

2011

## Resident assistant use of student development theory and its relation to supervisor knowledge and use

David Michael Schmid  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©2011 David Michael Schmid

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Schmid, David Michael, "Resident assistant use of student development theory and its relation to supervisor knowledge and use" (2011). *Dissertations and Theses @ UNI*. 617.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd/617>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses @ UNI by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

RESIDENT ASSISTANT USE OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND  
ITS RELATION TO SUPERVISOR KNOWLEDGE AND USE

A Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

---

Dr. Michael Waggoner, Committee Chair

---

Dr. Christopher Larimer, Committee Member

---

Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk, Committee Member

---

Dr. Timothy Gilson, Committee Member

---

Dr. Geraldine Perreault, Committee Member

David Michael Schmid

University of Northern Iowa

December 2011

UMI Number: 3493269

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

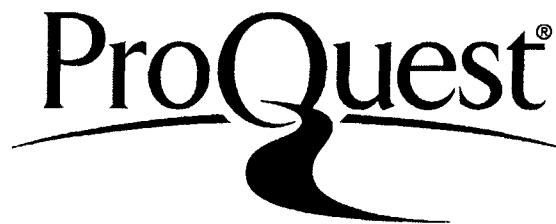
In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI 3493269

Copyright 2012 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This edition of the work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright by  
DAVID MICHAEL SCHMID  
2011  
All Rights Reserved

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with a sigh of relief and a feeling of excitement that I finish this dissertation and complete my Doctor of Education. This has been a long road of trials and tribulations and one that I am glad that I have traveled.

I first want to thank my committee, Dr. Mike Waggoner, Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk, Dr. Timothy Gilson, Dr. Christopher Larimer, and Dr. Geraldine Perreault. I have so appreciated their time and effort, in addition to their encouragement through this process. A special thank you goes to my Committee Chair, Dr. Mike Waggoner, who has encouraged and supported me when I needed it most.

I also want to acknowledge my supervisor, Lyn Redington, who has given me perspective and also both challenged and supported me as if embodying Nevitt Sanford herself!

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their support through this lengthy process. There were times that I doubted it would happen; however, yes, the Christmas letter will finally state that I am Dr. Schmiddy!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Student Development Theory.....	2
The Resident Assistant Position.....	6
Supervisor Preparedness.....	8
Significance of the Study.....	10
Purpose Statement.....	12
Research Question.....	12
Methodology.....	13
Data Collection.....	16
Data Analysis.....	18
Parameters.....	19
Definition of Terms.....	19
Anticipated Results.....	21
Organization of the Study.....	21
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	23
Student Development Theory .....	23
The Resident Assistant Position.....	40
Supervisor Preparedness.....	46

Relevant Studies..... 48

Significance of the Study..... 52

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY..... 55

    Design Considerations..... 55

    Purpose..... 56

    Review of Related Literature..... 57

    Participants..... 57

    Data Collection..... 61

    Data Analysis..... 64

    Summary..... 67

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS..... 69

    Response to Invitation..... 69

    Findings - Resident Assistants..... 72

    Findings - Supervisors..... 86

    Findings- Comparative Analysis..... 93

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS.. 98

    Response to Research Questions..... 98

    Discussion..... 101

    Recommendations for Practice..... 105

    Limitations..... 109

    Recommendations for Future Research..... 110

REFERENCES.....	113
APPENDIX A: E-MAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE.....	120
APPENDIX B: MEMO TO UNI PARTICIPANTS WITH INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	122
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	124
APPENDIX D: E-MAIL SENT TO UW-LA CROSSE HALL DIRECTORS WITH INFORMED CONSENT FORM ATTACHMENT.....	127
APPENDIX E: E-MAIL SENT TO UW-LA CROSSE RESIDENT ASSISTANTS WITH INFORMED CONSENT FORM ATTACHMENT.....	129



LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Topical Areas for Supervisor Interviews.....	63
2. Topical Areas for Resident Assistant Interviews	65

RESIDENT ASSISTANT USE OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND  
ITS RELATION TO SUPERVISOR KNOWLEDGE AND USE

An Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Approved:

---

Dr. Michael Waggoner, Committee Chair

---

Dr. Michael J. Licari  
Dean of the Graduate College

David Michael Schmid  
University of Northern Iowa

December 2011

## ABSTRACT

Resident assistants perform various functions and serve students in many aspects during their time in university residence halls, with one of their central responsibilities being to encourage student development. This study examined the use of student development by resident assistants and its relation to supervisor knowledge and use of student development theory.

Informal conversational interviews were conducted with three Residence Life Coordinators at the University of Northern Iowa and three Hall Directors at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Between two and five of the resident assistants supervised by these individuals were also interviewed.

Results indicate that while resident assistants may be aware of student growth and development, they are not aware of specific student development theories. In addition, it is unclear whether resident assistants utilize student development theory or whether they merely utilize concepts of growth and development. No relationship existed between resident assistants' awareness of student development and their supervisor's knowledge or use. Finally, while much of the style or relationship between the RA and the

supervisor can be attributed to the supervisor, the academic preparation of the supervisor played no role.

Recommendations for practice include refresher courses in student development for professional staff members. Next, supervisors of resident assistants should utilize more intentional discussions about student development theory. Student development theory should also be utilized more intentionally by professionals. Next, the profession must return to a focus on student development theory either in professional journals or at conferences. Finally, training should be provided so that theory can be in the background knowledge of all RAs.

Limitations included only two schools in the sample, a lower number of resident assistant participants in three out of the six staffs, the role that the researcher plays at one of the campuses involved in the study, and gender limitations at both schools.

Recommendations for future research include replication with a larger number of locations and participants. Additionally, other research methods outside of interviews could be utilized. Finally, the entire field of student affairs should be researched to determine

exactly how student development theory is incorporated into student staff members.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Residence halls provide a variety of services to students; however, one of the central goals of any residence hall is to provide experiences that encourage growth and development in the students living in them. Due to this goal, "students living in traditional residence halls tend to make significantly greater positive gains in a number of areas of psychosocial development than their counterparts who reside off campus and commute to college" (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, p. 28).

While resident assistants perform various functions and serve students in many aspects during their time in university residence halls, one of their central responsibilities is to encourage student development. Because of their proximity to students, resident assistants often "interact with more students than do student affairs professionals" (Schuh, Stage, & Westfall, 1991, p. 272) and thus have more opportunities to positively impact residents. Yet resident assistants operate at different levels of understanding with regard to student development theory and utilize the concepts differently in various interactions with students. However, "there appears to be

a large measure of support for the notion that we can enhance our professional practice . . . by using theory in practice" (Stonewater, 1988, p. 267). Thus, resident assistants do have an impact on a student's development, but does this impact have a basis in student development theory?

### Student Development Theory

Student development theory as a whole is wide reaching and covers many different areas of theory. While an early attempt to explain student development was presented by the American Council on Education (1937) when they detailed the Student Personnel Point of View, there were still many labels even into the 1980s describing student development theories as human development theories. Indeed, "the student affairs profession has examined a range of human development models and intervention strategies for implementing a student development philosophy in educational practice on the college campus" (Heineman & Strange, 1984, p. 528). Plato (1978) detailed the shift to student development philosophy and away from the old label of simply student services.

Sottile, Iddings, and McDonough (1997), described how early human development theories were extended into student

development. Theories discussed in their study included Erikson, Perry, Chickering, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Belenky, Clinchy, and Goldberger.

While there were numerous foundational theories written in the 1950s and 1960s including Erikson, Chickering, and Kohlberg, "the late 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction of a number of theories that built on earlier foundational psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, the 1990s and 2000s have witnessed a growth in the number of theories in both spiritual and faith development and social identity theory (Evans et al., 2010).

One of the central focuses of student development is viewing the student as a whole; however, this has not been the case in the recent years. As Baxter Magolda (2009) stated, "although the profession adopted student development theory as a philosophy to augment its whole student stance, theorists focused on separate strands of theory that complicated emphasizing the whole student" (p. 621). In doing so, there has been an influx of new theories that address a specific portion of a student's identity. Indeed, it is important to be "addressing tensions and



intersections between existing theoretical frameworks and new ones generated [for] specific populations" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 622). While research on these individual dimensions is important, looking at it holistically is also important. Baxter Magolda (2009) for example argues for such a systemic approach, "to understand students in their diverse social contexts and locations requires building theory in practice, intentionally and systematically gathering and interpreting how students make meaning of their experience" (p. 636).

There are "several newer theoretical approaches to understanding identity [that] are emerging. These approaches foreground both marginalized populations (e.g., by race, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality) as well as the societal structures and dynamics that produce and perpetuate marginalization and oppression" (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 583). This can be as a result of the growing diversity of the college population. "As college populations became more diverse and social scientists attended to racial and sexual orientation identity development in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, student development theory evolved to focus tightly on identity development of specific student populations" (p. 590). As

a result, "Student development scholars and student affairs professionals should be open to new theoretical approaches and to exploring new combinations of well-known theories" (p. 593).

Peer influence has also been discussed as an important component of student development. As Bryant (2007) stated, "existing theory does tell us that involvement during college, including the peer interactions that take place in the context of student organizations, facilitates social integration, which in turn enhances academic achievement and emotional health" (p. 14). As peer interactions are seen as influential, learning and engagement of the individual becomes paramount.

As Baxter Magolda (2009) discussed, "the intersections of learning and development are another major area in which integration is warranted" (p. 622). Learning is an important component of student development. From Kolb's Learning Theory to the Ways of Knowing of both Baxter Magolda and Belenky, Clichy, Goldberger, and Tarule (Evans et al., 2010), learning is an important facet of development. As Pizzolato, Brown, Hicklen, and Chaudhari (2009) stated, "it is imperative that colleges and universities move toward understanding how various

developmental aspects of the student may be intertwined and are affecting their learning and development" (p. 488).

Thus, a focus for student affairs professionals is incorporating development, learning, and perhaps engagement. As Kuh (2009) discusses, "the student affairs professional has long embraced various iterations of the student engagement construct" (p. 696).

In addition to student development, it is also important to be aware of the role that parents are now playing with their students. "The increased involvement of so-called 'helicopter' parents has also inflated the emphasis on student needs, expectations, comfort and support. Parents of the millennial generation are perhaps the most involved and demanding mothers and fathers in higher education history" (Dalton & Crosby, 2008, p. 4). While student affairs has always focused on the student, it is important to view how partnerships with parents can be beneficial to student development.

#### The Resident Assistant Position

"The college residence hall was probably the first student affairs agency to use students as paraprofessionals in systematic and sustained programs" (Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1999, p. 51). Winston et al. (1999) described the

various roles and responsibilities of resident assistants as being a model of effective student, peer helper, information and referral agent, socializer, leader and organizer, clerical worker, and limit setter and conflict mediator. Additionally, "RAs can play an important role in helping students thrive in the potentially overwhelming transition to college life. RAs often interact with more students on a daily basis than do parents, professors, and the average college student" (Wu & Stemler, 2008, p. 554). While the resident assistant position includes various roles to assist students, there exist differences in the theory that backs the practice. This stems from the fact that "the gap between theory and practice remains large, however, partly because too few staffs have learned theory in depth" (Rodgers, 1989, p. 155).

Yet regardless of the training received, according to Rodgers (1989), if resident assistants or any student affairs staff members are to effectively function within the realm of theory, they "must know the constructs and propositions of theory in depth in order to use theory to understand and explain student behavior, environmental influences on behavior, and student-environment interactions" (p. 155).

One can be sure that "resident assistants are [a] developmental influence in residence halls" (Blimling, 1999, p. 61). A study conducted by Zirkle and Hudson (1975) "indicated a significant relationship between resident assistant behavior and the development of maturity among freshman males" (p. 31). In addition, resident assistant behavior also "made a difference in the variable studies on grade point average and selected student behaviors" (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975, p. 32). Finally, "environmental influences gained in the residence halls, such as friendships and sense of community, have a powerful influence over students' development" (Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003, p. 518). However, it is where this ability to have an effect on the development of students was learned that is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of resident assistant impact on development and one of the focuses of this study.

#### Supervisor Preparedness

Student development theory is at the core of many College Student Personnel preparation programs, and it is these programs that prepare individuals for full-time work in student affairs and specifically, housing departments. As Torres et al. (2009) stated, "enhancing the development

of students has long been a primary role of student affairs practitioners" (p. 577). Additionally, in a study completed by Herdlein (2004), student development theory was rated as the top area out of 12 in which graduates of student affairs administration programs had the most preparation, as rated by Chief Student Affairs Officers. With regard to graduate perceptions, Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, and Molina (2009) found that "recent graduates felt that they had received the highest level of preparation in the [area of] understanding student development" (p. 108), which echoed supervisor's impressions as well (Cuyjet et al., 2009). Herdlein (2004) further stated that "it was also clear from the survey that practitioners were looking for individuals with a solid knowledge base in the traditional areas of college student personnel" (p. 67).

While "it is not clear whether student development theory is useful to those who work with college students" (Stage, Schuh, Hossler, & Westfall, 1991, p. 293), it is assumed in any activity with information to better inform or prepare a participant, more success will be achieved, which in this case can be extended to resident assistants and student development theory. Finally, as Knepfelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) state "we now talk of being more

aware of the multiple conditions in which we are called upon to work with students, and the many considerations we must make in deciding what to do in a particular situation" (p. xiv). Thus, this study examined resident assistants' level of knowledge of student development theory, the amount of use of that theory, the source of this knowledge, and the relationship between supervisor preparedness and resident assistant knowledge and use.

