MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AMONG

TRIO PROFESSIONALS

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of American higher education frontline workers in student affairs who reported regular use of mindfulness practices. Incorporating reflective practices like mindfulness on college campuses (Palmer, 2009) for frontline staff in student affairs, who work directly with students, could provide more opportunities to increase the awareness of these practices through staff development and staff training. Ten participants provided their experience in focus group interviews through Zoom. Within focus group interviews, written responses, and surveys, three major themes emerged from their understanding of their roles as frontline staff. These themes were: (1) the collective connection to "good" in student affairs; (2) the perception of mindfulness and equity in Higher Education; and (3) intentional care to the overall well-being of themselves and others. Flowing from thematic analysis of the data, this study's findings divide into a two-pronged discussion regarding (1) consideration of contemplative practices within the organizational environment and (2) participant perspectives on the value of their mindfulness practices. This research suggests that mindfulness can improve the personal well-being of employees. Organizations can highlight in their mission the value of contemplative practices and recognize the awareness that spiritual capital supports employee resilience, that spiritual intelligence can strengthen an employee's internal psychological well-being. Recommendations from the study support learning opportunities, discussion of mindfulness practices, and intentional personal and collective reflective opportunities can increase awareness about the value and connection to student affairs frontline staff. These practices can create valuable insight into building a contemplative organization for higher education organizations.

Keywords: mindfulness, contemplative practices, frontline employees, student affairs, employee well-being, TRIO programs

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, a pandemic crisis impacted our world. The World Health
Organization named COVID-19 a deadly virus that, less than 90 days after entering the
United States, created a complete quarantine, restricting person-to-person interaction to
virtual communications and magnifying technology use not only for Americans but for
the entire global community. Schools shut down, businesses closed, public transportation
was strictly limited; only essential businesses – hardware stores, grocery stores – were
open with limited hours and restricted access. At the precipice of national lockdown, the
public challenged quarantine restrictions and social unrest impacted the daily
environment. A series of African American deaths at the hands of law enforcement
officers resulted in overflowing and graphic reports from every media outlet, change
platform organizations demonstrating in the streets, and normalizing the military
presence in America's cities. The deaths of Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020, and
George Floyd on May 25, 2020, sent the nation into a media tailspin that was closely
observed by the rest of the world. By May of 2020, over 100,000 COVID-19 deaths were
reported in the United States.

On August 8, 2020, over five million cases were reported in the U.S. In October 2020, the nation was shocked to learn that the President of the United States of America and the First Lady both tested positive for COVID-19, confirming for many naysayers that the virus was "real." On December 27, 2020, nineteen million cases were reported in the U.S.; two days later a confirmed case of a new variant, SARS-CoV-2 was reported in the U.S. Within the same year, a polarizing presidential election occurred, causing an even greater political divide among Americans. In 2020, the US News and World Report recognized the pandemic's endurance and other social, political, and cultural impacts as an exceptional undertaking for citizens. Americans looked toward 2021 as a return to normalcy; however, the most shocking event in recent history occurred on January 6, 2021, as a mob of 2,500 domestic insurgents stormed and occupied the United States Capital Building in Washington, D.C., shock waves reverberated through schools, business, and entire communities, compounding the stressors of the previous year with this new cataclysmic event.

On January 20, 2020, Joe Biden was inaugurated as the 46th president of the United States. The next day, as twenty-five million U.S. cases of COVID-19 were reported, President Biden released The National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness. The U.S. reported over half of a million COVID-related deaths by February of 2021. As the anniversaries of the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd passed, it was reported that there were an additional 229 African American killed by law enforcement officers in the 365 days since George Floyd's death rocked the nation. These events led to increased participation in socio-political movements such as Black Lives Matter (Milligan, 2020).

During these uncertain times, emotional and mental strain from the COVID-19 quarantines; implementation of the new, associated virtual work setting; and, for many, the plan to return to a still COVID-impacted workplace created an environment of heightened anxiety. Social unrest compounded as racial tensions loomed both in and out of the workplace. Constant political chaos and pummeling from social media platforms further worsened the bruised psyche of the American people. Americans of all ages and backgrounds joined protests on either side of the political spectrum. Polarizing speeches from public figures de-emphasized moderate points-of-view. Colleges and universities across the nation became venues for debate and demonstration as students and faculty returned to campus.

Political science scholar, Daniel Drezner, noted that any typical daily stressor further magnifies anxiety and tension (Milligan, 2020). COVID-19 stressors to the higher education community depleted the workforce and impacted the workflows of the campus. Virtual service delivery became the norm that tens of thousands of front-line staff were required to provide. In historical transition periods, monumental events often force political, social, economic, and technological change, changing the way organizations function. During the COVID global pandemic, higher education institutions were no exception (Bennis, 1989). This study was conducted within this changed environment.

Prior to the impacts of COVID-19, most U.S. institutions of higher education had a significant component of face-to-face learning, or a mix of online and face-to-face learning, and considered this their normal operations.

Face-to-face learning is a people-intensive enterprise. Managing and running residential facilities, dining operations, athletics programs (varsity and

recreational), and other aspects of student life require an army of people (Kim,

2020, para. 5).

Due to the demands of jobs in student affairs divisions, frontline employees in both "normal" and COVID-impact environments experience limited opportunities to reflect on individual and emotional reactions and values (Adams et al., 2006). Front-facing positions (defined as direct interaction with students) deemphasize the individual and create a need for stress management practices, such as mindful practices. Exploring how staff on the front lines in student affairs serve students and gaining insight into how contemplative experiences serve as a coping mechanism for academic-related stress for student affairs employees may illuminate ways to promote internal stability and self-awareness for the individual worker. Ideally, the organization of higher education would benefit from reduced employee turnover and stress, resulting in increased student retention and satisfaction.

Background of the Study

Staff in higher education institutions are a critical part of the college or university mission. As such, staff development that further focuses holistic institutional efforts can result in significant positive impacts for the many students whom staff serve. In the Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice (2010) which addressed the professional development of student affairs staff, Peter C. Mather, researcher of positive psychology in higher education, encouraged strategies in positive psychology, parallel to neuroscience, to support staff and demonstrate how their role incorporates the institutional culture, system, and structure. Mather (2010) further stated that encouraging student affairs divisions to understand the interconnectedness of the emotional, cognitive,

and moral experiences for staff using an integrated approach to human development, may improve the well-being of an employee whose role is essential to an institution's functions. Theories in organizational behavior and management, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1998), focused on an individual's personal growth and perspective in the workplace. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs addressed psychological safety and the opportunities to reach self-actualization in work environments. Rendón (2009), who primarily addressed faculty, students, and administrators in her book on the interconnectedness of teaching and learning through contemplative practices, further discussed this holistic opportunity by addressing the complementary balance of teaching and learning connected with internal and external knowledge for students and all higher education employees. By necessity, this also included the staff who served and supported students. Through the reflective process, concepts such as wholeness, harmony, and interdependence support higher education's attempt to reach a holistic approach to education and student development.

In all types of organizations, the pursuit of organizational outcomes often overshadows the equally important need for internal exploration and inner dialogue for employees in the organizational space (Manning, 2018), limiting their opportunities for reflection and influencing organizational performance. Within the wellness component of higher education, emotional well-being (Jang & Jeon, 2015), social interactions, and other intelligence forms drive creative solutions to university culture (Mather, 2010). According to Leif (2007), "Education cultivate[s] the beliefs beyond the verbal and conceptual to include matters of the heart, character, creativity, self-knowledge, concentration, openness, and mental flexibility" (p. 1), which requires intrapersonal

development and the cultivation of internal resources. This approach suggests that academia provides essential skills and practices that improve self-management regarding collaboration, stress management, and time management. These skills could benefit staff, particularly frontline staff, because frontline staff often balance organizational metrics and student needs. More support to employees who directly support student needs could increase overall well-being among those who support many campus functions and operations. When staff ignore their needs and deplete intellectual and emotional reserves, this may lead to errors and overall customer dissatisfaction (Glomb et al., 2011). While this research study focused on the individual, it is essential to understand that incorporating mindful practices into employee wellness for one person could help to create positive outcomes for the whole organization.

University staff is one of the largest growing populations on campus oriented to maximizing the human potential to support students (Tierney, 2008). Therefore, performance metrics are foundational to measure progress among these professional staff who work frontline with students in academia (Colyvas, 2012) and remain present in the mission of daily duties. The responsibilities of frontline student affairs staff require quick responses (Rendón, 2019) from staff who work daily to balance the intersections of organizational direction and student needs. The required levels of responsiveness to students' needs and the campus community could impact frontline staff's emotional experiences and management. Likewise, frontline staff in higher education lack the tenure protection some faculty enjoy. These factors could preemptively generate anxiety about their job security to the point of exhaustion. Research makes clear that front-facing workers' daily management of this tension (of no job security? What tension?) could

create imbalances at the intersection of organizational goals and student needs. Organizations often focus on the demands required to meet organization metrics, ignoring employee needs, and overvaluing job-dependent outcomes and workplace stressors that negatively impact staff. While organizations have employee wellness programs to support staff, organizational demands increase internal conflicts of promoting healthy personal practices to maintain the individual workers' well-being (Beer, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Organizations could help alleviate some workplace stressors by encouraging work/life balance and modifying position types and duties. However, Morgan (2006) stated that "organizations [also] thrive on and at times actively create stress as a means of promoting organizational effectiveness" (p. 311). For example, technology allows advancement for student services and communication. At the same time, management could use the same technology to increase performance by connecting with an employee's daily work activities through online software and creating increased control and record of activities that negatively influence the work environment. Another stressor may arise through a professional attempt to advance in one's career. For example, a staff member could show dedication to the organization through fully embracing the goals and missions of the institution, accepting long work hours beyond the forty-hour work week, and even missing meals and rest to complete projects and daily duties. These chronic stressors decrease employee well-being (Morgan, 2006). Despite everyday realities, frontline employees in student affairs face increasing and diverse workloads (Mullen et al., 2018) that remove opportunities for reflection (Webster-Wright, 2013) and increase employee

attrition (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al. 2018). This increased workload limits innovation to meet organizational demands (Rendón, 2009).

However, some frontline staff in student affairs use contemplative practices (Beer, 2010), such as mindfulness, to balance personal well-being, restore internal stability, and build awareness supporting reflection (Palmer, 2009). It could be that these practices that help to regain frontline staff's healthy cognitive processes (Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017; Qualia et al., 2015) and positive emotions may, in turn, be beneficial in the higher education workplace (Beer, 2010; Mather, 2010). Understanding the lived journeys of frontline student affairs employees who use mindfulness could provide a frame of reference for those seeking to support staff and leverage positive impacts on students and the organization of these frontline workers.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have significance for research, theory, and practice. The implications of each will be further discussed in Chapter five.

Research

While most college and universities utilize metrics, in some instances, higher education institutions also encourage individual characteristics of employees, including originality, critical thinking, creativity, and increased awareness using self-reflection and analysis (Mather, 2010). However, few studies address mindfulness in higher education to demonstrate the connections between intrapersonal reflective activities developed by professional staff (Rendón, 2009) and its influence on healthy workplace environments. The findings of this study contribute toward filling that paucity of knowledge.

Theory

In this study, a qualitative approach provided an interpretive theoretical lens to find meaning about how participants translated and perceived mindfulness within the constructivist worldview (Patton, 2015). However, no *a priori* theoretical framework guided the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I applied an *a posteriori* framework after participant data. This approach required an application of the theoretical lens after themes emerged from the data. In this case study, I used the following theories: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (addressing psychological safety and the opportunities to reach self-actualization in work environments), the contemplative cognition framework (identifying processes of intention, attention, and awareness) and the spiritual framework (seeking personal growth and development within an organization).

The terms mindfulness and contemplative practices can be challenging to define. Looking for experiences involving intention, attention, awareness, and the processes surrounding those terms can help classify a mindful activity or contemplative practice with a set of valuable criteria. The contemplative tree, generated to illustrate the current types of practices, helped participants and the researcher identify the practices that characterized contemplation and the association with mindfulness practices. Given the exploration of the literature, the data-driven analysis and findings of the study contributed to an increased understanding of the applicability of one or more of these theories to studies of contemplative practice in higher education.

Practice

Exploring mindfulness adds to the limited literature on the holistic pursuit of well-being and emotional stability. Incorporating reflective practices like mindfulness on college campuses (Palmer, 2009) for frontline staff in student affairs, who work directly with students, could provide more opportunities to increase the awareness of these practices through staff development and staff training.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of U.S. higher education frontline workers in student affairs who reported regular use of mindfulness practices.

Research Question

In connection with the purpose, the following research questions helped direct the study:

- How do frontline workers in student affairs describe their mindful practices?

- How do frontline workers in student affairs perceive that their experiences with mindfulness practices influence their daily work with students?

- How do frontline workers in student affairs perceive that their experiences with mindfulness practices influence their abilities to navigate the organizational environment?

Research Design Overview

Qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) offered an interpretive perspective focused on student affairs staff experiences with mindfulness practices in the work environment. The qualitative inquiry helped the researcher explore the meaning of

frontline experiences in student affairs (i.e., the study's purpose) in ways that do not presuppose or privilege any experience or perspective.

Generally, qualitative methods help the researcher understand how participants make meaning in their daily environments (Patton, 2015). For this study, a qualitative approach explored the lived experiences of frontline student affairs staff using mindfulness practices and how they believed their practices could influence their experiences in the work environment. Focus group interviews and visual documents helped communicate participants' experiences. The researcher in this qualitative study also served as an instrument and sought to analyze the data inductively using reflection, coding, theming, and other qualitative analysis practices.

Assumptions

I assumed participants were authentic and truthful about their disclosures of their mindfulness practices. Additionally, the researcher hoped that participants were open and honest about their descriptions of the work setting practices and how they used contemplative practices.

Population

As opposed to using a general sample of frontline student affairs professionals, a targeted sample of TRIO student affairs staff was the population for the research. Participants were employed at a U.S. college or university receiving federal TRIO funding for programming for this study. Further, only frontline student affairs employees who had a caseload of participants and identified as TRIO staff served as participants in the research. Focus on this population imposed two conditions expected to produce the richest data for this study: (1) a known criticality of meeting student needs at the

frontlines of service, and (2) required annual objectives of federally funded grants (organizational metrics). While this study was not designed to be generalizable, a focus on TRIO staff set the stage for understanding the role and influence of mindfulness practices used by these frontline employees in student affairs and, in the case of this study, specifically those employed in TRIO programs.

Definition of Key Terms

Definitions of key terms help to better understand the research and identify meanings specific to this study within student affairs and mindfulness practices.

- *Higher Education -* Higher education institutions referred to as four-year, two-year, vocational, and trade school post-secondary education institutions (beyond the high school diploma). To encompass TRIO professionals who work in student affairs-related areas, student affairs objectives must include post-secondary education entrance. Awarded degrees for these institutions include professional certificates, associates, bachelors, masters, and doctorates.

- *Student Affairs -* A division of student affairs that includes a reporting structure of staff who work in offices that encompass areas of enrollment management, advisement, student conduct, counseling, residence life, and TRIO programs. The organizational structure includes an officer of student affairs, sometimes known as a vice president of student affairs, typically a member of a top-tier reporting system (Davis & Cooper, 2017).

- *Frontline Student Affairs Staff -* Frontline staff are student affairs professionals who work directly with students and provide frontline customer service that carries out organizational goals. Frontline student affairs staff facilitate tasks

including workshop programming, individualized meetings, and retention

initiatives designed to support the students (Schuh et al., 2017).

- *Case Management -* Case management is the task or function of staff who help

  students create action plans based on student needs. This generalist model

  included advocacy, referrals, and monitoring focused on students' needs and

  issues (Havermans et al., 2018). General areas that traditionally have case

  management tasks include helping professionals in counseling, social work, and

  education (Harrison, 2014; Lynch & Glass, 2019).

- *TRIO -* TRIO Programs are retention-based academic programs that provide

  services to students from disadvantaged circumstances. The federal grants include

  eight targeted programs to serve participants meeting a criterion of low-income,

  first-generation, and students with disabilities through the academic pipeline

  beginning in middle school to postbaccalaureate programs (Federal TRIO

  Programs, 2020).

- *TRIO Staff -* TRIO staff are student affairs staff who work directly with first-

  generation, low-income, and students with disabilities using grant objectives as

  metrics for continued funding. TRIO staff help students prepare for entrance into

  post-secondary education or assist with the retention of students while at the host

  post-secondary institution in their persistence and graduation goals (Federal TRIO

  Programs, 2020).

- *Contemplative Practices -* For this study, contemplative practices are mental and

  physical activities that allow individuals to increase their skills for coping, paying

  attention, and accessing compassion in decision-making in the academic

environment (Ergas, 2013). The concept of a contemplative practice suggests an idea of reflection and awareness (Rendón, 2009). One strategy that intentionally provides intrinsic understanding and reflection is a contemplative practice called mindfulness, a term used interchangeably with contemplative practices.

- *Mindfulness -* Mindfulness, used interchangeably with the term contemplative practice, is the act of being presently aware and paying attention, without judgment of the thoughts, emotions, or the state of a person at the time (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

- *Well-being -* Well-being utilizes a comprehensive approach that identifies nurturing positive emotions through intrinsic-focused goals and happiness-focused activities, including strength identification, appreciation, and service (Mather, 2010). These activities may come about through nurturing mental, physical, and social aspects of the individual (Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017).

- *Stress -* The physical or emotional impact from one's environment that influences bodily or mental pressure, negatively impacting individual well-being (Mullen et al., 2018).

- *Employee Burnout -* An increase in workload resulting from organizational demand where stress increases and job performance decreases, as a result (Lim, et al., 2010).

- *Attrition -* The loss of student affairs professionals from the organization. Most often, attrition was reported as due to stressful and undesirable working conditions within the nature of supporting institutional needs (Marshall et al., 2016).

Summary

This chapter identified the need to understand how staff may use mindfulness practices to address the demands made on them as frontline student affairs staff members. As workloads of frontline employees increase, and circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic impact the workplace, pathways that encourage reflection and awareness may support staff and limit employee attrition. Chapter two reviews the literature to consider current knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of frontline staff within student affairs, specifically within TRIO programs, and the impact of mindfulness practices within the work environment.

