and I did it, just the satisfaction of completion, the fact fact of completion again.

Interviewer: Yes, so tell me what does that mean to look at a moment and to say, I did it? What is that like?

James: There’s like a sense of satisfaction. And also to turn this thing way back around, I’d say whenever I look at a moment I reflect back to the past, for me it was before Graceland, before I came here, and think, would I ever do anything like that? Would the younger me ever do anything like this, go out and do stuff like that, lead activities? Would I ever do that? And it’s like, man, no.
Interviewer: So it sounds to me like as you reflect upon your past experiences, it sounds to me like you're asking questions about the past through the lens of the present, and you see the difference, and just judging from what you're saying and how you're saying it, it sounds to me like it's making you feel good. You see the progress.

James: Yeah, it's satisfying.

Interviewer: Very cool, very cool. Well hey, again this has been very helpful for me and very insightful. You've said a number of things that I have found really fascinating. Anything else that you feel like you would want to share with me at this point about your experience as a House President and a student?

James: I think I've basically said it all, what I feel about my experiences, because they're eye opening in a sense. It's not easy, definitely far from it. But it's been eye opening for me and I'm glad I did it.

Interviewer: It sounds like you've had a really important and successful journey thus far.

James: Yeah, it has.

Interviewer: Very good. Well, my friend, I thank you much.

James: No problem.
Jillian: Interview 1

Interviewer: Okay, well thanks again. As you know, what I'm really trying to do is get a better understanding of what the experience of House Presidents are really like. And so I've got some questions that I want to ask you, but we'll kind of let the conversation meander and I'm just eager to hear stories and experiences, and thoughts and all that.

Interviewer: And so, I guess I would want to start with just a very, very simple one, which is, can you tell me about your experience of becoming a House President? How did that occur? And I know what the processes are, but for you and your story, how did that happen?

Jillian: Well as you know, my oldest brother went to [inaudible 00:01:00] and was a House President when he was here, so I kind of knew about it from a very surface level understanding. But so my freshman year when I was here, I thought, "I think that's something that I would want to maybe run for in my junior year."

Jillian: So then, I was able to get on House Counsel my freshman year, second semester, as a [Cosa 00:01:30] rep because of some shifts that happened in [Cosa]. So then, I did that and that was kinda my first real involvement with the house as far as a position. I always went to things and whatnot. Yeah, so that was my first experience with House Counsel and closer to the House President and seeing what they do and everything like that.

Jillian: So then, my sophomore year I was on [Cosa] board, which was a lot of fun 'cause I like [Cosa] a lot my freshman year, so I did it again and I decided that I wanted to run for House President because I still wanted to be really involved in my house and I wanted to live on the hall again. That's just something I had wanted to do. And my House President my second year was really great and I saw the difference in styles from my freshman year to my sophomore year and how I wanted to make the hall myself. So that's kinda why.

Interviewer: Yeah, good.

Jillian: And I ran for it and then ... yeah.

Interviewer: Good. And just in general, I'll get more specific later, but in general what's it been like for you, to be a House President?

Jillian: It's been good. it's been a lot of late nights, for sure, but it's been a lot of fun really overall because really it's the people, I think, that I got to interact with. Really even starting out 'cause my roommate from last year, [inaudible 00:03:03], she ran for House President and got the position as well, so we were kinda doing it together, which was really fun.

Jillian: And then, in training, got to know the other House Presidents and became good friends with several of them. So that was a good initial start to the year. And then, with the women on my house, getting to know them and get closer to them has really been great.
and a lot of fun. And just the activities and the functions and IMs and everything has been a lot of fun for me, not that there's not stressors or other things, too, but those have been the main things so far that have been a lot of fun and I'm glad I got to be a part of.

Interviewer: So you mentioned the stressors, what have been some of the stressors?

Jillian: Class is hard to keep up with with everything else. If the House President role could be a role without class, it'd be a breeze, but it is not that way. So that's been a challenge, as far as figuring out when to get things done and work on homework when you really want to be present on your house, as well as, there's also other things going on outside of your house. So when you're not there normally you're not doing homework if you're hanging out with your other friends that aren't in your house or whatever, so then when you're there you want to be available for the people on your house and have your door open. But a lot of times it's hard to get things done if you have your door open and people come in and talk, which is nice. You want that, but you also have to get your school stuff done.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: Which has been the challenge.

Interviewer: Yeah, 'cause both those things are pretty demanding. So as you look at it, what do you think have been your biggest successes so far in your role as HP?

Jillian: I think making the focus from the start of the school year about getting to know people and having fun opposed to winning everything, because, well, one, we haven't won a lot of things so that's made it easier. Just in IMs and through Homecoming Week and things like that, just making it, "Okay, this was a fun activity that we get to do together. It doesn't matter how we do as much." So I think that's been a good thing.

Jillian: And then, also, I think participation has been really good 'cause we've had a few functions and we've had over 20 women go to all of our functions. And normally there's at least 20 women at house meeting every week, so I think that's been really great too, just that they're staying involved and participating and that they want to be a part of it. It's just been a nice thing, I guess, for me.

Interviewer: So is there pressure to win?

Jillian: Sure, there is, but ... I don't know, not so much when it hasn't been established as, "We always win this, we have to keep winning," I don't know. So not so much for my house, but there's always pressure. We did win ... we won the blood drive, which was exciting. So that was good. We got house funds for that, which is nice.

Interviewer: So the stuff that is winnable is things like the blood drive, I think you may have mentioned air band, intramurals, that kind of stuff. Does that pressure come from inside you? Does it come from other women on the hall? Does it come from outside the hall?
Jillian: I think there's pressure from the house in the activities that you win money for because they want the house funds to be able to do house things. But as far as IMs or whatever, I don't feel a lot of pressure to win ... I don't know. I'm competitive myself so I like ... it's fun to win, but also I give [inaudible 00:07:15] and have fun either way, so it doesn't effect me as much, but some people have a harder time letting that go and just having fun. But, something to work on.

Interviewer: So those are some pretty significant success that you've named. What about challenges? What have been the biggest challenges that you had to face in the role?

Jillian: I think -

Interviewer: And let me reframe that. It's not only the biggest challenges you face in the role of HP, what are the biggest challenges you face this semester inclusive of your House President role, but not necessarily limited to that?

Jillian: So one of my biggest challenges has been staying on top of my school stuff 'cause that has been harder this semester than, I think, previous semesters. And even though this year ... previous years I ran, too. I had a sport, but this year I'm not running. So that was nice to have that time, but also I think running was really helpful for me as far as relieving stress and just mentally and physically I enjoy exercising and doing that.

Interviewer: And so, I haven't done that as much this semester just 'cause of other things and it's not set in my schedule anymore. It was like, 4 o'clock, you have practice. So it sometimes doesn't happen, which I think has been a bit of a challenge. But, yeah, definitely staying on top of school stuff has been hard because of just the busy schedule and setting times to study and learn and do projects.

Jillian: But as far as within the house, I would say probably House Counsel has been a little bit of a challenge, just 'cause clashing personalities and different things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. So when the personalities clash, what do they usually clash over?

Jillian: So several of my House Counsel members are also roommates. And so, when they have roommate problems, which it doesn't paly into our House Counsel meetings. There's no hostility or anything. But when they're having roommate problems and disagreements then it's like, "Well, you still have to work together," and stuff like that and be involved.

Interviewer: Yeah. And that's a challenge ... I don't want to make assumptions here. So that's a challenge for you as a House President because these are your Counsel members sometimes, at least, and you've got to be responsible for holding the Counsel together and working with them while they're conflicted, is that-?
Right, right. It's a lot easier to be a collective group when you're all good buds and good friends and get along and want to do stuff together. The idea is that you want to go to events and then you'll invite other people and the other house members will want to go because you guys have a lot of fun together. But we still have pretty decent participation, so that's good. But that's been a challenge, yeah.

So keeping ahead of the studies while also serving as a House President has been a major challenge. Dealing with people who are in conflicted, or at least tense relationships on the house, that's been a big challenge. Anything else come to mind that you want to name?

Splitting time, as far as time to be on the house. And then, also a lot of my close friends now don't live on the house, so having the time to hangout with them and do other things while also making sure that I'm available for my house. And then also, like I mentioned, working out has been a challenge, too, but that's not as big of an issue really.

Is it like how do you have a personal life and still do the job?

A little bit, yeah. 'Cause there are some people that you'd like you're in college, you don't need to rely on other people as much, but they're like, "Where are you? Can you let us know when you're gonna be gone for more than two hours from the house?," and I was like-

"No." Usually I don't know and it just happens and I don't know, but I have a whiteboard and I normally write where I'm at.

Wow, that's interesting. So part of the pressure is women in the house who need you to be available, is that-?

Apparently, yeah.

For who knows what. There hasn't been anything major that I've been needed to be there for immediately, but ... They just want you present.

Some of them, yeah, which I understand being present on the house, but to an extent 'cause, obviously, I have a personal life, too, outside of the house.

Yeah, it's not your whole life, is it?

Right.
Interviewer: Wow. So that's a whole ... that's interesting. So that's a whole stack of really varied stresses, isn't it? So there's keeping up with the homework, that's one thing. Dealing with stressed relationships, that's a different thing. Having some semblance of personal life, that's, yet, a very different thing. And then, having this demand of people who need you to be present in case they need something. So that's quite a variety of stressors, I think.

Jillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow. So have you found anything that helps you deal with those challenges? Is there anything that's particularly helpful?

Jillian: Definitely talking to the people that are the people that want you to be there all the time and telling them, "I'm not gonna be here all the time, every spare moment I have." And just ... I don't know, communication, I think, is a major help, especially in those tense relationships because sometimes people just need to talk about it to get it off their chest. It may not change anything in their relationship with their roommate or [inaudible 00:14:10] members might not get better, but sometimes I think them talking about it to someone else is beneficial just to get it off the chest and then it just moves on. So communication for that and for the people that expect you to be at their beck and call, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: But, yeah. So those have been helpful.

Interviewer: What do you ... so those are some things you do in response to other people that help manage that. Is there anything you do just for yourself to help manage your own stress or help you cope with what you're dealing with?

Jillian: Mm-hmm (affirmative), exercising for sure, yeah. When I have ... I can tell when I'm at a point where it's like, "This isn't what I need to do right now. I'm just gonna go for a run." And then, I'll do that and that helps a lot 'cause it just ... I don't know ...

Interviewer: Good.

Jillian: It's emotion and just ... I don't know, it's nice to get outside and do something else. So that helps a lot. Spending time with certain people definitely helps, too, I think, relieve stress, just good friends hanging out. That's nice.

Jillian: And also doing certain activities with the house are fun, too. IMs help, I think ... for me, anyway. That's a kind of a stress relief, too. So there's different things within the role that you're expected to do anyway that also help relieve some stress just 'cause ... IMs, I guess, is also a physical activity, which that has been nice for me 'cause that's something I enjoy doing anyway.
Interviewer: Yeah, okay, that makes sense. So the physical activity, the running, the being with the right people for you. Yeah, those sound like really helpful [inaudible 00:16:04].

Jillian: Sleep is also a good one.

Interviewer: Sleep is a good thing.

Jillian: Sleep is really helpful.

Interviewer: Yeah. Anything else that comes to mind right now in terms of coping, managing with stress?

Jillian: I definitely talk to my mom. Unload on her sometimes. Yeah, just helpful. And talking to other HPs, my other close friends that are HPs, is really helpful too 'cause they have similar problems and they just ... it's easier to talk to people that can easily relate to what you're going through, I think is true for almost any circumstance. But yeah, so that's been nice too.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Good, I'm glad that you're engaging in the things that are working for you. Let me shift a little bit and ask you this one. Can you ever think of a time where you had an experience that at first it seemed like a nega-

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:17:04]

Interviewer: that at first it seemed like a negative experience, but then after a while it took on a different meaning for you. Has that happened at all this semester?

Jillian: I think probably, yes. Yeah. So, it was the night of airband during homecoming, and we were trying to run through our performance a couple hours before airband was suppose to start. So we were gonna run through our performance, then we were gonna and get ready, and change, whatever and then go back to the gym. And there were some of my house members that ... okay so we all ... everyone showed up which was great because it had been really hard to get people to practices and everything like that with all their own stuff going on.

Jillian: And so they ... everyone showed up, and then they said they were going to the bathroom, two people, and one of them was on the house council, so they're going to the bathroom. And they had been gone for a few minutes, and hadn't come back. And we were also outside, and it was close ... it was supposed to storm in a little bit, and all of our props and stuff were out there. So we had a limited range of time, to just practice it with everyone there since not everyone knew their position, whatever. So anyway, they left and went to a basketball game that was occurring. And we hadn't even run through it yet and they had main roles in the airband. So I called them and I was like, where are you, what are you doing, we need to run through this. And the basketball ... it wasn't gonna be over when we were done with whatever.
Jillian: So anyway, I called them and told them they need to get back there. And it seemed like a very negative experience just because I felt like I was kind of, listen you need to be here, you're on house council, this is ... yeah, but they needed to be there. And it felt negative because everyone else was there, and you know they heard this conversation and they were like, well we wanted to meet this person whatever, and I was like, they're gonna be there after this. But they came back and whatever, and yeah. But later, I think it was good because, I don't know if they thought it was ... because it seemed disrespectful to me mainly, that they would do that, especially being on the house council. So I think that I made them come back and do it, ended up being a good thing because they saw that they need to do their stuff and that I'm not gonna just let it happen type thing.