#### Significance of the Study

Numerous studies have been completed regarding the amount of use or level of knowledge of student development theory. These include assessing the amount of use of student development theory by professionals in the residence halls (Stage et al., 1991), determining the effect of residence hall staff members on maturity development (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975), assessing resident assistants' self-efficacy (Denzine & Anderson, 1999), examining the uses of human development theory by entry-level practitioners in student affairs (Heineman & Strange, 1984), evaluating knowledge perceptions of human development theory among student affairs master students (Strange & Contomanolis, 1983), and using developmental theory in the supervision of residence hall staff members

(Ricci, Porterfield, & Piper, 1987). However, the only specific cases found regarding resident assistant staff members involved assessing residence hall paraprofessionals' knowledge of student development theory (Schuh et al., 1991) and instituting a session to assist undergraduate residence staff to use theory to support practice (Forney, 1986).

While a goal should be that student affairs practitioners, including paraprofessional resident assistant staff, "use one of many student development theories to identify developmental levels or tasks of the students" (Stage, 1989, p. 295), the level and frequency that this occurs varies across staffs throughout the United States. Thus, "although developmental theory frequently serves as a valued resource for professional student affairs practitioners, the task of translating this knowledge to peer helpers so that they can understand and draw on it to support their own work can be quite challenging" (Forney, 1986, p. 468). It is this challenge that was assessed during the course of this study.

This study furthered Schuh et al.'s (1991) study by determining the level of knowledge of student development theory, but it also incorporated an aspect regarding the



use of student development theory. No specific theory was utilized in order to offer resident assistants the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and use of any one of the numerous theories available. While "student development practitioners often have difficulty assessing the impact of programs that use theoretically derived developmental models" (Wise, 1986, p. 442), the researcher believed that assessment of this information was not a challenge. Finally, this study took Stage et al.'s (1991) study one step further by looking at resident assistant use of student development theory and not relying on only professional and graduate student use.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine resident assistants' knowledge and use of student development theory. Additionally, this study was to determine the relationship between a residence hall supervisor's academic preparedness with regard to student development theory and their resident assistants' respective level of knowledge and amount of use of student development theory.

#### Research Question

The primary research question was as follows: Where do resident assistants obtain the knowledge of college

student development theory and to what extent do they use it? In order to answer this question, four sub-questions existed:

1. To what extent are resident assistants aware of student development theory?
2. How often do resident assistants utilize student development theory?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between how aware resident assistants are of student development theory and their supervisor's knowledge and / or use of student development theory?
4. What effect does a supervisor's academic preparation and self teaching play in their knowledge and use of student development theory?

#### Methodology

The two schools incorporated into this study, the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, were chosen based on their classification as regional comprehensive universities and also due to both institutions' comparison on the Educational Benchmark Institute (EBI) survey. In addition to student populations being similar, the residence life

systems are also similar in their philosophies and the way in which Hall Directors and Residence Life Coordinators interact with both the resident assistant and resident populations (personal communication, L. Jicinsky, September 17, 2010). Both residence life systems are deemed as very strong by peers in the field. Finally, former resident assistants and graduates of the Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs graduate program have gone from the University of Northern Iowa to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse for both full time and graduate positions. The same can be said about former graduates of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse currently working at the University of Northern Iowa. Over the past ten years, five individuals who have worked at UNI have gone on to UW-L and during the 2010-2011 academic year there were three full-time professionals at UNI with ties to UW-L.

At the time of the study at the University of Northern Iowa, there were six female coordinators and one male coordinator ranging in experience from this being their first year at UNI through this being their fifth year at UNI in this role. Through an open e-mail request, the process and requirements to be involved in the study were explained. From the total number of participants

responding who accepted the request to be involved in the study, three individuals were chosen. These individuals were chosen so that there were differing backgrounds and years of experience among the three participants.

At the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse at the time of the study, there were currently six male hall directors and three female hall directors ranging in experience from this being their first year at UW-L through this being their fourth year at UW-L in this role. Similar procedures of selection as those utilized for the UNI group were employed.

The second sample population is defined as all resident assistants working for the six chosen coordinators in the study. These individuals had differing experience from just starting the position in August, 2010, through possibly entering their third year as a resident assistant. Thus, each of the participants would have minimally been involved in one formal fall training period, one formal winter training period, and had the opportunity to be exposed to various training and interactions with their current supervisor. Again, through an open e-mail request, the process and requirements to be involved in the study were explained. A minimum of five resident assistants from

each of the three coordinators were set as a desirable number for inclusion in the study, based again on differing experiences and backgrounds within residence life.

In both instances, mixed purposeful sampling was utilized. Specifically, purposive sampling was utilized so that when the sample reached its capacity, the study began and others who may have met the requirements for inclusion were not pursued. Additionally, typical case sampling was utilized as it is the researcher's belief that the resulting participants were typical of other participants if chosen.

#### Data Collection

Once the sample members had confirmed that they were interested in participating, two copies of the informed consent form were mailed to them with a memo for instructions. One copy was to be signed and returned via campus mail to the researcher and the other was to be kept for the participant's own records.

Interviews were conducted first at the University of Northern Iowa with the three coordinators selected for inclusion into the study. An informal conversational interview approach was utilized where topics were specified

in advance; however, no specific question wording or sequencing was predetermined. Interviews were conducted in the respective coordinator offices and all interviews were recorded so that no information was lost; however, if a participant declined to be taped, their wish was respected.

The second round of interviews were conducted with each resident assistant participant at the University of Northern Iowa. Again, once the sample members had confirmed that they were interested in participating; two copies of the informed consent were mailed to them. One copy was to be signed and returned via campus mail to the researcher and the other was to be kept for the participant's own records. An informal conversational interview approach was utilized where the topics were determined in advance, but the sequences and exact wording of each question were determined during the interview. Interviews were completed in the place of choice of the resident assistant. The interviews were completed in their rooms, the researcher's office, or other area, as determined by the interviewee. The interviews were recorded so that all information was able to be recovered however; again, if a participant declined to be taped, their wish was respected.

The same procedure was followed at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with Hall Director interviews preceding resident assistant interviews. The informed consent forms were e-mailed prior to the scheduled interviews. At the time of the interview, two copies of the form were present. Both were signed by the researcher and the participant with one copy for each person. However, aside from this change in procedure, all other processes were followed as stated earlier.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a phenomenological approach as described in Johnson and Christensen (2007). Thus, using interview data, the statements were reduced to the common core as described by the research participants and significant statements were searched for within question areas and across question areas. After constructing the significant statements and meanings, themes were searched out and described.

To assure interpretive validity, member checking was utilized, thus participants reviewed their statements. This was accomplished in a post interview assessment sent to the participants to assure that what the researcher recorded was the true feelings and thoughts of the

participants. In addition, internal validity was verified through data triangulation.

#### Parameters

This study incorporated only three supervisors at both the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. While generalizability to other situations is not possible as a result of this study, it was hoped that this study would determine resident assistants' perceptions of their knowledge and use of student development theory and also describe from where this knowledge has been learned. Thus, the study anticipated that the results would shed light on practices that will encourage future use of student development theory by paraprofessionals in the student affairs field.

#### Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined according to their use in this study and to ensure that the reader is aware of the meaning used by the researcher. Those terms without citations have been defined by the researcher.

ACPA refers to the American College Personnel Association.



Hall Director is a full-time, master's level professional at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. The Hall Directors are responsible for the oversight of a residence hall and supervision of a resident assistant staff.

NASPA refers to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Resident Assistant is a student staff member, normally an undergraduate, who lives on a residence hall floor and is responsible for the general welfare of the students on the floor where he/she lives (Stange, 2002). The abbreviation "RA" is also used interchangeably with this term.

Residence Life Coordinator is a full-time, master's level professional at the University of Northern Iowa. The term "coordinator" is also used interchangeably with this term. The coordinator is responsible for a building of 300-600 residents and supervision of between 4 and 13 RAs.

Upper Midwest Region - Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO) is a regional professional housing association comprised of members from the following states and province: North Dakota, South

Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Manitoba (Stange, 2002).

### Anticipated Results

The researcher proposed that at the conclusion of this study, it would show those resident assistants whose supervisors had a strong background in student development theory would have better knowledge about student development theory and use it more frequently than those RAs who have supervisors with a weaker background. Additionally, it was expected that the level of knowledge of the supervisor was not only dependent upon their academic preparation, but also on any other involvements that the respective supervisor had undertaken. This may have meant outside reading, conference or workshop attendance, or specific interactions with others who can better instruct on student development theory. Finally, it is postulated that overall, the results of the study will guide practice to encourage more use of student development theory by resident assistants.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presented the introduction, purpose statement, research questions, methodology, parameters,

definition of terms, and anticipated results of the study. Chapter 2 contains the review of literature and research related to student development theory, the resident assistant position, supervisor preparedness, and the significance of the study. The methodology and procedures that were utilized for the study are presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes the results of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a discussion, study limitations, and thoughts on future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a discussion of student development theory. It then discusses the resident assistant position and follows with a discussion of supervisor preparedness with regard to student development theory. This chapter concludes with relevant studies and a discussion of the significance of the study.

#### Student Development Theory

Student development theory as a whole is wide reaching and covers many different areas of theory. While an early attempt to explain student development was presented by the American Council on Education (1937) when they detailed the Student Personnel Point of View, there were still many labels even into the 1980s describing student development theories as human development theories. Indeed, "the student affairs profession has examined a range of human development models and intervention strategies for implementing a student development philosophy in educational practice on the college campus" (Heineman & Strange, 1984, p. 528). Plato (1978) detailed the shift to student development philosophy and away from the old label of simply student services. Thus, from the early

beginnings of both student services and human development theory, student development theory was created and has prospered.

Many studies have been completed on the effects of various aspects of a student's life on their development. Furr and Elling (2000) described the various effects of work on student development. Delworth (1989) discussed the variables associated with development on college students, specifically issues of gender and ethnicity; however, she also presents the variable of timing, "the points in the life cycle at which students enroll in our colleges and universities" (p. 162). Finally, Astin (1984) detailed the effect of involvement on students, postulating that involvement will not only increase the engagement of the students in activities, but also further learning and personal development.

Sottile et al. (1997), described how early human development theories were extended into student development. Theories discussed in their study included Erikson, Perry, Chickering, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Belenky, Clinchy, and Goldberger. A brief overview of these six theories follows.

### Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson was the first clinical psychologist to address the identity development journey from adolescence through adulthood (Evans et al., 2010, p. 48). He focused on development over the life span and expanded upon earlier theories that focused only on childhood. He focused on the epigenetic principle, which he defined as "anything that grows has a ground plan, and . . . out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole" (Erikson, 1968, p. 92, as cited in Evans et al., 2010, p. 48). According to Torres et al. (2009), "taking a lifespan approach, Erikson identified eight stages / phases in which individuals address a series of crises to arrive at more or less healthy resolutions to major developmental tasks" (p. 578). The eight stages include Basic Trust versus Mistrust; Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt; Initiative versus Guilt; Industry versus Inferiority; Identity versus Identity Diffusion; Intimacy versus Isolation; Generativity versus Stagnation, and Integrity versus Despair (Evans et al., 2010).

### Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development

William Perry developed his theory during the 1950s and 1960s. He suggested that "development progressed from a dualistic view to a more complex or more pluralistic one, in which knowledge and truth can no longer be equated" (Sottile et al., 1997, pp. 5-6). As Evans et al. (2010) stated, "the foundation for Perry's theory consisted of nine positions outlined on a continuum of development" (p. 85). As individuals develop, they move along a continuum from duality, to multiplicity, to relativism, and finally to a commitment in relativism (Evans et al., 2010).

### Chickering's Vectors of Development

One of the most well-known student development theories is Arthur Chickering's Vectors of Development as discussed in *Education and Identity* (1969) and updated in 1995 with Lori Reisser. "Chickering identified seven dimensions of identity and proposed that higher education should be about developing those aspects of self that had the most value for the individual and the society" (Reisser, 1995, p. 505). This theory was based upon the premise that college students move through various stages of development, or vectors, as Chickering refers to them. While other theories have been developed and researched,

"the ideas presented in *Education and Identity* continue to provide a strong foundation for much work in student affairs" (Thomas & Chickering, 1984, p. 392). The seven vectors as presented in Chickering and Reisser's revised theory (as cited in Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998) are as follows: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

With regard to movement through the vectors, "Chickering noted that students move through these vectors at different rates, that vectors can interact with each other, and that students often find themselves reexamining issues associated with vectors they had previously worked through" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 38). It is this movement through the vectors in which resident assistants and other student affairs staff members can have the most profound impact.

#### Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg developed his theory with a focus on moral development. The core of the theory is that moral reasoning develops through a six-stage sequence across three levels (Evans et al., 2010). Individuals move



through the six stages beginning at the Pre-Conventional Level with Heteronomous Morality. In this stage, individuals make moral choices to avoid punishment. As they progress into stage two, Individualistic, Instrumental Morality, individuals seek to follow rules if they earn some reward as a result of following them (Evans et al., 2010).