Road Map

Chapter one provided an introduction and overview of the study. Following this summary, Chapter two provides a literature review of frontline employees in student affairs, specifically in TRIO programs, and mindfulness practices. Chapter three provides the research design and a description of data analysis. Chapter four details data themes as a result of data analysis. Finally, Chapter five documents the study's findings, limitations, and future potential studies that could direct new avenues for understanding mindfulness practices among student affairs professionals.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the history of American higher education, shifting organizational

culture and context led to increase student staff development (Manning et al., 2017;

Schuh, et al., 2017; Thelin, 2017). Over time, universities competed with other local

universities for student enrollment, increasing the need for more staff (Harrison, 2014;

Schuh et al., 2017). Colleges and universities increased recruitment and enrollment by

increasing campus activities and departments (Student Personnel Point of View, 1987).

The Student Personnel Point of View (1937, 1949, & 1987) was a publication of

written reflections of student affairs professionals throughout the 19th century. In these

documents, the authors highlighted agreements brought together by the initial

culmination of staff practices across the United States from early meetings and

conferences. The first publications highlighted common practices among university

employees and aided in the development of staff training materials. These documents

highlighted how the faculty and staff worked together to prioritize the academic mission

of learning. While student learning development occurred with faculty inside the

classroom, student well-being also occurred outside the classroom with student staff and

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and evolved into academic affairs and student affairs (Manning et al., 2017; Schuh et al., 2017).

Today, the student affairs role is no longer solely about supporting the student in learning and development and academic achievement (Manning et al., 2017; Martin & Seifert, 2011). Student development areas now include counseling, career planning, recreation programming, and student centers, which require personnel and demonstrate the need to hire more staff (Manning et al., 2017). Institutional administrators now assign more responsibilities to the student personnel areas, assess the effectiveness of services, and account for resource costs - determining if a department is a cost center or a revenue center. As a result, administrators require more work and innovation from an already taxed university staff group. In new university operational models, the employees are collectively known as frontline staff, who work directly with students as first responders, providing the necessary support needed to retain students on a college campus (Lynch & Glass, 2019).

In 2020, COVID-19 created both a disruptive yet transformative opportunity for colleges and universities (Weinberg, 2020). Significant societal changes in the United States forced echoing cultural, political, social, economic, and technological transformations in higher education (Bennis, 1989). COVID-19, as a global pandemic, was particularly impactful to institutions and all campus. For example, universities balanced many additional obligations, accommodating the loss of revenue generated from residence halls, auxiliaries, and bookstores while increasing online technology platforms and working to retain staff (Burki, 2020).

Both historically and today, staff play a significant role and embody the largest-growing group of employed individuals in higher education institutions. Staff are key components of the foundation of daily operations (Sneyers & De Witte, 2017; Tierney, 2008). However, staff members' required pursuit of organizational outcomes often overshadows the equally important need for internal exploration as an employee which mutes the necessary internal dialogue a person needs to function as a frontline employee who solves problems for students (Good et al., 2016; Manning, 2018). Professional development of staff opportunities for reflection and development could potentially support organizational ecosystems. In traditional businesses, the wellness component of emotional well-being (Bowen & Moore, 2014; Good et al., 2016; Jang & Jeon, 2015; Mullen et al., 2018), social interactions, and other forms of multiple intelligence types has driven creative solutions to organizational culture and systems (Good et al., 2016; Mather, 2010).

In today's environment, a comprehensive approach to support the university ecosystem through the intrapersonal and interpersonal strategies of staff suggests academia provide training and resources that improve self-management, such as exposure to mindfulness practices that positively support collaboration, stress management, and time management. When staff on the frontline of customer service with students ignore their needs and deplete intellectual and emotional reserves to problem solve and quickly address student issues, the environment can lead to errors and overall dissatisfaction (Glomb et al., 2011) for staff members and students.

First, this chapter will address stakeholders in higher education, followed by a discussion of student affairs and the demands on frontline staff for support services,

student advocacy, and case management. Next, a discussion of the literature investigates the contemplative, human needs, and spiritual ideologies of personal exploration of mindfulness within the organization. Subsequently, an overview of mindfulness practices in higher education will address current higher education uses. A contemplative cognition framework will help situate practices that involve attention and intention through cognitive exploration, identifying that meditation is one of many practices associated with contemplation and reflection. Mindfulness and contemplative practices will be further defined.

The Higher Education Investment

Staff members are an organizational resource directly connected to investment in student retention and graduation. The obligation of institutions to provide more resources, such as expanding student affairs offices and services, positively influences student achievement, as well as institutional performance (Eaton, 2010; Huisman & Currie, 2010). However, those changes come with an increase in pressure to make services effective and operational through staff and resources.

State and Federal Investment

Due to increased fees, resources, and staff required to meet accountability standards for accreditation (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Finney & Kelly, 2010; Marshall et al., 2016; Thelin, 2017), universities have advocated at both the federal and state level for greater levels of funding allocations in educational budgets. Accountability efforts, such as accreditation, were systematic ways that government bodies required institutions to meet performance measures and gain more direct control of academic programs. As responsibility shifted from internal mechanisms within private and public organizations

to external regulatory processes and imposed accountability, additional staff were needed to support areas of hierarchal, legal, professional, and political requirements (Douce & Keeling, 2014; Huisman & Currie, 2010) to ensure effective business operations.

The federal government also collaborated with institutions through indirect and direct influence on students with the use of student assistant programs (Chambers et. al, 1986; Finney & Kelly, 2010). As an invested stakeholder in students, the federal government utilized student financial aid and federally funded grants, like TRIO programs, to support citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds (Finney & Kelly, 2010; Thelin, 2017). Drawing upon the influence of elected state government officials, political interest groups, and various federal legislative acts, the federal government directly impacted our nation's economic development through the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA). The HEA established regulations to ensure post-secondary accreditation and imposed additional financial responsibilities for institutions accepting federal funding for students and federal program grants. Under the HEA, the government began to allow universities and non-profits to supplement student programs with grants, which increased staff and services and the overall investment in students.

Investment of Federal TRIO Programs

The HEA increased the need for more front-facing or student-focused personnel to achieve the goals of the TRIO grants. Title IV of the current HEA addresses student aid and grant-funded programs, including proposals for TRIO program grants. TRIO funds currently operate through legislative approval, including political advocacy by and with state politicians. Traditionally, the Higher Education Act renews every five years and includes the legislation needed to provide TRIO grants to universities (Hegi, 2018).

Within the Higher Education Act, there are eight TRIO programs. Each program serves students who would be the first in their immediate families to graduate with a four-year college degree, also identified as first-generation college students. Additionally, students must meet federal income criteria for poverty. A percentage of students served must also have a registered disability (Federal TRIO Programs, 2020). TRIO professionals typically work in student affairs divisions and use student affairs models to guide their support of students. Staff in TRIO also have case management responsibilities and serve as frontline employees. Staff in this role must understand both the grant requirements and the university mission to meet program and organizational goals. Services include advice and assistance in course selection, mentoring, coaching, referral services, tutoring, educational and cultural workshops, and discussions regarding graduate school (Federal TRIO Programs, 2020; Schuh et al., 2017).

Once an institution receives TRIO operational grant funds, post-secondary educational institutions, both two-year and four-year, host the grant on their campus. Grants typically reside in the student affairs division, which provides additional advocacy and student success services. There are eight TRIO programs to support students at varying levels of education, including secondary education (grades six to twelve). The primary responsibility of TRIO staff is to retain and graduate cohorts of students both in secondary and post-secondary education. Students must self-select to participate in TRIO programs. While the government provides opportunities for universities to support students through grant funding, colleges and universities have also increased services needed to retain students by creating additional offices to support student services and

retention beyond enrollment and advisement. This, too, increases frontline services (Manning, et. al, 2017).

Institutional Investment

Over time, federal, state, regional administrators, and college and university boards of trustees became more invested in supporting the operations of colleges and universities. These units maintained financial aspects and accreditation, directly and indirectly influencing organizational operations. College and university presidents relied on academic and student affairs officers and directors to maintain the required academic and financial responsibilities required of local, state, and federal guidelines (Schuh et al., 2017). When executive leaders at institutions recognized the potential for internal changes, they began to consider tuition rates, completion rates, quality monitoring, quality reviews, changing tasks, and related duties of enrollment for offices and staff that focused on retention (Eaton, 2010; Thelin, 2017).

Student Affair Investment as Educators

The student affairs educator's role with students has persisted and evolved as student needs continued to grow over time (Hevel, 2016; Long, 2012). Student affairs educators are higher educational professionals who support students in their academic and social integration on campus. Students encounter student affairs staff starting when the students are recruited and applying to their colleges and universities; these relationships can continue until they graduate.

McNair et al., (2016) advocated that all employees on a college campus have educational and leadership roles and assumed the title of educator. McNair et al., (2016) referenced the theoretical work of situated learning by Lave and Wenger (1991). Situated

learning means that a person's role is situated, or defined, by what they do, what they see, and what they learn (Lave and Wanger, 1991). In higher education, an inclusive educator brings creativity and wisdom from all areas on campus into the context of their work and expertise. Situated learning also says that faculty, administrators, and staff daily interactions with students in an educational environment could signify value to the institution (McNair et al., 2016). As one of the fastest growing types of personnel on a college campus, student affairs staff continuously dedicate themselves to student needs outside the classroom environment and contribute solutions to challenges that are created by the constant change surrounding education (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Schuh et. al, 2017).

History of Student Affairs Personnel

Overall, student affairs professionals support student growth by providing many services and often become role models and mentors, serving in many ways to positively influence retention and graduation (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Long, 2012; Martin & Seifert, 2011). Contemporary student affairs professionals continue to evolve in areas of support related to housing, orientation, volunteer and service learning, counseling and health services, and other various areas depending on university and student needs (Manning et. al, 2017; Martin & Seifert, 2011). Student affairs areas play a significant role in the context of decision making to ensure student achievement (Eaton, 2010). Historically, students enrolled in post-secondary education have needed assistance in course selection decisions, student payments to the university, and other student services outside of the classroom (Manning et al., 2017). However, from early on, simple transactional customer services could not provide adequate resources for student success.

In the broader view of higher education, the university's investment in the student as a whole person promoted a common goal among institutions and their community members (Morgan, 2015). Publications like the *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937, 1949, & 1987) brought forth one of the first documents to culminate common practices among student affairs staff and university communities (Chambers et al., 1987). Some of these practices include:

- Support to the academic mission of the institution

- Belief that each student is unique

- Belief that students' feelings affect thinking and learning

- Knowledge that environments outside of the classroom impact learning

- Necessity of informed citizenship

- Students' responsibility for their own actions

In today's global society with complex ideas, a college graduate should have the skills to communicate with diverse coworkers and teams, enact critical thinking, and make informed decisions; and exercise authority in a leadership role; all from the college experience (Barham & Winston, 2006; Chambers et al., 1987). Views from publications such as the *Student Personnel Point of View* help to holistically shape the staff who in turn shape the graduate.

Student Affairs Personnel Point of View

While a student affairs division is a foundational part of the contemporary institution's organizational structure, student affairs did not exist in the colonial era. Faculty originally served as *in loco parentis,* translated as "in place of parents," in the college environment (Hevel, 2016; Long, 2012). In the 1920s, students attended college

while faculty created the rules and regulations to address conduct and expectations, both on and off campus.

As time passed, faculty began to focus more efforts on their disciplines and interests and engaged more with graduate students (Hevel, 2016). Undergraduate students became more interested in holistic pursuits, participating in activities such as sports, fraternities, and other extracurricular undertakings involving the mind, body, and spirit (Hevel, 2016; Long, 2012). The diminishing involvement of faculty left administrators at land grant universities to enforce rules and regulations by hiring professionals known as "deans of men" and "deans of women" (Hevel, 2016; Long, 2012). With increased staff, students began to receive services involving vocation and career planning in addition to rules and conduct. Additionally, physicians, whether faculty in medical studies or solely medical professionals in field, began providing medical health services to students (Hevel, 2016).

Initially, the American Council on Education developed the publication entitled the *Student Personnel Point of View* (*SPPV*) (1937, 1949, & 1987), most known for the formal emergence of student personnel areas at universities (Chambers et al., 1987; Manning, et. al., 2017). Student staff established their roles on campus environments and shared experiences within their work area, and student affairs became a more prominent entity in college environments. The *SPPV* highlighted the roles of staff as student affairs offices interacted with students and operated within the institution. The *SSPV* focused on the professional practice, the historical changes that influenced this practice, and the collective sharing of assumptions and beliefs that emerged around the changes and practice. Historical changes, such as World War II, created inclusionary goals of

democracy for all, international exploration, and solutions to social problems within higher education. The revised goals included in the *SPPV* positively contributed to the universities' diverse differences using teaching and learning models, assisting both faculty and staff as they reflected on the community's values (Chambers et al., 1987; Long, 2012). While it was a consensus among professionals that students should receive equal treatment (Long, 2012), higher education faced a difficult road because of students' continually changing needs.

Student Affairs Staff and Roles

As student affairs staff provide more than customer service and carry out organizational goals, student affairs professionals of all types play a key role in students' successes (Harrison, 2014; Jansson, 2010). Student affairs employees who provide frontline services, such as those in enrollment management roles, meet students daily and oftentimes address basic student needs before providing academic resources (Harrison, 2014; Morales, 2014). Maslow's hierarchy supports the human motivation framework within student affairs environments during their college experience. Staff investment in students beyond enrollment transactions creates more staff and campus connections, which provides safety nets and positively impacts retention (Douce & Keeling, 2014; Wilson et al., 2016). These responsibilities in daily work mean staff are frontline with students providing both basic support and advocacy. Staff often find themselves moving beyond transactional support to assist them with other connections that further develop their personal growth. Frontline staff establish relationships with students that help students to succeed towards their self-actualization within the learning environment.

Frontline Student Services

Students must pay their fair share of the cost of attendance, making them customers who engage in transactional services associated with application and admission, enrollment, and graduation (Thelin, 2017). As costs vary by institution, students must make payments toward their education, sometimes in conjunction with state and federal funding, which requires a service-based interaction with frontline staff in student affairs (Finney and Kelly, 2010; Thelin, 2017). These service-oriented areas often include admissions, recruitment, registration, bursar payments, financial aid processing, academic advisement, career services, and other functioning areas that provide direct services to students as customer and consumer of education (Schuh et al., 2017).

Frontline staff are employees in an organization who typically are first to interact with customers and may serve as the only point of contact between students and their colleges and universities. These staff members take on an immense responsibility for ensuring customer satisfaction (Engen & Magnusson, 2018). In an educational setting, the student is roughly equivalent to the customer. As a frontline employee and often a first responder to students, staff encounter many operational processes. Frontline staff take on the tasks needed to ensure business operations in many areas of student affairs, having the potential to innovate creative solutions to student support challenges.

Studies within higher education and in other fields identify staff as first responders and as key to innovations. In a study conducted by Engen & Magnusson (2018), frontline employees contributed to creating innovations at both the employee and management level in any business or industry. Front-line employees, such as TRIO staff,

work in higher education, generate ideas, implement processes, and report advice on program effectiveness. Understanding the effect that a front-line employee can have on the efficiencies of business operations can help an organization streamline processes and manage organizational resources.

While staff contribute to key processes, job challenges are inevitable and can impact employees positively or negatively. Operational challenges can emerge when job demands increase and job expectations are no longer fully aligned; this is also known as role conflict (Coelho et. al., 2011). In a study of front-line staff conducted by Coelho et al. (2011), role conflict within the job allowed staff to positively utilize intrinsic motivation and creativity to support innovation to daily operations. Student affairs staff may encounter many opportunities to review efficiencies and manage role conflict when encountering varying issues brought forth by the fluctuating student needs and competing college environments (Burke et al., 2016). Job complexity, associated with role conflict, can help to increase intrinsic motivation and creativity (Coelho et. al., 2011). Coelho et al. (2011) and Engen & Magnusson (2018) agree that, in providing front-facing services, frontline employees address customers with variable needs and contribute to creative solutions; these problem-solving roles may include creator, reporter, developer, advisor, implementer, and executor (Engen & Magnusson, 2018).

Student Advocacy and Case Management

Contemporary student affairs areas also include advocacy and case management (Harrison, 2014; Havermans et al., 2018). When student affairs professionals holistically support students outside of the classroom, they encounter students who need additional resources, encouragement to self-advocate, and staff advocacy for supportive services.

When staff connect student to resources such as food, finances, health or other community resources, the staff operate as case managers. This working definition allows using the case manager role with TRIO staff as all TRIO participants have needs (financial and acclimation, as examples) specific to their eligibility status that require wrap-around services before staff can provide academic services. When student affairs professionals deal with supporting students beyond enrollment, they allow higher level professionals such as counseling professionals to better address more serious or critical issues such a crises-focused incident. However, as student affairs professionals work directly with students, the student affairs staff move into helper roles, foundational to student needs.

The case management function in student affairs emerged from a recognition of the need for additional resources that allow the student to better focus inside the classroom. Staff training may include strategies for goal setting, motivational coaching, and the use of individualized action plans (Harrison, 2014; Jang & Jeon, 2015). In an article written by Adams et al., (2014), case management in higher education was a method to connect students in distress to resources that assist in resolving a person's concern. The case manager was the staff who helped coordinate, advocate, monitor, and evaluate the person in need on a college or university campus. Further in the article, Adams et al., (2014) compared social work theory and case management standards which outlined case management in student affairs. Adams et al., (2014) identified that the use of a student affairs case management model to address student's needs compliments the views and theories associated with student affairs advocacy and the importance of increasing efforts of care for the students.

Manning and colleagues (2017) identified case management characteristics among an effort-of-care model. Similar to case management, professionals worked closely with students, provided emotional compassion, and understanding to student needs, and created connected safety net resources with other offices on campus. While frontline services support enrollment services such as bursar payments and student enrollments, case managers could address setbacks which prevented or caused problems leading up to enrollment. In this instance, both frontline staff and case managers needed to provide empowerment and positive motivation for students, which allowed students to take on greater responsibilities. When staff put more effort towards student needs and concerns, staff sometimes interact with students who disclose trauma, typically before they are referred to counseling centers. Interacting with students in an emotional state has sometimes depleted resources of time and energy for student affairs staff and created what is known as secondary trauma (Lynch & Glass, 2019; Manning et al., 2017). While addressing student needs utilizes a greater use of staff resources beyond transactional services that occur within offices such as admissions, advisement, and enrollment, the work to support the student is essential.

Attrition in Student Affairs

While necessary, institutional responsibilities and an increased number of employees have led to fast-paced educational work environments, creating stressful daily situations in addition to an increase in case management responsibilities (Lynch & Glass, 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). Frontline student affairs staff sometimes work in confined spaces, in close proximity to peers, and encounter bureaucratic management styles, in addition to increased leadership demands (Lynch & Glass, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016;

Mullen et al., 2018). As higher education adds lively student events and infinite opportunities for academic exploration to draw more enrollment and satisfy the current consumer savvy student population, staff loads intensify to compensate for increased student needs and organizational goals (Bender, 2011; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). A work pattern where staff care for others first and themselves last leads to stress, which negatively impacts the organization through decreased performance and employee attrition (Havermans et al., 2018).