Jillian: So that was just that came to mind. I'm sure there's others but that was one of them.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the negative ... if I'm hearing you right ... the negative was them kind of disregarding, the need to be there. And that felt like disrespect. But when it was all said and done, it was over, it felt differently because you were able to get them to come back. So what did that feel like inside you, when you had that experience of being able to actually help change that situation. What did that feel like for you?

Jillian: I mean, it was definitely nice when they actually came back and we ran through it and realized that, okay we're okay with our ... because everybody is stressed and a lot of ... we have so many new house members this year, just because the new ... since there was a house that got dissolved and everything we had a lot fuller house, and majority of our house is new people. I think it's 28 of our ... there's like 51 or so total members are new this year. So over half. And several of the classmen don't participate anyway so a lot of them are even nervous just about being in front of people and so, yeah it was rude to those people that they had left too. But yeah it felt good for me to be able to get them to come back because it was, I don't know, nice.

Interviewer: Yeah. So something inside you enabled you to do that. Something inside you enabled you to take a negative situation, deal with it, and kind of keep your head about you. And help it end up in a way that ended up being good for everyone. What was that, that was inside you? What enabled that to happen? Do you have any idea?

Jillian: I don't know. I don't know, I think I ... well I like to think that I handle pressure fairly well. And so yeah, I don't know, I just ... what needs to be done in a situation and I did it. But, yeah I don't know.

Interviewer: Have you always handled pressure well?

Jillian: I definitely think I've gotten better, because I remember ... this is kind of an example ... but when I started running in the beginning of high school I would get so nervous and I would not want to talk to my parents or anything before running events, and things like that. And after I was completely fine. But I would just be so nervous, and pressured. I would feel pressured, I guess, to do well and what not. Which not that I don't feel pressure to do well now but I think I just handle it in a better way.
Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: As far as expressing the pressure outwardly.

Interviewer: Yeah. Sounds like you do. So you use the term pressure at several points, which I think is pretty understandable for someone in leadership. Or someone who's a student.

Jillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have there been things that have happened this year ... let me rephrase that ... What are the things that help you just deal in general, deal with the pressure of life. You've mentioned running helps. But when you think about just pressure in general, are the things that you've learned that help with that?

Jillian: I definitely think being optimistic helps a lot. And not focusing on the negative things that happen for an extensive amount of time, because essentially ... you learn from the negative things that happen, and yeah they might be tough, and they might really knock you down a little bit but I think being able to realize that it's not the end of the world and stay positive and focused on doing better the next time, I think has been a big help as far as pressure goes because people make mistakes, and you feel pressure from the mistakes because you have to come back from it, but yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Well thank you. So you've talked a lot about some of the things you've experienced in the job. You've talked about some of the realities that are outside the job. When you think about this semester just as a whole, inclusive of the HP role but not only in the HP role, just sort of the semester as kind of a chunk of time. What experiences in your life this semester, have been most significant to you? And we've talked about successes, we've talked about challenges, but success and challenge don't necessarily mean significant. Now it may be that those were the most significant, but when you look at your life this semester, what are the things that have happened, that you've experienced, that you find to be really significant for you?

Jillian: Well I definitely think the relationships I've formed have been the most significant thing for me this semester. Both on my house. I've become really close to some of the new freshmen this year. Other HP's, I've become really close to. One of them that I didn't really know her very well at all before HP stuff, and we've become really close friends, and she's actually coming skiing with me this Christmas, with my family.

Interviewer: Nice.

Jillian: Yeah, that will be really fun. And then also people outside of my house that I've also gotten to know and formed relationships with has been significant to me. Yeah.

Interviewer: So relationships have been critically significant.

Jillian: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-
Interviewer: Yeah. Anything else? Any other experiences that you've had either over time, or a moment in time that have been really significant?

Jillian: I mean, I think continuously learning how to manage time is significant. With classwork. And learning really how to manage everything, I think has been very significant as well. And making sure you have your priorities straight.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: Because that's important.

Interviewer: So have you found anything that's been most helpful in terms of that part? In terms of the dealing with the time management and the balance stuff?

Jillian: I think just knowing what's most important to you as an individual, because that will help you manage your time, which has been helpful. But, also is a challenge because when multiple things are, there most important focuses, such as people. Your relationships with people, for me anyway. My relationships with people are one of the most important things on the list. But then also academic are really high up there too.

So I'm managing both of those, has been ... those are my hardest. Which is kind of why the exercise and aspect has kind of fallen off a little bit but, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a lot. And those are huge items too. Yeah, they really are. Talking about managing relationships, and managing workload, and all that. That's pretty critical. Anything that you've discovered to help compliment the exercise?

Jillian: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Anything in addition to exercise that you discovered that helps you with ... helps you deal with all of these-

Jillian: Stressers?

Interviewer: Demands. Stressers. All the demands on your plate.

Jillian: Yeah, I mean, the nice thing about my priorities ... Okay academics is mainly just a stresser. But the relationships with other people ... the other people are often good de-stressers so spending time with those people, and that's also building relationship with them as well. So its kind of like your doing both, managing both in one it helps you kind of de-stress because your just ... I don't know, spending time with the people that your close friends with or whatever, and your also maintaining your relationships and that aspect of things.

Interviewer: Good, good, very good. Well it sounds like your personal ... its identified very specific things that help you deal with the stress, and deal with the demands, so that's really good. I mean, that's a really good thing. In terms of the impact ... I asked you about
experience that have been most significant for you, and you mentioned the
relationships. What impact have those relationships had on you personally?

Jillian: In what way do you mean exactly?

Interviewer: Just how have they affected you, how do they ... what do they mean to you? Why are they important to you, I guess.

Jillian: Yeah. I mean, they mean a lot to me because they're people I've become really close to, and through that they've also been people that I know I can rely on. And then are there when I need them. And I'm there when they need me as well. Give and take. But yeah, so it's definitely had a very positive affect on me, just because I've gotten to know them, and I care a lot about them.

Interviewer: Okay, good. So the next question, you've kind of already answered and that is tell me about the various demands that are on your plate. And what you do to deal with those demands. And I think you've kind of named a whole bunch of them. You've named academic pressures several times. You've talked about the role of the house president and how you have to deal with that. Other, you've alluded to how you deal with some of that. Any other demands that are on your plate that strike you as important?

Jillian: I mean, there's some people that aren't on my house, that I don't get to see as much, because of everything else going on, and I consider my relationships with those people important as well. So that's been kind of a demand, because I want to see them and maintain that relationship but also ... like this week especially has been really busy so I haven't really been able to hang out with them but just because of ... I had several, I had tests and I had my presentation today, and I had other assignments that were due the other day, so I wasn't really able to see them much but ... and its been like that, it's been busy throughout. The other weeks too. Every week. I'm like, okay once I make it to this I'll be fine, and then it gets to the next week, I'm like, okay just have to make it through this. Yeah. Continuous process.

Interviewer: But it's frustrating when we can't see the people that we want to be with.

Jillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: Yeah, so it's been kind of hard.

Interviewer: Well it sounds like you're a woman with a lot on your plate right now. So but I guess that's part of the house president experience, and part of what I'm wanting to understand, and better. And so I've heard you clearly say that you've got all these things, but you also know some ways to deal with it. Running, time with friends, engaging in house activities that are fun, and if not physical.
Interviewer: ... if not physical. Anything else that you have discovered that helps you deal with the stress or the pressure? Or the main ones?

Jillian: Those and sleep.

Interviewer: And sleep.

Jillian: Sleep, definitely. Lack of sleep, I tell you.

Interviewer: Sleep's [crosstalk 00:34:18].

Jillian: Makes everything worse, if you don't have enough sleep.

Interviewer: How hard is it to get a good night's sleep in the role that you have?

Jillian: Well, Interviewer, I have not gone to bed before 2:30 or 3 in a while now.

Interviewer: Wow, for weeks, maybe? Or for days, at least?

Jillian: I think that, yeah, it's been days this week. I think last week I got to bed, I think once, by 1 AM and I was like, "Man, that's a good night."

Interviewer: And then, when are you getting up?

Jillian: Well, so this week I've gone to bed at around 2:30 because I just get so tired to that point where I can't do anymore homework. I'm just falling asleep doing it, so I'm like, "There's no point." So then I'll have to get up early to finish it in the morning sometimes, or if I'm studying, or whatever, I want to get up.

Jillian: So early for me, for when I've gone to bed at 2:30 is 8, 8:30.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jillian: That's what I consider early, 'cause I don't have class til 11 on those days. Well, on everyday except Thursday where I have 12:30.

Interviewer: Sure.

Jillian: That has been helpful, that my classes have been later.

Interviewer: Yeah, so this is really important. In addition to all these demands and all these stressors there's also the body not maybe getting what it's needing, you're saying. What is the biggest cause for you for not being able to get adequate sleep? Is it this, that the cumulative demand of all these things or does there tend to be one or two things that tend to put a bigger dent in the sleep than others?
I think it's cumulative for the most part because I think all the things add up, and then the things that I have to get done, like assignments and homework ends up being last minute, which I should do better at that. But they've gotten done. All of them have gotten done, so I'm still hanging in there. Break will be nice. So everything kinda adds up.

And then the academic things that I have to have done end up keeping me up 'cause I have to stay up to do those. And then, also there'll be people that are ... and I'll usually have my door cracked to where people can open it. It's open, but it's not all the way open when I'm doing assignments and really trying to focus.

So people can come in and bug you?

Yeah.

So, give me an example of what are the kinds of things that people come looking for you for. You leave the door cracked so people can come in and you've alluded how they come in at all sorts of hours. What are they wanting you for?

I've had ... there's one ... [inaudible 00:37:19] she'll come in and she'll just say, "Jillian, do you have any snacks?" I'm like, "Yeah, go ahead. Help yourself," and she'll get her snack and then she'll go. I've had people from ... come in about laundry stuff. Just like, "Someone's laundry is in there, I don't know what to do." And so I'm like, "Did you knock on their door?", 'cause they have a whiteboard that has the numbers if ever ... And they'll be like, "Yeah, they didn't answer." And I'm like, "Okay, I know who's in that room, I'll text them." And then I was like, "You're supposed to fold the laundry if the person's not there and you're gonna take it out." She's like, "I have to fold their laundry?" And I was like, "Yeah, I'll help you." So, that's been a thing.

People from a different house, even, ran to my room because there was a spider on their house, on their hallway. And they were like, "This is the biggest spider I've ever seen." And they're like just going on about it, and so I went and killed that. And just different random things like that that happen.

So this is stuff all over the map.

Yeah, people just come in to talk, whatever, hangout, or do homework in my room sometimes. The same girl that comes in for the snacks came in and she just slept on my beanbag as I was doing homework. And I was like, "All right, that' fine."

Wow.

Different things like that. It's fun.

Let me ask you one more question. How would you contrast your experience as a House President right now to what your experience was like when you first began? 'Cause you
just about got almost a full semester under your belt, so what's the difference between
your experience now compared to when you first started?

Jillian: Well, I'm a lot less clueless, I think, than I was, or how I felt anyway, at the beginning.
Just in any number of things really, I felt like I didn't know anything at the beginning.
And then, mainly ... you know the women now that are on your house, so that makes
life a lot easier 'cause you feel like you have those connections with people and that you
can just drop in and they won't just be like, "Why is she here?" They're just like, "Oh,
hey," type of thing.

Jillian: So that's been a whole lot nicer now in this semester. And there's not as much stress as
there is at the beginning of the semester with Homecoming Week. I think it's mentioned
all the time, which, granted, I don't think it was as bad as it was made out to be from
previous years that I had heard about from House Presidents. But it definitely is time
consuming, but I think it's fun.

Jillian: But, yeah, so, I guess those are the main differences. Just I think it's a lot easier now, I
think, just 'cause I know more of what I'm doing. I know the people, which makes it
easier to interact. And at the beginning, for me, I'm not a super ... I don't consider
myself an extrovert exactly. I think I'm somewhere in between, in some middle ground.
So it was very taxing for me to try and get to know people that I didn't know at all. Just
the continuous new faces all the time, of trying to get to know them and form the
connections, it was hard just 'cause it would wear me out. I wanted to do it, but I would
just be tired from trying to do it. So now that's a lot better too 'cause I know them and
it's not tiring to talk to them and [inaudible 00:41:15].

Interviewer: So more experience, more knowledge, and more familiarity with the people?

Jillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jillian: Yes. And I've realized I can survive the classes I'm taking, so that is a good thing, too.

Interviewer: Yeah. So what caused you to realize that?

Jillian: I'm not failing. That's the main thing.

Interviewer: So you're doing it, that's ...

Jillian: Yeah, yeah. Going in, which not that I didn't think I could do the classes beforehand, but
I just knew that it was gonna be challenging and because I wasn't sure if I was gonna
graduate this year or wait a year. I'm taking classes that I would have taken normally my
senior year, like Senior Research and Biology Seminar would normally have that ...