As individuals move into the Conventional Level, they move through the third stage, Interpersonally Normative Morality. In this stage, individuals make moral choices to be perceived as a good boy or a good girl. As they move to the fourth stage, Social System Morality, "individuals view the social system as made up of a consistent set of rules and procedures applying equally to all people" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 104).

Individuals reach the Conventional level when they reach the fifth stage, Human Rights and Social Welfare Morality. In this stage, "laws and social systems are evaluated based on the extent to which they promote fundamental human rights and values" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 104). Finally, individuals reach the final stage, Morality of Universalizable, Reversible, and Prescriptive General Ethical Principles. In this stage, "decisions are based on

universal generalizable principles that apply in all situations" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 105).

### Gilligan' Theory of Women's Moral Development

Prior to Gilligan's work, "human development theorists for the most part did not see women as a group worthy of psychological study" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 111). As a result, "Carol Gilligan called for an increase in developmental theories examining the concerns and experiences of women" (Sottile et al., 1997, p. 8). As a result, she described the moral development of women, which was in contrast to the reliance of Lawrence Kohlberg and his theory constructed on the basis of work with only men.

Gilligan's theory incorporates the theme of voices, specifically *A Different Voice* (1982), the work that summarized her theory. "The different voice she delineated is distinguished not by gender but by the themes of care and justice" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 111). In addition, Gilligan described a theory of three levels and two transition, "with each level identifying a more intricate relationships between self and others" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 112).

### Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's Women's Ways of Knowing

In this theory, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) describe "five epistemological perspectives from which women know and view the world" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 122). These perspectives include silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986). The result of the research encouraged women to nurture their own voices with an application in both the classroom and in student affairs (Evans et al., 2010).

### Later Theories

While there were numerous foundational theories written in the 1950s and 1960s including Erikson, Chickering, and Kohlberg, "the late 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction of a number of theories that built on earlier foundational psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, the 1990s and 2000s have witnessed a growth in the number of theories in both spiritual and faith development and social identity theory (Evans et al., 2010). Thus, a look at the more recently researched theories that are present in student development today is also important.

One of the central focuses of student development is viewing the student as a whole; however, this has not been the case in the recent years. As Baxter Magolda (2009) stated, "although the profession adopted student development theory as a philosophy to augment its whole student stance, theorists focused on separate strands of theory that complicated emphasizing the whole student" (p. 621). In doing so, there has been an influx of new theories that address a specific portion of a student's identity. Indeed, it is important to be "addressing tensions and intersections between existing theoretical frameworks and new ones generated [for] specific populations" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 622). While research on these individual dimensions is important, looking at it holistically is also important. Baxter Magolda (2009) for example argues for such a systemic approach, "to understand students in their diverse social contexts and locations requires building theory in practice, intentionally and systematically gathering and interpreting how students make meaning of their experience" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 636). While it seems that student development has remained the same, according to Dalton and Crosby (2008) when they stated that "student learning and development in college depend greatly

on an optimal balance of challenge and support" (p. 1), it is also important to be aware of the various new theories in the literature that speak to the individual aspects of each student.

There are "several newer theoretical approaches to understanding identity [that] are emerging. These approaches foreground both marginalized populations (e.g., by race, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality) as well as the societal structures and dynamics that produce and perpetuate marginalization and oppression" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 583). This can be as a result of the growing diversity of the college population. "As college populations became more diverse and social scientists attended to racial and sexual orientation identity development in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, student development theory evolved to focus tightly on identity development of specific student populations" (p. 590). As a result, "Student development scholars and student affairs professionals should be open to new theoretical approaches and to exploring new combinations of well-known theories" (p. 593).

"In recent years, attention to spirituality, though still vaguely defined, has become more visible in higher

education" (Kiessling, 2010, p. 1). This is true in both the development of theories and also attention given to spirituality based groups on college campuses. While this is the case, "there is a gap in our knowledge and a need to understand better the beliefs and practices of student affairs professionals in terms of their integration of spirituality as a component of holistic student development" (p. 1).

While some student affairs practitioners may question the link between spirituality and student development, Kiessling (2010) believes that "student affairs is a profession that is engaged in the primary mission of student development. Spiritual development (and religious development) is an important component of identity development and a component of student development" (p. 8). In addition, as Love and Talbot (2009) stated, "until spiritual development is incorporated into the canon of student development theory, it may be up to professional organizations to encourage this information dissemination through workshops and conference programs" (p. 625). Wherever this information is transmitted, spirituality has become an important topic of student development. Finally, "student affairs professionals must understand the role

that such values such as faith, hope, and love play in the structure and persistence of communities, in the construction of knowledge, in the understanding of truth, and in developmental processes of students" (Love & Talbot, 2009, p. 615).

In addition to the incorporation of spirituality into student development theory, there is also a growing trend of involvement in religion based organizations. A study by Bryant (2007) "identified generally positive relationships between participation in religious organizations and social integration, emotional well-being (primarily mediated by the provision of friendship networks), and spirituality" (p. 14). Through this greater involvement, one can also view how theories are combined. In this case, both Astin's (1984) involvement theory and faith development as Love and Talbot (2009) and Kiessling (2010) have stated are intertwined.

An additional area of growth is the number of theories focusing on diverse identities and diverse development. As Pascarella (2006) stated, "consequently, interactions with a diverse spectrum of people, ideas, values, and perspectives that are different from one's own and challenge one's assumed views of the world have the

potential for important developmental impacts during college" (p. 511). In addition, "the scholarship over the last 40 years, particularly the last 25 years, has documented the increased diversity on college campuses" (Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009, p. 646).

This development occurs along numerous different paths. "One of the more revealing lessons from student affairs scholarship on diversity and multiculturalism has been recognition of the limitations of the theory base" (Pope et al., 2009, p. 644). As earlier theories may have been developed on only white research participants, such as those of Kohlberg or Perry (Evans et al., 2010), later researchers sought to understand the impact that an individual's race, gender, sexuality or culture had on his or her overall development. "Assumptions about the universal nature of development were being made and ... cultural and gender differences were often being minimized or ignored" (Pope et al., 2009, p. 644).

With respect to males, "recent behavioral trends involving male students on college campuses have led to increased scholarly attention to masculinities in higher education" (Harris, 2010, p. 297). This may seem in conflict with previous statements about original research



being conducted on only white males. Why would research need to be conducted now on male gender identity? As Davis and Laker (2004) state, "a lack of understanding related to men's development leads to either reliance on stereotypical gender scripts or failure to consider men as gendered beings" (p. 49). Thus, while it appears contradictory, indeed, it is only in recent years that a focus on male gender identity development has taken place. Additionally, males have become the subject of studies resulting in information applicable to only males, as opposed to earlier research that was completed using male subjects, but generalized to both genders.

In addition to culture and gender, sexuality has also seen an increase in both the number of theories and articles written on it and the attention paid by both society and professional organizations. As an example, "when a student is coming out, his Collegiate Gay and Bisexual Men (CGBM) social identity is shaped by his interactions - sexual or not - with individuals and institutions" (Wilkerson, Brooks, & Ross, 2010, p. 280). While sexuality is a component of an individual's identity, Wilkerson et al. (2010), found that "none of the men in this study desired to be defined only by their sexual

orientation. Instead, they preferred to be known as collegiate men with a variety of talents and interests, who are also gay or bisexual" (p. 293). This reinforces Baxter Magolda's (2009) point of the various intersections of an individual identity and how it is one component of the overall whole student.

Peer influence has also been discussed as an important component of student development. As Bryant (2007) stated, "existing theory does tell us that involvement during college, including the peer interactions that take place in the context of student organizations, facilitates social integration, which in turn enhances academic achievement and emotional health" (p. 14). As peer interactions are seen as influential, learning and engagement of the individual becomes paramount.

Of recent note is the extension of student development theory into learning theory. As Sherman (2011) stated, "during the past two decades, student affairs practitioners have shifted from a focus that is predominantly concerned with student development to one that is equally concerned with development, learning, and assessment of learning outcomes" (p. 1). In addition, as Baxter Magolda (2009) discussed, "the intersections of learning and development

are another major area in which integration is warranted" (p. 622). Learning is an important component of student development. From Kolb's Learning Theory to the Ways of Knowing of both Baxter Magolda and Belenky, Clichy, Goldberger, and Tarule (Evans et al., 2010), learning is an important facet of development. As Pizzolato et al. (2009) stated, "it is imperative that colleges and universities move toward understanding how various developmental aspects of the student may be intertwined and are affecting their learning and development" (p. 488). Thus, a focus for student affairs professionals is incorporating development, learning, and perhaps engagement. As Kuh (2009) discusses, "the student affairs professional has long embraced various iterations of the student engagement construct" (p. 696).

In addition to student development, it is also important to be aware of the role that parents are now playing with their students. "The increased involvement of so-called 'helicopter' parents has also inflated the emphasis on student needs, expectations, comfort and support. Parents of the millennial generation are perhaps the most involved and demanding mothers and fathers in higher education history" (Dalton & Crosby, 2008, p. 4). While student affairs has always focused on the student, it

is important to view how partnerships with parents can be beneficial to student development.

One final area of discussion for college student development theory is its application in numerous settings. With regard to the campus judicial system, "student development theory can be useful in helping to explain why students make decisions that lead to violations of the code of conduct" (Pontious, 2008, p. 4). Additionally, "administrators might pay attention to the various ways in which campus programs and services require students to engage their peers in meaningful discussion, debate, and service-related activities. Collaborative activities such as intramural sports are likely to yield growth and personal development" (Strayhorn, 2008, p. 10). Finally, as Moran (2009) states "because identity development is multidimensional and complex, its assessment is not easy. Development is continually occurring in many different arenas, and assessment can provide only a limited evaluation of a particular aspect of that development at a particular point in time" (p. 477). The application of student development theory will be consistently important by student affairs staff members, whether they are professional or paraprofessional.

### The Resident Assistant Position

"The college residence hall was probably the first student affairs agency to use students as paraprofessionals in systematic and sustained programs" (Winston et al., 1999, p. 51). Resident assistant positions as they are known today began at Oklahoma State University in the mid-1930s (Murphy, 1988). Julia Stout, Dean of Women, had many staffing ideas and educational principles that "are generally used in residence halls throughout the United States today" (Murphy, 1988, p. 147). She instituted the employment of graduate students to serve as advisors, tutors, and study supervisors. This contradicted the previous use of "matronly older women" (Murphy, 1988, p. 146). Due to Stout's foresight, "the roles of advisor, guide, and sometimes tutor, continue as important functions of the position" (Murphy, 1988, p. 147) across the United States.

Winston et al. (1999) described the various roles and responsibilities of resident assistants as being a model of effective student, peer helper, information and referral agent, socializer, leader and organizer, clerical worker, and limit setter and conflict mediator. Additionally, "RAs can play an important role in helping students thrive in

the potentially overwhelming transition to college life. RAs often interact with more students on a daily basis than do parents, professors, and the average college student" (Wu & Stemler, 2008, p. 554). While the resident assistant position includes various roles to assist students, there exist differences in the theory that backs the practice. This stems from the fact that "the gap between theory and practice remains large, however, partly because too few staffs have learned theory in depth" (Rodgers, 1989, p. 155).

Few staffs have learned theory in depth because there exists large differences in the amount of training that resident assistant staff members receive regarding student development theory. For example, at Oklahoma State University, new resident assistants are required to complete an academic course in which student development theory concepts are instructed (C. Wittrock, personal communication, October 29, 2003). However, at the University of Northern Iowa, no course is required, nor is there any specific training session on student development theory provided to the campus as a whole. While individual supervisors may choose to present concepts from student development theory, no centralized training is offered. If

resident assistants are interested in further reading or research on the topic, materials on Chickering's Vectors of Development (Reisser, 1995) are included in the Resident Assistant manual.

Yet regardless of the training received, according to Rodgers (1989), if resident assistants or any student affairs staff members are to effectively function within the realm of theory, they "must know the constructs and propositions of theory in depth in order to use theory to understand and explain student behavior, environmental influences on behavior, and student-environment interactions" (p. 155). In addition, "if the housing program subscribes to the student development philosophy... then a number of skills and a substantial amount of knowledge appear to be essential in preservice training" (Winston et al., 1999, p. 58). Thus, institutions, if they utilize theory as a base, should offer training programs to support this goal. Finally, theory is seen as important as "there is tantalizing, if sparse, evidence to indicate that the specific experiences that enhance development during college can have enduring implications for an individual's later life" (Pascarella, 2006, p. 516).

In addition to differences between the presentations of theory to staff members, the way in which resident assistants and residence hall systems operate also differs from campus to campus. Due to these differences, there are four primary philosophies for working with students in residence halls: the student services approach, the custodial care and moral development approach, the student learning approach, and the student development approach (Blimling, 1999). The approach that most closely resembles the inclusion of theory is the student development approach. It is characterized by the following:

1. Acceptance of the belief that individuals develop in stages that are sequential, cumulative, increasingly complex, and qualitatively different
2. Acceptance of the student as the principal agent for change
3. A belief that the role of residence hall staff is to assist students in accomplishing goals that they have set for themselves
4. A recognition that one must consider the development of the whole individual - intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Blimling, 1999, p. 50).



Resident assistants must incorporate elements of this student development approach to successfully impact students living in their community. While these areas of impact may also vary, according to Blimling (1999),

a synthesis of over 20 years of empirical research revealed seven areas in which residence halls had a significant influence on students: retention, participation in extracurricular activities, perception of the campus social climate, personal growth and development, interpersonal relationships, and faculty interaction (p.56).