Stress

Throughout the literature, student affairs professionals have been shown to leave the profession at rates averaging 40% to 60% within five years of initial employment at a postsecondary institution (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Marshall et al., 2016). Many studies identify stress as a significant contributor to staff loss in student affairs (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018; Thompson, 2018; Wilson et al., 2016). Specifically, Mullen et al. (2018) examined student affairs professionals to address employee job stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover. In this quantitative, survey-based research using 789 participants from over 122 post-secondary schools, researchers found that job stress and burnout correlated with increased levels of work dissatisfaction in student affairs. The study found that well-being in one's professional life can predict attrition in service-oriented work environments.

Burnout

Stress can be a result of increased demands beyond an individual's ability to cope with an environment, taxing a person's emotional resources (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018). Burnout is a commonly reported factor related to attrition among

31

student affairs professionals (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Marshall et al., 2016). Burnout, related to stress, is the consistent contact with stressful daily work environments for extended periods of time creating emotional exhaustion (Mullen et al., 2018).

Marshall et al. (2016) substantiated the increase in stress and burnout. In their mixed method study, they reported that up to 63% of those who work in student affairs experienced stress during the workday. In the study, Marshall et al., (2016) found that 51% of participants felt that their workload was excessive. While participating staff felt like they had adequate mentoring and education credentials in preparation for the student affairs profession, they also felt like they might have benefitted from more training to deal with the work requirements. In the Marshall et al., (2016) study, respondents believed that initially knowing more about staff challenges, such as the difficulties for upward mobility and increases in work demands, would serve as valuable insights to new employees. Student affairs environments encouraging the balance of personal life and rigid work weeks could improve the employee experience and potentially reduce burnout and attrition in student affairs (Beer et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018).

Investigating Employee Wellbeing

Student affairs research has highlighted that well-being in an individual's professional life can predict attrition in a student service-based work environment (Mullen et al., 2018). Mather (2010) recommended nurturing positive emotions, making intrinsic-focused goals, and practicing happiness-focused activities that include strength identification, appreciation, and service. Positive psychology, parallel to neuroscience, could help student affairs areas understand the interconnectedness of the emotional,

cognitive, and moral experiences as an integrated approach to human development (Berkovich-Ohana et al., 2019; Webster-Wright, 2013b). To support staff, supervisors could encourage practices, such as personal exploration, to encourage career-sustaining activities. These activities may include intentional work-life balance, recognition of positive job aspects, and professional development training for continuous learning (Beer et al., 2015; Morgan, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2011). In supporting employee well-being, exploring the nontraditional yet effective strategies such as mindfulness and other contemplative practices can add to the literature on strategies and training curriculum that inform stress management (Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017).

Mindfulness practices have been shown to positively support faculty in the classroom (Berkovich-Ohana et al., 2019; Webster-Wright, 2013b), and mindfulness as an incorporated practice in the work environment has positively impacted the workplace (Dane, 2011; Mrazek et al., 2012). The following section discusses literature on how mindfulness practices include the theoretical lens of spirituality. Addressing spirituality in the workplace, separate from religion, is shown to have positive impact on employees (Duerr, 2004). Theorists, including the work of Manning (2018), Morgan (2006), and Duerr (2004), offer the opportunity to look closer at new models that involve personal explorations that benefit the whole organization. Within these concepts, mindfulness practices could positively impact the educational structure of staff and daily work environments.

Mindfulness in the Workplace and Task Performance

There is research on mindfulness in the workplace that investigates whether the practice improves employee productivity. Studies related to task performance proposed

that mindfulness is a state of consciousness focusing on a person's internal awareness to the present-moment and its relation to the external work environment (Dane, 2011). Many researchers have investigated cognitive functions and their relationship to work and productivity. Activities such as mind-wandering can limit productivity; mind-wandering is when there is a change in thoughts unrelated to the tasks at hand (Mrazek et al., 2012). Mindfulness, a present moment state of awareness, is an opposite concept from mind-wandering also addressed in workplace studies. Mrazek et al., (2012) found that mindfulness decreases the undesired act of mind-wandering, therefore increasing task performance.

Providing training opportunities that use mindfulness techniques can lead to a reduction in mind-wandering and improve productivity (Mrazek et al.,2012). Mindfulness has also been identified in the improvement of cognitive functions such as attention, cognition, emotion, behavior, and physiology (Dane, 2011; Good et al., 2016). Research on mindfulness and its influence on task performance, conducted by Dane (2011), found that mindfulness, as a state of awareness, can both support and inhibit certain tasks. When an employee is engaged in an active environment, utilizing mindfulness can assist in the focus needed to complete a task with which they are familiar. On the other hand, mindfulness might not be as helpful when employees lack the expertise to carry out duties. Findings from Dane (2011) also indicate that mindfulness and other forms of mindfulness practices can positively influence outcomes related to employee relationships and well-being (Dane, 2011; Mrazek et al., 2012).

While contemplative practices and mindfulness research indicate an approach beneficial to staff, some researchers have identified potential risks, ethical challenges,

and unintentional results when incorporating mindfulness training (Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

Mindfulness is highly researched in psychology and has been found to impact ethical

decision making (Shapiro et al., 2006, 2011). Researchers such as Morgan (2015) discuss

the practice of mindfulness in educational courses such as business, economics, and legal

studies as potentially beneficial as students move into the associated professions.

Mindfulness has influenced organizations both positively and negatively in areas of

ethical considerations and stages of employee perception when engaged in mindfulness

(Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Safe and effective mindfulness programs necessitate trained

practitioners and resources for counseling, when practicing contemplation. Qui & Rooney

(2019) identified that some practices of stillness and mediation can potentially trigger

unwanted memories or decelerate work productivity if instructors lack training or do not

identify as practitioners of Buddhism. While growing interest has led to over 4,000

scholarly articles (Qiu & Rooney, 2019), the understanding of mindfulness training and

its implications in the workplace is still identified as novel (Grossenbacher & Quaglia,

2017; Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

Reflection and Growth in Organizations

Theories in organizational behavior and management, such as Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs, focused on an individual's personal growth and perspective in the

workplace. Addressing activities in the workplace that incorporate reflection and growth

was complementary to positive psychology's approach to industrial organization

(Manning, 2018; Mather 2010). In the book *Maslow on Management* (1998), Maslow

applies the term self-actualization to those working in industrial plants, as illustrated in

Figure 1. The figure clarifies how work becomes a part of the self and considers how

workers address psychological health. Pairing theory that addresses human needs with an organizational spiritual framework allows for exploring mindfulness practices in frontline staff who work daily with students. Morgan (2006) also discusses the importance of human needs. He studied the emergence of human resource departments and their role in the organization. He found that physiological need, such as wages and salary, remained at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy. While salary was foundational to an employee's human needs, it was not the only motivation for an employee's behavior or longevity in the workplace. However, employees who explored personal identity and found self-actualization in their work impacted their work environments positively. When an employee can explore varying levels of the hierarchy, the benefit supports both the organization's operational functioning and employees' individual needs (Morgan, 2006).

Figure 1

Ways that organizations meet employee needs on Maslow's Hierarchy
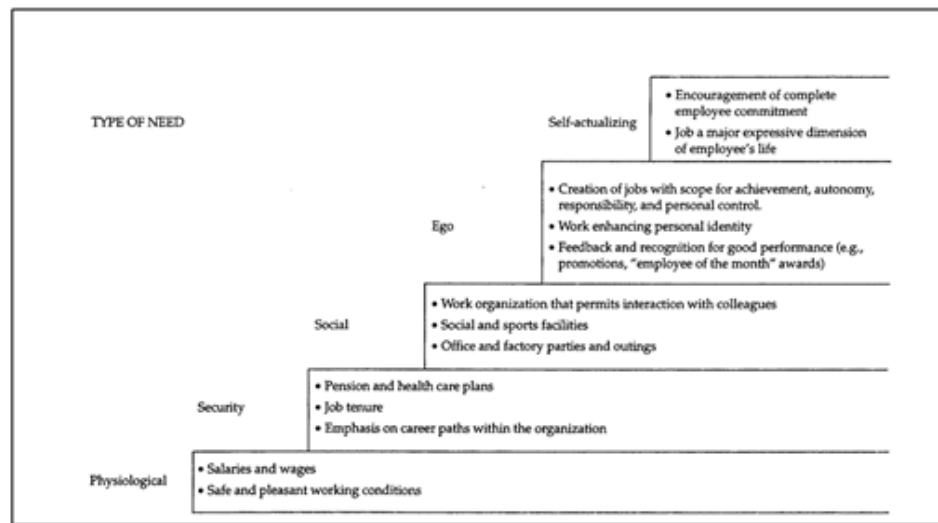
Spirituality in Higher Education

Interestingly, another concept related to reflection and personal growth is spiritual models in organizations and in higher education. While spiritual ideals provide the value of spiritual development for the student (Astin, 2016), when it comes to office functions and employees, American colleges and universities identify first with the bureaucratic model of operations rather than with the pursuit of growth and independence (Morgan, 2006). Correspondingly, most in western society understand the separation of "church and state," especially in public colleges and universities. When institutions view the spiritual model as a religious act, there is an effort to limit the religious imposition on an individual's legal rights within the educational environment (Manning, 2018). For this research, religion is defined as a formalized practice associated with a system of faith and belief (Rendón, 2009). Spirituality is defined as a personal practice that creates internal awareness of reflection and individual growth (Rendón, 2009).

Spirituality in the workplace may appear to present itself as a new-age idea, even too new for the modern organizational theory models, portraying overly optimistic views (Manning, 2018). However, Zohar (2010), one of the original theorists to address the topic of spirituality with the organization, found that elements such as vision, power, and leadership align within the spiritual perspective and the organizational functions. Zohar (2010) uses the two terms, spiritual intelligence, and spiritual capital to address organizational spirituality and create a spiritual model. Within the spiritual model, recurring connections and flattened hierarchal models connect leaders, followers, and coworkers. The development of cooperative relationships encourage connection rather than separation to communicate and improve academic unit's functions (Morgan, 2006;

Tierney, 2008). Within spiritual capital, the researcher identified the opportunity to explore internal resources to include:

> …the wealth, the power, and the influence that we gain by acting from a deep sense of meaning, our deepest values, and a sense of higher purpose, and all these are best expressed through a life devoted to service (Zohar, 2010, p.3).

With this definition, spiritual capital identified the act of creating and deepening meaning and purpose (Morgan, 2006).

Spiritual intelligence is a term describing human qualities. Zohar (2010) explained that the term originated from the introductions of multiple intelligence by Howard Gardner (2000) and emotional intelligence by Daniel Goleman (1998). Both authors addressed leadership and the continuous need to develop internal intelligence qualities necessary for spiritual capital. The core qualities that develop spiritual intelligence include self-awareness, flexibility, the ability to deal with suffering and transcend pain, and the ability to make connections among differences that occur in an organization. The concept also identified that spiritually intelligent leaders take the opportunity to ask why, seek answers, and provide servant leadership skills (Greenleaf, 1998; Manning, 2018). While personal qualities of spiritual capital and spiritual intelligence are highlighted as valuable assets toward growth and awareness for the individual, organizations can also take the internal assessment of the organization's operations as a whole (Manning, 2018). Manning (2018) discussed that strategic planning that involves the reevaluation of organizational missions could assist in the acknowledgement that institutions are not separate from the world around them and

should consider more of their impact on the outside world (Morgan, 2006; Tierney, 2008).

A spiritual context addresses the individual as a whole in the workplace (Good et al., 2016; Joyce et al., 2018; Morgan, 2015). Ideologies of spiritual intelligence could also potentially support divisions as a whole and support the administrative decision-making process (Morgan, 2015; Zohar 2010). Taking on a spiritual perspective and looking at the positive psychological aspects of an inward mindfulness practice can potentially impact a large growing student affairs division (Morgan, 2006; Manning, 2018).

Origins and Foundations of Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices

On an individual level, spiritual dimensions within theory allow for exploration of professional and personal fulfillment for those who actively engage in the college experience at all ages (Hahn & Weare, 2017; Wang, 2014). Wang (2014), a researcher who explores the curriculum of nonviolence in education, discussed that spiritual awareness could connect K-12 school teachers beyond the work required of test standardization and teaching accountability. In mindfulness practices of stillness, Wang (2014) shared the spiritual opportunity a person has to self-educate, discover insights, meaning, and understanding not always gained in informal educational pedagogy or training. Educators committed to mindfulness practices within institutions agreed that cultivating more reflection in organizational culture provides support to the entire educational system. The advocacy of contemplative practices encompasses those who teach, those who learn, and those who provide the day-to-day operations at an institution (Beer, 2010; Beer et al., 2015; Leif, 2007; Morgan, 2015; Song & Muschert, 2014).

Moving beyond operations and processes to provide more opportunities for things such as spiritual relatedness has proven beneficial to educational communities' ecological context (Manning, 2018; Wang, 2014). According to Manning (2018), people explore value and purpose within the work environment, spiritual openness is inevitable. Wang also encouraged a practice of mindfulness for other educators as a method of cultivating internal connection (Wang, 2019). In the book *Nonviolence and Education*, Wang (2014) points out that, **"**The spiritual is not only about aspiring beyond but also about awakening to the profound meaning of our ordinary lives" (p. 172), identifying the importance of seeking the deeper meaning that Zohar (2010) discusses regarding organizational spirituality in our normal daily functions. When incorporating a mindful or contemplative practice, both an individual and an organization can search for a deeper connection to personal vision and mission.

Defining Contemplation and Mindfulness

Mindfulness, often used interchangeably with the term contemplative practices, established attention as a primary component of the definition. The most widely known description, established by Emerson Kabat-Zinn through his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, defined mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4, 2005). Researchers such as Shapiro et al, (2006, 2011) conducted a meta-analysis that also includes the terms attention, intention, and awareness in the definition of mindfulness. Finally, Grossenbacher & Quaglia (2017) created a framework from mindfulness, that bring key terms together to describe a contemplative practice. This framework also helped to identify multiple ways to be in a contemplative state aside from meditation.

In general, when defining the terms mindfulness and contemplative practices, the terms intention, attention, and awareness are involved (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992, 1994; Morgan, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2006, 2011). First, the word attention is defined as "a process that modulates the efficiency of the processes as they are happening through facilitation and/or inhibition" (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017, p. 8). This definition describes how people process information in the mind when focusing their attention on their thoughts. Next, Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) defined intention as "a process that 1) carries motivational impetus 2) specifies a goal, and 3) increases the likelihood of subsequent information processing that serves that goal" (p. 11). Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) explained intention, from the earlier work of Kabat-Zinn (1994) and Shapiro et al. (2006). Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) also viewed intentions of continuing meditations, during a period of time, as significant to a person's practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1994 and Shapiro et al., 2006).

Finally, the last element focused on awareness and established the term separate from attention. Paying attention does not generate awareness. Grossenbacher & Quaglia (2017) identified contemplative awareness as "a process that (a) entails conscious experience, and (b) makes information widely available for further processing" (p. 11). When engaging in a practice such as meditation, Grossenbacher & Quaglia identified a better opportunity for accessing awareness. Awareness is the opportunity to develop and process information received moment by moment. The three elements of attention, intention, and awareness regrouped the terms into thematic ideas. Grossenbacher & Quaglia (2017) used the term contemplation to name these groupings and themed the

terms as intended attention, attention to intention, and understanding of transient

information (awareness).

Contemplative Cognition Framework

The contemplative framework is a theory Grossenbacher and Quaglia, (2017)

developed to identify aspects of the contemplative experience and how the

aforementioned terms (intention, attention, and awareness) combine in an integrated

approach. While the components of attention, intention, and awareness portray simple

mindfulness and contemplation elements, integrating the components into three processes

expands the framework for use for more than just mindful meditative techniques. The

processes provide cohesive functioning of a practice represented by the researcher as

integrated attention (IA), attention to intention (A□I), and awareness to transient

information (ATI).

The three processes, IA, A□I, and ATI can be further understood as follows:

- The intention of attention could both guide and keep attention during a practice

  (IA);

- Next, attention could monitor, hold, and decide intention (A□I); and finally,

- Attention to awareness could consider both transient sensory information and

  mental events as they occurred in the present moment (ATI).

Each of these events interrelates within the other, and the explanation of deliberative

cognitive processes of IA, A□I, and ATI provides guidance and boundaries to the act of

contemplative cognition as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

How Attention and Intention Work Together
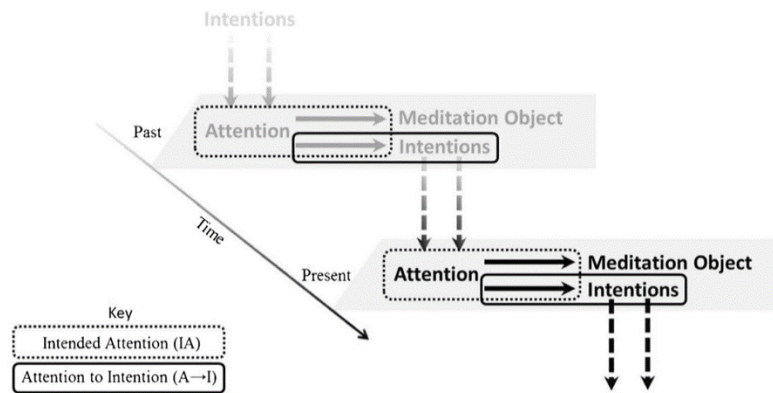
While the contemplative framework deals with thought and mental perceptions, Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) recognized that contemplative cognition's benefits and outcomes do not require formalized sitting practice. Practices such as yoga, tai chi, aikido, mindful walking, and breathing impacted awareness in diverse ways based on personal experience (Barbezat and Bush, 2014). To understand this, Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) used an example of the experience of exercise and the benefits to each individual who exercises. They explained that the benefits and outcomes of two people who go to the gym and spend the same amount of time and energy at the gym could report different results depending upon various aspects of the experience and workouts. They went on to argue that the same could apply to meditation and mindfulness experiences. They established that meditative experiences could also differ in the outcome of experience as they interrelate with awareness, intention of a contemplative practice, and attention to a contemplative practice.