Jillian: So that was ... I was kinda nervous for that just 'cause everyone else in there is seniors
and I wasn't.
Interviewer: Good. Is there anything else you would want me to know about the House President experience?

Jillian: I think it's definitely worth it, for sure.

Interviewer: Good.

Jillian: It's been a really good experience so far.

Interviewer: Good. What advice would you give to a new House President?

Jillian: Hang in there. It gets a lot easier and, I think, better. And better is a vague term, but better really, in a lot of ways just 'cause ... depending on what your main focus is, I guess. It really depends on the person, I guess, how they deal with the role.

Interviewer: Yeah. So I appreciate that. So your comments, your stories have been really helpful to me. They've given me some insight into the HP experience and there's been a lot in your story, of course, about the juxtaposition between success and challenges, stressors and friends, academic demands, HP demands, ways of coping, all of that. And so, it sounds to me like the HP experience is certainly one that's been high demand. Is there anything else that you can think of that has helped you just deal with everything? The HP thing, the student thing, is there anything else you'd want to mention to me?

Jillian: That's helped deal with--?

Interviewer: Just helped you deal with the stressors and all the demands. Anything that you have discovered that helps you, perhaps, have, I don't know, either a bit more peace or that helps you deal with things. 'Cause when you tell me stories about how you deal with things you describe these challenges that you deal with and then you're able to help things be okay. So I'm just wanting to make sure that I'm understanding what are the things that help you to be okay, get you to feel a sense of peace or focus or stress reduction, in addition to the things you've already told me.

Interviewer: And maybe there aren't any. Maybe those are the things. I just want to make sure I'm catching everything I can.

Jillian: As far as ... I think the main things I've told you have been external things that I do. But as far as internally, I think there's a lot to be said on how you view things internally that helps you deal with things. So I don't dwell on the things that ... if people tell me something that maybe isn't what I want to hear ... not that I ignore it, but I hear it and I don't just keep thinking about it, let it eat away in a sense.

Interviewer: Is it that you're choosing what to focus on?

Jillian: Yes. Mm-hmm (affirmative), I think so.

Interviewer: And have you always been able to do that or is that a skill you've recently developed?
Jillian: I think it's been developed, I think throughout ... I haven't always had it, I don't think, but, yeah, definitely ... last year definitely helped me 'cause I got ... this is just an example of something, but I got a very poor test score back and I was very upset about it. And that was a big thing that was hard for me to stop just thinking about it all the time and beating myself up for it.

Jillian: And there's been ... there's always failures and things that help, I think, us learn to move on.

Interviewer: But you've learned how to focus your attention on things that don't create as much stress, is that what you're saying?

Jillian: Yeah, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay.

Jillian: I think that's accurate.

Interviewer: So when you refocus your attention what do you refocus on? Is it a practice that you have? Does it change from time to time depending on what it is? And how do you get yourself into that space, that internal space?

Jillian: Definitely the mindfulness activity is a good example of just thinking about letting things go and ... acknowledging things and then letting them go, that was a big thing in the mindfulness practice.

Interviewer: So that was helpful to you then, that experience?

Jillian: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, that was nice. And then, I think also, I don't know ... being outside helps me a lot too to feel more at peace or relaxed, I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: It also helps for me to focus on the big picture instead of all the tiny little things that ...

Interviewer: Would you recommend the mindfulness training to other House Presidents in the future?

Jillian: Yeah, I would.

Interviewer: What does it do for you?

Jillian: If nothing else it was a chunk of time, an hour, out of the day that ... out of the week, I guess. It was once a week, that you got to just relax and not have all the other ... well, all the other things are still there, of course, that you think about, but to be intentional about having a time where you're not thinking about them.
Interviewer: Yeah. And then, were those practices things you tried to practice, then, other times during the week?

Jillian: I did not do times where I would lay and just think about it, but there was definitely times where I would think about what Tracy had said, since she led it, about taking things in and letting them go. I thought about different things that we had talked about in the mindfulness activities.

Interviewer: And what was your experience like with that? What did that do for you?

Jillian: I think it was just good to be aware of what you are consciously thinking about and doing, because, like she said in the mindfulness activities, we're constantly getting information and taking things in and I think just taking a minute to process everything and then just let it go is helpful, for sure.

Interviewer: Did you find it most helpful ... well, maybe not most helpful, but was that helpful in your student role, your HP role, both roles, life in general? What was your experience with that?

Jillian: I think it was helpful in both roles because there's a lot of input coming in from both of those sides of things as far as academics, you get grades back and feedback on assignments and things like that. In the HP role you get people telling you all kinds of things on your house and whatnot. And, yeah, life too, I guess, but mainly those two roles, it was helpful.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jillian: Yeah, to be mindful about things.

Interviewer: Okay, that's helpful. Well, again, I just thank you so much for taking the time to do this. What you've shared has been very helpful for me. I feel like I have really gained in my understanding of things, so thank you for that.

Jillian: Good, I'm glad I could help.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Jillian: Interview #2

Interviewer: All right, well thank you again, appreciate it. In our first interview, you had indicated that the mindfulness class was helpful to you in dealing with some of the demands of your roles and responsibilities. When we think about mindfulness things from last semester, we might think of them in two big buckets. There's one bucket that is the mindfulness practices that we utilize in our personal lives back in our rooms wherever we are, whenever we do it.

Interviewer: Then there's a second bucket that was the actual class itself, the actual experience of going to a class with other people. It's kind of that first bucket I want to ask you about, the actual class. That is, you said that going to the class was helpful in terms of helping you deal with all of the stuff on your plate and I was just wondering if you could just tell me a little bit more about that?

Jillian: The class was nice just because even though it was just for a short period, it was a dedicated time to go and decompress and relax and stuff, which was nice and it was nice that it was with other people and specifically, other HPs that I knew were also very stressed with different things and especially like one of my good friends that's an HP that she went as well. It was nice to just kind of be there with them and I don't know, Tracy, she was really good at just doing the, she had Kristen do the yoga stuff and then she would do the mindfulness stuff. I think I almost every time, I think I got into a phase where I was like dozing off, where I didn't hear what they were saying but then when it ended, I was awake so I heard it stop. I don't know, it was just a really neat zone to be in.

Interviewer: You're in a zone where you weren't asleep-

Jillian: Not completely, no.

Interviewer: But your mind wasn't super active, right?

Jillian: Right, like I don't really remember what happened in that time that passed in that phase but one of the times they had stopped doing mindfulness and it had people starting to get up and when I came back to I guess full consciousness, people were already standing and stuff and I hadn't got up yet and I was like, "Well, I don't remember what happened from the last thing I heard on the audio or whatever that was playing," but yeah, I was just out a little bit more than normal but not fully asleep.

Interviewer: Okay, very good. You had mentioned that the class experience was helpful to you because we had talked about all of the demands that are on the HP's plate. I mean there's the academic stuff that you have to do, there's the house president stuff that you have to do, there's all the stuff that you have to do. Can you say a little bit about how the class itself was helpful to you?
Jillian: One of the main things the class teaches and that they say when you're there, they're like, "If a thought comes in, don't fight it coming in because thoughts constantly are going in and out, but just let it come in, acknowledge it and then let it go." It was good in the aspect of if things happen like disappointments or different things to not dwell as much on those and the stresses like that you having coming up. It's not going to help you if you just are freaking out about it because it's going to happen either way so just to acknowledge it and let it go was one of the main practices and I think that was useful just in a lot of ways. It was stress and just different things going on.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Thank you. Let me ask you a slightly different question. Okay, because some of the questions there are going to be a little bit nuanced and some of them might probe a little than before. You've just done a really nice job of describing how the class was helpful to you. Can you what the class meant to you? Did the class have meaning? That's a harder question.

Jillian: That is a harder question. I mean, yes, the class did have meaning. Mainly because the class like I said, was other HPs and people that I knew coming together and just kind of going through this new experience that we hadn't been through before really, or I hadn't at least. It was, I don't know what words to use as what it meant but I don't know, it was just kind of a new experience that, at first I was a little like, "Oh, I don't know about that," or if I'm going to do it, I was like, "Oh, maybe I'll try it," and then I liked it.

Interviewer: Does this meaning have something to do then with new experience?

Jillian: I think so. I'm not typically a person that likes a lot of changes in different things like that, so yeah, it was a new idea I guess for me to get my head around and I had never thought about, like I've never really done yoga, or mindfulness practices, or meditation, or things like that really. I've watched hypnotists like [inaudible 00:06:21] but not the extent of my experience with it but yeah, it was just kind of opening like a different door that I had never really looked into and then it was like wow, and then it made me notice how much thoughts and things that you dwell on or think about can impact your attitude and your day-to-day living I guess kind of, just with your outlook and how you approach situations and things like that. That was really interesting too.

Interviewer: Okay, very good. You alluded to the fact that other house presidents were there with you. What did it mean to you that you attended with other HPs that you attended with other HPS, or maybe it meant nothing, maybe it would've been the same if no HPs were there? I'm not trying to suggest things or put any words in your mouth, I'm just curious, did it mean anything that you had fellow HPs that attended with you?

Jillian: Yeah, I definitely liked it a lot that there were other HPs there because after our fall training, really like we're together all the time and we learn all this stuff and we kind of all split, all of our 16 different ways with all our different houses and stuff, and we really only see each other at our CHP meetings. You see each
other but you're not really intentionally together, mainly just you and there was, I would say a majority of the group most of the time were HPs that were there. Which is nice just because the HP as a group, you get to know those people pretty well and kind of know what they're going through and stuff like that so that that shared experience, and then the additional shared experience of going to the mindfulness and meditation practice was also neat.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Thank you. In our first interview as we talked about mindfulness, everybody kind of had their favorite thing that they learned, right? For some it was like the body scan, for others it was the yoga, for some it was the breathing exercises, for some it was what you had alluded to, letting a thought come in, recognizing it, letting it pass. You had mentioned in particular, this idea of taking something in and letting it go as being a practice that was helpful to you. Can you tell me about why that was important to you?

Jillian: Being a house president, you can't always please everyone and there's a lot of criticism that comes with it. I don't know, things just don't always turn out the way you plan them to as far as like maybe how an event goes or how much participation you're getting in your house and different things like that. It's easy to dwell on the negatives and the things you're like, "Man, I really wish this was going better or differently or however that may be," but with that practice, it's like okay, you can acknowledge the things that you want to change but just don't dwell on it because that's not going to help it. I mean sure, do something differently if that's what you need to do but dwelling on the things and the people that you can't control or change aren't going to really do much for you, so that's kind of why I appreciated that practice a bit.

Interviewer: Very good. Were you able to practice it frequently from time to time, every now and then? How did that work for you?

Jillian: I'd say it was fairly often, whether it was with class things, just because there's constant stress at this point but yeah, for sure fairly often with, because I mean we have even house meetings every week and you always have assignments for classes and just bombarded with a million different things all the time.

Interviewer: Okay, good. I remember specifically you talked about that particular practice doing that. Were there any others of the practices that you found to be particularly helpful, the breathing, the yoga, the body scan, any of those?

Jillian: I think it was normally during the body scan that I kind of drifted somewhere in between conscious and unconscious. That one was neat but as far as other practices, I remember one of the first ones we did was with a raisin or we were eating something and it about eating it and noticing just like everything about it with all your senses. That was really interesting just because I'd always just eat my food normally and not really thought much about it but that definitely was just like a different way to appreciate and think about exactly what you're doing and everything about what you're doing.
Interviewer: Yeah. I’m just curious, did you ever try that outside of the class? Do you ever take a moment and whether it was with food or nature or whatever?

Jillian: Right. After that, I definitely with food a few times. It was like, “Hmm, I never noticed this before,” because I was paying more attention to it or something because of having done that intentionally in the class that I hadn’t really noticed but yeah, and as far as just appreciating the things around you. Which I don’t know if that was, I mean it was partially before the class but also after.

Interviewer: That’s actually really important. I’ll probably come back to that. Let me just ask you right now, I may ask you again later. You said something really significant. You said that when you were doing these things, it helped you appreciate the things around you and that you had experienced that before the class as well but after the class when you would be doing whatever it was, the mindful eating or the mindful whatever, that you would appreciate things more around you.

What was that appreciation like? What were you doing? Let me put it this way, what does it mean that you were appreciating them more? Was it that you were noticing them more? You were lingering with them more? Describe that experience for me.

Jillian: I think lingering with it more because I had seen it and noticed things before. A simple example is just like the sunset or yeah, something like that, that you see every day but you don’t always think to stop and really appreciate it I guess and what it looks like and sometimes you focus on one of your senses instead of all of them, which is kind of what was different in that practice. It was just the sense of eating the food and taste but it was like the smell, the touch, the visual aspect of it too, which normally with like a sunset would just be you would think visual but then if you think about all your other senses and you just kind of I think don’t notice or some of your other senses get blocked out when you’re focusing on one thing in particular but then to kind of stop and think about all of the other things that are going on around you as well that involve all your other senses.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s really well-said. What did that experience do for you, this experience of appreciating things more deeply? Did that have any impact in your experience in your life, your stress?