Resident assistants can assist in many of these areas, even including the encouragement of ethical principles and ethical decisions as described by Kitchener (1985).

Methods of advancing the growth and development of students living in residence halls include involving them, integrating the in-class and out-of-class experience, performing direct interventions, incorporating them into the community in which they live, providing optimum dissonance, and role modeling development (Blimling, 1999). Additionally, "the first line of staff contact with the student - the RA - did play a role in the student's level of house involvement" (Arboleda et al., 2003, p. 528). Resident assistants provide these opportunities through a variety of activities, including planned programs or

informal conversations with residents throughout their community.

Programs are of both an educational and social nature, again paying attention to the development of the whole person. Schroeder and Mable (1994) encourage the use of resident assistants in development "because students are not greatly influenced by administratively sponsored activities and publications, [thus] alternative means need to be found for conveying the values that institutions wish to teach" (p. 104). It is through the programs and other interactions mentioned that development can take place, as resident assistants are not viewed as a member of "the administration." Finally, "an active residen[t] assistant has the opportunity to generate involvement by hall residents because he or she sees residents' environmental needs and expectations for participation" (Arboleda et al., 2003, p. 520).

A study by Wu and Stemler (2008) found that "in light of their explicit responsibility to create community on the college campus, it seems reasonable to assume that effective RAs are likely to be those with high levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI)" (p. 534). Indeed, the "study found that EI of the RA was statistically significantly

associated with RA effectiveness" (Wu & Stemler, 2008, p. 550). Thus, in this case, a student development theory is being utilized to relate the resident assistants' emotional intelligence levels with effectiveness.

One can be sure that "resident assistants are [a] developmental influence in residence halls" (Blimling, 1999, p. 61). A study conducted by Zirkle and Hudson (1975) "indicated a significant relationship between resident assistant behavior and the development of maturity among freshman males" (p. 31). In addition, resident assistant behavior also "made a difference in the variable studies on grade point average and selected student behaviors" (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975, p. 32). Finally, "environmental influences gained in the residence halls, such as friendships and sense of community, have a powerful influence over students' development" (Arboleda et al., 2003, p. 518). However, it is where this ability to have an effect on the development of students was learned that is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of resident assistant impact on development and one of the focuses of this study.

#### Supervisor Preparedness

Student development theory is at the core of many College Student Personnel preparation programs, and it is

these programs that prepare individuals for full-time work in student affairs and specifically, housing departments. As Torres et al. (2009) stated, "enhancing the development of students has long been a primary role of student affairs practitioners" (p. 577). Additionally, in a study completed by Herdlein (2004), student development theory was rated as the top area out of 12 in which graduates of student affairs administration programs had the most preparation, as rated by Chief Student Affairs Officers. With regard to graduate perceptions, Cuyjet et al. (2009) found that "recent graduates felt that they had received the highest level of preparation in the [area of] understanding student development" (p. 108), which echoed supervisor's impressions as well (Cuyjet et al., 2009). Herdlein (2004) further stated that "it was also clear from the survey that practitioners were looking for individuals with a solid knowledge base in the traditional areas of college student personnel" (p. 67). Indeed, student development theory was ranked as the most important professional skill or competency attained through master's level graduate study in student affairs as rated by 1200 new entrants into the student affairs field (Waple, 2006). While this may be the case, there still exist vast

differences in preparation when programs are compared due to highly different expectations and program components.

With regard to specific theories of interest, Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stofflet (2004) stated that "our experts were asked to identify theories they expected entry-level professionals to base their practice upon, and these results yielded 15 different theories" (p. 294). Some of these theories included Astin's Involvement Theory, Chickering's Seven Vectors, Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory and others. Burkard et al. (2004) further stated that "these theories have been instrumental in helping many practitioners conceptualize and plan student services and based on these findings they will likely continue to be influential in the near future" (p. 302). It is the researcher's belief that they will continue to be influential as well!

#### Relevant Studies

Three specific studies served as a prelude to this endeavor. The most closely related study was carried out by Schuh, Stage, and Westfall (1991) as it measured residence hall paraprofessionals' knowledge of student development theory. The study presented four developmental approaches to the paraprofessional supervisors'

(coordinators) including Drum's (1980) theory, Chickering's theory (1969), the health and wellness approach to programming, and Schuh's freshmen problems approach. Coordinators "selected an approach employing one of the theories to programming that fit their residents' needs" (Schuh et al., 1991, p. 272). Vignettes were then written reflecting Chickering's vectors of development and college student developmental issues with which RAs were likely to come into contact (Schuh et al., 1991). 217 resident assistants were surveyed with 179 usable surveys. The results demonstrated that resident assistants who worked in areas where Chickering's theory was utilized as a programming approach scored higher on the instrument than resident assistants who did not work under the approach (Schuh et al., 1991).

A second study by Stage et al. (1991) detailed work at one institution to determine the amount of student development theory used by three groups of housing staff members - full time coordinators, graduate assistants in the higher education / student affairs masters program, and graduate assistants not enrolled in the higher education / student affairs masters program. All participants were given an instrument that was modified from the original

designed by Heineman and Strange (1984). It involved questions on a Likert-type scale and the questions were broken into three categories: cognitive use of theory, discursive use of theory, and application of theory. The results showed that full time coordinators scored highest on all three scales, followed by the graduate students enrolled in the higher education / student affairs program, and then the graduate students who were not enrolled in that program (Stage et al., 1991). The limitations of the study included a small sample size, although this allowed the institutional culture elements to remain the same. In addition, the differences among graduate students not enrolled in the higher education / student affairs program were not able to be determined (Stage et al., 1991).

The third related study was completed by Heineman and Strange (1984). This study assessed the uses of human development theory by entry-level practitioners in student affairs. Three hundred fifty-seven master's graduates were surveyed, resulting in 244 usable questionnaires. The questionnaire was comprised of fifteen questions and assessed using questions from "have used a human development theory to explain or understand a student's behavior in my own mind" to "have been asked by my

immediate supervisor to find out more about a particular human development theory" (Heineman & Strange, 1984, p. 530). Results demonstrated that 92 percent of the respondents had utilized a human development theory to explain a student's behavior. In addition, "the human development knowledge base also seems to further the [participants'] professional development" (p. 531).

While "it is not clear whether student development theory is useful to those who work with college students" (Stage et al., 1991, p. 293), it is assumed in any activity that with information to better inform or prepare a participant, more success will be achieved, which in this case can be extended to resident assistants and student development theory. Finally, as Knepfelkamp et al. (1978) state "we now talk of being more aware of the multiple conditions in which we are called upon to work with students, and the many considerations we must make in deciding what to do in a particular situation" (p. xiv). Thus, this study examined resident assistants' level of knowledge of student development theory, the amount of use of that theory, determine from where this knowledge is learned, and determine the relationship between supervisor preparedness and resident assistant knowledge and use.



### Significance of the Study

Numerous studies have been completed regarding the amount of use or level of knowledge of student development theory. These include assessing the amount of use of student development theory by professionals in the residence halls (Stage et al., 1991), determining the effect of residence hall staff members on maturity development (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975), assessing resident assistants' self-efficacy (Denzine & Anderson, 1999), examining the uses of human development theory by entry-level practitioners in student affairs (Heineman & Strange, 1984), evaluating knowledge perceptions of human development theory among student affairs master students (Strange & Contomanolis, 1983), and using developmental theory in the supervision of residence hall staff members (Ricci et al., 1987). However, the only specific cases found regarding resident assistant staff members involved assessing residence hall paraprofessionals' knowledge of student development theory (Schuh et al., 1991) and instituting a session to assist undergraduate residence staff to use theory to support practice (Forney, 1986).

While a goal should be that student affairs practitioners, including paraprofessional resident assistant staff, "use one of many student development theories to identify developmental levels or tasks of the students" (Stage, 1989, p. 295), the level and frequency that this occurs varies across staffs throughout the United States. Thus, "although developmental theory frequently serves as a valued resource for professional student affairs practitioners, the task of translating this knowledge to peer helpers so that they can understand and draw on it to support their own work can be quite challenging" (Forney, 1986, p. 468). It is this challenge that was assessed during the course of this study.

This study furthered Schuh et al.'s (1991) study by determining the level of knowledge of student development theory, but it also incorporated an aspect regarding the use of student development theory. No specific theory was utilized in order to offer resident assistants the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and use of any one of the numerous theories available. While "student development practitioners often have difficulty assessing the impact of programs that use theoretically derived developmental models" (Wise, 1986, p. 442), the researcher

believed that assessment of this information was not a challenge. Finally, this study took Stage et al.'s (1991) study one step further by looking at resident assistant use of student development theory and not relying on only professional and grad student use.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 provides a review of the methodology that was utilized in the completion of the study.

#### Design Considerations

The design of the study focused on a qualitative approach. While the researcher examined the possibility of completing both a quantitative and mixed method approach, the qualitative method provided the more descriptive information that was desired. In addition, the qualitative method allowed for the individual differences and observations that are more difficult to clarify with a quantitative approach. Finally, a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to interact with individuals in the field, which allowed him to get the personal perspective that was very important for this type of research.

In examining the way in which the qualitative information would be gathered, many different types were considered. A questionnaire, both in an on-line format and a paper and pencil format was considered, but again, the researcher felt that the information would be too impersonal. The researcher also considered gathering information in a focus group format, but wanted to hear the

individual experiences and be able to compare them to one another, thus the focus group was not utilized. The interview approach was decided upon to extract the most personal data.

### Purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine resident assistants' knowledge and use of student development theory and how it relates to their supervisor's knowledge and use of student development theory. The primary research question was as follows: Where do resident assistants obtain the knowledge of college student development theory and to what extent do they use it? In order to answer this question, four sub-questions existed:

1. To what extent are resident assistants aware of student development theory?
2. How often do resident assistants utilize student development theory?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between how aware resident assistants are of student development theory and their supervisor's knowledge and / or use of student development theory?

4. What effect does a supervisor's academic preparation and self teaching play in their knowledge and use of student development theory?

#### Review of Related Literature

Information was collected on this topic by conducting a computerized search utilizing the University of Northern Iowa Library System and Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC). Additionally, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition* (2001), was used. Student affairs journals such as the *NASPA Journal* and the *Journal of College Student Development* were also utilized. Finally, articles and handouts from conferences presented at NASPA and the Upper-Midwest Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO) that support this research effort were considered.

#### Participants

There were two sample populations within this study. The participants were drawn from the UNI campus and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus. First, the sample population of supervisors included the other seven full-time residence life coordinators at the University of

Northern Iowa and the nine full-time hall directors at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

The choice of schools was considered across many different levels. The researcher considered including numerous different types of schools including large, research institutions, small liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive universities. In addition, the researcher considered schools in different parts of the country as well. After consideration, it was determined to include two schools that were similar in nature and geographical location so that they could be compared both in regard to supervisors and the resident assistant systems.

The two schools incorporated into this study were chosen based on their classification as regional comprehensive universities and also due to both institutions' comparison on the Educational Benchmark Institute (EBI) survey. In addition to student populations being similar, the residence life systems are also similar in their philosophies and the way in which Hall Directors and Residence Life Coordinators interact with both the resident assistant and resident populations (personal communication, L. Jicinsky, September 17, 2010). Both residence life systems are deemed as very strong by peers

in the field. Finally, former Resident Assistants and graduates of the Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs graduate program have gone from the University of Northern Iowa to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse for both full time and graduate positions. The same can be said about former graduates of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse currently working at the University of Northern Iowa. Over the past ten years, five individuals who have worked at UNI have gone on to UW-L and during the 2010-2011 academic year there were three full-time professionals at UNI with ties to UW-L.

At the time of the study at the University of Northern Iowa, there were six female coordinators and one male coordinator ranging in experience from it being their first year at UNI through it being their fifth year at UNI in the coordinator role. Through an open e-mail request, that can be viewed in Appendix A, the process and requirements to be involved in the study were explained. From the total number of participants responding that accepted the request to be involved in the study, three individuals were chosen. These individuals were chosen so that there were differing backgrounds and years of experience among the three participants.



At the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse at the time of the study, there were six male hall directors and three female hall directors ranging in experience from it being their first year at UW-L through it being their fourth year at UW-L in the hall director role. Similar procedures of selection as those utilized for the UNI group were employed.

The second sample population was defined as all resident assistants working for the six chosen coordinators in the study. These individuals had differing experience from just starting the position in August, 2010, through possibly entering their third year as a resident assistant. Thus, each of the participants would have minimally been involved in one formal fall training period, one formal winter training period, and had the opportunity to be exposed to various training and interactions with their current supervisor. Again, through an open e-mail request, the process and requirements to be involved in the study were explained. Gender, ethnic background, age, and other characteristics were not controlled as they were not a priority for inclusion in the study and it was assumed that this lack of control did not have an effect on the outcome of the study. A minimum of five resident assistants from

each of the three coordinators were hoped to be chosen for inclusion in the study, based again on differing experiences and backgrounds within residence life.

In both instances, mixed purposeful sampling was utilized. Specifically, purposive sampling was utilized so that when the study reached its capacity, the study began and others who may have met the requirements for inclusion were not pursued. Additionally, typical case sampling was utilized as it is the researcher's belief that the resulting participants were typical of other participants if chosen.