Additionally, Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) identified that the formalized act of meditating is not a requirement of the purposeful cognitive process. The contemplative

framework provides more awareness to the psychological process of contemplation; and, through the utilization of a theoretical basis, provides a useful contribution to those who attempt to better understand meditative states, traits, and training. After understanding the theoretical framework that guides contemplative practices and mindful activities, understanding the emergence of contemplative practices helps explain its practical use in higher education. In a fast-paced academic environment, ignored stress and fast-paced lives could decrease educators' efficiency. However, increasing their attention, intentions, and awareness in their daily working lives may increase personal growth (Beer et al., 2015), spiritual capital, and spiritual intelligence qualities bringing personal meaning beyond the work environment. The contemplative cognitive framework is an integrative framework that addressed the challenges associated with contemplative practices, including terminology and definition surrounding mindfulness, meditation, and similar techniques (Grossenbacher and Quaglia; 2017).

Mindfulness is becoming a popular and widely used term in western culture today. But the practice originated in eastern parts of the world. While there has been a continuous presence of contemplative ideas in the United States and higher education, Morgan (2015) identifies three influential phases that brought contemplative practices into awareness in the country and in higher education.

Eastern Practices

The initial historical accounts of mindfulness practices often acknowledge the origins from religious Buddhist and Hindu philosophy and practices in the 1840's which developed from the immigration of the Chinese population and culture in the West (Morgan, 2015). Traditional Buddhist religious rituals began with mindful meditations in

Eastern traditions spanning over many years (Morgan, 2015; Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Daoism, for example, generates health with one's life force, qi, in unity with Dao, and is a widely known practice of mind-body awareness (Lin et al., 2019). While historically, mindfulness practices originated in spiritual traditions, these practices help cultivate individual experiences of compassion and unity (Lin et al., 2019). In environments in other parts of the world, mindfulness practice centers such as Plum Village, led by monk and practitioner Thich Nhat Hahn, have encouraged contemplative pedagogy among teachers (Hahn & Weare, 2017).

Western Practices

The second wave of practices occurred in the 1960's and 1970's, when western interest generated a focus on mindfulness beyond the spiritual, separate from religion. Western interest stemmed from the discovery that the practice positively benefited participants' physical and mental health. In education, interest in mindfulness crossed academic disciplines including transpersonal psychology, yoga in the West, and research in neuroscience and meditation (Morgan, 2015). In these studies, programs developed among health care professions, such as the widely known Emerson Kabat-Zinn, who introduced strategies such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction techniques used in clinical trials for both cancer patients and for corporate employees (UMMHC, 2014). Outcomes from these research trials showed a reduction in feelings of anxiety and improved overall health and well-being (Baer, 2006; Beiter et al., 2015; & Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992). In education and research, utilizing a framework for understanding mindfulness practices helped create a baseline of the use of varied traditions and activities in varying classroom contexts (Hahn & Weare, 2017). Additionally, the

collaboration of those who practice and found benefits in mindful activities, including faculty and educational administrators, also generated more interest in the topic (ACHME, 2019).

Contemplative Practices in Higher Education

In general, mindfulness, also known as contemplative practices, within higher education has yielded positive outcomes and benefits within educational work environments (Beer et al., 2015; Beer, 2010). In a constructivist case-study on higher education professionals, Beer (2010) found that the role of contemplative practices in an individual's work and personal life highlighted positive themes when they applied a practice in their daily activities. Themes of awareness, integration, and interconnectedness emerged in this case study (Beer, 2010). Additionally, participants reported that while personal practice helped mitigate struggle, a collaborative practice that is supported in the work environment created a beneficial multilayered experience (Beer, 2010; Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017).

The Beer (2010) study also revealed that contemplative practices helped to sustain relationships with family, friends, and coworkers. Administrative staff experienced positive impacts for supervisory, communication, and other work-related responsibilities, such as department and faculty meetings (Beer, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2006, 2011). Other studies on mindfulness also reported influence on relationships and indicated that mindfulness and contemplative practices could positively influence outcomes related to performance, respect, a personal connection with spirituality, and well-being (Beer, 2010; Beer et al., 2015; Good et al., 2016). In a study at Naropa University, document analysis showed that contemplative practices influenced organizational processes (Beer et al.,

2015). Administrative staff recommended establishing guidelines that included respected practices such as an intentional bow before meetings, a commitment to well-being, and dedication to the university's mission; all believed to be associated with a contemplative practice of awareness and attention within the institution. While studies have emerged in higher education, many qualitative studies originated with faculty sharing their experience of their contemplative practices as they taught mindfulness in the classroom (Beer, 2010).

Contemplative Pedagogy

Many of the books and much of the literature on mindfulness and education emerged from utilizing contemplative practices in both secondary and post-secondary education. Identifying spiritual and meditative factors provides an alternative strategy for supporting those in the academic world and expanding personal growth and well-being (Beer, 2010; Beer et al., 2015; Morgan, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2006). Practices of compassion, self-awareness, and meditation are only a few of the mindfulness practices that increase practitioners' wellbeing. Faculty also recognize benefits for future teachers. A pilot study conducted by Napoli (2004) showed that mindfulness training for teachers identified positive outcomes such as:

- assistance in curriculum development

- reduction in conflict and anxiety

- increase in well-being in one's personal life and

- creation of positive change in the classroom.

While benefits emerge for the students in the classroom, in more recent research Wang (2019) substantiated the need for self-care and mindfulness practices that benefit those

who teach. Over time, as faculty began to appreciate the benefits of mindfulness, curriculum emerged for student engagement in mindfulness, as well as the use of mindful inquiry for reflection and thought (Wang, 2019).

Faculty and Contemplative Practices

In a profession that requires educators to take on multiple tasks, often overlapping in demand, few training models for teachers incorporate the understanding of self-awareness into personal and professional transformation (Wang, 2019). Wang (2014) uses nonviolence to integrate practices of contemplation. Nonviolence is "…the unity between the body and the mind within the self…" (Wang, 2014, p. xi). Wang then discusses the nonviolent practice that she shares in the educational environment. She advocates for teachers to reflect on their personal insights about internal awareness and how that awareness can prepare instructors for opportunities in the classroom which strengthens teaching. These strategies also included reflection, mindfulness, and understanding how students and teachers relate to others, which generated more moments of peace for both the teacher and the student (Wang, 2014).

Curriculum Development and Mindful Inquiry

Research on contemplative pedagogy in higher education recognizes beneficial outcomes for students in the classroom (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Exploration into contemplative education creates more activities that bring about intention, attention, and awareness (Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017) and divide activities into a significant grouping to include practiced stillness (meditation and silence), creative pursuits (mindful reading, writing, deep listening, and music), movement (yoga, Tai Chi, walking, and labyrinths), and activisms (volunteering and vigils) (ACHME, 2019; Barbezat & Bush,

2014). The conceptualization of the activities helps to generate contemplative activities for reflection and growth on and off-campus (Barbezat & Bush, 2014).

The term mindful inquiry often encourages students to revisit assumptions and question challenges and allowed faculty to provide critical analysis during the educational experience. Webster-Wright (2013) discussed that pedagogy methods used the term *mindful inquiry* to describe the act of creating space for contemplation for active problem solving. The conscious investigations of mindful awareness of thoughts and beliefs focus more on meditative practices, which allow for intentional space utilizing reflection and awareness (Webster-Wright, 2013). The mindful inquiry method helps problem solve questions that may need an opportunity to "rest" in the mind before proceeding with solutions (Webster-Wright, 2013). Additionally, utilizing mindful inquiry for contemplation and reflection help guide students in alternative diplomacy methods and facilitate teaching moments in the educational environment (Wang, 2014). Contemplative techniques also provide opportunities to convert negative instances of differences and energies into collaborative efforts that connect the individual to their community and society locally and internationally (Wang, 2014).

Contemplative Organizations in Higher Education

Another impact of contemplation in higher education originated from the creation of organizations and societies that currently bring more contemplative practitioners together. Mindfulness and contemplative practices have expanded in many academic fields, which creates an opportunity for a formal gathering of educators (both faculty and non-faculty) to share their experiences (Morgan, 2015; Webster-Wright, 2013). The refocus on contemplative education started with the formation of organizations like the

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, also known as CCMIS, in 1995 (Morgan, 2015). Interest quickly spread, networks began across the country, and a general belief emerged that contemplative and spiritual integration holds a significant role in developing learning and personal transformation in post-secondary education (Morgan, 2015; Webster-Wright, 2013). Within these studies, practitioners, theorists, and students explored contemplative practices in the classroom, which resulted in discussions of holistic development among the myriad of struggles including chronic stress, focus, meaning, and purpose (Beer et al., 2015; Dufon & Christian, 2013; Morgan, 2015).

Identifying mindfulness as contemplative pedagogy and practice with faculty and teaching provides useful insight to others. Contemplative practices also led to societies like CCMIS (ACHME, 2019) and practicing groups of contemplation and educational exploration in places like Plum Village (Hahn & Weare, 2017). This exposure brought attention to educators. Their understanding of mindfulness engendered academic staff who teach students to become more self-compassionate and self-aware, preparing students for their future careers and personal endeavors in society in the U.S. and worldwide. Other conferences have stemmed from CCMIS, focusing specifically on contemplative practices in higher education, incorporating both pedagogy and other practical applications for institutions that include staff (ACMHE, 2019).

Contemplative Tree

While many researchers have defined mindfulness and studied contemplative practices in varying ways, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CCMIS) utilizes the image of a contemplative tree to help others understand, combine, and interpret contemplation for themselves. Barbezat & Bush (2014), seen as seminal authors

to contemplative pedagogy in higher education, advocated for the exploration of the many activities which create stillness, internal focus, introspection, and reflection. The tree visual may help others make meaning of mindfulness practices and how they combine and interconnect concepts with the classroom curriculum across varying disciplines. Barbezat & Bush (2014) encouraged use of the tree and promoted the practices on the tree for students, faculty, and staff in support services offices to include counseling centers, athletics, teaching, and learning centers.

Figure 3

Contemplative activities illustrated on a tree, created by CCMIS

The Tree of Contemplative Practices
www.contemplativemind.org
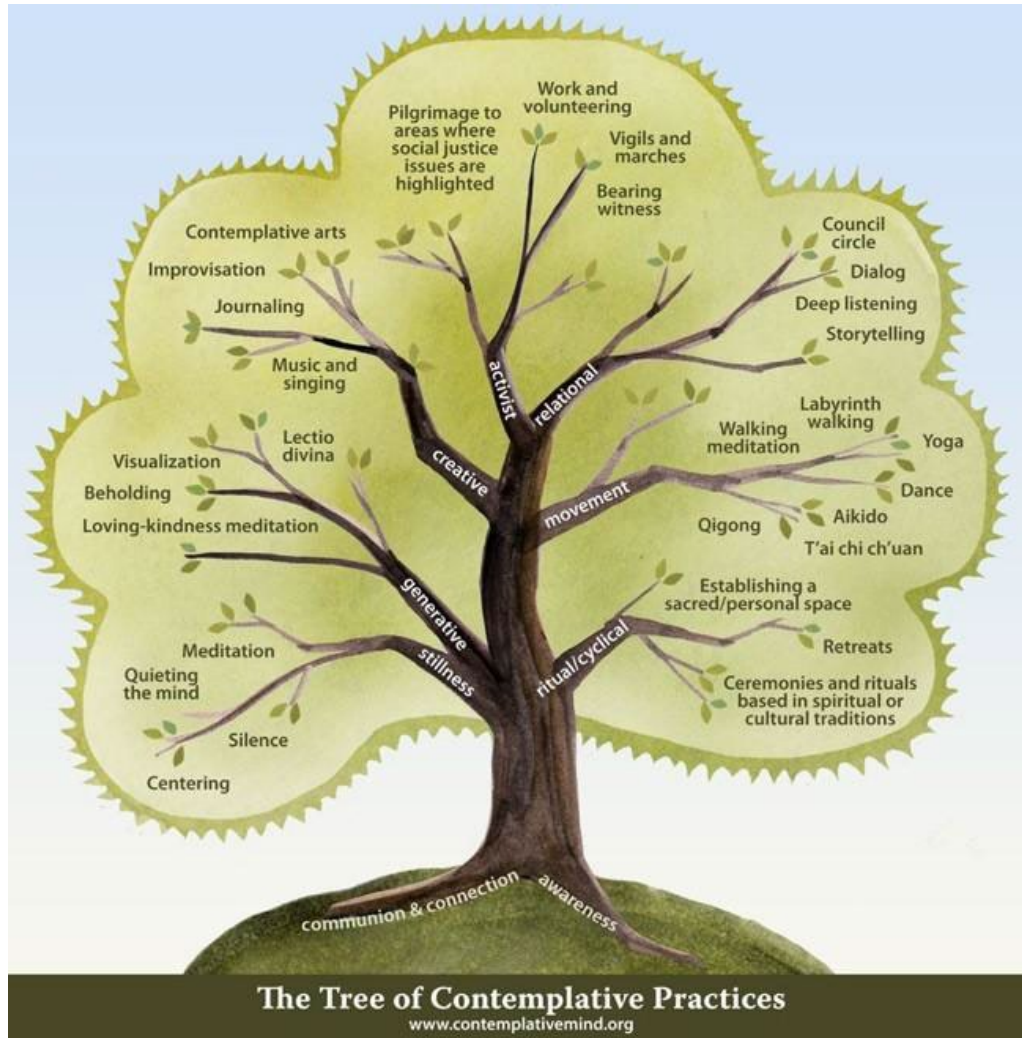
While the image is not exhaustive, Figure 3 illustrates contemplative practice components. The idea of using a tree image originated from a research report entitled, *A Powerful Silence: The role of Meditation and Other Contemplative Practices in American Life and Work* (Duerr, 2004). The practices illustrated in the tree reflect how the participants in the qualitative study explored contemplative activities in organizations. Following this project, CCMIS shifted these ideas into an educational context and application for academics. As CCMIS also acknowledges, the image does not exhaust all potential contemplative activities in which people might engage. It does provide a blank

tree for others to illustrate their approach or use in educational, non-commercial projects. The following components, as shown in Figure 3, represent specific symbolic meaning:

- The Roots: This area of the tree acknowledges the practice's spiritual and religious traditions while allowing for contemplative activities that emerge in the secular context.

- The Branches: This part of the tree creates multiple groupings of the practices to include stillness sections. Stillness represents the silencing of the mind and body to help with focus and calm. Another collection encompasses generative areas, which address thoughts and feelings and includes characteristics such as compassion and devotion as opposed to quiet and calm represented in the stillness section.

The illustration's purpose created a way to unite internal awareness that created insight into the contemplative tradition.

Conclusion

The increased investment in higher education and the student of contemporary times has an impact on every level of the organization chain. When efforts positively influence student retention, frontline staff share a large part of the effort and frequently become the single point of contact for students outside of the classroom. This effort can create stress and attrition among student affairs professionals (Barham & Winston, 2006; Marshall et al., 2016). Therefore, exploring concepts that encourage employee growth strengthens the organizational structure (Manning, 2018; Morgan, 2006) to carry the weight of change that occurs, even monumental events like the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Exploring ideals such as mindfulness, and incorporating concepts such as

spiritual awareness and personal growth for employees, helps to holistically support every aspect of the organizational structure (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Beer, 2010; Beer et al., 2015; Webster-Wright, 2013). In reviewing the benefits among contemplative practices in Western pedagogy and societies such as CCMIS (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Webster-Wright, 2013), it appears that personal practices of care in the workplace, perhaps particularly for those on the front lines of providing services to others, creates more opportunity for meeting daily demands and constantly changing educational environments.

Road Map

While Chapter two explored and discussed the literature related to the research problem, Chapter three will elaborate on the proposed qualitative methodology for a study of mindfulness practices among student affairs professionals. Chapter four will provide data analysis on the study followed by a discussion section of the research in Chapter five.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

Chapter three details the study's research design, which included the presentation of the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions. Next, the research procedures, presentation of results, and ethical considerations provide insight into the processes. Also included in Chapter three is an overview of the data analysis and the plan for Chapter four.

Problem Statement

Organizations could provide alleviation of some workplace stressors by encouraging work/life balance and modifying position types and duties. However, Morgan (2006) stated that "organizations [also] thrive on and at times actively create stress as a means of promoting organizational effectiveness" (p. 311). For example, technology allows advancement for student services and communication. At the same time, management could use the same technology to increase performance by connecting with an employee's daily work activities through online software and creating increased control and record of activities that negatively influence the work environment. Another stressor may arise through a professional attempt to advance in one's career.

For example, a staff member could show dedication to the organization through fully embracing what the institution stands for, accepting long work hours beyond the forty-hour work week, and even missing meals and rest to complete projects and daily duties. These chronic stressors decrease employee well-being (Morgan, 2006). Despite everyday realities, frontline employees in student affairs face increasing and diverse workloads (Mullen et al., 2018) that remove opportunities for reflection (Webster-Wright, 2013) and increase employee attrition (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al. 2018). This increased workload limits innovation to meet organizational demands (Rendón, 2009).

However, some frontline staff in student affairs use contemplative practices (Beer, 2010), such as mindfulness, to balance personal well-being, restore internal stability, and build awareness supporting reflection (Palmer, 2009). It could be that these practices that help to regain frontline staff's healthy cognitive processes (Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017; Qualia et al., 2015) and positive emotions may, in turn, be beneficial in the higher education workplace (Beer, 2010; Mather, 2010). Understanding the lived journeys of frontline student affairs employees who use mindfulness could provide a frame of reference for those seeking to support staff and leverage positive impacts on students and the organization of these frontline workers.

Despite the daily demands, employees in higher education report that those who practice contemplative practices (Beer, 2010), such as mindfulness and meditation, experience benefits such as balanced personal well-being, restored internal stability, and an increased awareness supporting reflection (Helber et al., 2012). Positive psychology-based strategies which encourage individual growth and connection potentially advance a

universal investment of educational growth and development for those who interact on the campus environment (Good et al., 2016; Mather, 2010).

Understanding mindfulness practices can contribute to the improvement of employee wellness, encourage personal and thoughtful introspection (Beer et al., 2015) to student affairs practitioners, and support the organization as a whole. As discussed in the literature review, there are few studies regarding student affairs professionals who pursue mindfulness practices (Beer et al., 2015). This study addresses initial findings from those few studies that explore the meaning of mindfulness practice experiences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of U.S. higher education frontline workers in student affairs who reported regular use of mindfulness practices.

Research Questions

In connection with the purpose, the following research questions helped direct the study:

- How do frontline workers in student affairs describe their mindful practices?
- How do frontline workers in student affairs perceive that their experiences with mindfulness practices influence their daily work with students?
- How do frontline workers in student affairs perceive that their experiences with mindfulness practices influence their abilities to navigate the organizational environment?