Jillian: I think the main thing was just the act of being more present and like in tune with what is going on around you or what you’re doing specifically. I don’t know if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Okay. It makes total sense. In fact, we may come back to that idea of presence here in a little bit. Just out of curiosity, the body scan, I’m fascinated with the zone that you were in because that seemed like that was a pretty good experience for you. Did you ever experiment with that outside of class? See if you could lead yourself through the body scan?
Jillian: I did not. I didn't try to do the body scan. There have been times where I, like when you're falling asleep you briefly get there for a minute and you can sometimes wake back up or fall all the way asleep but it was interesting because some of the other people that were doing the body scan several times, one of the other HPs individual, he would fall asleep almost every time we did it and he would be snoring. Yeah, so that was an experience on its own.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's good. Okay, we'll come back to that one more time probably but I want to switch gears for a moment and ask you about something that you had mentioned and that others have mentioned. In our earlier conversation, you talked about your door and you talked about your open door. When you were talking with me about the open door and some times you talk about when you close it, I just got the impression that was important because as you talked about the open door, there was some feeling associated with it. I think your voice actually raised a tiny bit, but that open door meant something was my impression. I could be dead wrong about that, absolutely wrong.

Jillian: No, you're not at all.

Interviewer: I was just wondering if you could tell me more about the door and what does that door mean?

Jillian: Well, coming into the position, seeing other HPs and how well they did in my perception, which it always really bothers me when people try to say whether or not a person is a good HP because you can never know what they have to deal with on their house and even if you've been a house president, it's different for everyone with their house councils and their house environment, just a million different things. Coming into it, one of the things that I had perceived as really important was having an open door as an HP, just so that you're, obviously invisibly there for your house and your house members and just kind of symbolizes an open kind of community and open communication and just shows that you're there if they need to just come in, they can just walk right in and kind of that type of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah, so what does it say about you?

Jillian: About me?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jillian: I value people and communication I think are some of the big ones but yeah, I don't know.

Interviewer: Well, and you talked with me about how people come through that door a lot and at all times, right? What does that mean to you that they come through the door to see you?
Jillian: I mean it's a good feeling for sure because one, it makes it feel like it's actually serving a purpose and doing something so it's not just open and no one is utilizing it. One of the main things is as an HP, is helping other people and being there for others so when you're able to do that, it's really nice and when people use you for that purpose, it's rewarding in a sense just because you feel like what's happening is good and it's supposed to be happening, it's the way it should be kind of.

Interviewer: It's rewarding for you when people come in and it's of help to them when they come in.

Jillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me more about when the door goes closed.

Jillian: Yeah, I thought you would ask that. There's almost kind of honestly a feeling of guilt associated with it when it's closed but in some sense there is just because you want it to be open, you want to be available but you can't be all the time, especially with studying for tests and stuff because I've tried having the door open while I'm studying and I'll stay up 'til like two in the morning talking to someone instead of studying so it doesn't work so well. Then with that comes the practice of acknowledging that okay, maybe you know you don't want to have it that way all the time but right now, you need it that way because you need to focus on studying or whatever else is going on.

Interviewer: Yeah, so is the closed door then, it sounds to me like the closed door is important for self-care. Is that correct?

Jillian: Yeah, I think so. I think the open door can also be helpful for self-care as far as like your friends coming in and talking to them and that can be stress relief for me as well. It can be both ways but as more of an introvert, I would say yes, it's helpful to have that time sometimes when it's closed.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. Is the door then kind of a tool to manage both self-care and availability, is that what I'm hearing?

Jillian: Yeah, in some ways yeah, for sure.

Interviewer: Okay. Say a little bit if you will and thanks for allowing me to probe on some of these things, say a little more if you will about your use of the door in this relationship between being available and needing to study, needing to take care of myself. Just talk to me about the use of the door in that way.

Jillian: If I really don't have anything, any assignments or anything that has to be done super soon, then it'll be open pretty much all the way. I don't have it propped open because it kind of swings shut a little bit if I don't. Then there's a zone where I kind of have some things coming up but they're not immediate so I still
have it open but it's not completely wide open. It's more in between open and close so people can see that it's open and that they can come in if they need to but also so I don't get distracted by everyone that I see going by or things like that.

Jillian: Then there's the zone where I really shouldn't have it open because I have things I need to do but I still want it to be open so I'll have it cracked where it's not latched so people can still push it open and then there's the no, I really need to study now because I have a test tomorrow and the door is shut.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything you do to care for yourself when that door goes closed other than giving yourself time to study?

Jillian: A lot of times, I'll close it if I'm on the phone with my mom or on the phone with people, that's the main-

Interviewer: Yeah, because you had mentioned the conversations with your mom is one of the really important ways for you to deal with stress and demands and all of that.

Jillian: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay, good. The door is closed when you're caring for yourself in terms of study time, when I talk to mom, any other thing?

Jillian: Napping.

Interviewer: Napping, that's right.

Jillian: Sometimes my door is weird in that it can look like it's shut all the way but it won't be latched unless I really press on it so sometimes I won't latch it and I'll take a nap and sometimes people will come in and see that I'm sleeping and leave. Yeah, but other times I'll just close it all the way when I'm napping.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you ever do any of the taking things in, letting it go stuff when the door is closed or is that more a thing you do kind of in the moment as things are coming at you?

Jillian: I think it's more in the moment and I don't think I think about it very much. I don't think, "Oh, I'm going to use my mindfulness practice now."

Interviewer: You just do it.

Jillian: Yeah, I think it just kind of happens because I'm never like, "Yes, I remember the words of Tracy Sulter, like come in and let it go."
Interviewer: That's probably even better because if you can just do it without saying, "Oh yeah, I can try this," that means it's probably more integrated in you.

Jillian: Yeah, which has been somewhat surprising to me in that my mom would tell you, I'm very critical of myself in general but it hasn't seemed like it's been super hard for me to go through some of the criticisms and different things like that and setbacks or just certain things haven't really affected me in a super negative way I think because I don't dwell on it as much maybe.

Interviewer: Good. That's good. All right, I want to go back to something that you alluded to a few moments ago. In our earlier conversation, you talked about doing some things to relax but you talked about the present moment. Then a few moments ago, you talked about this kind of taking things in, letting them go and you ended that with saying in just kind of being in the present moment. What I'm curious about is, for you, what is being in the present moment like? What is the experience of being in the present moment like? Yeah, I guess that's it.

Jillian: That's a good question. I'd say the experience is more one of relaxation and not worrying as much, which it's impossible to not think about the future and past and everything like that so not saying you don't think about those things but if you can use the practice to acknowledge all the things around you and direct your focus not towards those things that you can't control and that aren't pressing at the moment, then it's a relaxing experience.

Interviewer: You feel relaxed.

Jillian: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Does that experience then of doing that and relaxing, when you come out of that moment, does it affect the way that you experience people, things, tasks, after you come out of the moment or is it pretty much [inaudible 00:28:30] back to normal?

Jillian: We use the word moment, and I don't know that it's necessarily an exact moment because I don't know if I could point to a time and be like, "That was when I was present in the moment." I don't know, it's also not one of the things that I acknowledge I don't think at least but even on runs or something, I'll be running and, which I did this last year too but I didn't really do it much outside running but if I got to a spot that was just really pretty, that I would just kind of stop and stand there for a few minutes and just kind of look at it and take it in.

Interviewer: Be present there.

Jillian: Yeah but I don't know if you recognize like the moment that you're doing it or if it's just kind of now and then you become more present.
Interviewer: I think you're saying it really well because our descriptions of time are inadequate usually so I think what I hear you saying, and let me check it out, is that it's not about a moment in time in which you feel in the present moment, it's more of an experience or a way of being where for during that experience, you feel as though you're in the moment not worrying about past, future, and you're just relaxed but it's not necessarily an identifiable marker in time, is that right?

Jillian: Right. Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. That pretty much hit it.

Interviewer: Okay, good. You had mentioned earlier that one of the things that happens is this appreciation for things and you kind of mentioned that, alluded to it again with watching the sunrise or sunset or whatever on the run. I think that's pretty important. It sounds to me like when you come out of these experiences, you have this deeper appreciation I think you said for some of the things around you. Does it ever affect your relationship with people?

Jillian: As far as other people, I'm not sure but as far as myself, yes. Specifically, I've been running on the treadmill because it's been so cold out and I used to hate running on the treadmill and I couldn't do more than like two or three miles on the treadmill because I just didn't like running in a stationary spot that was whatever. Now that I've been doing it, and running is very much a mental sport so it's kind of helpful for these types of things but I'll notice sometimes if I'm running, I'm just like, "Oh man, this is awful. I hate running on this treadmill. I want to be done and running is hard, I don't like it," and then if I'll actually stop and think about how do my legs feel right now, how do my lungs feel? How does my body feel? It's really like, "Hmm, it's really not that bad." I'm like, "Okay, well, then it's probably not," it's more of a mental thing that's telling me this is hard than physically.

Interviewer: It makes me appreciate the power of the mind I think is a way to say it, just because it is so powerful and what people can do and what people believe they can do in that aspect.

Jillian: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, and it's almost like, it's not like you're doing a body scan while you're on the treadmill but that you just described is very akin to that, I mean thinking about your legs, thinking about your lungs, thinking about-

Jillian: For sure, yeah, you're right.
Very cool. Okay, so when we talked the first time, you had shared some stories with me about times in your life in which you had an experience that first seemed negative but then over a course of time, whether that time was minutes, or days, or weeks, or whatever, that experience took on a new meaning, doesn't mean that a negative experience became good but something happened where you kind of reframed that and it took on some different meaning for you. Are there things in your life that you do that you believe help you discover meaning in things that at first seemed negative?

Like things I do to try to find the positives in like bad situations?

It could be or it could be finding the pauses, or it might just be an experience has come at you, you're having this experience, it feels negative but you do something and that experience becomes something other than negative. Let me refrain that, it's not that it becomes other than negative but it has some different meaning attached to it. In other words, you mind meaning in the experience no matter if it's negative, positive, whatever in the end, that maybe it didn't present itself that way when it first hits you. Because you had talked about a couple of things in that regard and I'm just wondering, is that just something that comes natural for you or are there things that you do, practices that you implement that actually help you to discover meaning in those things?

Well, I think one of the big negatives that I had, not this year but last year, was in failing a test in one of my classes and I had never failed a test. That was definitely a big negative and I struggled with it for a little bit and then I had to remind myself there are much worse things that could happen to a person than failing this test. I just didn't make it, "Oh okay, everything is fine," but made me focus on the things that to me are more important than a test grade or things like that, like my family and the people in my life, and different things like that.

That experience has made me look at, I don't know of academics as a whole in kind of a different light but just on things that I value most and just not that I didn't value them the most then either but just now, I'm more aware of okay, this isn't the worst thing in the world. There are worse things and the really important things are all right so it's going to be fine. That I guess kind of became a little bit of a practice after that just from that experience.

Now there's been other negatives as well such as in the house president position with house council not turning out quite the way I was hoping and we've actually replaced I think three of the main, three of the five.

Wow. That's a lot of turnover, isn't it?

Yeah, main house council members with freshman, which was a negative in the beginning of the people quitting for various reasons, work, one had a class that met at the time of her meetings so she couldn't do it anymore, different reasons. Now the people that are involved really want to be involved and are
good at their positions and it helps people because I was on house council as a freshman and I, it was a really good experience for me because I wanted to be involved in everything so it's nice, it has a different meaning for them obviously, than for the others that kind of do it or for me, who lost them but also gained new really good people so yeah, I don't know if that answers your question.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, no, it does very much. Let me ask you one more question, okay?

Jillian: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: We talked last time a lot about all the demands that are on your plate as a student and as a leader and what I'd be curious about is as you think about what has helped you the most in dealing with those demands, what advice would you give to a brand new leader who is just starting, a brand new student leader? What should they do?

Jillian: What should they do? I think first I would tell them, because I think almost anyone or for most of the people that I have talked to going into a new leadership position, there is definitely a level of doubt in whether or not you're going to be good at the position, or if you can do the position. I think that's just a general thing people experience, maybe I'm wrong, I don't know but so first, I would tell them to have confidence in what they're doing and that they will figure it out along the way. You're not going to have all the answers when you start or when you end either but you'll find out more of them along the way so I'd say have confidence in what you're doing and don't do half in because you're nervous that you might not be good at it or something might not turn out the way you want it to because if you're half in, then it probably won't, you know, that type of thing.

Jillian: Then I would tell them to be I guess mindful is the word, of themselves and what, because you do, you learn a lot about yourself and how you deal with criticisms and stress and all these different things and how you then interact with other people when you are in those stressful and criticized positions so I'd say be aware of yourself and notice how or what kind of leader you are and how you lead so that you can, if it's not the way you want it to look, you can maybe make changes or that type of thing and figure out what the things are that help you the most because nobody else can really tell you that. It's important to learn. The faster you learn it, the better it is.

Interviewer: All right, very good. Well hey, you have shared some things tonight that have been really insightful and really helpful.

Jillian: I'm glad.

Interviewer: I really appreciate this.