#### Data Collection

Once the sample members had confirmed that they were interested in participating, two copies of the informed consent were mailed to them with a memo for instructions. The memo can be seen in Appendix B. One copy was to be signed and returned via campus mail to the researcher and the other was to be kept for the participant's own records. The informed consent form can be seen in Appendix C.

Interviews were conducted first at the University of Northern Iowa with the three coordinators selected for inclusion into the study. An informal conversational

interview approach was utilized where topics were specified in advance; however, no specific question wording or sequencing was predetermined. Topical areas are included in Figure 1. While theory was at the cornerstone of the interview, no specific theories were included so that participants could discuss any theory with which they had experience. Interviews were conducted in the respective coordinator offices and all interviews were recorded so that no information was lost; however, if a participant declined to be taped, their wish was respected.

The second round of interviews was conducted with each resident assistant participant at the University of Northern Iowa. Again, once the sample members had confirmed that they were interested in participating; two copies of the informed consent were mailed to them. One copy was to be signed and returned via campus mail to the researcher and the other was to be kept for the participant's own records. The memo sent with the informed consent forms is in Appendix B. An informal conversational interview approach was utilized where the topics were determined in advance, but the sequences and exact wording of each question were determined during the interview. The topical

---

*Figure 1: Topical Areas for Supervisor Interviews*

1. Academic preparation - classes and other work on student development theory
2. Training offered to the RAs on student development theory
3. Materials given to the RAs on student development theory
4. Uses of student development theory by the coordinators
5. Incorporation of student development theory into the work with the resident assistants by the coordinator
6. Beliefs on the usefulness of student development theory in general
7. From where did the coordinators learn to use student development theory, if outside areas already discussed

---

areas for the resident assistant interview are included in Figure 2. Interviews were completed in the place of choice

of the resident assistant. The interviews were completed in their rooms, the researcher's office, or other area, as determined by the interviewee. The interviews were recorded so that all information was able to be recovered however; again, if a participant declined to be taped, their wish was respected.

The same procedure was followed at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with Hall Director interviews preceding resident assistant interviews. The informed consent forms were e-mailed prior to the scheduled interviews. The e-mail with the informed consent form sent to the UW-La Crosse Hall Directors can be seen in Appendix D and the e-mail with the informed consent form sent to the UW-La Crosse Resident Assistants can be seen in Appendix E. At the time of the interview, two copies of the form were present. Both were signed by the researcher and the participant with one copy for each person. However, aside from this change in procedure, all other processes were followed as stated earlier.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a phenomenological approach as described in Johnson and Christensen (2007). Thus, using

---

Figure 2: Topical Areas for Resident Assistant Interviews

1. Length of time served as a resident assistant
  2. Favorite and least favorite part of the position
  3. Definition of the term student development
  4. Definition of the term student development theory
  5. Use of student development theory in their work as a resident assistant
  6. Incorporation of student development theory into their work
  7. From who did they learn what student development theory means
  8. Where they believe these individuals learned student development theory
  9. When they learned about student development theory
  10. How they learned to incorporate student development theory into their work as a resident assistant
  11. What they do not understand about student development theory
-

interview data, the statements were reduced to the common core as described by the research participants and significant statements were searched for within question areas and across question areas. After constructing the significant statements and meanings, themes were searched out and described.

The process was as follows. To assure interpretive validity, member checking was utilized, thus participants reviewed their statements. This was accomplished in a post interview assessment sent to the participants via e-mail to assure that what the researcher recorded was the true feelings and thoughts of the participants. In addition, internal validity was verified through data triangulation. As Johnson and Christensen (2007) state, "data triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources using a single method" (p. 280). Thus, by using multiple interviews, data triangulation will verify internal validity.

After the member checking was complete, the interview notes were combined into a document for each type of interview. Thus, the University of Northern Iowa Residence Life Coordinators were in one document, the University of Northern Iowa Resident Assistants in a second document, the

UW-La Crosse Hall Directors in a third document, and the UW-La Crosse Resident Assistants in a fourth document. The documents were organized according to interview question area. Within each area, significant phrases were highlighted and combined. Each combination was then grouped for description in the analysis. Once each separate document had been highlighted, the two resident assistant groups and the two supervisor groups were compared to find both similarities and differences. Finally, the resident assistants' responses were compared to the supervisor responses to garner information for the effect of the supervisors on the resident assistants.

Through this process, a better understanding of the overall themes and the ability to describe these themes was realized.

#### Summary

Following an e-mail invitation to all possible coordinator participants, three individuals were chosen for inclusion into the study at each site. A follow-up invitation was sent to resident assistants working for each coordinator and five individuals were attempted to be chosen from each group. Interviews were conducted utilizing an interview guide approach and were tape



recorded. Finally, data analysis followed a phenomenological approach and accounted for both interpretive and internal validity through member checking and data triangulation.

## CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS

This chapter provides the results of research regarding resident assistant use of student development theory and its relation to supervisor preparedness.

Response to Invitation

At the University of Northern Iowa, seven full-time residence life coordinators met the requirements for inclusion in the study. Six confirmed that they would be willing to be participants in the study. As a result, three were chosen for inclusion based on varieties of experiences, variety of backgrounds, and also the number of supervisees that would also meet the requirements for inclusion. The resulting supervisor sample included one individual in her fifth year of the position, one individual in her third year in the position and one individual in her second year of the position. Interviews were completed with this set of participants and then a request to participate was sent to each of their supervisees.

In regards to the supervisor with five years of experience, 11 resident assistants were requested to participate. Four responded positively to the request and

all four were included in the research study. Two resident assistants with one year of experience and two resident assistants with two years of experience were part of this sub-sample. This subsample included three males and one female.

In regards to the supervisor with three years of experience, 13 resident assistants were requested to participate. Six responded that they would be willing to participate and five were selected from this group of six. Three resident assistants with one year of experience and two resident assistants with two years of experience were part of this sub-sample. Three of the participants were male and two were female.

Finally, the supervisor with two years of experience works in an all female facility and had eight resident assistants who qualified for inclusion. Five responded positively and were included in the study including one resident assistant with three years of experience, three resident assistants with two years of experience and one resident assistant with only one year of experience.

At the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, an invitation to participate was sent to eight full-time hall directors who met the requirements for inclusion in the

study. Three confirmed that they would be willing to be participants in the study and were thus chosen to be part of the sample. The resulting supervisor sample included one individual in his fifth year of the position, one individual in his third year in the position and one individual in his first year of the position. Interviews were completed with this set of participants and then a request to participate was sent to each of their supervisees.

In regards to the supervisor with five years of experience, eight resident assistants were requested to participate. Six responded that they would be willing to participate and five were selected from this group of six. Four resident assistants with one year of experience and one resident assistant with two years of experience were part of this sub-sample. Three of the participants were female and two were male.

In regards to the supervisor with three years of experience, eight resident assistants were requested to participate. Two responded positively to the request and both were included in the research study. Both were males and one had three years of experience and the other resident assistant had two years of experience.

Finally, the supervisor in his first year of experience had nine staff members who qualified for inclusion. Two responded positively and both were included in the study including one resident assistant with two years of experience and one resident assistant with only one year of experience.

While names will be discussed in the responses, the names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

#### Findings - Resident Assistants

##### Favorite Part / Least Favorite Part of the Position

The initial responses to warm up questions were interesting as it drove future responses. Ten out of 14 resident assistants at UNI and five out of nine resident assistants at UW-L spoke about getting to know individuals as the favorite part of their job. This was followed up with 5 out of 14 at UNI and four out of nine resident assistants at UW-L discussing watching growth or impacting change in their residents. This was exciting for the researcher as questions about student development were not even asked yet and already there was discussion about growth, development, relationships, and impact.

Conversely, when asked to discuss their least favorite parts of the position, it was not surprising to hear that conduct and confronting residents was one of their least favorite portions. While this similarity was apparent between the two different samples, the differences were in tune to departmental policy differences. While one school's RAs lamented the posting policy and longer weekend duty, the other schools RAs were frustrated at times by the balance challenges inherent in such a position and attempting to figure out time management. In addition, the least favorite tag was laid on paperwork only at one school as well.

#### Student Development

When discussing student development, definitions were varied but with some central concepts. At UNI, 12 of the 14 RAs felt that student development was helping students to grow or to reach their full potential. This was duplicated at UW-L where eight out of nine felt the same way. In addition, several RAs discussed guiding residents to resources and being knowledgeable in those resources. What was really intriguing to the researcher was when resident assistants would discuss the student development perspective without ever having had a theoretical

background in student development. For example, Megan defined student development as when one "develop(s) emotionally, academically, and also there..it really depends, even spiritually, if that is what they need through some sort of counseling too." This directly correlates to the Student Personnel Point of View, "The concept of education is broadened to include attention to the student's well-rounded development - physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually,-as well as intellectually" (American Council on Education, 1949, p. 2). It was as if she had already been exposed to a variety of student development literature, yet she later never talked about any specific theory being presented to her.

Another interesting discussion of student development was the knowledge by several of the resident assistants that development was individual in nature. As an example, Katie shared that "student development is all about self realization and that takes time and practice. No one can tell you how to live your life, they can only help you and guide you." Although later in the interview she discussed the fact that she learned about student development through teacher education classes and that her supervisor had discussed it, there was still no direct presentation of

student development theory. A second RA discussed individual experiences as well. Stephen shared that

Students bring different things to this university - they just don't come with open arms and free spirits and forgetting everything that has happened to them in their lives and so it is important to understand that student development - it's so subjective to the circumstance or to the case or to the student or roommates or an entire floor or house.

It was as if the resident assistants were espousing several of the central tenets of student development theory. Once again, the American Council on Education in 1949 described that

The student personnel point of view holds that the major responsibility for a student's growth in personal and social wisdom rests with the student himself. Necessarily, however, his development is conditioned by many factors. It is influenced by the background, the abilities, attitudes, and expectancies that he brings with him to college, by his college classroom experiences, and by his reactions to these experiences (p. 4).

Thus, the resident assistants were sharing concepts from over sixty years prior to today; however, the question remained, from who or where did this knowledge originate?

#### Student Development Theory

After the term student development was discussed, the participants were asked that if by adding the term theory on to that statement, was the meaning changed. Responses were varied with some respondents feeling as though adding



theory did not change the meaning to others who felt that theory made it sound more like a blueprint or plan of how to encourage development and still others felt that theory made it sound more academic in nature. Bobby had one of the more poignant examples of this when he stated that

Student development theory sounds like an essay that I have to read, but I won't. Student development theory makes it sound academic and to me personally, it makes it sound like what I do is a job. I like thinking that I do this because it is fun and student development theory makes me feel like what I do is planned, and strategic, and a reason why I do everything. Sometimes that is good but I personally shy away from defining what I do as that.

Thus, while he could state what student development was and was positive about it, the instant that theory was added to the mix it became less interesting to him.

Other responses in this area talked about theory becoming a plan for how to go about development. For example, Michael stated that "I would have to say it is the way you go about doing it - that is the definition of theory." This concept was interesting as theory in the researcher's opinion is a description of how development occurs along a theory, not a plan for how to develop students. However, RAs felt that theory would provide a plan for how to instill development.

### Resident Assistant Use of Student Development Theory

Overwhelmingly, RAs felt that they used student development theory. At UNI, 13 out of 14 RAs stated emphatically yes that they do use theory and the fourteenth RA felt that she used it subconsciously. At UW-La Crosse, five RAs definitely said that they use student development theory, three felt that they used it subconsciously and there was one lone dissenter stating that he did not use student development theory "because I respect that I wouldn't want to be forced to change into a way and I respect what they want to do and how they want college and I just kind of give them little hints and nudges and stuff." Thus, although this resident assistant stated that he does not incorporate theory, his response demonstrates that he still incorporates hints and nudges, perhaps similar to Nevitt Sanford's challenges that he balances with support (Sanford, 1967).

Since it was determined that resident assistants do indeed use student development theory, the next question is how do they incorporate it into their work? Eight of the fourteen UNI resident assistants referred to some use in programming while four discussed the use in referring residents to appropriate offices or individuals on campus.

Similarly, four of the nine UW-La Crosse RAs discussed programming while one discussed referrals. Two individuals discussed the use in every day conversations and how they push residents toward different experiences. However, perhaps the most interesting response was from Luna who stated that "knowing a specific theory could help me more." It was this insight that was refreshing in saying that she knew student development theory and used it in her work, yet she did not know specific theories.

An additional consideration on this topic was offered by Cindy. Cindy stated that she guessed that she used student development theory without realizing it. However, her discussion of how she incorporates it is as follows:

I try to be pretty intentional with what I do. I always say that I do everything I do for a good reason. I am very intentional but I don't particularly think like oh, this will make them. By providing them the opportunity to challenge themselves and providing the environment, but I don't specifically say oh this is step 1 - I don't break it down.

Thus, Cindy has reasons behind why she plans a program, has a conversation, or encourages interaction, but does not see it as a theoretical background.

From Whom the Resident Assistants Learned Student  
Development Theory

There were basically four options that the resident assistants offered up across both campuses. First, the majority of them had heard about student development theory from either their residence life coordinator or their hall director. Eleven of the 14 resident assistants at UNI and seven of the nine RAs at UW-L stated this. A second response was learning from other resident assistants and four RAs at UNI and four RAs at UW-L discussed this. Other responses included high school and college teachers, the RA Planners, the counseling center, and the central staff for the department of residences. Two individuals stated that they had never heard of student development theory before.