However, before addressing the research study components, it was essential to understand both how my positionality within the study may have influenced participants and the broader context of the student affairs professionals in higher education.

Researcher's Positionality

Patton (2015) states that "Reflexivity turns mindfulness inward… the pathway to self-awareness" (Patton, 2015, p. 71). In qualitative inquiry, researchers serve as lenses for the study and "…the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). As a human instrument, I, as the researcher, responded and made changes as I collected data to ensure understanding and complete synthesis of participant responses. Therefore, since the research was subject to inherent human bias, it was critical to know how my subjectivity may influence the data (Merriam, 2002; Kahlke, 2014). As a qualitative researcher, reflexivity about my position (i.e., positionality) relative to this study provided essential insight into assuring this study's quality and outcomes.

I am a researcher and a student affairs professional. I have worked in the university setting for fourteen years. I started in this profession because I wanted to help students graduate from college, just as others helped me. I am also a first-generation college student, and my situation was unique. At the beginning of my senior year of high school, at 17-years-old, I left home and moved from Georgia to Oklahoma. My aunt allowed me to stay with her, finish my senior year, and helped me enroll in college. After I graduated from high school, I moved into the dorm one week before college classes began. My aunt and uncle were about an hour away and I did not have a vehicle. These isolating circumstances required that I make connections on campus and find resources

that would help me become successful. Since I knew going back to Georgia was not an option I could pursue, I had to connect with someone who could provide the support I needed to graduate. In the office of a TRIO program, I found staff who answered every question I had about financial aid, personal finances, and goals. I remember that no question was too demanding of the staff's time or attention in this environment. They became my campus family. I visited the TRIO office many days out of the week and then applied to every vacant student worker position they had available.

My experience interacting with supportive college staff kept me in school and I graduated in four years. When I was able to apply for a vacant TRIO staff position, I eagerly applied and, when hired, I supported and connected with students. I also became enlightened about the employee side of student affairs. I realized that staff needed to be aware of retention and graduation rates set by departments, which impacted how teams met goals and served students at the university. Reporting requirements for TRIO programs included annual reports of student progress to the U.S. Department of Education. Sharing this information with campus leadership, faculty, and other offices kept these programs connected to the campus resources currently in place. We helped students make individualized learning plans, connected them with tutors, and encouraged their connection with faculty and other campus resources by including regularly scheduled check-ins. These interactions brought students into the offices with their questions and, as a staff member, I believed that no problem was too demanding of my time. While this could be stressful at times, it was gratifying. It is the reason I still work in the TRIO environment today.

I encountered the mindfulness practices of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) through an email blast from my university's counseling center and thought it would be an excellent tool for students. In a series of eight sessions, I learned MBSR practices about how awareness influences meditation, walking, eating, and other present-moment opportunities. In this training, open discussions with other student affairs professionals helped me to realize we could all use more moments of present awareness. At the end of the eight Saturday sessions, I asked what specific, prescribed strategies we should use when working with students. While we received recommended books and other material resources, there was not a prescribed way of administering practices to the college students. The instructor mentioned that the best way to support students (if you were not a counselor, as I am not) was to take care of yourself so you could give the students your best. This statement and the substantial benefits I received from the MBSR practices moved me to meet others on campus who enjoyed a mindful way that continues my interest today. I began to search for books and peer-reviewed articles involving mindfulness and contemplative practices and realized that this topic is not a new concept in higher education. Professors have incorporated these practices in the classroom. There are published studies in peer-reviewed journals concerning mindfulness practices in the classroom for social work and health profession students; however, very few studies (or no studies) feature the impact of mindfulness practices on staff in higher education.

Today, I am in a leadership role managing frontline employees providing TRIO services. Given my previous experience in frontline service to students, I believe that exploring employee use of mindfulness practices would inform our existing knowledge to connect with staff who used the practice of mindfulness for themselves and even with

students. As a frontline employee, I recall long hours working with students back-to-back without lunch breaks, staying into the evening hours to finish projects and document services for annual reports, and the impact that my time commitment had on my personal life as well as my headspace. Through that experience, I developed a deep appreciation for serving students; however, I wondered how I could do it more efficiently and still retain time and energy for my own pursuits. This interest led me to seek out others in higher education who have employed their own version of mindfulness practices. In carrying out the current research study, I practiced continuous reflection about how my experiences and perspectives may influence my research in both helpful and less helpful ways.

Reflecting on participant responses and requesting member checks helped me to better understand the participant's stories, however, participants may not have provided in-depth responses if they believe the stories might have impacted their place of work. For a potential situation where staff may have been hesitant to respond, carefully addressing the precautions required by the Institutional Review Board helped with the way in which they interacted in the focus group. I also hoped that my experience as a TRIO staff member over the years may have helped with the identification of themes and codes as I conducted interviews and drafted field notes.

Within field notes, I asked myself, "How has my work experience in higher education impacted how participants respond to my interview questions? What has shaped my perspective of the work environment of frontline staff similar to my participants? Was this interpretation theirs or my own?" This type of questioning helped

me be aware of participants' responses, my understanding of their responses, and the interplay between them.

Study Design

Using the problem statement, purpose, and research question previously provided, the following sections further detailed the design of the study.

Epistemology

Epistemology, or worldview, is a philosophical belief system about what constitutes meaningful knowledge. Epistemology provided direction for how my research proceeded and what I believed was meaningful in the study. My epistemological position informed my role or perspective, and how I understood my relationship with the research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the epistemology of constructivism informed inquiry about how student affairs professionals constructed their realities in the organizational environment. Constructivism is a learning approach where a person makes meaning and actively constructs their reality. To take a constructive approach, the researcher must gather a person's understanding of past, present, and new personal experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Patton (2015), in a work setting, a researcher has the opportunity to understand the professionals' daily lived realities and how these experiences shape their work in the organizational environment.

A constructivist view helped me to identify how the participants made meaning of mindfulness practices and how it may have supported their roles as educators. For this study, the epistemology of constructivism informed inquiry about how student affairs professionals constructed their realities in the organizational environment. More specifically, this study sought to understand how frontline student affairs staff members'

experiences with mindfulness practices influenced their *daily work* and their *interactions* with students and co-workers in the educational work environment. Through participant experiences and data analysis, themes emerged and could transfer or allow inferential generalization in other contexts or settings (Patton, 2015).

Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical perspective is a philosophical stance with associated assumptions that narrow and further direct the research (Patton, 2015). This study used an interpretivist theoretical perspective. Crotty (1998) and Creswell & Creswell (2018) stated that interpretivism assumes that, as people interact with the world, they interpret and construct meaning through their lived experiences. The interpretivist perspective helped to find meaning around how the participant translates and perceives mindfulness practices within the constructivist worldview of their experiences. As each participant shared their stories, the interpretive lens allowed me to focus on understanding how they perceived the impact of mindfulness practices in their particular student affairs environments. These subjective outcomes differed depending upon their institutions or their experience with a practice. However, understanding the way in which the participant used mindfulness practice within their educational environment provided insight into others' experiences or to future researchers in a similar research context.

Theoretical Framework

No *a priori* theoretical framework guided this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which allowed the responses from the participants to indicate how they constructed meaning without presupposed beliefs. Instead, this study used *a posteriori* theoretical framework, selected after data collection, to assist with understanding the data. The

contemplative cognition framework (identifying processes of intention, attention, and awareness), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, and a spiritual framework (seeking personal growth and development within an organization), as discussed in the literature review, served as *a posteriori* to bring meaning to the data.

Qualitative Approach

The constructivist worldview chosen for this study is associated with a qualitative approach that established the meaning of experiences, and the researcher sought to understand how frontline student affairs staff made meaning and developed patterns in a period (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, a qualitative approach allowed me to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals using mindfulness practices and how they made meaning in the work environment. A qualitative approach sought to reveal the participants' perspectives of their individual experiences (Merriam, 2002; Kahlke, 2014). A qualitative approach addressed my research questions, which are interpretive, exploratory, and descriptive in nature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

Addressing critical aspects of purposeful data collection helped me thoroughly and empirically answer the research questions. Creswell & Creswell (2018) identify key components of setting the stage for data collection, which include addressing the research setting; participant recruitment; participant selection; and the discussion of types of data collection and the interview protocols.

Research Setting

The site chosen for this study involved a video conference held via Zoom. For this study, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, most communication with

students and staff occurred on technology-based platforms. Zoom provided access to group interviews for participants in varying locations in the United States. Video interviews, rather than audio only, helped the researcher gain more insight by capturing emotions, beliefs, and thoughts about participants on the researched topics (Patton, 2015). Virtual interviewing provided both written documented and recorded stories and allowed the collection of qualitative data through the interaction between participants and the researcher.

While the research occurred in an artificial setting, verbal replies, paired with content analysis of the video, captured authentic reactions and responses in the moment and allowed for richer data mining (Leavy, 2017). Additionally, Zoom offered automatic transcription which was used to cross-reference the transcription using rev.com software. During the interviews, two of the four Zoom sessions failed to record, and subsequently written documents of the responses were requested of participants as an additional data source. This additional layer of recording, written documentation, and transcription helped to assure an accurate record of participant words.

Participant Recruitment

For this study, a targeted sample of TRIO student affairs staff selected from an existing list of national TRIO Training conference attendees provided a data rich population for meeting the purpose of the research, as opposed to using a general sample of frontline student affairs professionals. Using a subpopulation in student affairs contributed to greater homogeneity of work demands and work environments. Thus, recruitment occurred among TRIO program staff, a population that also typically meets the criteria of student affairs professionals. When TRIO staff attend state, regional, and

national conferences, recruitment opportunities provided an avenue to control sampling

of participants and a more homogenous focus. As a federally-funded program, each

TRIO grant at a university is required to recruit students with similar backgrounds. The

commonality of working with students who are U.S. citizens, first-generation, low-

income, and who may have a disability could reveal similar challenges for staff who have

similar objectives of retention and   graduation. To facilitate discussion, I also used

focus groups. In these focus groups, participants also connected similar experiences and

pointed out differences that allowed for more in-depth data for this qualitative study.

While TRIO programs originally started with three types of federal grants in 1965

through the Higher Education Act (HEA, 1965), TRIO currently has eight diverse kinds

of programs to support students at varying levels of education. While TRIO grants serve

participants in secondary and post-secondary institutions, funds for grant operations

reside primarily at post-secondary institutions, although some funding allows for

community organizations to host grants. One grant in particular, TRIO Training, provides

guidance to staff regarding the mandates and regulations required for operations of the

grants. TRIO training conferences help staff nationwide to carry out TRIO grant services

and meet objectives and mandates while also interacting with other professionals, both at

conference sites and virtually.

Connecting with the administrative staff, specifically training grant

administrators, helped me recruit participants through the conference events. Cultivating

relationships with the administrators allowed me to recruit frontline professionals

attending the TRIO conference. These administrators had access to staff who registered

within the state, regional, and national conferences, varying in numbers per program. The average conference attendance was 100 to 300 participants annually.

To recruit, I first drafted an email for recruitment to conference attendees who had previously registered and attended TRIO Training. The TRIO Training staff sent the initial email to conference attendees who registered with TRIO Training. In this email, a link was provided to a questionnaire that helped to identify TRIO staff who distinguished themselves as student affairs staff with a mindfulness practice in their daily lives. The survey stayed open until at least 20 percent of 200 conferences attendees completed the survey. I received 40 completed surveys. I sought a minimum of twenty participants among two focus group interviews for rich quality responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, upon further research, Guest et al, (2017) guided me to create smaller focus groups with 3 to 4 people instead of 2 larger groups of eight to ten participants, stating that three focus groups with a high degree of knowledge can provide necessary information to generate major themes within the data. Given the fit and availability of the participants for the study, I made a shift to interview ten participants total. This arrangement included three small focus groups of 3 participants and a single one-on-one interview. After participants completed the interview and reflection, I provided $20 Amazon gift cards to interviewees via email.

To keep track of participant recruiting, I requested an initial list of targeted TRIO professionals who received the recruitment email sent by TRIO Training staff. To reach my targeted goal of 40 participants, I expanded recruitment efforts via national TRIO listserv emails, and state and regional TRIO conferences. As a member of the TRIO

listserv, state, and regional conferences I also sent out a recruitment email to more potential TRIO participants.

Participant Selection

Identifying data-rich participants helped create stronger focus groups for understanding the experiences of frontline student affairs professionals who use mindfulness practices (i.e., the population). This study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as purposeful sampling, recognizes that the target sample meets the study's needs (Patton, 2015).

To participate in the study, individuals met the following criteria:

- Employed in a part- or fulltime staff position, for at least one year, by a two-year, four-year, private, public, or non-profit higher education institution.

- Employed in a TRIO program.

- Staff from TRIO programs worked for a college/university rather than a community-based organization funded by TRIO.

- Had experiences with a mindfulness practice while in the current TRIO/student affairs position. To gather the most in-depth responses about how a practice over time has supported a staff member, participants also had a practice to share in focus group interviews.

- Worked for 1 year in TRIO programs. The grants typically run for five years, then colleges and universities rewrite for continued or new funding of those grants. One year in their position ensured that they had a minimal understanding of TRIO program policies, guidelines, and engagement with participants within the organizational work environment.

- Participants had assigned caseload of TRIO student participants. Programs vary in the number and participants served; therefore, participants worked daily in organizational environments addressing student needs regularly.

The questionnaire in the appendix served as a filter to select participants and to collect varied responses.

- Combined years of experience working in TRIO programs and student affairs.

- The longest years of experiences with mindfulness practices.

- Experience with multiple mindfulness practices.

I also tried to use an equal sample based on demographics which include age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Prioritizing participant selection helped to vary experience in a sample of participants who work in a similar student affairs field.

Data Collection Types

Establishing multiple data sources varied the evidence of patterns and themes to help to assure trustworthiness of a qualitative study's findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participation occurred in focus group interviews and the participants listened to a presentation to establish a common and/or personal definition of mindfulness. A questionnaire aided me in selecting participants who met the selection criteria. Focus group interviews along with a common definition of mindfulness allowed selected participants to share their experiences. Finally, the researcher used both field notes and reflective and analytic memos to process the collected data responses (Patton, 2015). Once generated, these data sources assisted the researcher in presenting the concepts for data analysis and member checks. These data collection types in the qualitative design

strategy provided in-depth responses to explore the deeper meaning that arose in mindfulness practices among TRIO professionals.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was a collection of both closed and open-ended response types of student affairs frontline staff interested in participating in the focus group. The questionnaire was both a filtering tool and a method for collecting demographic information important in the analysis of the data. As a filtering tool, the questions identified staff who met the participant criteria. The questionnaire requested closed responses to include participant demographic data and IRB-required information: researcher's contact information and consent form; participant's name and preferred pseudonym; age and gender identity; length of time in student affairs and length of time in TRIO; the number of students they met with per week; and TRIO program type and position. Open-ended questions asked potential participants to explain their mindfulness practice and the length of time they engaged in the identified practice.

Participants were purposefully selected based on the experiences discussed above. While questionnaires provided insights into the study's data, they inevitably failed to give the in-depth response that focus group interviews provided.

Focus Group Interviews

Group interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and provided a valuable opportunity to allow TRIO/student affairs professionals to engage with the researcher and each other. Patton (2015) shares that, as social beings, participants in a focus group may discuss how they came to understand a given phenomenon. In the case of this study, the phenomenon explored was mindfulness practices within the organizational environment.

Focus group interviews helped collect different responses to open-ended questions that developed in conversation among participants as they focused on the study's purpose and research question (Patton, 2015). These responses helped to generate patterns in answers. Semi-structured questions, paired with active listening, also helped generate data saturation during interviews conducted via Zoom video conferencing. Patton (2015) suggests open-ended interviews support probing for in-depth responses to participants' subjective experiences. This study held three focus group interviews and a one-on-one interview with a total of ten people. All Zoom-based focus groups were audio and video recorded in combination with the rev.com transcriptions.

A set day and time for interviews was communicated to participants through a calendar invitation. Additionally, a calendar survey tool, doodle.com, provided available dates and times, for a potential lunchtime session or a six o'clock in the evening session. I also asked participants to attend the interview in a secluded location to minimize distraction. Before the interviews, I sent an email that showed participants how to change their names in Zoom before entering the room if they chose. As the researcher, I kept the user's identity connected to the recruitment survey and connected their emails with their survey reflections at the end of the focus group meetings. Attitudes, values, and beliefs about how participants make meaning with diverse perspectives and consensus opinions created a more deeply expressed conversational method of data collection within the group interviews (Patton, 2015). The following steps helped the researcher conduct interviews in a Zoom platform:

1. First, I built rapport with other TRIO professionals by introducing myself as a current TRIO staff member, in addition to my introduction as a doctoral student at

Oklahoma State University. Then, all other participants had an opportunity to share their pseudonyms, if they preferred, to ensure that their screen names match their preferred pseudonyms.

2. Next, I shared a brief presentation within the Zoom space regarding mindfulness practices and provided examples that established a standard definition of mindfulness among participants.

3. I then conducted the focus groups by asking questions that dealt with personal practice and how that experience influences their daily organizational environments.

4. The participants received a reminder that they would receive an electronic gift card at their preferred email address.

5. Beyond the focus group interviews, I provided a member-check by emailing initial themes to all participants that allowed for the accuracy of the data collected. Member-checks allow the researcher to discuss and consult with participants during the analysis of the data (Saldana, 2016). Member-checking occurred with a follow-up email which detailed with semi-formulated themes and patterns within the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Focus group interview questions included the following:

Student Affairs Role in the Organization.

1. In what ways do you believe your role as a TRIO Professional contributes to the organizational success of your institution and TRIO program?

   - How would you describe stress associated with your role?

2. What are some of the impacts of the university expectations on your role as a student affairs professional?

3.   In what ways does the organization and its mission impact your personal growth?

Mindfulness and the Personal Employee Practice.

4. How do you define mindfulness?

5. What type of mindfulness practices do you use?

    ● What type of personal mindfulness practices do you use outside of the workplace?

    ● How does the practice differ in the workplace?

6. How do your mindfulness practices influence you in the workplace?

Each of the focus group interviews included the researcher and 4 interviewees.

An interview guide also helped to contain all the information discussed above. The guide contained printed interview questions with space in between questions to collect brief notes for the researcher. The guide was an adaptation of procedures from Creswell & Creswell (2018). The notes were added to the MAXQDA software as recorded memos.