Jillian: I was just rambling.
Interviewer: No, you're rambling out of the core of your experience and that's why it's so rich.

Jillian: Good. I'm glad.

Interviewer: Thank you again.

Jillian: Yes, of course
Nate: Interview #1

Interviewer: Well thanks again I really appreciate your time. As you know, I'm really interested in understanding the experience of house presidents as much as I possibly can and so I just have got a series of questions I'd like to talk with you about and the first one is pretty basic and that is tell me about your experience in just becoming a house president.

Nate: Like leading up to it or ...?

Interviewer: Yeah, kind of what was that experience for you? What caused you to decide to do it? What was it like in the process of becoming one?

Nate: Well so prior to becoming a house president, and prior to coming to Graceland, family had come here several years and years and years past but I didn't... they didn't experience Graceland as much as I have, I think when it comes to the overall kind of aspect and majority through res life too. But once I got here, I kind of ... I always found leadership in some sort of aspect, whether it be in smaller groups or class projects or anything like that. And when I got here I saw the role of house president as kind of like I'd like to do that.

Nate: Now it might sound weird but I didn't see any of my past house presidents as people leading me to become house president. It was people ... everyone else around I saw. Like my past house presidents were great guys but they weren't the ones that I saw as the motivation to become it. And so-

Interviewer: When you say it was the people kind of around, is it-

Nate: It was the people outside of the HP on the hall. All the upperclassmen that were there and then some people who were HPs on other halls. I tend to, when I make relationships, I tend to find relationships with people that are older than me and so when it came to senior class I bonded with them more. So they kind of led me into a direction of this is what our hall stands for, this is how we have done things in the past and this is what we think is a good idea for leading on now things have definitely changed.

Nate: But it's once I got the job, once I actually started with the training, the trainings made it seem very ... I felt very ... the training was helpful but it just seemed it was a whole month of just sitting in a like at times it was just sitting in a classroom getting lectures about how to be personable with people. Which I didn't' think was something we'd have to go through as in depth as we did. Because there were times it was things that I don't take into consideration, like the active listening we learned. How you're supposed to sit when you're talking to someone.

Nate: I never thought of that stuff. And frankly when I get talked to by someone who went through that training now, and I realize what they're doing I'm like I know you're doing that. But it did help me understand a little bit where more people would be coming
from. In several different situations. There are still situations I do not want to deal with
that I've dealt with a little bit. The ones that get to the very serious side and whoo, even
during training when it's just role playing. It's something that I'm not the biggest fan of.

Nate: But, so far as I've gone through it's been very very helpful with the group of people that
I'm working with. Because yeah, we went through the training together but it was the
outside the training aspect that we bonded and we actually got to be able to actually
lean on each other. So that's kind of where I'm at at the phase of where there's been
stuff happening in my position where it hasn't been super serious but it's been serious
enough to where I have to be a full fledged leader. And so ...

Interviewer: It sounds like you've had to deal with some serious stuff.

Nate: Yeah. I've dealt with one student alone I've dealt with him having several difficulties in
his home life. His ... if I'm getting this right. One of his brothers, I think step brothers
tried to commit suicide. One of his friends got shot. A friend died in a fire. And a
shooting happened in his hometown. So that was a lot just for that one guy. And then I
had another who, he's very outgoing in the social aspect but I think he's a very insecure
person. He had to deal with ... well he deals with migraines I think and so he takes
ibuprofen for it.

Nate: But one night I was alerted to someone saying he took 30 in one sitting. And so my hall
director took him to the hospital and everything like that. Saying he didn't think it was a
big deal. He's used to taking 10 in one sitting and so it was just like ... but everyone else
around is like, no that's not. You take four at max and that's really it. And so, he went to
psych ward to get ... just to get cleared and everything like that. But he's got a very I
don't know if it's prideful but it's an arrogant pride to where he doesn't think he needs
the help from other people. The key aspect is we went to do a night event where we go
over the girl's dorms and sing a song for them.

Nate: On the way there people are playing a small game of tag and he gets very competitive
so he goes all out. And he goes, and to avoid getting tagged he jumps and actually hits
his head on the top of the door. Cuts his head. I didn't find out about it til we got
upstairs but we had the hall director over there at that building and one of their house
presidents come up to him and say hey you need to sit down because you're bleeding a
lot. But he just like I don't need any help, I'm good, I'm fine. And then it's been probably
about two hours later, I'm getting texts from another house president saying that he
came back over to one of the ... to her and was just playing with the wound.

Nate: And I'm no, uh-uh. I can't deal with that. So he comes back and I, because of my position
I can't be the liable person to drive him to the hospital but I found someone to take him
to the hospital. So I found out all that was done, but then I got word that was the person
I sent to take him to the hospital took him to a friends house that took him to the
hospital. Why, I was like. So there's that. And then ...
Interviewer: So these are some pretty serious life and death kind of things. So one of the questions that I wanted to ask you is what are some of the biggest challenges that you've faced as a house president, would these be listed amongst them?

Nate: Yeah. Because ... you ask me to follow the rules and dish out hey, you guys have to follow these guidelines. If you don’t, I have the right to give you a violation of some sort. That's fine. That's said, done, you know what you did. It's over. The stuff when it comes to personal, it gets very tricky. And so I know one of my co-workers had to deal with bedbugs on their hall and just it's very weird having to deal with stuff that isn't ... there's no real set way to deal with. Because it's different with every other person. The bedbugs, that's ... you clean up but it's still very disruptive fro everyone around you.

Nate: But when it comes to the individuals, that can be very tricky I feel like.

Interviewer: Yeah, wow. Well those are some pretty big challenges in and of themselves. Is there anything else when you think about the challenges that you deal with? I mean obviously you've named people who either come to you or that you're aware of that have either major issues in their life or injuries or life and death stuff, that's pretty heavy in it's own right. Any other challenges that you face as an HP that you'd want to share?

Nate: Trying to meet the needs of everyone is really difficult. Because you'll have, at least in this system the people that are very inclusive with the whole house system. And then you have, and these are people that tend to be, the way I've seen tend to be people who don't have other than classes, very much any tied to obligations. So people with athletics, it's very hard. So, this year alone we've had if I did the count right, we started off with 19 football players, five basketball players, three baseball players, two volleyball players and one soccer player on the hall alone with two non-athletes. Three non-athletes. And then myself so count four.

Nate: So when you have that many people assigned to very strong obligations, you're not going to have a lot of participation, so you're not going to have a lot of people having the same needs and wants as everyone else. So, when it comes to creating events or trying to make sure everything seems fair, like you're not keeping anyone out of the loop, it becomes very difficult. Because yes, you live on the hall, the house together. But you're not clicking as much as you would want as with when you have the people that are with you basically almost 24, 20 hours a week. So that's probably one of the things I have to deal with.

Interviewer: So those are challenges that you’re having to deal with. What's been the biggest helps in dealing with those challenges?

Nate: My associates. All the other house presidents. And because last year I heard talk of cliques and friend groups being formed and that will happen. But I heard of deep deep separation between them. And this year, the group of people that I have working with me is the best group I could have actually asked for. Because it's everyone that understands what you’re going through but is willing to help out in different situations. And there’s no one that’ll be like, oh you're going through this but I'm going through
much, much worse. No. It's like they'll hear you out before they even start spieling
about their own stuff.

Interviewer: Wow. That's great that you've got a peer group that kind of gets it because they're going
through it like you are. Has anything else been helpful to you personally? Do you
grapple with all the challenges before you?

Nate: Yeah. What's left of my upperclassmen on my hall, I have two guys that after this year
will be gone. And to say they are like my closest friends here is going to be something
that I'm going to have to deal with next year, them being gone. But as of right now they
are very supportive of everything I've done so far. They've had their freshman year, they
admired mainly because of all the people that participated and all the friends they made
during that time. And then some of those people that were here during their time still
come back to have fun.

Nate: And so they experienced a very large community on the hall. Where in the past, at least
since my sophomore year, so last year and this year, it hasn't been large. It's been a
small group. But they've understood everything that what happened last year and is
somewhat occurring this year to be the same. But they understand that I am still trying
to do everything I can to make sure not only that I'm having a good year for their final
year but the people that are still involved have a good year as well. So they've been very
helpful with that.

Interviewer: Okay good. Well you know, I've been asking you about some of the big challenges. What
are your major successes?

Nate: I would say, I've shaken things up on the hall to where every Tuesday we'll have a house
meeting where we'll have everyone come in and give their organization spiels and they'll
do that. We'll play games and stuff like that. But usually in the past it was just on the hall
in the student lounge. And that would be it. Every single week for the past couple of
years.

Nate: This year I've tried spreading it out across campus to where we do several different
things outside of just the hall. But other than that I feel like I've tried to do a lot more
with our sister house. And I think that's probably been the biggest thing. Because we
have on a good day, we'll have six or seven people participating all together. And
sometimes it will be fun but then you have just those black moments of okay this is all
just the same. Us, this small group, we're not getting any big interactions. And so with
the help of our sister hall, I've kind of tried to fill that space a little bit because they
come to support and they come with numbers and it's a group of people that are very
fun to be around and very inclusive.

Nate: And they really helped out during this first semester. Especially during homecoming. So I
feel like, and I'm hoping to do more of that next semester too, even though next
semester is not the biggest interaction with the house pairings, I'm going to try to push
it to where we have as much as we can other than IFs. Because I feel like if we can do
that, it will be not only will the guys be learning how to deal with other people, they'll
be actually gaining more relationships. And I think that's something I've done very well this semester as a whole.

Interviewer: Okay. Cool. Let me ask you another question, a very different kind of question. And that is have you had an experience this semester, either in your role as HP or even just kind of in your life generally. Have you had an experience in which something happened that at first, seemed negative. But then, as time went on, that experience began to take on maybe some new or different meaning for you?

Nate: Huh. I do not know. Everything that has come forth has been straight to the point. So nothing's come to where it started off in a sticky situation and left itself in a clean way. So I haven't experienced anything of that nature.

Interviewer: Have you experienced anything that started negative or uncomfortable and maybe you didn't end up clean but when it first happened it felt like oh my gosh this does not feel good, but then over time, you began to attach meaning to it or understand it in a new way. Whether or not it was clean or happy or whatnot? And if nothing comes to mind, nothing comes to mind. But this is the hardest question I think that I'm going to ask.

Nate: Because I mean, everything that I've experienced, whether it be through classes or just interactions. It's all come out. Nothing has changed in my view after any of that. I see it more clearly so with the students I've gone through those sticky dilemmas, change of view has always been my viewpoint has always been the same and it's stayed the same. But it's just ... and I think it's just become more clearer in an aspect. Like okay this is -

Interviewer: You understanding the dynamics going on?

Nate: Yeah. So through training you run through okay, this person is having problems with depression and they're taking a lot of pills. Okay, what do you do about that? That's ... take the pills away. Make sure they talk to someone about it. There, there, there. But then you'll have in real life, you'll have situations where you have the person, they don't want to talk to anyone. And so, having to see why they don't is something that you'll talk about but you never understand why they don't want to do it until you start talking to them about it. So ...

Interviewer: So with that greater clarity that comes, because that's a perfect example of the question that something starts out. You experience it one way and maybe your understanding of it's nature doesn't change but with time there comes this increased clarity of understanding. Maybe understanding it deeper, more, whatever. Is there any way to know kind of what makes that clear understanding possible? Or is there anything that's helped you kind of be able to over the passage of time see things with greater clarity or greater depth? Or does it just kind of happen?

Nate: It just kind of happens at some point. I kind of ... in my mind I am a skeptic of some sort. I always, my parents, my family says oh you're just being negative. No, I'm not being negative, I'm seeing everything from the other side that you're not seeing it. So that's how I explain my nature to them. And so, I've had to deal with a lot of stuff where my
opinion is vastly different to a large majority. So in a way you have to back it up of some sort. If you push yourself to learn more about not only just your side but everyone else's side.

Nate: And so, one thing is so, it's not a secret but it doesn't come up unless someone asks. I go by the standing of I am an atheist of some sort. I don't believe in the whole higher power and everything like that. But I don't let anyone not believe in that. And so when they ask me why don't I, made sure that I read every single page of the Bible. I made sure I learned all of the past histories of as much as I could about all that stuff so that yes, I know all of this stuff but I don't see it in the way you see it.

Nate: And so it's kind of giving a ... it's in every other aspect of making it clear everything more clear. It just comes down to okay, this is where I see it, and this is where you see it. I'm going to do more to try to see it from where you're seeing it. And how I see it just going to come second. But how I see it is just how I see it.

Interviewer: No that's helpful. So you look back over this semester. You've talked about some successes you've talked about some challenges. What experiences for you this semester and not only limited to the HP stuff, just the semester at a whole. What experience has been the most significant for you? However you want to define significant.