Where Their Supervisors Learned Student Development Theory

This was the first area where there were major discrepancies among staff members. At UNI, one supervisor had all five of her staff members state that she partially learned it in grad school while another only had one state that grad school played a role. The third supervisor at UNI only had two staff members state that graduate school played a role. However, other areas from which they learned theory included their roles as RAs, their roles as

professional residence life staff members, training sessions, conferences attended, or books that the supervisors have read.

At UW-La Crosse, six of the nine resident assistants felt that the experience as professionals was where their supervisors learned theory with only three of them mentioning graduate school. The professionals experience as an RA and learning it from students also provided outlets for education. However, I believe that Jason had the most interesting answer:

I would like to say the same way I did - but that begs the question where does it start? I think that ultimately student development theory came from observations people had on students and like I said - it is not something we explicitly state here, but I think that it came from other staff members' trial and error - seeing what works and what doesn't. I am sure that if you put student development theory - the term on it, they could come up with things about it, but nothing explicitly stated.

I found this to be extremely insightful as theory itself is consistently being developed and revisited. The fact that Jason, without a strong theoretical background, has grasped this concept and incorporates it into his work is truly amazing.

When They or Their Supervisors Learned Student Development  
Theory

This area was also different across the two schools. At UNI, resident assistants discussed the a-ha moments they had or when big situations came up that theory came into play. For example, Susan stated that "you have to experience it like in a major situation in order to understand it." Thus, many felt that it did not come into play until you were challenged with a big situation. Still others just felt that it was experience that was the teacher. Terry stated that "I think [residence life coordinators] try really hard to teach you early on about how to develop your residents, but I think that only does so much, but as you are in the job and you keep figuring out what works and what doesn't work, that kind of helps to show you how to develop them more in the future." Thus, regardless of the training that may be involved, the experience that a resident assistant has is paramount to their education on everything, including theory.

At the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, the theme of learning as professionals continued with Mary discussing the learning as being a "complete cycle." Many felt that the more years that professionals had under their belt the

more they would learn and use student development theory. However, other RAs at UW-L discussed learning it from the time that they began as a student. Bobby offers up what is similar to the theory to practice model:

I have talked to certain grads in our program and it seems like that they learn about theories through practice with their students through practicums and internships. I am sure that they are aware of the theories in the classrooms, but it is not until they get out in the field until they actually learn them.

Bobby is stating that while theory can be learned, it is not utilized until "out in the field." I found this concept intriguing as in the researcher's opinion, theory is developed for use in the field of student affairs, not merely to sit on a shelf. The researcher always hopes that is what all theorists desire for theory!

#### Materials Offered on Student Development Theory

This was a dichotomous topic area. At UNI, seven RAs stated that they had been given materials and seven stated that they had not. These materials included RA Manuals, flash drives from their coordinators, bulletin boards, contact information for others to share theory, On Duty Newsletters, and resident assistant focused websites. At UW-L, four stated that they had received materials on student development theory, four stated that they had not,

and one stated that he had not, but then followed it up with talking about receiving information on choice theory during RA class. Other comments about this area included the fact that RAs receive an abundance of materials from the first day of training and beyond; however, rarely are these materials labeled as student development theory. Thus, the resident assistants do not make the leap that student development theory materials have been given to them without the explicit statement that this is a student development theory.

#### Incorporation of Student Development Theory into Their Work

This area saw some consistency in responses. Seven out of nine resident assistants at UW - La Crosse and 6 out of 14 at UNI felt the way that resident assistants learn to incorporate theory is through experience. Whether it was referred to as trial by fire, trial and error, taking risks, or simply experiencing things, that was the way that learning takes place. An example of this came from Jason. He stated that:

I think a lot of it comes from gathering information from your peers and also understanding where they come from, but also a lot of trial by fire, trial and error - you find out what works and doesn't work. Maybe you put on a program and it flops and you tweak it a little bit and you put it on another year and it goes great. So I think a lot of it is mainly trial and



error, and also observing residents. I find it the longer I am being an RA, the easier it was to be able to take a step back and take a reflective look at my residents and think, where has this person come from, you know, residents I am close with. In my specific case, where has he come from when I first met him to know closing at the end of the year.

A few of them also discussed the readings that they do that are either on their own or given to them by their supervisor as the way that they learn. Also, several RAs referenced observing their supervisor or other RAs and then incorporating theory based on their observations.

One of the most interesting responses was from Luna. She stated that "with some stuff that I learn, I realize that it is how I do that - if I go to a conference and go to a program I go - Oh, I didn't know that is how I am supposed to implement a program, but I do that, so I am on the right track." Thus, she has learned from somewhere that in order to do her job correctly she follows a process, but then later learns what the theoretical background was for that practice.

#### What is not Understood about Student Development Theory

What is not understood was much more similar than what is understood. At UNI, 9 of the 14 stated something to the effect of exactly what it is while two more simply stated that they do not know "a lot!" At UW-L, seven of the nine

stated that they wanted more specifics on what it was while one stated that they did not know a lot. However, there were a few insightful answers.

First, Joanie held some frustration with theory.

Specifically, she stated:

Why do they make it sound so complicated? They make it seem so complicated and when it is broken down for us, it seems like basic common sense, but the way they lay it out, there was this one thing with a car - it looked so complicated and confusing on paper, but when they started talking about the general ideas, I thought that this is common sense...it is just redirected, refocused, and put to good use versus just letting whatever happen.

The researcher feels as though this is common among students, but Joanie was the only one to share this frustration with me. Theory can be seen as too complex whereas the practice of theory is quite simple.

The second comment was one seen earlier in other areas as well. Stephen stated that "I am pretty sure that some of the things through the theory I am doing already." This reiterates the fact that resident assistants feel as though they utilize student development theory without really having a background in that theory.

#### Final Comments from the RA Interviews

One of the most amazing things that the researcher took from the interviews was the pride in their positions

that the RAs take. All of them had a sparkle in their eye when they talked about it. Perhaps Erin can sum it up best when she says "the RA job is a phenomenal job - there are times where you are up until 5:30 in the morning or when you are just falling asleep after 3am rounds when the duty phone goes off or the fire alarm goes off and then you are up dealing with puke, but it is definitely worth it." When an RA can discuss late nights and dealing with vomit and still be positive, that is when it is apparent that the right individuals had been hired for the job!

#### Findings - Supervisors

##### Academic Work and Other Preparation

The three Residence Life Coordinators at UNI all attained their masters degrees and had varying numbers of courses on student development theory from one to three. One of the coordinators had completed her master's thesis on student involvement theory and how that impacts student development. Finally, one of the RLCs commented on her graduate program's focus on the theory to practice model and how that was the focus.

At UW-La Crosse, the three hall directors in the sample all completed their master's degrees, but also talked about their varying undergraduate education. One of

the Hall Directors was education focused and also completed a mixed master's degree that included both counseling and higher education, so counseling theory was a larger part of their program. However, all three had between two and three classes that touched on student development theory.

#### Training Offered to Resident Assistants on Student Development Theory

The three RLCs from UNI all discussed the fact that they had not done any specific training on student development theory. They discussed how they may talk one on one with a resident assistant about a specific situation and discuss a theoretical background. However, as Pomona stated, "I never explicitly said this is a student development theory." In addition, Rowena stated the fact that she used it "in-hall [in her] first few years" and how she "talked about theory when it was fresh in her mind from grad school."

This result was confirmed at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse as two out of the three stated that they had not done any training on the subject. Mike confirmed Rowena's comment when he stated that "the time that I would have been more likely to use it would have

been earlier." The third, John, stated that he had done the following:

I introduced them to Chickering, just knowing that they don't really have a theoretical background knowledge - and they may not care to know, but try to focus on some of the simpler theories - Astin's Involvement Theory, Perry's Theory, focusing kind of dualism, moving to more relativistic thinking - these are some easy ones that come to mind that are pretty parsimonious and easy to explain - also throwing [in] a little Maslow's Hierarchy of Individual Needs.

Additionally, Tom talked about the fact that "a lot of it happens non-intentionally, so this year, in this building, it has had a much different scope than everyone else."

Thus, there was little planned training that occurred in any of the staffs that were sampled during this study.

#### Materials Given to the Resident Assistants

The materials given to resident assistants were varied as well. At UNI, two of the three discussed the theory portion of the RA Manual that goes out to every RA. In addition, handouts and Paperclip Communications were discussed as other avenues. In addition, two discussed the fact that they knew that they had offered more on student development theory, but that they could not remember exact materials at this moment.

At UW-L, one hall director, Tom, went in depth with the materials given to his staff during training. He

discussed a binder that that included training activities, programming models and other items. In addition, he talked about formal meetings with his staff every week for one to two hours and then one on ones with each staff member either every week or every other week depending on the semester. At these meetings student development is also discussed. The second hall director, Mike, did not offer any materials on student development, but echoed Tom's sentiments about staff meetings and one on one time, in addition to the informal checking in that happens when RAs drop by his office. Finally, John discussed and handed out items related to Chickering and how the theory fits into their job description.

#### Uses of Student Development Theory by Coordinators and Hall Directors

This area offered numerous different responses for the supervisors. One responded that he did not believe that he used it that much due to his roots in counseling. Three talked about using it specifically in the areas of conduct. Two more discussed using it with multicultural student development for students from various backgrounds or with students who are going through the coming out process.

The only similar feeling was shared by five of them in some way and it referred to having theory in the back of their mind, or not using it intentionally, but using it as a framework. John talked about it as "it is kind of second nature and I sometimes catch myself reverting back to theory." Pomona also referred to this as she talked about using theory in conversations with students. She discussed this as follows:

Some students she touches on may be not necessarily student development, but it is communication, interpersonal development and how to have tough conversations with roommates, neighbors, even RAs on staff, with professors, family, that's a lot of what she does is how to be articulate instead of other things.

Thus, while the uses are varying, a majority have theory in the background of their mind while they are working.

Finally, Pomona may have summed it up best when she stated that "it was her favorite topic because it gives you a window and a way to articulate what you are seeing with students in a way that she would not have been able to articulate before."

A final area that was discussed was in the area of group development. Several of the supervisors discussed their observations on their staffs and student leaders and

how they incorporated group development concepts into their leadership.

### Other Areas from where Supervisors Learned Student

#### Development Theory

There were several areas from where the supervisors learned student development theory that was not tied specifically to graduate programs or classroom learning. First, five out of the six mentioned conferences and the various sessions that they attended. Second, three mentioned various readings on the topics whether provided by UMR-ACUHO, ACPA, NASPA, ACUHO-I, or other organizations. Third, two of them discussed the conversations that could ensue between masters level professionals who share a background in student development theory. Finally, one discussed their mentor specifically in this area. This occurred during his undergraduate days as his mentor "introduced me to the field of development theory and my actual internship was with him comparing psychology theory as it applies to student development theory." This was interesting as it was the first discussion by the supervisors of impact in their undergraduate program.



Undergraduate Roles of Supervisors and Exposure to Student  
Development Theory

The roles that the supervisors played in their undergraduate program definitely had an impact on their profession. There were various responses from being completely unaware of student development theory to being required to use Chickering in the first six weeks of the school year as a development plan for her residents in her role as an RA. Minerva also shared some of her RAs' thoughts when she stated that "I don't know if I would have thought that this was student development but maybe just generally development." Additionally, Pomona discussed the fact that she was exposed to student development theory even prior to being an RA as she was president of a leadership organization and her advisor exposed them to theory.

There were two interesting responses that I want to highlight. Mike discussed his experience as follows:

I don't know if I can tell you how I felt about it, I remember the absurdity of how it was presented - they had seven Barbie dolls that they had dressed to represent each of the seven vectors [as represented by Chickering]. It was my hall director and my assistant hall director presenting it. So I think it was part I am about to spend a year with these two and a part of this is really absurd.

This perhaps summarizes one of the researcher's feelings about theory - the fact that the way it is presented may have the greatest impact on how it is used.

As a second completely different example, John stated his experience:

I was introduced to Chickering - my mentor . . . came back from a month sabbatical while he was getting his doctorate, one of the first things he did with our whole campus RA staff was to introduce Chickering and there was a lot of mumbling and groaning because it was an academic component and we should have been doing teambuilding, but just looking at the other areas he drew from to create that. That was when I realized that it was a mixture of life-span development, some psychology, some processes, interpersonal communication - that is when I started to get a little more invested and realize that there is a whole another field out there of research.

Again, while some in John's experience were lamenting the way in which it was presented, John was able to view theory in a completely different way and incorporate it into his undergraduate practice.

### Findings - Comparative Analysis

#### Comparing RA to Supervisor

While the researcher entered into this study anticipating finding a large difference among RAs as a result of their supervisor, this did not exist.

At UNI, all RA participants stated that they did indeed use student development theory in their work as

resident assistants, regardless of supervisor. However, the interesting difference was in the discussion of where this was learned. One Residence Life Coordinator's staff all referenced her graduate program as where she learned it while another only had one of her RAs reference graduate school. In addition, materials offered to RAs on student development theory were across the board, regardless of supervisor. However, the amazing thing was that all of the RAs had received a manual with student development theory in it including Chickering and Kohlberg.