Presentations and Mindfulness Defined

At the beginning of the recorded focus group Zoom session, a presentation provided examples of common definitions of mindfulness and interviewees established a basic understanding of mindfulness and activities associated with contemplative practices. The mindfulness practice presentation lasted 10-15 minutes. During this presentation, the following agenda items took place:

● a definition of stress, burnout, well-being;

- common definitions and examples of mindfulness;
    - o these definitions included descriptions of the components of contemplative cognition framework which addressed intention, attention, and awareness and its relevance to mindfulness;
- a voluntary guided meditation of box breathing;
- an attached visual of the contemplative tree to assist with the example of mindful activities.

The contemplative tree (Duerr & Bergman, 2015) was a helpful resource for the presentation and focus group because the image assisted participants with establishing their definition of mindfulness and other contemplative practices. For this study, I shared the contemplative tree image in a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the many ways people might engage in their own personal practice. The image listed many activities to include categories of activist, creative, generative, movement, relational, ritual, and stillness practices. Once the presentation concluded and examples of mindfulness guided the study, participants responded to the focus group questions and had an opportunity to submit a reflection regarding the focus group experience and any other comments regarding the interviews. They completed the reflection in a one-question survey associated with their name or pseudonym for the Amazon gift card and to connect their demographic data for common themes and meanings. A follow-up email after the presentation reminded participants who did not upload their reflection within one week after the focus group interviews. All the participants completed the one-question survey.

Data Analysis

To the extent possible, I established the validity and accuracy of the data source outcomes for the study's reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Recordings and transcriptions supported content analysis. The data collection was an inductive process to investigate the meaning embedded in the focus group texts of transcription, reflection, and submitted documents (Patton, 2015). Analysis was a continuous process beginning with data collection and then including coding, analysis, and pairing both initial and analytic memos for data interpretation. First, two-cycle coding occurred with the software MAXQDA which helped to further turn codes into categories. Next, initial and analytic memos provided insight and researcher resources for additional filters of recognizing patterns and themes. The purpose statement and research questions were revisited often to discuss data in later chapters emerging from data-driven themes and categories.

Two cycles of coding created categories and themes ideal for a qualitative study. By means of an interpretive, constructivist model, this particular study lends itself to a set of "generic" approaches to coding (Saldana, 2016). A generic approach to coding can remain less formal depending on findings that occur within memos and data (Saldana, 2016). According to Saldana (2016), coding allows the researcher to classify the data systematically. The process of first cycle initial coding and second cycle focused coding assisted me in the analytic process.

Two techniques in first cycle coding which were emergent included In Vivo coding and emotional coding. These strategies applied sequentially to transcripts, participant reflections, field notes, and analytic memos assisted in capturing the participant's mindfulness experiences in high demand work environments. In Vivo

coding helped to capture phrases and language that provided insight into further analysis. Emotional coding allowed me to explore the intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and feelings that happen among staff. To ensure the coding process was appropriate, preliminary coding occurred on field notes and transcripts (Saldana, 2016). After the first cycle of coding, the process of charting into a simple table, labeling codes, and creating data sections in the table helped to find commonalities, raise questions, understand responses, and identify initial alignments of ideas presented by participants.

As an adaptation of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), focused coding breaks down categories using gerunds to title themes of meaning and significance. While not all categories used gerunds, the codes used from the first cycle of coding transformed second cycle classifications and remained fluid until final categories developed. In the analytic process, topics emerged to provide insight at the macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level overlapping in theme. Saldana (2016) recommends that code weaving is a comprehensive way to use primary codes, concepts, and themes into a narrative, creating as few sentences as possible to explain the data. Using data to support the created statement also assisted in writing later chapters of the research study and addressing the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Patton (2015) contends that establishing trustworthiness requires spending a considerable amount of time with the data and requires careful attention to a deeper understanding of the participants and to the human experience. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), Patton (2015), and Creswell & Creswell (2018), credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability all help to assure the results of the findings from

participant responses, data sources, and thematic analysis. Interacting with specialists for

peer review, who use mindfulness practices, incorporated an expert perspective and

knowledge into the assessment, establishing credibility and dependability (Patton, 2015).

Transferability determined if the study was useful in another research context. Finally,

confirmability helped to ensure that the project fit together, cross-referencing multiple

data sources within the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following table

provided criteria for research trustworthiness:

Table 1

Criteria for establishing trustworthiness

Trustworthiness Criterion	Practices of Trustworthiness	Description
Credibility	- Member Check - Peer Review - Data Triangulation - Theoretical Triangulation	Providing member-checks allowed for the accuracy of the data collected. Member-checks occurred with a follow-up interview with semi-formulated themes and patterns within the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Focus group responses that were not clear occurred in the follow-up member checking and peer review responses. Utilizing a peer to question findings to someone other than the researcher helped to debrief the study. In triangulation, coded data and themes require multiple data sources to establish the validity of the patterns and themes that emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
Transferability	- Data source descriptions - Purposeful sampling	The description containing thick, rich accounts of the study during the research

Trustworthiness Criterion	Practices of Trustworthiness	Description
	● Generalizability	process provided general transferability to other research contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).
Dependability	● External Audit ● Member check	An external audit reviewed the procedural steps of the study. This process helped to establish the validity of interpretation and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
Confirmability	● Qualitative reliability ● Reflexivity ● Triangulation	The researcher set up protocols to confirm the triangulation of transcripts, code comparisons, and multiple memos documenting the process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Anticipated Ethical Concerns**

"First, do no harm." This famous quote helps create the mindset to ensure that

research participation does not harm the participant or the researcher (Leavy,

2017). Understanding ethical issues was a crucial component of research. Within each

step of the design process, careful considerations of participant personal protections took

place. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was critical, and participant

recruitment began only after receiving approval. Following this approval, conference

administrators sent the initial recruitment email with the questionnaire to participants.

It was essential to understand the vulnerability of sharing student needs,

participants' firsthand experiences of daily demands, and the pressures of work within

higher education. In understanding this dynamic, responses varied in discussion and

detail. The participants' responses provided insight that might not emerge otherwise in a

typical work environment. Free resources from the PDF handouts from the American

Psychiatric Association on Workplace Mental Health provided participants with

additional information about stress in the workplace. While experiences varied by person,

participants still shared how they balanced daily needs while identifying mindfulness

activities and insights that created space for intention, attention, attitudes, and awareness.

The image below adapted from the researchers, Shapiro et al., (2006), demonstrates the

mechanisms of mindfulness that are important to the psychological and physical well-

being of mindfulness-based practices.

Figure 4.

Adapted Mechanism of Mindfulness
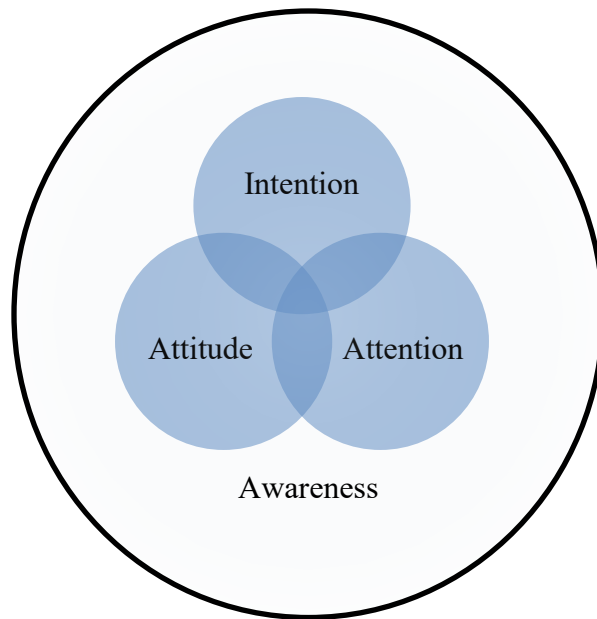
To this effort, there was a need to support skills that promoted increased self-compassion,

self-awareness, and unity as a whole.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, higher education has made substantial use of

virtual software and communities. Many universities require instructors to deliver

educational content primarily online or hybrid. Also, frontline TRIO/student affairs staff

use similar communication platforms for daily conversations with coworkers and the services provided to students. Therefore, it was essential to acknowledge the many additional facets of stress and frustration that technology might have brought and their influence on staff responses. Data sources such as the reflection after the focus group interviews and the other electronic written documentation helped to interpret the context of their experience during the pandemic and how it influenced participants' responses to mindfulness and the work environment.

Summary

Chapter three provided insight into this qualitative study's research design. Questionnaires, focus group interviews, presentations, and visual data served as data sources, and data analysis helped make meaning of the responses of student affairs professionals who use mindfulness practices. The researcher collected data to establish trustworthiness and provide enough reflexive opportunities with field notes and data sources to identify themes presented in Chapter four. Finally, Chapter five will present and discuss the findings of the study to include conclusions, implications, and limitations of study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter three provided an overview of the research process and data analysis practices which led into the themes that Chapter four addresses. Specifically, Chapter four provides an analysis of qualitative data sources from transcripts of focus group Zoom interviews, a collection of reflective surveys, and participant written documents. Additionally, reflective memos about participants who worked in frontline positions at higher education institutions and shared their mindfulness practices provided support of the qualitative analytic process. While all participant interactions occurred virtually due to the continued COVID-19 pandemic, participants shared their personal stories and communicated insights in thoughtful ways. The interviews consisted of three focus group sessions and only 1 - one-on-one interview for this study. For the three focus groups, there were three people in each Zoom interview. The information below reflects the characteristics of these interviews. For this study, pseudonyms provided anonymity for participants to protect personally identifiable information shared in the discussions. For participants who did not provide a pseudonym, I assigned a pseudonym.

Focus Group Characteristics

For this study, a total of ten participants contributed to the interviews. The focus group participants selected closely represented the demographics of those who initially completed the questionnaire. Seven participants identified as female, one participant identified as male, and one person identified as non-binary. Eight of the participants worked 40 or more hours per week, and two participants worked less than 39 hours per week. Eight participants attained master's degrees, while two earned bachelor's degrees. Each interviewee was employed at a unique college/university with interviewees representing six community colleges; two public, four-year colleges; one private four-year institution; and one public four-year research institution. Participant demographics contributed to the variety of responses discussed later in the chapter.

Description of Participants

As opposed to using a general sample of frontline student affairs professionals, a targeted sample of TRIO student affairs staff provided the necessary qualitative experiences to meet the needs of the study. Target recruiting of TRIO staff in student affairs imposed two conditions expected to produce the richest data for this study: (1) a known criticality of meeting student needs at the frontlines of service, and (2) required annual objectives of federally funded grants (organizational metrics). Purposeful sampling also helped me conduct information-rich interviews (Patton, 2015). The following is my brief description of each participant as I learned about their involvement as frontline staff and their mindfulness experience.

Focus Group Interview 1

As we began to walk through the presentation and my description of mindfulness, participants felt more comfortable about the interview. They began to speak more freely, with fewer pauses between responses. I began to feel more comfortable, as well. This group of participants hosted two female and one nonbinary individual who ranged in age from 20 to 49. One person identified as Asian American, and two participants identified as Caucasian. Two participants worked at a two-year public institution and the other participant shared their experiences from a four-year private institution.

Participant 1 - Naomi. Naomi is an educational professional sharing 26 years of experience with TRIO and student affairs. In the interviews, she shared stories that provided insight into her understanding of student affairs at her institution. During the interview, she took brief but noticeable pauses to think before her responses, sharing her experience at the institution respectfully and conscientiously. She also identified that she had 20 years of experience with yoga, meditation, and mindful journaling. Her understanding of mindfulness and TRIO programs came across as knowledgeable and confident in her responses.

Participant 2 - Nicole. Nicole was a young professional with eight months of student affairs and TRIO experience. While she had less than a year of experience, she had more knowledge of mindfulness that combined made her an appropriate candidate for the research due to her interaction with mindfulness involved yoga and journaling. She waited her turn to speak and let others provide their insight, but she also shared a smile when talking about her 5-year journals which contained pre-made writing prompts, and her enjoyment of yoga. In her written reflection, she wrote about the effect on her day

when she did not incorporate mindfulness in her practice. During the interviews, her stories illuminated her interest in social justice, both within her role at her institution and her personal beliefs; additionally, she expressed that she saw that alignment within the institution.

Participant 3 - Emerson. As the first person I met in Zoom, Emerson talked with me while waiting for the other participants. Emerson was very friendly, which helped me because this was my first interviewee interaction. Emerson was a little quieter when the interview started, but their four years at the community college with TRIO programs and six years with mindfulness came across in the responses. There was a sense of assurance of how Emerson saw the fit of their TRIO office role at the institution during the interview. Emerson wrote in his written document that they knew the institution saw the importance of TRIO. Emerson also recognized the similarity in institutional goals and their departmental goals.

Focus Group Interview 2

The second set of interviews came across as more conversational. I noticed that my experience with the first group increased my confidence, which may have provided more comfort for my participants. This interview group contained all women in the age range of 30 to 59. Two participants, both Caucasian, worked at a two-year public institution, and one participant worked at a four-year doctoral-granting public university and identified as African American. This focus group did not provide written responses as I was able to obtain the recording and transcription of this interview.

Participant 1 - Susan. Susan did not specifically share a formalized yoga or meditation practice in her initial questionnaire or during the interview, but her willingness to provide

examples of how mindfulness helped her in student affairs and at home came across in her personal stories. She smiled when she talked about how she encouraged her students with the ideas of mindfulness practices and shared examples of the realizations she made for herself. She was open about her awareness of the challenges faced by the students and of the daily interactions in student affairs, confidently sharing how those opportunities were a part of her life.

Participant 2 - Ronnie. Similar to the other participants, Ronnie provided insight that unfolded as the discussion moved along, and she also provided a thoughtful, reflective survey response summarizing her awareness of the experience. Ronnie identified as having ten years of experience in student affairs and four years of experience in TRIO. During this interview, she gave specific examples of how the staff in her office practiced mindfulness and shared personal examples of mindful moments at home while listening to others' stories. Her openness to the interview allowed me and the other participants in her group to see specific examples of the evolution of mindfulness in her life.

Participant 3 - Sharon. Sharon took an interest in why I wanted to learn about mindfulness before the interview started. She wanted to know more about my study, to share more in detail what the research was about. After we spoke on the phone, she shared that she appreciated the study because she believed it was essential to the well-being of other staff in student affairs. Mindfulness among the educational workforce was not typically discussed with staff. As a student affairs professional for 15 years and a TRIO professional for seven years, her experience also provided insight into student needs. With 20 years of experience with yoga, meditation, and breath work, she provided excellent examples of non-judgmental awareness of thoughts, a fundamental principle of

mindfulness. Once she learned more about my research after the phone call and the presentation, her stories and experiences brought opportunities to deepen the discussion and provide ways to share commonalities in the background of other frontline staff. After my second interview, I became more excited about hearing others' experiences. I recognized some themes from the first two interviews and provided more stimulus to the conversation to flow through the responses. In the end, I wondered how the participants became interested and involved with mindfulness if they had not shared that part of their story with me.

Focus Group Interview 3

The third interview reflected stories from two female participants who worked at a four-year public institution and one male participant who worked at a two-year public institution. All three participants were African American in the age range of 20-49. This focus group ran over time and did not wholly record; however, the participants also agreed to revisit with me later in the day when they were available to finish the responses and provided me with written documentation of the interview session which did not record.

Participant 1 - Tee. While Tee was a young professional, her experience in student affairs spanned over six years in her profession, and three of those years supported TRIO programs. Her personality was very welcoming and energetic, with a bright smile when the camera panned over her screen. She was from the same institution as the other participants but served in different TRIO grants. She shared her spiritual connection with mindfulness using tarot cards as reflective prompts and how her practice helped with her contemplative reflections of the day. She also looked up to one of the other participants

as an expert in mindfulness while still giving credit to belief in her understanding of the benefit of the mindfulness practice. She also stressed the importance of her own experience and its positive impact on her-and how she interacts with students.

Participant 2 - Ms. Brittany. Initially, Ms. Brittany was a little more reserved than Tee, who is from the same institution. Ms. Brittany did not share until the end of the interview that she was a Reiki master; she went on to describe Reiki as the practice of energy work. However, during the interview, she shared examples of her awareness of her environment and of another person's energies and emotions. She acquired this knowledge through 15 years of mindfulness experience. Ms. Brittany worked in a part-time position and had four years of experience in student affairs and five years of experience in TRIO. She provided advice and expertise to others and gave personal examples of her self-care practices.

Participant 3 - Matthew. Matthew was much quieter than the other two participants in his group; he shared only what he needed to answer the questions. He was willing to share the creative skills he recognized as mindfulness, such as rapping, poetry, and art. He discussed breath work, meditation, journaling, and leaving his desk when times were more stressful. On his questionnaire, he identified that he worked in student affairs for six years and worked in a TRIO program for three of those years. He also estimated that his engagement with traditional mindfulness practice had lasted one to two years, but his creative pursuit has been a lifetime experience starting in his youth.

One-On-One Interview

Interview with Lauren. This interview occurred twice due to the recording issues with Zoom; still, she responded with detail and wisdom in both interviews, translating well

into the sociological world and the institutional and TRIO office setting. The knowledge and experience shared by Lauren provide insight into many of her roles as a higher education professional. She worked six and a half years in student affairs and three and a half years in TRIO programs. Lauren shared that she taught sociology courses, met with students, and served in the Director role advocating for her program. Her mindfulness experience expanded over five years. She gave examples of meditative practices like yoga and body scans. She also highlighted reflective instances where she and her staff shared group experiences of non-judgmental awareness in office meetings.

While these were mostly group interviews, personal participants shone through, while acknowledging the similarities in their experience in higher education. Following my observations of the participants, the next section will highlight the themes that interconnected their mindfulness experience as staff in student affairs and TRIO.

Emerging Themes

"There is a difference between meditating and meditation." -Kain Ramsey

The quote above is a phrase from a mindfulness-based course, *The Mindfulness Practitioner*, which provides a symbolic explanation of how the findings emerged during the interviews. Participants discussed their meditative practices and how they used mindful awareness to support their work with students, co-workers, and their understanding of the institutional goals. This next section will share examples of "meditating." For this section, I define "meditating" as meditative activities like walking, yoga, breathing, and any practice that requires focus on an intended action with non-judgmental awareness. At the same time, the themes identify states of meditation. I also

define "meditation" as – contemplative moments of awareness that increase a person's outlook within their work and personal lives.

The following themes outline participants' shared experiences within focus groups. Within participant stories, the interviews highlighted mindfulness and contemplative practices (meditating and meditation), which helped support frontline staff's understanding of the benefits of mindfulness in their lives. In addition to the focus groups and interviews, participants reflected their frontline roles and mindfulness practices in a one-question reflection that followed the focus group interviews. Within focus group interviews, written responses, and surveys, three major themes emerged from their understanding of their roles as frontline staff. These themes are:

(1) understanding the collective connection to "good" in student affairs;

(2) attentive perception for mindfulness and equity in Higher Education; and

(3) introducing intentional care to the overall well-being of themselves and others.