Nate: So there is a running joke of some sort but kind of a title that I've seen certain house presidents from other halls but mainly our hall the past give and that's the title of dad, basically. So in my freshman year, our HP wasn't referred to as that. It was the HP that was there the previous year who was then CHP. Bert Neilson.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Nate: He was classed as dad, and the guys would call him dad. And so I wasn't, I'm ... the people that we have now don't know anything about that. It's all the upperclassmen, the three and two that are left. And even though, so it was during New Years in November, and even though this person was a little bit under the influence, he called me dad. And I felt like yes, I'm taking that. So it's kind of a realization that they are accepting you in that position and it's big shoes to fill because people that get that title -

Interviewer: That's a great example. What's kind of rolled up into that term, dad? I mean that's obviously got meaning for you. Kind of unpack that term a little bit for me.

Nate: It's someone that is.. it's basically given to the person that's always there. But it's a weird thing because there's an aspect of okay, it's not a father-like figure or anything like that. It's just they stand by you and you're able to have fun with that person and you will not really look up but ... not look up to them but you will see them as someone who is worth your respect. And so, that's how I've seen it and that's how it's kind of been doled out.

Interviewer: That is a great story. I really appreciate that. Anything else you'd want to mention as being things this semester that have been most significant to you?
I think I've gained relationships here, freshman year it was just on the house. Sophomore year it was spread out a little bit more but I've gained much more relationships that I had gone anywhere else I most certainly would not have gained. And so it's ... so the small environment kind of heightens the sense of the relationships. So, there are times where we'll go out and since there's nothing on campus we'll go out and we'll spend the hours outside of the town. And hang out. And there was ... there's been a lot more of that this year I feel like.

Good, good. So, let me shift gears a little bit. One of the things I am interested in is the question about everything that's on your plate. And so when you think about all the demands that are on your plate and here again, looking at your life as a whole, not just the leadership role. So, tell me about if you were to kind of list all the stuff that are the demands that you have. What's on that list?

Classes. Grades. Health, physical and mental. I'll say family but it's, they understand where I'm at and what I'm doing so it's not as big of a thing. Everything on the house president plate, making sure everyone abides by all the rules and everything like that.

I'm kind of more ... people are like some HPs on here are not excited about morgue hours next week. I'm happy, that means it's silent and I don't have to deal with anything. And if the guys don't follow the rules it's like, sorry, I gotta do this for you. But I'm fine with it.

But that, and I think happiness. Not just myself but everyone around me whether it be the HP, just house president or just relationship. I think because in my head I feel like I need to make everything as positive as I can. So I don't have a lot of serious conversations. And when I do, I try to add a brighter sense to it.

Man, that's a lot on the plate. You've mentioned the HP stuff, there's the grades, there's the classes, there's the family. You used the phrase that there was kind of mental health in the sense but all this needed to be cared for. What do you do to deal with all that? What's been helpful in terms of dealing with all this and kind of keeping your own sense of balance or center?

I don't have a very specific answer for that. When people ask me that I give them the oh, I did the mindful meditation thing. But I've never personally ever felt super stressed. At times if it's the only time it'll happen is like if I'm having trouble sleeping. But that happens rarely. And so, when it comes to dealing with it, it's ... I just think it's just not thinking about it just in general. So it's just I'll take personal time and that's closing my door for two hours whether it be napping or playing games or just watching TV.

And then if I'm able to, there will be ... there are things that I do just to just close my mind off and that's either play some sort of sport. So IAMs helps me a lot. And then one big thing is okay, I can watch TV and movies at home and that's fine but I'm never shut off completely. If I go to a movie theater and watch a movie, that is gone. My mind is empty, nothing else but the movie. It is a suspension of reality basically for me. So I am no longer here, I am there. I am just a spectator of what's going on in front of me.
So if I could do anything, like this past break I went to go see three movies. Expensive, but still. I will find that time to go and do that. So I've gone to every Thursday night movie we've had and it's just me and the screen. And what's going on on there. And that will be like nothing else is in the back of my head. No thoughts, no like I wonder what's happening over there.

No it's just if I am thinking anything it's like what's going to happen next or wait, this happened then and so it's just all there.

Just to have a singular focus with no thing rattling around up there. Well let me ask you about it. You said several things that really captured my attention. So you mentioned sport. And doing something physical and that helps apparently.

Yeah, working out not as much because it's just I'll be running on the treadmill and then it's like oh I'll be running on the treadmill and think about this stuff. I try to watch TV and do it at the same time but it doesn't work very well. But when I'm in a legitimate sport.

Now you mentioned you made a passing reference to time alone. And in that time alone is that when you're watching TV or is that when you're at the movies or is there anything else that you do in your time alone?

That's really it. So it's video games, TV, movies when I'm in my own space, when I'm by myself. When I lived at home, my house was the top floor, my two siblings or my two sisters and my brother and my mom and dad lived up there. And then we had the main floor with the office, kitchen, living room, dining room, all that. And then the basement there was the entertainment room, bar, my room, weight room and storage room. So I was down there and I made the entertainment room my own. Like that entire floor was basically my own little bachelor pad. So it was my cave. I was down there as much as I could.

So it was ... and my family was like oh you're very what's the word ... you're excluding everyone so I was like, no I'm just trying to have my own personal time.

Yeah, no that makes sense. So a couple of of the things that you mentioned. The first thing you said was you made a reference to the mindfulness meditation work. Can you say a little more about that?

Yeah, so originally I took the stress and relaxation class basically just for the easy A because it was just go to class and it was done. No homework no nothing like that. But then this year I was like, you know what, I'll try the mindful meditation. I've done things like it, like back when I was in high school and all that stuff I did theater productions. And before rehearsals and before the productions we would go through and we would do like that kind of setting your minds at ease things, where you lay down, the instructor gives a calm, soothing talk and you kind of submerge into that kind of relaxed state.
Nate: And I can feel it at some point and then when I tried that here, I could feel it too. I've fallen asleep to be honest. I've fallen asleep during mindful meditation. I learned that I snore. I found that out and I was like no! And so, going through that, it's nothing ... it wasn't anything that was oh if I don't get this I'm going to be tense and stressed for the rest of the week. It's just something that it was just the hour that I gave to myself where it was nothing but nothing I had to worry about.

Interviewer: So was it helpful?

Nate: Yeah it gave me the excuse other than closing my door and shutting people out to go participate with other people and do it and sleep for about 10 minutes.

Interviewer: And so that experience in the mindfulness meditation class sounds like it was helpful. Did you ever experiment or implement any of those practices outside of the class during the day? Or not so much?

Nate: Not so much. I can't ... it's like working out. I can't do it unless someone makes me do it.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Nate: Or at least I can't do it unless I have a obligation to do it. So with the working out, I don't work out by myself a lot. Back in high school it was football during the summer and during the fall. And so it was like wake up at five every morning to ensure that I went there to work out, do practice and then do all that stuff. So signing up for that, it was an obligation that I agreed to, I made sure I stayed with and I didn't quit.

Nate: So when I sign up for something, I don't quit at it, and so -

Interviewer: So the mindfulness meditation class then was helpful because it, if I'm hearing you right, it gave you this place where you could go for an hour where you could find rest, where you could have some degree of help from all the demands that were on the plate. But because it was a group thing, you made you commitment to it you just had to go. And a leader would kind of conduct through there? Okay. Okay, very good.

Interviewer: Let me ask you, kind of a ... it might strike you as a weird question. You referenced your door, and closing the door. Tell me about the open and closed door for your experience as a house president.

Nate: So, on a whole you always start off the year by saying we have an open door policy. Which means that if my door is open, you can come in and we can have a conversation, we can play games, we can just sit there or stuff like that. And that's supposed to be for basically everyone on the hall. After week one, it's doors are shut. Mainly because they want their alone time and they want to do that by themselves.

Nate: So, I still have my door when I'm in my room and I am not having that hour or two by myself, my door is open. Other than that, if my door is shut, it's either because I'm sleeping, doing homework, or I'm just not there. And if I'm not there it's because I'm
either in class or I'm in the student lounge and I'm doing ... and that's where you can find me and that's where we can talk and play games and stuff like that. So it's not just limited to my room.

Nate: But, you will have some halls where you'll see several doors open. And then you'll see halls where there are no doors open. And so, for an HP you need to have your door open a lot. Otherwise you're just not available. You're going to be seen as you're not there at all. And so you always want to feel like you're ... you always want it to make everyone feel like you're there for them 24/7 even though you're not there for them 24/7. You're there for them 23/7 because the other hour you're sleeping.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah. So how easy is it to get enough sleep?

Nate: Not very. I've got 8:00 AMs every day. And so going from ... it's going to sound bad but I'm late for every eight AM. But I made sure that ... no I didn't make sure it was okay. I made sure that even though I'm late, I'm still participating in class. I'm still one of the three people that will talk during class to the professor. So, but there are nights where whether it be after rounds or after house meeting or just after homework it's alright. I gotta shower now. I'm gonna get in bed. And I'm not going to be able to fall asleep. I know I'm not going to be able to fall asleep.

Nate: One specific thing. Last Thursday night didn't fall asleep until 5:00 AM in the morning. Wasn't doing anything, just body wouldn't shut down. So, there will be some nights like that. Not a lot of them are 5:00 AM. Some of them are just 3:00 AM or 2:00 AM. But yeah. The weekends are where I sleep.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nate: And when I go home I make sure to tell my parents that I am not getting out of this room until I wake up.

Interviewer: Checking out for a while. So let me ask you one final question. When you contrast your experience as house president right now compared to your experience when you first started, what's that like? How would you compare the two?

Nate: One was at the beginning, it was an eager sense to have a lot of participation on the ... with the house. Meaning there's going to be a lot of people participating. And now it's alright. These people are going to go. These people might go. These people are definitely not going. So these people are going to be there without me even saying hey, come here now. They'll be there, done. The maybes are, "Hey, really want you here. If you can come, that would be great." And then it's just like, "Eh, maybe. Maybe not."

And so it's a weird thing because when it comes to the house system, it thrives on participation. So, starting the year, you think okay. I can get this person seems open enough to start doing this stuff with us.

Nate: I'm going to try to grab them early before anything else. But then they get tied to other things and so they don't want to do it. And then it just rolls on with large and large
numbers. And so now it's a sense of okay. I don't even have to say anything to these
people, I'm just going to say what the event is and the people on the other side of the
spectrum are, "Hey, this event's here. It's going to be here. It's going to be then, and it's
going to be this is what we're doing. And so I want you to come, but if you have other
obligations it's up to you."

And it feels like a sense of giving up but it's very hard when these kids get into a group
of not wanting to do stuff that Graceland is known for. And so, it's a realization of okay. I
know where these people stand. And I know where these people stand. And I need
sometimes it's like maybe I need some new blood. One or two new guys that will be like
I'm here for it. I'm going to join this group but I'm also going to be part of this group. I
don't think I have any that split. And that's the biggest thing. You're like ... when you
have athletes on the hall so it's like you want to go to all of their events. All their games.

And so, as kind of what's the word I'm looking for? It's kind of a sense of like ... I'm doing
this, I'm going to this for you. So I would like you to come to this for me. Not everyone
sees it that way and so from the beginning of the year where it's like, okay participation
is going to be great. I'm going to have a lot of numbers to now, these guys are going to
go. And I know these guys aren't. And so ...

So going to those athletes games, that's just one more kind of thing on the plate, then
isn't it? So with all that on the plate, what does that feel like? I mean you get the HP
stuff, the family stuff, the academic stuff. What's that like for you to try to have all that
stuff?

I'm stuffed. I'm stuff. I don't eat a lot of Thanksgiving dinner. I didn't eat a lot at
Thanksgiving so that's why, mainly probably because I'm stuffed with everything else.
No but it's very ... I would say it's -

Stressful?

Yes. I would say it's more ... irritating in a sense. I want to punch my hand into my couch
because oh, these guys, their music is and they're not doing anything for me why should
I do anything for them? But it's very ... the plate starts to get bigger and bigger as soon
as one thing new comes on to the plate. But it's just something that you have to deal
with. Even though it's the HP thing adds more to it, my plate's going to be stuffed no
matter what. My plate is going to be full no matter what. Full is just a word, it doesn't
mean that it's capped. It just means that the base of it's full but it's still towering on
more and more.

Haven't hit capacity yet.

Yeah. Which, when it comes to that there will never be a capacity because you're either
not putting a lot on your plate or you're just putting so much on your plate. So. At least
that's how I see it.
Interviewer: Hey man, I really appreciate this. This has been very helpful. Is there anything else you think I ought to know?

Nate: I think I gave you as much as I could, yeah.

Interviewer: I think you gave me a lot so thank you.

Nate: No problem.

Interviewer: I really appreciate it.
Interviewer: Well, thanks again for doing this. I really appreciate it. In our first conversation, you mentioned that the mindfulness class had been helpful to you in dealing with the stuff on your plate with your different roles and responsibilities and such. If we take a look at that whole mindfulness experience and if we put it in two buckets, there was kind of one bucket that might be called Mindfulness Practices That Could be Done Anytime Anywhere in Anybody's Personal life. Then there was also the class itself, the actual mindfulness class.

Interviewer: And you had mentioned that the actual experience of going to the mindfulness class was helpful to you in terms of dealing with the roles and responsibilities that were on your plate. Can you tell me a little bit more about the class itself and particularly why that was helpful to you?