At UW-L, all RA participants stated that they used student development theory except one. In addition, all of them talked similarly about their supervisors learning it through past experiences or through graduate school.

As a whole, and when comparing supervisors directly to their resident assistants, the researcher would have expected finding more differences than what resulted. For example, Mike discussed the fact that he did not use student development theory that much and used more counseling theory. However, his RAs recognized, defined, and incorporated theory just as much as other supervisors both at his institution and the comparable institution. In addition, Minerva had by far the most theory based courses

and seems to be both the most passionate about theory and the most interested in continuing to learn about theory. However, her staff was one of the most consistent in stating that no materials had been given on student development theory and two flat out had never heard of student development theory before while two others discussed Minerva as being someone from whom they had learned theory only after further questioning. Thus, no information suggests that a supervisor's academic preparedness or self preparedness has any role with how a resident assistant becomes aware of, learns, or uses student development theory.

#### Comparing Campus to Campus

There were several comparisons across the campuses that were interesting to note.

First, all RAs at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse are required to take a course that discussed choice theory. Thus, a theory is put before them right away as an RA. However, at UNI, there is no theory course, yet they each receive a manual that has theory as one chapter. So while the methods are different, every resident assistant across the two campuses has been exposed to theory in some way.

The second difference was the areas of the resident assistant position that were least liked by the RAs. As discussed earlier, one school's RAs did not enjoy the posting policy and longer weekend duty, while the other schools RAs were frustrated at times by the balance challenges inherent in such a position and attempting to figure out time management. In addition, the least favorite tag was laid on paperwork only at one school as well.

Third, it was apparent that relationships were important to both the RAs and the supervisors. This was taken further when you could see words shared by the supervisor as incorporated into the students' responses. For example, Mike discussed how he tells his staff to care and that should be their primary role. This exact phrase was used by Jan when she described how she worked with her students.

Finally, the campus structure provided for some of the differences. At one campus with a more hierarchical supervisory structure, more comments were made about the central staff. At the other where the organizational chart is more flat, references were made to individuals by name.

This is not to say that one is better than the other in structure, it is merely an observation.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This chapter provides a discussion of the research questions, a discussion the results in the study, recommendations for practice, the limitations of the current study, and recommendations for future study.

#### Response to Research Questions

The initial research question posed in this study was as follows: Where do resident assistants obtain the knowledge of college student development theory and to what extent do they use it? The four sub-questions and the responses follow.

The first sub-question was to what extent are resident assistants aware of student development theory? The research demonstrates that while resident assistants for the most part feel that they can define student development and then student development theory, very few resident assistants are actually aware of specific student development theories. Even when a theory is presented in a manual or class, it is not recognized as a student development theory. Thus, while resident assistants may be aware of student growth and development, they are not aware

of the specific theories so prevalent in the student affairs field today.

The second sub-question asked how often resident assistants utilize student development theory. The responses to this question can be seen as two-fold. First, almost the entire sample felt that they used student development theory. This was seen in programming, referrals, or one on one conversation. However, so few of the study participants could actually define or discuss a specific theory. Thus, it is unclear whether resident assistants utilize student development theory or whether they merely utilize concepts of growth and development.

The third sub-question asked as follows: what is the nature of the relationship between how aware resident assistants are of student development theory and their supervisor's knowledge and / or use of student development theory? There appears to be no relationship between resident assistants' awareness of student development and their supervisor's knowledge or use. The most poignant example of this was in the case of Mike. He stated that he did not use student development theory because his background is in counseling and his operative lens was counseling. However, his resident assistants were able to



define, discuss, and incorporate student development concepts just as easily into their work as resident assistants who had different supervisors. Additionally, the use of student development theory concepts seemed to lessen as the supervisors became more removed from their graduate program. Whether this was due to the material not being right in front of them or other job requirements taking over is unclear.

The final sub-question asked what effect does a supervisor's academic preparation and self teaching play in their knowledge and use of student development theory? Again, there appears to be no relationship between academic preparation and self teaching by the supervisor and their use of student development theory. As an example, Minerva had the most academic preparation in her master's program, yet her resident assistants seemed to have less knowledge and use of student development concepts than other resident assistants in the study. While much of the style or relationship between the RA and the supervisor can be attributed to the supervisor, the academic preparation of the supervisor seemed to play no role.

### Discussion

There were several conclusions that could be drawn from the current study. First, it was apparent from the conversations with the supervisors that student development theory is used the most during the first year out of grad school and that the further away from grad school an individual gets, the less he or she uses it. This could be due to several reasons whether it be the fact that during graduate school, theory is a focus and many graduate programs put the theory to practice model to good use. Or it could be due to the fact that during the first year of a new position an individual attempts to learn the new system and put their own spin on it. Thus, by the time the individual gets to their second, third, fourth, or any year beyond, so much focus is on the work at hand that theory becomes a foregone notion.

As a result of this, refreshers for master's level professionals should be incorporated with sharing of new theories and those that have been updated. As an instructor in college student development theory, the researcher stays up on new theories through the incorporation of new textbooks, readings, and other avenues. However, professionals in student affairs may not

feel that they have the time to stay up on the topic with the many work demands placed upon them. Thus, offering more theory focused refresher sessions at conferences or within training for professional positions is a must.

Second, supervisors talked about having theory consistently as a framework or in the background, so while theory may not be a conscious portion of everyday life, it is still present. This is amazing to the researcher because it is basically stating that student development theory is used, but rarely intentionally.

When the researcher thinks about the reason behind why theory is typically developed, it is always with an intentional purpose and it attempts to explain some phenomenon or behavior. Even when this purpose ends up being something completely different at the end, it is still with an intentional purpose in mind. For example, Chickering was attempting to develop work for faculty when he developed his theory, yet student affairs "would come to have the most impact on his later thinking and would do the most to implement his ideas in practice" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 66). Thus, by only having theory in the background, as opposed to upfront and center, being intentional in plans and actions become lost!

However, one other option for consideration is the fact that theories become so internalized that they are not noticeably utilized in practice, yet practice is guided because of the internalization. While this does eliminate the intentionality of theory, the researcher is pleased with this thought process to at least know that theory is being utilized in some way.

Third, the way in which student development theory is presented is so important. From supervisors' experiences, student development theory can be looked at as overly academic or as absurd, as John and Mike experienced, respectively. In addition, merely offering it in a manual that is given as a resource is not effective either as recall was non-existent for UNI RAs. At UW-L, choice theory was remembered and it was not necessarily in a positive manner. Comments were made about it being too technical in manner or too complicated. Thus, presenting theory in an engaging manner that breaks it down and makes it applicable seems to be the best way to encourage RAs to use theory in their practice.

Fourth, student development theory is rarely recognized if not stated as "Student Development Theory." Thus, a supervisor could talk about Kohlberg, Chickering,

or even Maslow, and unless specifically stated as a student development theory, the resident assistants do not even realize that they are hearing about student development theory. This seemed to occur even more frequently in one on one conversations. Supervisors would talk about utilizing theory in situational conversations with their RAs, yet not add the moniker of student development theory. Thus, an RA could be a part of these conversations, learn about development, but never understand that it was from a theoretical perspective. This is not to say that it is a bad practice to never clue RAs into the fact that theory is involved, it is just a limitation of this study in recognizing knowledge and use of theory.

Finally, one thing was very clear. The resident assistants, while varied in class standing, race, background, and other characteristics, as a group came across as very caring and outward focused. Almost every single individual talked about growth and development in their students and how they impacted that development. Thus, the question that has to be answered is does theory become such a part of the resident assistant position that it is inherent without even being educated on theory? Or does theory get incorporated through one on one

conversations and other interactions between the resident assistants and their supervisors without it being planned? Either way, the researcher is thankful that RAs are as strong in their positions as they are and as eager to assist residents in their growth and development.

#### Recommendations for Practice

There are several things that can be put into practice to increase the recognition, knowledge, and use of student development theory. First and starting in a top down fashion, individuals with master's degrees should not leave education on student development theory at the end of their graduate study. Refresher courses in student development should be developed either in institutions or in a large on-line community to assist in staying up to date on current theory. Due to the fact that theory changes yearly, if not monthly, these refreshers would need to be coordinated by individuals who are committed to researching updates and new theories. It would be the researcher's hope that by being educated on theory that has changed or developed since graduation that masters graduates would continue to use theory and not lose it as this study suggests occurs. Additionally, by staying up to date with current theory discussions, supervisors would be able to

have more options from which to pull their theoretical repertoire. Thus, supervisors would be able to draw from a variety of theories and may find more theories with which they would be comfortable.

The next suggestion for practice is to have supervisors of resident assistants utilize more intentional discussions about student development theory. With the increased knowledge as encouraged in the prior recommendation, supervisors would be able to better incorporate a wider range of theory options. While many individuals may gravitate toward one specific theory due to its simplicity, its wide applicability, or a personal preference based on a mentor's encouragement, all of the theories would be at the finger tips of the supervisor. Thus, discussions could center on a student's development or even the resident assistant's development with theory as the backbone. Additionally, stating the fact that while talking about Chickering, for example, that the supervisor is indeed talking about a student development theory will enable resident assistants to recognize and later discuss student development theory as a whole.

The third recommendation for practice is to have student development theory become part of the foreground

and not merely in the background of an individual's thoughts and reasoning for handling various situations. While goals and learning outcomes seem to be part of practice for many student affairs professionals, rarely do these goals and learning outcomes have a theoretical aspect. By encouraging theory to become part of the context for practice, it will better integrate theory into the entire student affairs department. When theory becomes integral, more conversations will ensue and more knowledge will be shared thus creating a cycle for inclusion of theory into practice.

The fourth recommendation is that if student development theory is as important to the field of student affairs as is stated by NASPA, ACPA, and other organizations, an emphasis must be returned to it. Even when viewing the *NASPA Journal* or *Journal of College Student Development*, very few articles focus on theory. If the journals would focus one portion of every issue on theory in some form, more individuals would be exposed to it than currently occurs. As stated earlier, the researcher stays abreast of current topics through the teaching of a course on College Student Development theory. This forces the researcher to learn about new theories on a



yearly basis. Through this research new theories are sought out; however, it is often through on-line means that these theories are found and delivered. If there were a journal that focused on theory, even if just presenting a small piece bi-monthly; other professionals would be able to stay abreast of current trends as well.

Finally, so much of the resident assistant position is focused on the individual. The RAs counsel students, listen to students, provide interventions to students, and program. While programming may seem not focused on the individual, it is often said that if a program reaches just one student, it was worthwhile. If theory can become even in the background knowledge of that RA in the individual focus on students, it can only be assumed that the individual would benefit from it. The researcher realizes that this would mean more training and more time on the part of the supervisor and the resident assistants, however, this time should be seen as valuable and worthwhile.

The researcher is not suggesting that a full student development theory course is needed for every resident assistant across this country. However, presenting two or three basic theories such as Chickering's Vectors of

Development, Perry's Model of Intellectual and Ethical Development, and Astin's Involvement Theory would provide resident assistants the knowledge needed to better work with students. The theories could be interchanged to best fit with theories that are most valued by the supervisor, and thus most easily utilized by the supervisor. In this way the supervisor could discuss these theories with the resident assistants and the theory would be in the background of both the supervisor and the resident assistant in both of their work with students.

#### Limitations

As with all studies, there were a few limitations. First, this study only incorporated two schools and six supervisors. While the information received provided a context for some results, more research needs to be completed on a varying range of schools including small private, large public, and all institutions in between.

Second, the sample size was smaller than planned for three out of the six resident assistant staffs. While one staff was only short by one participant, two of the staffs only had two RA participants a piece, short of the five planned per staff. While answers were typically consistent across the sample and thus not overly surprising based on a

limited number, it is possible that the staffs represented by only two staff members were outliers.

Third, due to the fact that the researcher is a housing professional at the University of Northern Iowa, some respondents may have not been as open as believed. While all participants have a good relationship with the researcher, it may have had either a more positive or negative result on the overall responses.

The final limitation is due to the fact that it was a single gender of supervisor at both schools as represented in the sample. At UNI, all supervisors were female and at UW-L all supervisors were male. Again, while the researcher does not believe that it had a large bearing on results; it is a fact worth noting.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research. The first serves to take care of several of the limitations by replicating the current study with a larger amount of participants and across varying types of institutions. In addition, the sample should be varied across gender so that it is not singular in nature.

The second area would involve a different type of research method. While interviews enabled the researcher

to get rich information and understand from the participant's point of view, it did not allow for a great deal of analysis of the specific work patterns of the resident assistants. Thus, incorporating observation as a data collection tool would enable the researcher to view how college student development theory concepts are being integrated into the work of resident assistants. While it is difficult to imagine how this could be accomplished due to the fact that the subjects are not in a lab and thus would be difficult to be observed completing all of their daily tasks, the researcher hopes that it would be an obstacle that could be overcome.

The final suggestion is far more reaching. Research needs to be done on the field of student affairs. Does the field produce knowledge of student development theory? Do resident assistants inherently learn student development because of the job that they do? Or do resident assistants already have knowledge of student development and growth prior to becoming resident assistants? Do resident assistants get hired based on the qualities that make them care about student development and growth? All of these questions could be developed into full studies with a large number of participants. When completed, these studies could

guide both the development of future student development theories and the ways in which current theory can best be put into practice.