Theme 1: A Collective Connection: Understanding the Connection to "Good" in student affairs

Without directly using the term "collective connection," participants provided many examples which highlighted the institutional, social, and personal good of using mindfulness practices in their work as frontline staff. These stories often reflected that institutions, staff, and community organizations all aim to support students despite the stress of daily tasks at hand.

Institutional good

Many participants recognized that their efforts as frontline staff included beneficial contributions to the university. Participant responses addressed how

mindfulness helps them to meet their own needs, and mindfulness could be seen as a contributor to the support of the institution. In the institutional climate, meeting grant and departmental goals sometimes overrode the staff's efforts to meet organizational metrics. In a response from the first interview, a participant sent a written response about university expectations.

> *There were times I had sleepless nights if in disagreement with policies or trying out different and new procedures. But breathing exercises, daily yoga, and meditation would remind me to focus on what's within my control. If I felt the need to advocate for myself, mindfulness helps me manage strong emotions or distance myself, so I could problem-solve more constructively.*

This response helps to highlight the mindfulness practices that the participant used to support her mental and emotional thoughts when addressing work stressors. While some participants sometimes felt stressors or felt unrecognized for some of their efforts as grant staff who support students with high need, other TRIO grant staff in the interview sessions shared that they received support from their institutions to continue supporting students more at risk at their college or university. Participants in the focus group also established that longer-running TRIO programs received increased resources the longer the TRIO grant remained at the institution.

In my final interview session, I had the opportunity to virtually visit with a staff member who was a faculty member and taught mindfulness in sociology-based courses. Lauren also had a caseload of TRIO students while holding a management position. She was very patient. From my observational perspective across the screen, she was very calm and smiled when giving most of her responses. Her position about the institution's

support helped shed light on the institution's efforts. The school provided her with resources for workshops on mindfulness-based practices.

> *...I feel that we're very much supported, and as you know, TRIO budgets are baby budgets. So, we just had our president's office fund the lunch for our summer enrichment program, which took place a few weeks ago, and the Dean's office bought us yoga mats. So, we could do our meditation Mondays with our students, which we started this year. So, I feel very fortunate, and I feel fortunate also because we work for a very large institution, one of the largest in the country, we have eight campuses. And so, we also have the resources available for Qualtrics, and just other support staff throughout the college as a district, as well as at other campuses or other TRIO programs. And we're all like a trill squad among the college. So, in that sense, I feel very blessed.*

Resources such as Qualtrics, a survey tool, provides staff with the ability to identify student needs or track services supported by the grants. When grant funding limits certain provisions for spending, programs must find ways to secure items that they need to carry out services.

Social good

Within mindfulness, participants discussed the need to be present with themselves and how they interacted or related to others. The social need and connection stood out within many of the participants' responses during the focus groups. A purposeful connection to others on campus reinforced student retention goals for the grant. Job duties required connecting with those outside of their offices. When searching for community resources, frontline staff served as committee members, advocates, or

university representatives. In my second interview session, a reasonably new participant to mindfulness provided insight into her practice with students. Susan used her seven years of TRIO experience with the awareness she gained from mindfulness to tell her story. While she did not discuss mindfulness-based practices, she provided mindfulness-based experiences sharing her interactions with students and staff.

> *It [mindfulness] influences me a lot because I bring it to the students too. It gives me [inaudible] situation in this office long enough to know that I cannot plan on anything, and while I have experienced a lot, which helps me relate to the students, and helps to see things from their perspective, it allows me to be open to anything that the student feels comfortable sharing with me, because all we do day in, and day out is build rapport with our students, and our co-workers, and colleagues.*

Personal good

Participants consciously identified unique value in the students and the people they worked with daily. Engaging with others supported frontline staff in their pursuit of personal growth within their careers. First, the university's mission to support the surrounding community reinforced the mission of the team to do good and to provide service in their community. Frontline professionals also used opportunities for intrapersonal development to strengthen their interpersonal skills and knowledge. The frontline staff's personal experience from the use of mindfulness and reflection was valuable to participants. Sometimes changing student needs required empathy from staff.

> *I have been in situations where students, whereas Sharon just said, I was not expecting, and was in a situation where it was the last thing I ever thought I*

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would have to deal with closing, especially right around the holidays, and

taxed for my own family and responsibilities, and I was presented in a

situation and it just, it came down to what I know, what I felt, what I believe

for myself, and helped the student to get to the point where they could as

well. So, that's what mindfulness, in a nutshell, means to me, is helping

myself as much as my students, and the people I interact with, know their

strengths, and weaknesses, and awareness, and being real with themselves.

Additionally, participants engaged in and created workshop activities that helped students use mindfulness practices (i.e., yoga and meditation) to improve their college experience. In focus group interview session two, Sharon, a mindfulness practitioner of many years, recognized that her mindfulness practice helped her meet students' needs, empathize with them, and be open to unexpected student situations.

And so, there have been days that I thought, "Oh, this is gonna be a pretty simple day,"

and then all of a sudden, wham, you're dealing with something you could never have

anticipated. And so, it's a real opportunity to bring all the skills and the training that I've

had and say, "Okay, what's needed now?" And not waiting, but now. And that's golden to

me. So, I'll offer that.

This table below shows the responses associated with the concept of collective connection.

Table 2

Collective Connection Theme

Collective Connection (CC) Theme	Subcategories
Participants recognized the institutional, social, and personal good of using mindfulness practices in their work as frontline staff in student affairs.	**Institutional**
	Recognized that TRIO is in line with university goals and contributes to institutional metrics
	Could increase university support with resources and autonomy as TRIO grant longevity increases
	Acknowledged the difference of TRIO in comparison to university which can contribute to stress
	Social
	Described smaller student caseloads increased time and effort for fewer students
	TRIO viewed as additional/similar to university efforts in some instances
	Participated in opportunity for community connections, outreach, and networking off campus as a university representative
	Recognized the importance of empathizing with students or having hard conversations with participants
	Sought community resources to remove food insecurities and provide mental health resources
	Recognized the multi-faceted role as frontline staff (student supervisor, presenter, advocate, advisor)
	Personal
	Participants appreciated that relationships with students and staff on campus facilitated value to personal growth
	Utilized personal development opportunities as support for work responsibilities (software training, participation in committees)
	University missions to the social good aligned with a personal mission to support others
	Recognized the importance of empathizing with students or having hard conversations with participants

Theme 2: Attentive Perception: Participants identified the value of Mindfulness for Equity in Higher Education

The second theme to emerge from this research was a perception that mindfulness could help to improve equity in higher education. All participants recognized the value of mindfulness practices within their organizational environments for the students they

served. Participants paid increased attention to the needs of their students, recognizing the access and additional resources needed to support the retention and graduation efforts of TRIO students. The TRIO participants have smaller caseloads than other frontline employees such as those who work in academic advisement. Therefore, is a need for personal awareness when engaging with students and other staff on campus. For participants, mindfulness provided a way to assess their own emotional needs and interactions with others in a way that increased equity for the students and themselves.

Participants recognize more resource need for TRIO programs

According to the Center for Public Education (2016), "Equity is achieved when all students receive the resources they need, so they graduate prepared for success after high school" (p. 1). While this definition focused on secondary education, and TRIO programs serve secondary and post-secondary students in education, the concept is the same. TRIO grant objectives require the support of students who may not have had educational access, resources, or the academic support needed to get to or complete college. Mindful practices helped the interview participants to reflect on how TRIO influenced the higher education environment at their institutions and provided many of the resources necessary to keep first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities within the academic pipeline from secondary school to college graduation.

TRIO frontline staff identified that their smaller caseloads with first-generation students required more time, reflecting some instances of staff stress when discussing number-based outcomes compared to other non-TRIO frontline staff on campus. Emerson, a young TRIO professional, shared the idea of silos that occurred at their institution. Generally, in student affairs, a silo typically refers to the idea that offices or

departments may provide similar services and separate or isolate themselves to provide that service to their students. While he recognized the silos, he also recognized the alignment of the TRIO grant goals with the institutional goals. TRIO programs may provide similar services, however the services provided only apply to the students in the TRIO program.

> *I would say my role contributes highly to the success of our programs. Functionally, I am the face of the program, and I am here to serve our students with any issues I possibly can. When it comes to the success of the institution, I do see the general value I add to the overall mission. Despite this, however, I am also realistic. I serve 140 students at an institution that has yearly enrollment in the tens of thousands. While the institution may value those 140 students, they only account for a fraction of a percentage for the institution.*

An example of his observation of silos could look like the following: A TRIO program might require that the program provide advice and assistance in post-secondary course selection. The staff member will take into account a student's retention meetings regarding their family, work, and other factors that may lead to attrition from year to year. These retention meetings may seem like an advisor's role. While TRIO staff will encourage students to build a relationship with their advisor to understand specific degree requirements, their relationship with the advisor might present differently. An advisor who has a larger ratio of all students at the institution, might focus more on course requirements to obtain the degree and may not have the time to spend with the students about their personal matters or have the time for relationship building with multiple

meetings. Emerson mentioned both similar instances with his observation and experience at the institution.

Interviews also highlighted that other staff on campus were sometimes unaware that the services were specific to TRIO students who participate in the program at their college, even if similar services occurred on campus for other students. This young professional from the first group wrote it in this way:

The university applied for this grant to better serve an underserved population and increase the retention of the student population. Thus, their expectation is that I can provide programming, guidance, and assistance to students that will further enhance their experience at the institution as well as keep them there to increase retention numbers. This can be stressful and divert from the main mission as this is a numbers-based approach, but of course, comes back to needing to retain students to get proper funding.

When acknowledging the many different needs for students on campus that might reside off-campus, participants also sought community organizations for resources such as help with food insecurity and mental health connections to create the equity resources needed for students to focus on their education. Knowing the right time to share those resources with students was key to students using them; students had to be ready to receive or act upon the shared resources. In the second focus group, Ronnie stressed the importance of the attention needed to know what support to provide.

And so, one of the things that we have done is really focus on identifying what we can help, and identifying what we can't help, and then identifying community, and campus partners who can help students, so that we're not so taxed with working

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on stuff that's really outside of our realm. So, identifying what it is that the student

really needs. And once we can do that, it's just a stress reliever in itself, for both

of us, because you know what you now need, now we just need to find who can

provide that support, if we cannot do it.

Participants perceived a need for themselves

Participants displayed dedication to understanding the frontline role of working directly with students, even when these roles created stress. Participants highlighted roles like student supervisor, presenter, and "momma bear." When students needed more than one frontline service provided directly by the staff, participants said that mindfulness practices helped them know when and how to engage. Despite the challenges within the job, the staff discussed the internal shift of thoughts, feelings, and internal chatter that occurred within their minds when they did a personal check-in. In the second focus group interview, Sharon had many years in the student affairs field and many years of experience in paying attention non-judgmentally to thoughts. Her discussion of her self-reflective experiences provided insight into her self-care of the mind.

So, it's being present to all that chatter, which is getting in the way of me being

who I want to be, in relationship with the people around me at that moment,

because the chatter isn't always helpful. It's just chatter, and I can't stop the

chatter, but I can certainly tell it to go eat bonbons on the couch, because I have

something else to do right now, and I will say that to the chatter.

And so I kind of get playful with it, but I think that's some of the most important

things to do for me, because as an academic advisor, and someone who's worked

in education for a long time, I'm a doer, I'm a fixer. I want to get to the bottom of

something, if there's a problem, I want to know why that problem, because my

student is affected by it. So, my mama bear kind of comes out, but there are times

when I need to step back, and say, "We've gone far enough." Or, "[Sharon],

enough. This is a situation, how are we going to at least soften it for the student?"

Because I can't always fix it.

Below is the table used to organize the responses.

Table 3

Attentive Perception Theme

Attentive Perception (AP) Theme	Subcategories
Participants saw to use Mindfulness for Equity in Higher Education	**Participants recognize more resource need for TRIO programs**
	Acknowledged the difference in effort to support TRIO students in comparison to other University Students
	Used awareness of emotional states to create a signal to check-in to self, students, and staff
	Recognized the importance of empathizing with students or having hard conversations with participants
	Sought community resources to remove food insecurities and provide mental health resources
	Participated in opportunity for community connections, outreach, and networking off-campus as a university representative
	Described smaller student caseloads increased time and effort for fewer students
	Participants perceived a personal need of Mindfulness for themselves
	Recognized the multi-faceted role as frontline staff (student supervisor, presenter, advocate, advisor)
	Participants appreciated that relationships with students and staff on campus facilitated value to personal growth
	Utilized personal development opportunities as support for work responsibilities (software training, participation in committees)
	Attended events for community resource connections, outreach, and networking off-campus as a university representative
	Focused intentional mental attention to thoughts, feeling, and internal chatter

Attentive Perception (AP) Theme	Subcategories
	Asked oneself a series of questions to create personal awareness of well-being
	Used awareness of emotional states to develop as a signal to check-in to self, students, and staff
	Identified when staff take student stressors and recognizing when to let go of stressors

Theme 3: Intentional Care: Participants used mindfulness practices to support their wellbeing and the well-being of those around them.

In this theme, supportive mindfulness practices help participants cope within their connection to themselves and others.

Participants created a mindfulness practice for themselves

During conversations and as highlighted earlier, participants shared that much of their stress occurred when the staff took on the stress of the students with whom they were working. Sometimes, they further reflected that they must let go of that stress to take care of themselves. In my one-on-one interview, the participant shared the practice of check-ins with the self, also known as body scans or mind-body awareness, where one takes the time to become aware of the sensations or tensions in the body (Lin et al., 2019).

> *So, it's [mindfulness] purposeful intention to check in with yourself. Whether it's by checking in with your body, are you feeling stiff, or you're contracting some of your muscles, are your shoulders up 'cause you can't figure out how to do something on your computer, or because somebody came in and they're just having an off day, and maybe you're having an off day.*

The intentional care that the staff saw for themselves presented as an overflow into their student's well-being.

> *I'm more eager to do my job. Like I said, I'm present, I'm aware of what I'm doing, who I'm working with, how I'm working with them. And because I've had, as my practices required me to reflect and remember in all of these things that's going on in your central. I've then come to work and realized that I'm better at reflecting and remembering and getting my students to reflect on things and getting my students to be mindful. And I'm realizing that some of my practice, what I do is flowing into them, and I like it. And it helps them out, and we all get a positive interaction about it at the end of the day.*

Participants intentionally placed items in the work environment to enjoy calm moments. Participants personally defined mindfulness as "finding their calm." Participants shared that they added plants to their space, utilized aromatherapy, and implemented background noises, like a waterfall machine or soft music, that might facilitate a positive mood. The person who created the environment and those around them often enjoyed these personal spaces.

> *And then both at home, and in the office, I have a diffuser. And so, I will put in different scents that bring me calm. And I love to mix them, to see what wonderful smell will come out. And many times, my coworkers are like, 'Can you put in a few more, so that it goes all throughout the office?' So, I will put that diffuser on, open my door wide, and we will infuse the entire office. We also have gotten some plants in our office, they just help. The plants we got, were specifically supposed to purify the air. Not 100% sure if that's doing*

any work, but just the mental of knowing that that's what it's for has helped

all of our sanity.

The previous statement reflected that while the manipulation of the environment is not a mindful practice, the environment influenced the mental awareness of the staff. The participant followed up with a discussion of a more formalized meditation practice. She shared that the office staff's goal to keep mindfulness in the workplace turned into an intentional plan to provide meditation activities with students.

And then we actually have started just doing mindfulness in the office. So, I'll

listen to maybe a YouTube 10 minute or so mindfulness practice, and we also

have, I forget what she called her title. Maybe our health and wellness

outreach? We've actually brought her into several staff meetings to lead us

in guided meditation, and we intend to do that for our students this year as

well.

Participants also shared their intentional practices that occurred at different times of the day. Most participants agreed that short and purposeful practices at work are effective. In a morning routine, some participants took the time for quiet reflection and engaged in moments of stillness. In the second focus group, one participant shared a view of her workspace through her webcam.

So I come in in the morning, and I usually don't have my overhead lights on, so I

just use that over there, but for the camera, so I just kind of keep it calm, and

quiet, and I start every day with my door closed, and as my kettle is brewing, I

just, deep breaths, and I give myself some positive motivation.

Some staff have incorporated practices later in the day and/or engage in light yoga stretches, walk outside, or engage in intentional breathing exercises, often away from their desks.

> *With any practice, I don't take as long with the activities if done at work- I would have to do quick breathing and mantra meditation to help control any nervousness such as before a presentation. With yoga, I limit time and movements to breaks and small office spaces or a corner in a fitness center.*

All participants shared practices that they incorporated mindfulness practices in shorter length at work and more deep, focused practices at home. Participants also shared that their mindfulness practices reflected a spiritual connection through engaging in activities like listening to a Bible app, having a Reiki practice, or even pulling insights from personal tarot cards that assist in present moment reflections. Home practices also allowed the participants to engage in present moment activities when they felt a need to create calm and reflect on interactions with others.

> *I was able to identify more things that would be considered meditative practices after hearing from the other focus group participants. I love to take walks through our park and even on campus listening to audiobooks or the Bible app. It brings such calm and serenity to walk through nature and I feel super productive while listening to something that will benefit me or just for enjoyment.*

Mindfulness, which contains contemplative techniques, creates an awareness of their present moments, and allowed the participants to be more in touch with their inner selves.

Participants provided mindfulness practices for others

While mindfulness practices supported the frontline staff in their work, participants also shared their mindfulness practices with other staff and TRIO students on campus. For students, frontline staff used the method of awareness and non-judgment of the student situations. These participants used the opportunity to share insight or practices that might support the student's well-being. An understanding from focus group 2 provided a more in-depth explanation.

> *To me mindfulness . . . awareness of your strengths, your capabilities. I always tell my students, I'm like, "It's cheesy, but you are the captain of your own academic ship, you know yourself best. All I'm doing is I'm giving you advice from my training, my experiences. So, you know what you are capable of, you know what you can and can't do. And don't kid yourself, be honest, and be real with yourself.*

Many participants hosted workshops where students practiced light stretches on yoga mats or learned what mindfulness could do for them within the academic environment. Sharon shared that she had provided a workshop for the entire campus. In one instance, Susan shared that her TRIO colleagues sometimes come to their office to establish calm (to step away or enjoy the feel of the space) because of the participants' intentional mindfulness environment.