Nate: Mainly, when it comes to that kinda stuff, I'm not gonna do it on my own. I'll think about it. It'll be in my head the entire time, but I won't have the inclination of doing it on my own. And so what the class did was it brought me an excuse to actually, "Okay, I have friends and colleagues of the HP class that are going, so I'll join them, see how it works and see if it works out." Of course, I fell asleep a couple of times at the end of it, but it was mainly the environment of I'm not gonna have to do this alone per se, I think. 'Cause high school on and prior to college and everything like that, if I was doing anything it was because I was doing it with a group. I wasn't doing anything individually.

Nate: If anything I was doing, I'd be playing games individually and that's it. So working out, getting in shape and stuff like that, I wouldn't have done any of that if it wasn't for being part of a team atmosphere that, not necessarily made me do it, but made me want to do it. And so, I feel like that's kinda like what gets me to do the majority of the stuff that I do.

Interviewer: That makes total sense to me. So the class was helpful, because it was something you could do together. How was the class then helpful to you, in your life?

Nate: It gave me the excuse to actually relax. I'll have moments where I'll ... I'll try to keep my door open as much as I can on the whole, but then there'll be the hour or two that I need to myself, because a lot of it can be a lot, where I'll just close the door if I ... I'll fall asleep, take a nap or play a game just take it easy, watch a movie. I do that, but this semester I haven't been closing the door as much, and I've been falling asleep with the door open, but that's just me falling asleep before I'm able to actually cut off and get to that spot. So, that's mainly ... it gave me the excuse to relax.
Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense, 'cause there's a lot on your plate that you have to do during the course of the week. Was it helpful, or meaningful, in any way that you would go to the class with other house presidents?

Nate: Yeah, 'cause we ... at least the HP class, I feel like we've bonded a lot, and I don't think there's anyone that can say they're outside of the group, as a whole. When one person doesn't go, you think, "I wonder what they're doing?", and if I don't go, I know I'm gonna get a message from one of maybe two or three people saying, "Where are you at? Why aren't here?" And so, kind of like ... it gives everyone the ability to ... I would say, not necessarily push each other into doing it but making sure everyone knows that we're here and we're here to do it together, of that sort.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, to me. So did it help ... did going to the class experience help bind the HPs even closer, or was it the bond between the HPs that helped you get the class, or was it both?

Nate: Both. I would say more of the fact that we were already bonded a little bit more prior, but I think it definitely helped. 'Cause not everyone went, but at least you would see half, so about eight of them in the room at the same time. 'Cause everyone else had obligations that they had to fill and stuff like that, but I feel like just seeing everyone there made it seem like, "Okay, here's something else that we know we can do together, and know what is gonna help for us to actually relax."

Interviewer: Yeah, okay good. Did HPs ever talk about the stuff in class outside of class, or not so much?

Nate: When some of us fell asleep, yeah. I didn't know I snored until mindfulness meditation, and unfortunately that came out. But yeah, so anything ... there's not much that goes on in the class other than just a brief segment of yoga and just straight up relaxation. So there's not much like ... specific things to talk about unless someone has an embarrassing moment or anything like that. So, outside there's not much discussion other than ... if we're asking, "Hey are you going to the next class?," or something like that. But that's really it, there's not much ... I don't think there would be much discussion either way, in any other circumstance, depending on what we did in there. Unless there were like activities that we have to take outside of it.

Interviewer: Okay, good. So different ... so that was kinda the class itself. If we then go back to that other bucket, and say, "Okay, there's the mindfulness stuff that was taught in the class, but it could be used outside the class." Different people have different things they resonate with. Some people really like the mindful breathing, some people like the yoga, yeah everybody's got their different thing. Was there any particular practice or exercise that was taught in the class that really resonated with you, or not so much?
So, what they did ... the yoga, not so much, mainly because I find it a struggle right now in the shape that I'm in to keep up. Or just keep still, and whether it be downward dog, or stuff like that. But the relaxation bit, it's ... so prior to coming here, throughout my life I was in theater, and what we'd do before, I would say the week or two prior to the production ... before rehearsals we'd go through the relaxation bit, where we all lay down and the director does the relaxation bit where they talk and they tell you like, "Alright, close your eyes, as you're closing your eyes feel your body start to weigh you down. Feel like there's cement coming over your legs, coming over your arms, over your chest, just weighing you down and you feel that weight."

And so, that's what they did in the class and that's what I prefer when it comes to that kind of stuff. It's like that feeling of ... nothing's actually on me, but just the thought of there's, like I feel my arms and my legs getting pressed down on, I'm feeling that and it just has a weird feeling to me, and I kinda like it.

Yeah, is that what they call the body scan?

I think so.

Where they move through there, and your body parts just got heavier, and heavier, and they relax each individual ... okay. Was that something that you practiced only in the class? Did you ever practice outside of class, in your room, or ...

Only in the class, 'cause I won't take the time out of my day and do it myself. Mainly because doing it on the ... like having a YouTube video play or something like that, I don't find it as relaxing, 'cause I have to start it, then I have to get in position, and then I have to wait of it, and then if the school's Wifi goes out then I have to wait for it to buffer. So, it's-

Different than a light voice.

Yeah.

So let me ask a little bit about that particular exercise, the body scan, where the body parts are heavier and heavier. What is ... so that experience is meaningful for you.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

What is the experience of doing that exercise like for you?

It's hard to explain, really, 'cause yeah you start to feel like, in your mind, like everything's starting to get heavier and you're starting to feel more pressed down into the ground, like you're just sinking into the ground almost. But I don't know why it has the effect it does on me, I think it's just ... I don't know, I always
feel like I'm more comfortable when I am, personally when I'm ... like in my
room or something like that, when I'm trying to fall asleep, I need ... so there's
those things called weighted blankets, that are really heavy blankets. I don't
have one of them, but I really want one.

Nate: But it's just like, having pressure on my body makes me feel more relaxed at a
point. Because otherwise I'm moving around, I'm squirming around a lot, and it
just makes me feel still. It makes me ... so if I can have ... as of right now, all of
my clean clothes out of the laundry are on my bed, but they're on top of the
blanket. So I'll move my legs underneath all that and it's so weird, it's a pressure
feeling but it's just enough to ... I don't know. Yeah, so I'll try to get as much that
kind of feeling, but I don't know-

Interviewer: I can actually relate to that, yeah. So when you, let me probe a little bit. When
you say it helps you to feel still, I mean clearly that's a good experience for you,
you're smiling when you talk about it. And obviously there's a physical stillness
to it. Does still mean anything beyond physical stillness? Does it do something
else for you?

Nate: Personally, I wish. In my head ... those headphones I wear all the time, where I
can keep one in at the same time, so people ask me why I only have one earbud
in and why I have it in a lot of the time. And I tell them it's ... like my brain does
not stop, and as I'm having a conversation [inaudible 00:14:16], I'm thinking
about something else on a completely different level because someone said
something and now I'm thinking something that resonates with that, and it just
moves on and on. And then I have to remember, okay how did that start? And
then I have to go through the whole process again and again. The music kind of
keeps my head shut off. If anything, it's just repeating the lyrics in my head, and
so I feel more concentrated that way. But yeah, the whole stillness, it's ... with
the blanket, or the pressure, it has great effect on my body but not so much on
my mind.

Interviewer: So the stillness stills that part of you, then. And cause you to ... okay. And is that
stillness ... I mean obviously there's no motion, per se, lack of tension?

Nate: Probably. I've never had ... I feel like I'm tense a lot. I'll have moments where
like my back is the most tense out of everything, and so I'll have someone ... I'll
pop it on the back of the chair, or I'll lay down and I'll have someone pop it with
their hands. I've had a friend of mine who says their dad's a chiropractor, I
should go see him, but I'm like, "I don't have the time for that," and I always feel
like, "Oh, I should try to get a massage." And some people will try to do it
themselves for me, but I feel like that's too much pressure, so I don't know what
my shoulder, my tensions can take, because I feel ... like they say, everyone likes
their massages, which they're probably not telling them or something like that,
or it's just me. But I feel more tension in that, so I don't know what exactly can
relax the tension as much.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, the weighted covers, if you will, helps?
Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that body scan exercise helps, creates some physical stillness. Okay. Is that helpful to you, the physical stillness, is that helpful to you, you think? In terms of dealing with everything that's on your plate. Or is it more momentary?

Nate: I think it's more momentary, yeah.

Interviewer: It just gives you a relief.

Nate: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay.

Nate: Yeah, 'cause that ... you go through that, and then right after ... it's quiet hours, but people aren't being quiet and now I have to go up and deal with that because the moment's over and now I have to be back on the job. So, I think yes, the hour that they do for us is a great moment. But after that it's ... it's not long lasting.

Interviewer: Okay, good. I wanna come back to that in just a moment. Before we do, I wanna shift gears to another thing. In our earlier conversation, you had mentioned some things about your open door. And it was interesting because that was a phrase that was used in all of the HP interviews. Everybody talked about their door, open, closed, sometimes, sometimes not, et cetera. And as I listened to you talk about it, it occurred to me that this whole open door thing sounds pretty darn important, and that maybe it's more than just this piece of wood on hinges that you move around. Sounds like that door might represent a lot.

Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, I just was gonna ask you, tell me more about your door, and kind of what that means in your life as a student leader.

Nate: So, if I'm ... I'm not in my room as much as I have been the past couple years being here. So, the door ... well, it wasn't always open when I was in there. So when I'm in the room and the door is open, that's the ... it gives everyone the excuse to think, "I could come into the room and talk, or play a game, or just sit there." But, for me at least, I have one person on the hall that comes into the room when the door's open whenever they pass, and there's always a complaint. Whether it be about the hall, about something that they think is going wrong, or they think I should be doing. That's when the feeling of, "If only my door was closed."

Nate: 'Cause they don't knock on the door to do the complaint, unless it's in the moment, like loud music or anything like that. They don't knock on the door. When the door's open, that's when they feel free to unleash. So as of right now
when my door's open, I'm hoping they don't walk past it, because I have not had
a single time this entire year when they have come into the room just to talk or
have fun or anything like that. It's always a complaint. So that's probably the
biggest thing.

Nate: So when I'm ... I try to be more available, as much as I can when I'm not in the
room. So I'll spend a lot of the time at the GSG office, or the student lounge, and
not a lot of people from my hall come in, but a lot of people come in that aren't
on the halls that I have a means of interacting with people that aren't on my
hall. 'Cause I feel like if I was just glued to my room, glued to the hall, then I
would not be doing my job and I wouldn't be having any fun, and I wouldn't be
doing anything that I enjoyed.

Nate: So that's how I've restrained from being in my room all the time, and feeling like
I've not done everything. But when it comes to the room, the door open and the
doors closed is two big things.

Interviewer: Yeah, so it sounds like that open door represents, "Hey, I'm here, I'm available."
You had mentioned earlier, in passing, that the door sometimes goes closed
when you need to do some other stuff, and I thought I'd heard you say, and
clarify this, that sometimes the door goes closed just when you need some time
to take care of yourself.

Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you say a little bit about that?

Nate: 'Cause anyone that says that when they are HP that ... I don't know if anyone's
said it, but I can almost guarantee you at least once out of all the house
presidents there have been, people get upset with the people on their hall. The
HP will get upset with them, and that's when the door is closed, and that is
when I can let go. 'Cause I can't talk about my disapproval of what's going on in
the hall, or my lack of ... wanting to like what's going on, like what they're doing,
to anyone that is not of my stature, like my position, where I know it's going to
be confidential.

Nate: So I can't talk to anyone about on the hall with anything I feel about a certain
person on the hall, 'cause otherwise that's just gonna meld into a whole
negative situation that'll just get into a whole mess, make me feel like I'm not
doing the best job I can. Make them feel like they're not wanted. And so, when
my door is closed, that is when I let go. Whether that be playing games,
watching movies ... 'cause that's when I just forget. Maybe forgiving's not the
right word, because then it comes back and then I have to deal with it again.
But, I don't know ... unless ... nothing's to the point where it's absurd, to where
any physical or super emotional stuff will be released, but it's just to the point of
... I need some distance. That's where it comes in.
Interviewer: Yeah. No, that makes total sense to me, 'cause everybody needs a break, right?

Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: So when that door goes closed, of all the things that you could do, take of yourself and have that release that you're describing. What do you tend to do the most, not tend, excuse me ... what helps the most when that door goes closed?

Nate: So, I'll watch ... I'm a big movie buff, but like the only time that I feel completely relaxed is when I'm in the actual movie theater. When I'm in my room I have my phone and stuff like that, so I'm distracted in other ways. But when I'm in my room and I'm watching a movie, it gives me a couple things to do. One, just sit and watch the movie if I haven't seen the movie. Two, be on my phone and either play games or talk to other people. And the other one is, if it's a movie I've seen and I just wanted to relax, I'm gonna fall asleep. I'm gonna fall asleep in my recliner, I'm gonna wake up three hours later, 'cause I don't take 30 minute naps. I don't take an hour long nap, if I fall asleep during the day I'm out for like the majority of it. And so, that is probably the biggest thing. I'll play video games, but that'll take a long time because I don't play online where you'll have breaks in between. I mainly play like story modes and stuff like that, and that gets my mind off things. But the movie thing, that gives me different options to do, so I feel that works best for me.