## REFERENCES

- American Council on Education (1937). *The student personnel point of view*. Washington: American Council on Education.
- American Council on Education (1949). *The student personnel point of view*. Washington: American Council on Education.
- Arboleda, A., Wang, Y., Shelley, M. C., & Whalen, D. F. (2003). Predictors of residence hall involvement. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(4), pp. 517-531.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement theory: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 25*, pp. 297-308.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2009). The activity of meaning making: A holistic perspective on college student development. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(6), 621-639.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Blimling, G. (1999). *The resident assistant: Applications and strategies for working with college students in residence halls*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.
- Bryant, A. N. (2007). The effects of involvement in campus religious communities on college student adjustment and development. *Journal of College & Character, 8*(3), 1-25.
- Burkard, A., Cole, D. C., Ott, M., & Stoflet, T. (2004). Entry-level competencies of new student affairs professionals: A delphi study. *NASPA Journal, 42*(3), 283-309.
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Cuyjet, M. J., Longwell-Grice, R., & Molina, E. (2009). Perceptions of new student affairs professionals and their supervisors regarding the application of competencies learned in preparation programs. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(1), pp. 104-119.
- Dalton, J. and Crosby, P. (2008). Challenging college students to learn in campus cultures of comfort, convenience and complacency. *Journal of College & Character, 9*(3), 1-5.
- Davis, T., & Laker, J. (2004). Connecting men to academic and student affairs programs. In M.D. Coomes, & R.DeBard (Eds.), *New Directions for Student Services* (pp. 47-57). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Drum, D. (1980). Understanding student development. In W. H. Morrill & J. C. Hurst (Eds.), *Dimensions of intervention for student development* (pp. 14-38). New York: Wiley.
- Delworth, U. (1989). Identity in the college years: Issues of gender and ethnicity. *NASPA Journal, 26*, pp. 162-166.
- Denzine, G. M., & Anderson, C. M. (1999). I can do it: Resident assistants' sense of self-efficacy. *Journal of College Student Development, 40*(3), 247-256.
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D.S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D.S., & Guido, F., Patton, L.D., & Renn, K.A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Forney, D. S. (1986). Helping undergraduate residence staff use theory to support practice. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 27*, 468-469.
- Furr, S. R., & Elling, T. W. (2000). The influence of work on college student development. *NASPA Journal, 37*(2), 454-470.

- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Harris, F. (2010). College men's meanings of masculinities and contextual influences: Toward a conceptual model. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*(3), 297-318.
- Heineman, D., & Strange, C. (1984). Uses of human development theory by entry-level practitioners in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 25*, 528-533.
- Herdlein, R. J., III (2004). Survey of chief student affairs officers regarding relevance of graduate preparation of new professionals. *NASPA Journal, 42*(1), pp. 51-71.
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2007). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Kiessling, M. K. (2010). Spirituality as a component of holistic student development: Perspectives and practices of student affairs professionals. *Journal of College & Character, 11*(3), 1-10.
- Kitchener, K. S. (1985). Ethical principles and ethical decisions in student affairs. In H. J. Canon and R. D. Brown (Eds.), *Applied ethics in student services. New Directions for Student Services, 30*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Knefelkamp, L., Widick, C., & Parker, C. A. (1978). Editors' notes: Why bother with theory? In L. Knefelkamp, C. Widick, & C. A. Parker (eds.) *Applying new developmental findings (New Direction for Student Services, No. 4, pp. vii-xvi)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D. (2009). What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(6), 683-706.



- Love, P. & Talbot, D. (2009). Defining spiritual development: A missing consideration for student affairs. *NASPA Journal*, 46(4), 614-628.
- Moran, C. D. (2009). Conceptualizing identity development: Unmasking the assumptions within inventories measuring identity development. *NASPA Journal*, 46(5), 469-481.
- Murphy, P. M. (1988). *Student life and services: Centennial histories series*. Stillwater, Oklahoma: Oklahoma State University.
- Pascarella, E. T. (2006). How college affects students: Ten directions for future research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), pp. 508-520.
- Pizzolato, J. E., Brown, E. L., Hicklen, S. T, & Chaudhari, P. (2009). Student development, student learning: Examining the relation between epistemologic development and learning. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(5), 475-490.
- Plato, K. (1978). The shift to student development: An analysis of the patterns of change. *NASPA Journal*, 15(4), 32-36.
- Pope, R. L., Mueller, J. A., & Reynolds, A. L. (2009). Looking back and moving forward: Future directions for diversity research in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 640-658.
- Pontious, M. W. (2008). Calling the shots: Using a required ethics course to promote intentional moral development in student conduct violations. *Journal of College & Character*, 6(5), 1-7.
- Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). (2001). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Reisser, L. (1995). Revisiting the seven vectors. *Journal of College Student Development*, 6(6), 505-511.

- Ricci, J. P., Porterfeld, W. D., & Piper, T. D. (1987). Using development theory in supervising residential staff members. *NASPA Journal*, 24(4), 32-41.
- Rodgers, R. F. (1989). Student development. In U. Delworth, G. R. Hanson et al. (Eds.) *Student services: A handbook for the profession*, No. 2, pp. 117-164.
- Sanford, N. (1967). *Where colleges fail: The study of the student as a person*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schroeder, C. C., & Mable, P. (1994). *Realizing the educational potential of residence halls*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schuh, J. H., Stage, F. K., & Westfall, S. B. (1991). Measuring residence hall paraprofessionals' knowledge of student development theory. *NASPA Journal*, 28(4), 271-277.
- Sherman, G. L. (2011). Hermeneutics and the traditions of student development and learning. *Journal of College and Character*, 12(2), 1-10.
- Sottile, J. M., Iddings, W. J., & McDonough, M. G. (1997). *The role of human development and student growth among first and second year college students*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Hilton Head, SC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 413828)
- Stage, F. K. (1989). College outcomes and student development; Filling the gaps. *Review of Higher Education*, 12(3), 293-304.
- Stage, F. K., Schuh, J. H., Hossler, D., & Westfall, S. B. (1991). Residence hall staff use of student development theory. *NASPA Journal*, 28(4), 292-297.
- Stange, V. (2002). *Housing officers perceptions of resident assistant competencies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Dakota.

- Stonewater, B.B. (1988). Informal development assessment in the residence halls: A theory to practice model. *NASPA Journal*, 25(4), 267-273.
- Strange, C. C., & Contomanolis, E. (1983). Knowledge perceptions of human development theory among student affairs masters students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 24, 197-201.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). How college students' engagement affects personal and social learning outcomes. *Journal of College & Character*, 10(2), 1-16.
- Thomas, R., & Chickering, A.W. (1984). Education and identity revisited. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 392-399.
- Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. A. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 577-596.
- Waple, J. N. (2006). An assessment of skills and competencies necessary for entry-level student affairs work. *NASPA Journal*, 43(1), 1-18.
- Wilkerson, J. M., Brooks, A. K., & Ross, M. W. (2010). Sociosexual identity development and sexual risk taking of acculturating collegiate gay and bisexual men. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(3), 279-296.
- Winston, R. B., Ullom, M. S., & Werring, C. J. (1999). Student paraprofessionals in residence halls. *New Directions for Student Services*, 27, 51-65.
- Wise, S. L. (1986). The use of ordering theory in the measurement of student development. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 27, 442-447.
- Wu, M. B., & Stemler, S. E. (2008). Resident advisor general intelligence, emotional intelligence, personality dimensions, and internal belief characteristics as predictors of rated performance. *NASPA Journal*, 45(4), 528-559.

Zirkle, K., & Hudson, G. (1975). The effects of residence hall staff members on maturity development for male students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 16(1), 30-33.

APPENDIX A  
E-MAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Date

Dear (Respondent):

Residence halls provide a variety of services to students; however, one of the central goals of any residence hall is to provide experiences that encourage growth and development in the students living in them. One of the most important parts of the residence hall is the resident assistant staff. However, where does the staff learn how to do all that they do? Typically that responsibility falls on their supervisor, which is what I would like to learn more about.

You are invited to participate in a research study that will discuss resident assistant work and its relation to supervisor preparedness. An interview of approximately one hour in length would be scheduled with you. This interview will be tape recorded with your permission. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the interview and pick themes from this interview. A follow-up e-mail will be sent to you detailing what was found during your interview. It will be requested that you read and confirm that what was written is what you were saying. After returning confirmation or changes, your name will be changed so that no information can label you in the subsequent write-up of the information. Finally, all audio recordings and notes will remain intact until the completion of the study at which time they will be destroyed.

There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this project; nor are there any direct benefits. However, your participation is extremely valued.

To become part of this study, please respond to this e-mail with your name, e-mail, and phone number. A letter of informed consent will then be sent to you and further contact will be sent to schedule the interview.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at (319) 273-2249 or by e-mail at david.schmid@uni.edu. If I am not available when you call, please leave a message and I will call back. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director of Research Services, Anita Gordon, at (319) 273-6148 or by e-mail at anita.gordon@uni.edu.

Thank you in advance for your help. I appreciate your assistance!

Sincerely,  
David Schmid  
Residence Life Coordinator and Adjunct Instructor  
Ed.D. Candidate in Educational Leadership: Postsecondary Education  
University of Northern Iowa

APPENDIX B

MEMO TO UNI PARTICIPANTS WITH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## MEMORANDUM

To: (Participant)

From: Schmiddy

Date: (date)

RE: Informed Consent Forms and Interviews

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research! Enclosed with this memorandum are two copies of the informed consent form and a label. Your instructions are as follows:

- 1) Please read through the informed consent form. If you agree and continue to be interested in participating, please sign both copies. Keep one for yourself and place the second one back in the envelope
- 2) Place the label over your name on the envelope so that it is now addressed to me.
- 3) Place the envelope back in campus mail.

As soon as I receive your completed informed consent form I will call to schedule your interview. Should you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 319-273-2745.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate and I look forward to your interview!



APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW  
INFORMED CONSENT**

Project Title: Resident Assistant Work and Its Relation to Supervisor Preparedness

Name of Investigator(s): David Schmid

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in a research project conducted by the investigator to assist with completion of his dissertation and his doctoral work through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

**Nature and Purpose:** The study is designed to determine resident assistant work and its relation to their respective supervisor's preparedness for the position. Aspects of the resident assistant's work will be focused on, in addition to supervisor academic preparation and other preparations for the position.

**Explanation of Procedures:** You have responded to the e-mail invitation that was previously sent to you which initiated this informed consent form. An interview of approximately one hour in length will be scheduled with you. This interview will be tape recorded with your permission. After the interview, the researcher will transcribe the interview and pick themes from this interview. A follow-up e-mail will be sent to you detailing what was found during your interview. It will be requested that you read and confirm that what was written is what you were saying. After receiving a return e-mail confirming what was communicated or offering changes, your name will be changed so that no information can label you in the subsequent write-up of the information.

All audio recordings and notes will remain intact until the completion of the study at which time they will be destroyed.

**Discomfort and Risks:** Risks to participation are minimal.

**Benefits and Compensation:** No compensation will be given for inclusion in this study

**Confidentiality:** Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. You will be interviewed in person and your interview will be tape recorded, your interview will be typed out and themes pulled from the information, and then the summary will be sent back to you to verify that what was pulled out is what you meant it to be. After this point, all of the information linked to you will be changed to an alternative name and no linkage to your interview will be available. The tape of your interview will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project. Finally, the summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all.

**Questions:** If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact David “Schmidy” Schmid at 319-273-2745 or the project investigator’s faculty advisor, Mike Waggoner, at the Department of Educational Leadership, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2605. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

**Agreement:** I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Signature of participant)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Date)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Printed name of participant)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Signature of investigator)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(Date)**

David Schmid  
**(Printed name of investigator)**

APPENDIX D

E-MAIL SENT TO UW-LACROSSE HALL DIRECTORS WITH INFORMED  
CONSENT FORM ATTACHMENT

## E-MAIL

Date: (Date)

RE: Informed Consent

Good afternoon! Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research! Attached to this e-mail is a copy of the informed consent form. Your instructions are as follows:

- 4) Please read through the informed consent form. I will bring two hard copies with me to our interview and have you sign them at that time so that each of us receive a copy.
- 5) Please send me a list of e-mails of your RA staffs. I would like to send your RAs out the request to participate on Monday if at all possible.
- 6) Reply back to me with confirmation that you would like to continue on with the research.

I am wondering if you will be around next Friday as I would travel to LaCrosse to complete your interview. Please let me know if that would work. In addition, should you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 319-273-2745.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate and I look forward to your interview!

APPENDIX E

E-MAIL SENT TO UW-LACROSSE RESIDENT ASSISTANTS WITH  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM ATTACHMENT

## E-MAIL

Date: Date

RE: Informed Consent

Good morning! Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research!  
Attached to this e-mail is a copy of the informed consent form. Your instructions are as follows:

- 1) Please read through the informed consent form. I will bring two hard copies with me to our interview and have you sign them at that time so that each of us receive a copy.
- 2) Reply back to me with confirmation that you would like to continue on with the research.
- 3) Send me back your requested time for an interview. I am going to be in La Crosse on Thursday, May 5 starting at Noon and will have interview times every half hour until 7pm. I am contacting all of the RAs who have agreed to participate, thus, first come first serve with times and I will confirm that with you!

In addition, should you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 319-273-2745.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate and I look forward to your interview!

David "Schmiddy" Schmid