Interviewer: Good. So is the door ... and I don't wanna put words in your mouth, I'm just curious. It sounding like ... the door clearly becomes a tool that helps you kinda manage the availability, self care question.

Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: Does that door represent anything else in your life? Does it represent you in any way, does it represent anything you care about in a particular way?

Nate: I would say, if anything, it's the ability for me to be alone. In the aspect of 'cause at home, I grew up in a house where there were three levels. The top floor, which had ... where my mom and dad had a room, my two sisters and my brother had a room. So they all had top floor. Then the main floor was the living area, the kitchen, and my dad's office. And then the basement, which is where I lived. You had my room, weight room, storage room, and then entertainment area outside. That was where I resided, that entire area. The entire basement was where I was left to be alone.

Nate: Not in a bad way, because I considered it my personal area to relax and ... like when siblings had friends over, of course the basement was the place they would wanna hangout, and everything like that. But, when it was just during the day, during the night, when it was ... nothing was going on. The feeling of being
alone, when I choose to be, was kind of a feeling of ... alright, nothing is going
to, nothing is happening in my world other than this, other than me. I didn't
wanna take into consideration anything else that was happening. So, it was like
my own personal bubble that I was forming. And so when the door closes, that's
my basement. That's my bubble.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Sounds like safe space, yeah. Okay, good. So, this next question is a
little more difficult, perhaps. It has to do with ... and it's another mindfulness
question, it has to do with the relation of mindfulness practice and it's capacity
to help us focus or to be in the present moment, if you will. And when you
described stillness, with the body scan, how close are you to being totally in the
present moment with that, or is the mind still kinda free-wheeling a lot?

Nate: So, during something like the body scan, the instructor will talk about ... things
will pass through your mind, and you just have to let them pass. And just let
them ... like you focus on what they're saying. And so, trying to focus on it is a
little bit difficult, but I feel like that actually, like my mind doesn't wander as
much. If it does, it's not as rapid, I would say.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nate: And so, if the instructor says something that seriously clicks where my mind has
to think, "Oh, shoot, there was something I was gonna do," and then moves on
and on and on. Then, those were the moments that I stayed awake through the
entire thing.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nate: The moments where I knocked out were the times where I wasn't thinking
about anything.

Interviewer: So there were times, if I'm hearing you right, that you'd go to sleep. There were
times in which the mind would still be turned on. And there'd be those other
times in there, in which you're kind of in an in between time it sounds like.

Nate: Yeah, so there were weird moments because I would be listening to her talk,
and I would be sure ... like, okay I'm hearing her talk. I'm awake and I'm still
following what she's saying. And then I don't hear anything for the next two
minutes or so. And I'm like, okay ... in my mind I'm like, I'm not hearing
anything. But I'm still awake, I guarantee you I'm ... my mind is like, I am still
awake, it's just my eyes are closed and then all of the sudden I get a tap on the
shoulder and then my eyes are open and I was asleep.

Nate: And so, I found that very weird because other than moments where ... like I'll
have moments where I feel like I'm not sleeping, and then in my head I'm
picturing something ... an example like, I'm picturing ... this hasn't happened,
but the feeling is like I'm riding a skateboard and then all of the sudden I fall off
a skateboard and my actual body moves, and I'm like ... okay, I wasn't actually asleep, but I was thinking about this and my body reacted to it and I was like ... okay, I didn't understand it, but like I don't understand that. So I don't understand all that goes on while I'm in that state.

Interviewer: Yeah, 'cause it wasn't ... 'cause you were not asleep per se, but your mind was not busy.

Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, then it's like you were present there.

Nate: Like my mind was present, but my body was just ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Nate: That fell asleep.

Interviewer: So, when your mind is present ... in that moment, where your mind is present but not racing, your body is very relaxed. What is that experience like?

Nate: It's quite ... 'cause like, if my mind was focusing on that moment, while she's talking, but I don't hear her talking anymore ... I never thought of it as like I'm asleep now. I thought of it as, okay ... she'll say there will be silence for the rest of the time, and there's silence for the rest of the time. But in my head I'm thinking, "Okay, this has been about a minute. Okay it's been about two minutes." And then all the sudden, the tap on the shoulder happens and it's five minutes later, without me thinking, and so ... I'm more stuck.

Nate: So like, when it happens I'm stuck in that moment where my mind's like ... 'cause I picture it as like those moments where you fall asleep ... say I wake up to my first alarm at like 6:00 AM, and then I fall asleep 'cause I hit snooze and next thing I know, the moment I hit my head on the pillow I lift it up and then it's 8:00. And I'm like, there were no dreams, nothing going through my head. And I'm like, but I just put my head on the pillow. I just put my head on the pillow, so it should only have been like 10 minutes. No, it was two hours later.

Interviewer: Yeah. I appreciate your use of the word quiet, when I said what is it like when you're not asleep and the body's deeply relaxed, and the mind's not racing, you said quiet.

Nate: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now what does that feel like, to be quiet inside?

Nate: I don't know, I can't really explain it. It's more of a ...
Interviewer: Is it peaceful?

Nate: I would say so, but I don't have much experience with a peaceful atmosphere. Like people talk about they go out, and they hike and see the Grand Canyon, and they say, "Oh, it's a peaceful atmosphere." I don't see that, 'cause everything's in motion everywhere else.

Interviewer: Everything's racing still, right?

Nate: And so, I guess I can consider that the quietness, the peacefulness.

Interviewer: So, after you've experienced that moment of quiet, does it shape at all your ... how you experience or understand things or people, or does life slow at all, or is it right back on the treadmill?

Nate: It's right back on the treadmill. So as soon as ... it'll last from ... from the moment the quiet starts, even if like the tap on the shoulder wakes me up, it's still a more quiet sense even when the instructor's talking. And then you get out of the room, and you head out of the [inaudible 00:37:11], and you're walking. And then the moment I step back into a room where there's other people that weren't in the mindful meditation thing, where it's there ... say like, mindful meditation, they are moving at two miles per hour. And then I walk into a room with no one who's in there, these people ar moving 20. And so, I feel like I'm on the road going my speed and then, okay there's more people coming, I need to follow the speed limit. So it's, I gotta press the accelerator, it's game on.

Interviewer: Okay. That's fascinating, thank you for sharing that. I think that's kinda remarkable. When we talked the first time, you shared with me some stories about times in which you had had a experience that first seemed negative, but later on it took on a different meaning for you. Maybe not positive, but what once started as negative took on some different meanings. So, I don't know if that happens to everybody or not, but are there things that you do in your life that you believe help you to discover meaning in things that might first seem negative? Or does it tend just to happen?

Nate: Tends just to happen, mainly. As the mind is racing, questions pop up, and so questions that not a lot of other people think of, or wanna think of pop up. And I'm like, alright let's spend a couple hours on this in my mind. So, I like to think of it as ... I used to do speech and debate in high school, and every month we'd get a new topic that we'd have to debate and go to tournaments on. And I feel like when there's a new question that pops up into my head that I never thought of ... so like if I'm sitting in a room and people are talking, something is said that I necessarily don't agree with, the question pops into my mind like ... maybe not like why do they think of it, but what is the other outcomes of the thought of this question that's come about?
And so, my mind will just start going on for that, and then I feel like ... I'll forget a lot of it, because it's not a discussion I'm having in my head, it's just flashes, I would say. So, they ... I would say the thoughts kind of make more of a general statement's probably the best word I can think of, 'cause there's not like a full on conversation going on in my head, it's more of a ... I'm thinking to myself, and somehow I'm thinking of this completely differently now because someone said something a certain way that I did not agree with, and now I'm thinking, "Why are they thinking this?" And I look at people in the room that are listening to the argument, and I'm like ... they're not thinking the same thing this person's thinking, but they're not thinking the same thing I'm thinking.

So I don't know, it's just a lot that just goes on and ... it just, it gives me the chance to question a lot. Not a lot of people like to take the chance to question a lot of things, because they like to think it's ... there's a set answer to things, and I don't think there's ever a set answer to anything. So taking accounting classes with [inaudible 00:41:45], she says, "Main answer you'll have in this class is 'It depends'", and that's kinda what I categorize as what goes on in my head, it depends. Because a person like ... I think of ... a way I think ethically on things, and morally on things, is like ... when it comes to an individual person that had ... like I meet that person, that person has my respect at first.

They have it no matter what, I don't know you but you have my respect until you lose it, and it can be in different matters. But more in the lines of a morally wrong thing, that I consider morally wrong in my head. [inaudible 00:42:40].

Okay, that's good. Last question I've got for you. So as you think about your experience as a student leader, and what has helped you the most in dealing with all the demands that you have as a student and a leader. When you think about what's helped you the most, what advice will you give to new leaders who are just beginning?

I would say my advice would have to be more blunt, and the fact that ... everything you are thinking now is not gonna happen. You may think, "Alright I've got great ideas," [inaudible 00:43:38] for example, "I've got great ideas that are gonna get the majority of the hall participating in everything." That's not gonna happen. At least it's not gonna happen for the majority of the hall. And so, what you have to take into consideration is, "Okay, the great things I had planned for the majority of the hall, that's not gonna work. So, what are the great things I can think of that can make the experience for the people that are wanting to accept my help the best experience that they can have?"

That doesn't mean giving up on the people that are on the outside, because if you give up on them then it's just gonna be a completely terrible year for you and those people that are on the outside. So, there's a small area where, okay you have everyone that comes to all of the events. And you wanna make those events the best you can, in that moment. And not everything's gonna work out great, but take that and then show the people outside that hey, this event's going on. You may not think it's gonna be a great event, but just think about it
more and think about being more involved in a scenario where it's not just you
in your room with a couple people.

Nate: Because if you .. especially at this university, if you stay in your room, and you
stay only to a small group, then odds are you're not gonna be back the next year
or two. And so, making sure that the leader knows ... so, the leader that is up for
the job, you are not gonna have everyone's participation. You're not gonna have
everyone's approval on everything, so if you just realize that you don't have the
approval of everyone, and focus on the fact that you wanna make everything
great for the people that do the things, is probably the best thing. Because I feel
like that opens it up for the people that are on the outside that say, "These guys
are having fun, I wanna have fun, too."

Nate: So I would say, yeah ... it's blunt and honest, because you can't get on
everyone's good side and you can't get on the wagon of, "Alright, I have to stick
with this side because they're doing everything."

Interviewer: Right.

Nate: So you can't close off one side and keep to the other, because otherwise you're
gonna have the entire other side, which is mainly the majority of everyone else,
of the entire group, thinking, "Well, I'm not having my needs met. And I'm not
having any of the fun, and I'm not included in that." So, it's a messy situation
that happens every single year, but it's something that you have to accept and I
think accepting is the biggest thing. And it's not, accepting cannot be seen as
settling, 'cause if you're settling then it's just ... it's not gonna work out. So just
accepting that this idea is out there is the biggest thing.

Interviewer: Okay. Very good. Well hey, I thank you for this. I really appreciate not only your
time, but the insights that you brought to the table. I feel like I, once again,
know more about the HP experience that than I did when I started. So, thank
you.

Nate: Yeah.
Appendix B: Semi Structured Interview Schedules

The verbatim transcripts found in Appendix A (above) were produced in response to all study participants sharing their personal stories and thoughts in response to questions in two semi-structured interview schedules.

First Round of Interviews

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about your experience of becoming a House President?
   a. What has your experience as a House President been like?

2. What have been your biggest successes?

3. What are the biggest challenges that you face?

4. What kind of things are the biggest help to you in dealing with challenges?

5. Can you tell me about a time that you had an experience that seemed negative at first, but then took on a different meaning for you later?
   a. What do you think helped that new understanding to happen?

6. As you look back over your life this semester, what experiences have been most significant for you?
   a. What impact did those experiences have on you?

7. Can you tell me about the demands that are on your plate this semester, and what you do to deal with those demands?

8. How would you contrast your experience as a House President now, compared to when you first started?
Second Round of Interviews

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

1. In our first interview, you said that the mindfulness class was helpful to you in dealing with your roles and responsibilities. Can you tell me more about that and how it was helpful?
   a. You mentioned that the act itself of going to a class at midweek was important and helped you deal with the demands on your plate. Can you tell me why that was meaningful to you? .
   b. What did it mean to you that House Presidents attended the class together?

2. In our first interview, you mentioned that the particular experience of  (breathing/yoga/body scan/ etc.) was especially important to you. Can you tell me more about your experience with that and why it is meaningful to you?

3. I’m remembering that in our earlier conversation you talked about your “open door” in a way that sounded important to you. Could you tell me more about that and what it means in your life?

4. In our earlier conversation you talked with me about the experience of being focused/relaxed/being in the present moment. Can you tell me what that experience is like for you?
   a. Can you describe what that experience does for you?
   b. Can you tell me how that experience has affected your relationship with people or things?

5. When we talked the first time, you shared stories with me about times in which you had an experience that first seemed negative, but later on it took on a different meaning for you. Are there things that you do in your life that you believe help you discover meaning in things that might first seem negative?

6. As you reflect on your experience as a student and a leader and what has helped you the most in dealing with the demands of those roles, what advice would you give to student-leaders who are just beginning?