> *My office is like a safe space. When I'm there, I have my aromatherapy, I have the good vibes going. I control my atmosphere. So a lot of times coworkers come to my office to reset from whatever they may have brought to work, or with them, or what has occurred during the day, or whatever their stuckness is. And so I do*

appreciate being able to provide a safe space for others, because I know that, not

everybody has that. And especially when you're coming all the way from

downstairs, and way on the other side. That was definitely intentional. So I love

what I do.

These themes provided lived experiences of those who work with students and use

mindfulness as a tool to support themselves and others, responsively. Many participants

recognized that mindfulness helped every part of their lives, and some participants

contemplated that experience more deeply after the focus group conversations.

I was thinking about the conversation yesterday and realized that there is no way

that my mindfulness efforts cannot help but impact my work because my intention

is that they have a positive impact on all my relationships and encounters. There

is no way to compartmentalize. It speaks true to the adage that it's not so much

what we do as how we do it that matters. My efforts also remind me to trust, as I

said in our discussion, that it's not my job to "fix" a situation but to contribute as I

can and reach out as needed. I'm but one part of the solution and trying to do too

much prevents other people/ideas/solutions/possibilities that may be more

effective from coming into play.

As noted in the quote above, incorporating a reflective response as a part of the research

study, deepened the awareness of their mindfulness practices and its benefits in their

personal and work lives. The Statements below identify the responses associated with the

theme.

Table 4

Intentional Care Theme

Intentional Care (IC) Theme	Subcategories
Participants used mindfulness practices to support their wellbeing and the well-being of those around them.	**Mindfulness Practices for the Self**
	Identified the awareness of when staff take student stressors and recognizing when to let go of stressors
	Activated mental and physical check-ins regularly and when needed with Mindfulness
	Created spaces with the intentional awareness of the work environment (plants, aromatherapy, clear workspaces, Soothing sounds)
	Mindfulness breaks in the workday range from 10 – 15 minutes in shorter time spans (yoga, meditation, walking, and breathing)
	Acknowledged the importance of taking personal time from work
	Influenced and tied to a spiritual practice (reiki healing, tarot cards, listening to bible app)
	Participants began with a brief morning routine in the workspace before tasks and duties started
	Actively engaged in present moment activities to create calm when needed
	Established traditional mindfulness practices at work and home
	Mindfulness Practices for Others
	Shared the experience with others by attending and hosting mindfulness workshops for staff and students
	Engaged in Mindfulness in supportive work in Student Affairs
	Recognized the importance of empathizing with students or having hard conversations with participants
	Created spaces with the intentional awareness of the surrounding work environment (plants, aromatherapy, clear spaces, soothing sounds)

Summary

This chapter shared the reflective experiences of participants and discussed the major themes that emerged from the data collected. Following the significant themes were supporting subthemes that highlighted stories and examples of the use of mindfulness. Participants shared instances of interaction with students, co-workers, and community members and understanding the collective connection of how mindfulness

practices assist with the services provided to students. Participants also discussed the need for TRIO programs within the focus group. Finally, participants used mindfulness as an intentional care strategy for themselves and others. Next, Chapter five will discuss the study's findings, limitations to the research, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Chapter four presented three themes that emerged from data analysis:

(1) understanding the collective connection to "good" in student affairs;

(2) attentive perception for mindfulness and equity in higher education; and

(3) introducing intentional care to the overall well-being of themselves and

others.

Employees recognized that their mindfulness practices supported their daily personal and work environments, suggesting that mindfulness practices also benefit today's higher education institutions. Chapter five first re-presents the purpose of the study and research questions as a framework for study findings and then provides discussion of the findings within the current literature. Implications for practice may support the use of mindfulness and contemplative practices by student affairs frontline employees, in addition to increasing interest and awareness of contemplative practices within the organizational structure of higher education. Chapter five also includes implications for research and theory, as well as study limitations and future areas for research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of American higher education frontline workers in Student Affairs who reported regular use of mindfulness practices.

Research Questions

In connection with the purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

- How do people describe their mindful practices?

- In what ways do frontline workers in Student Affairs perceive that their experiences with mindfulness practices influence their daily work with students?

- How do frontline workers in Student Affairs perceive that their experiences with mindfulness practices influence their abilities to navigate the organizational environment?

The findings of the study, and related discussion, provide pertinent responses to these research questions.

Findings

Flowing from thematic analysis of the data, this study's findings divide into a two-pronged discussion regarding:

(1) consideration of contemplative practices within the organizational environment, and

(2) participant perspectives on the value of their mindfulness practices.

Research suggests that mindfulness can improve the personal well-being of employees. This is an area where the organizational mission can highlight the value of contemplative

practices and recognize that spiritual capital supports employee resilience, and that spiritual intelligence can strengthen an employee's internal well-being.

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An Organizational Role

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Finding 1a: Participants valued contemplative practices in all parts of their lives, including in the organizational setting.

Participants recognized that their personal practices of mindfulness supported them in their work environment. Mindfulness-based exercises, which strengthen attention and awareness of mental perceptions (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017), are also supported by research on psychological health and well-being in the workplace and present a more holistic approach to employee wellness (Morgan, 2006). In studies focused on wellness in higher education, Manning (2018) and Mather (2010) recognized that reflection and growth, also a contemplative component of mindfulness, also strengthen the employee's psychological well-being in the work environment. From the focus group reflection question completed after the interviews, one participant in this research study wrote,

> *I was thinking about the conversation yesterday and realized that there is no way that my mindfulness efforts cannot help but impact my work because my intention is that they have a positive impact on all my relationships and encounters. There is no way to compartmentalize.*

Recognizing the connection and value that arises from contemplative practices strengthens the opportunity for employees and organizations to explore how mindfulness training may integrate into the work environment. This concept is supported in the responses from participants who sought their own personal and professional

development. Employees do seek and take opportunities to assess work-life balance, identify positive job aspects, and explore development training for personal continuous learning, inclusive of seeking mindfulness opportunities. (Beer et al., 2015; Morgan, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2011).

Finding 1b: Participants felt able to practice mindfulness at work, but the institution or unit did not necessarily encourage or recognize the value of their practices.

Participants felt that they were neither discouraged nor encouraged to practice mindfulness as a part of their institutions' commitments to support employee wellness. Many participants took short breaks during the workday to incorporate a small piece of mindfulness from their larger-scaled practice at home. Staff participants in the study would take a ten-minute mindful walk, step away from their desks, or write down a few reflective notes to review at a later time.

> *With any practice, I don't take as long with the activities if done at work-- I would have to do quick breathing and mantra meditation to help control any nervousness such as before a presentation. With yoga, I limit time and movements to breaks and small office spaces or a corner in a fitness center.*

While there was discussion regarding helpful mindfulness practices to frontline staff, participants did not discuss the value of individual employee well-being as important to the organization. Instead, participants said that their institutions supported practices that value the community's greater good and address social justice challenges.

> *To have it written is different than actually embracing that culture, and actually doing the work. So, our university's mission has me often evaluating if I'm really*

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upholding those qualities that I say that I have, and upholding those qualities that

I desire to be known to have.

In this statement, the participant identified that she is actively reflecting on how the mission of the university influences her personal actions as an employee. Contemplative and mindfulness-based practices could play a part in this reflective experience as staff assess their own personal actions about their well-being and how it influences students and staff around them.

The institutional investment in meeting student needs, as supported through grants such as TRIO programs, provides resources to the social good of degree attainment for first-generation, socioeconomically disadvantaged students. When mindfulness is embedded as practices initiated by employees, contemplative and mindfulness-based practices provide an unacknowledged value to the university mission. Multiple participants identified that TRIO programs with longevity received additional resources to continue support of their first-generation students who participated in the grants.

They've been very supportive in terms of the matching dollars that they provide

for our SSS programs, the facilities that they provide for our UB programs.

However, few participants mentioned organizational statements or support that emphasize the value of employee care or wellness practices. In frontline roles, where staff may exhaust all resources to support students, including mental resources, methods such as mindfulness practices that assist with stress management or mental support (Beer et al., 2015) were not strongly highlighted or encouraged in their institutional missions.

Discussion: There is more need of institutional awareness and contemplation in the organizational setting.

The first two findings in this study suggest the value in an organizational culture that acknowledges employee perspectives on mindfulness and the role that a contemplative organization can have in the student affairs environment. Similar to the development of the contemplative tree from qualitative responses of the research from Duerr (2004), contemplative organizations continue to stand out as a process that can transform static organizational practices into flexible processes. These present-moment awareness practices bring the potential to embrace change and encourage personal reflective decision-making for the needs of the departments and divisions (Duerr, 2004). As supported in the literature, mindfulness supports employee well-being and productivity (Dane, 2011; Mrazek et al., 2012). A cultural climate that encourages a contemplative or reflective mindset can increase communication, highlight the importance of community, and create a positive connection between organizational missions and processes. Mindfulness practices can help to facilitate reflective characteristics which develop the person, in turn developing the organization through its people (Duerr, 2004).

When highlighting the student affairs frontline employees who are directly involved with students, it is imperative to recognize that these employees require spatial intelligence to think and make choices for the betterment of the student and the department or division. Empowering staff with decision-making within the institutional mission, vision, and value, and supporting contemplation practices can create the mental

flexibility and wellness needed in an ever-changing work environment, thus unraveling a custom model to support the institution's specific needs (Morgan, 2006).

Contemplative practices can be a tool to foresee and work through inevitable challenges that often arise with students in a case management or student advocacy environment. Research on contemplative organizational values, as highlighted by Duerr (2004), further support the value and practice of adopting a contemplative organizational culture and using mindfulness practices to facilitate intentional awareness to the self and others in the work environment. An introduction to a mindfulness-based approach could aid in other positive employee practices such as stress reduction techniques, time management, and campus collaboration (Bender, 2011; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013).

Employee Frontline Support

Finding 2: Participants expressed some frustration with their units' focusing more on metrics and less with their efforts to provide frontline services to students who require additional time and attention.

Participants recognized that decision-makers rely more on numerical data regarding frontline efforts and their impact on the outcome and less on the amount of individual effort it takes to meet objectives. The literature on frontline student affairs staff indicates that frontline employees are sometimes the first and only people to see students outside of the classroom (Lynch & Glass, 2019). Interestingly, frontline staff traditionally become positioned as the last to carry out decisions of leadership even while the research identifies frontline staff as key responders to innovations among work operations and processes (Engen & Magnusson, 2018). When leaders focus on outcomes-based decision-

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making, the practice may leave staff feeling disconnected from organizational efforts and concerned for the students they serve. One participant made this statement:

> *I'd like to think it's (university expectations), with the student first mentality, I would like to think that it's understanding that the students have needs outside of school, and school is a priority as well, but seeing them as human first, as people first, rather than just attempted credits.*

When frontline employees lack understanding about institutional decision-making, it can impact frontline customer service to students. As advocated by McNair et al. (2016), staff are also educators. Recognizing the importance of how staff understand metrics and university mission impacts how frontline employees situate the learning for students outside of the classroom (McNair et. al, 2016). In focus group discussions, participants shared how mindfulness practices translated into their work environments. Participants shared how they recognized the benefits of mindfulness and how it played a part in their recognition of thought and emotions of organizational decisions and expectations.

> *There were times I had sleepless nights if in disagreement with policies, or trying out different and new procedures. But breathing exercises, daily yoga and meditation would remind me to focus on what's within my control. If I felt the need to advocate for myself, mindfulness helps me manage strong emotions or distance myself so I could problem-solve more constructively.*

Glomb et. al, 2011 substantiated in their findings that mindfulness practices also help to support a focus on present moments and staff's personal awareness about decisions during times of uncertainty or decision-making, increasing psychological safety.

Discussion: Exploring ways to move from the standardization of outcome-focused goals.

Tierney (2008) addressed the impact of culture within educational structures and emphasized the importance of cultural perspective of the employee for larger decision-making practices. Acknowledging the organization's character by considering the staff and the department's needs is necessary. A practice of encouraging personal growth within the work environment which addresses human needs may inform organizational behavior and management practices (Morgan, 2006). Mindfulness or other reflective/contemplative practices can support the attention and awareness needed to address common concerns and frustrations that frontline staff recognize in a constantly changing educational environment where they are charged with meeting student needs (Manning, 2018; Mather 2010).

Discussion: Incorporating mindfulness to bring a new perspective and create push back to the modern bureaucratic method

Practicing mindfulness or contemplative practices may look different from the traditional task of coming to work and focusing only on serving students. Incorporating mindfulness or contemplative practices might alter staff members' priorities, to include starting the workday by reviewing the scheduled day and assessing where they are emotionally before engaging with students and other staff. While common concepts from bureaucratic theory remove the value of emotions, feelings, attitudes, values, and beliefs for the sake of outcomes (Morgan, 2006), mindfulness utilizes a person's awareness of these characteristics and their lived experience to strengthen the value of their work in high-functioning, sometimes stressful environments.

The concept of "McMindfulness," a name mimicked after the McDonald's corporation, which is known for its critique of the manipulation of mindfulness for corporate gain, tends to refute the benefits of a practice of meditation and contemplation as support to organizational structure. This argument occurs because western commodification of mindfulness practices as a quick fix to solve an employee's issues, stressors, and concerns (Hyland, 2015). More importantly, employees might see themselves as needing to be more efficient to get the organization rolling rather than having structural supports that make their lives easier and less stressful. This commodification view can create concern that the organization would coopt mindfulness in instrumentalist ways rather than for the sake of an individual's well-being and spiritual attainment. Therefore, changes to a bureaucratic process involve awareness of the value of mindfulness over time with a continued practice with the work culture. While contemplative practices originate from eastern religions, leaders must also recognize the separation of spirituality (identified as introspection) and religion (identified as a formal belief practice) to encourage internal decision-making (Hyland, 2015; Zohar, 2010). When organizations adopt contemplative practices as part of a cultural shift, the benefits to the institution present as a contemplative organizational "trait or folkway". Developing traits requires employees and leaders to have discussions and evaluation of contemplative values and processes over time as opposed to establishing practices for short-term solutions to temporary emotions or circumstances.

The practice of mindfulness facilitates the opportunity for organizations to increase the value of the awareness of individual characteristics of frontline employees as an essential layer of the institution, especially when connecting with students. Research

shows that students who make intentional connections with staff have higher retention rates, suggesting the quality of well-being of staff adds value to operations (Harrison, 2014; Jansson, 2010; Morales, 2014); this merits that leaders consider from the staff their current emotional well-being and mental state and how that impacts their work environment.

Finding 3: Most participants associated spiritual values with their contemplative practices.

Spiritual values in the workplace have been identified in research as a component within an organizational culture that supports employee's well-being in the work environment, creating a connection with others and generating positive emotions and interconnectedness (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Many of the participants used mindfulness as an internal approach to physically practice activities that intentionally brought full awareness of their thoughts and how present they became during the activity. Zohar (2010), a leading author incorporating psychology within the corporate world, identified the value of intrinsic exploration. Mather (2010) supports a practice of intrinsic focused activities to include resilience and goal-oriented activities that develop appreciation, service, and personal strength through the continuous development of mental, physical, and social aspects of the individual (Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017).

During the mindfulness activity that was a part of this study's reflection protocol, participants spent time writing about the connection to their personal spiritual beliefs and how religion may tie into their mindfulness practices. The reflection was an open-ended question where participants could write about anything they might have noticed and did not have a chance to share during the interviews. This is particularly interesting because

spiritual values emerged as a finding without a prompt specifically tied to spirituality or religion.

> *I was able to identify more things that would be considered meditative practices after hearing from the other focus group participants. I love to take walks through our park and even on campus listening to audio books or the Bible app. It brings such calm and serenity to walk through nature and I feel super productive while listening to something that will benefit me or just for enjoyment.*

Participants noted that the connection to their personal spiritual belief and mindfulness can play a part in their mindfulness practice.

> *While Christian methods are a great way to connect with mindfulness, it's definitely not the only way. And I believe that metaphysical practices get us to the root of our self-awareness with methods such a meditation, and these practices are used by other religions such as Hindu and Buddhist.*

While this statement regarding religious beliefs surfaced from the written reflections, participants did not discuss in focus groups how religion or spirituality played a part in their personal meditation practices. Discussions occurred regarding a participant's connection to Reiki and yoga practices, which were implicitly acknowledged as healing and restorative in nature, but discussions did not arise about their connection to personal mindful practices.

Discussion: Underlying spiritual capital developed within employees.

Religion, associated with a system of faith and belief (Rendón, 2009) is a personal practice not typically present in the work environment, particularly for those universities that are publicly funded. In the book, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, the author Danah

Zohar (2010) addresses the mental, emotional, and spiritual neural capacities of the "corporate brain." In this book, Zohar (2010) determined that organizations avoid building spiritual capital as a multiple intelligence. Although spiritual intelligence can support an integrated approach to further developing and supporting desirable human qualities (Zohar, 2010) that further develop emotional intelligence (Gardner, 2000), increasing spiritual capital within the work environment may not emerge as a beneficial intelligence for frontline employees who work in student affairs.

Employees make conscious decisions to support students' individualized needs, while pacing their daily work to meet program goals and address required clerical tasks, which can be stressful. The internal exploration that informs the value of work in the educational environment stands out most in the research regarding spiritual intelligence. While emotional intelligence and mental intelligence were crucial factors supporting change, Zohar (2010) recognized that one training or seminar on staff development or spiritual intelligence does not change the corporate culture. Organizations can foster this development by encouraging the value of internal awareness and staff development through their mission, vision, and values. The idea of the encouragement of spiritual intelligence also subscribes to the contemplative organization mentioned in Finding 1.

When frontline staff become supported in building spiritual capital, staff can reveal positive psychological benefits with others who also associate with internal reflection and well-being (Good et al., 2016; Joyce et al., 2018; Manning, 2018; Morgan, 2015). Identifying the benefits of spiritual capital development is an important factor for the growth of intrinsic personal work values (Manning, 2018). Zohar (2010) further identified qualities such as emotional understanding, the ability to deal with suffering and

pain, and the recognition of the interrelatedness of business decisions supporting positive outcomes of organizational support. Focus group participants reported dealing with all of these challenges. In addition to focus group participant reports, many articles regarding student affairs staff discussed employees who navigated unexpected daily challenges to include both the need to meet objectives set by the institution and meeting student needs (Bender, 2011; Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013). When organizations recognize the benefits of an employee's spiritual awareness in the workplace, the value of personal interconnection and emotional understanding can be supported with mindfulness and other contemplative practices that strengthen positive intrinsic qualities.

Implications of the Study

The following sections will discuss the implications of the findings of this study in the areas of research, theory, and practice.

Research

This study's outcomes further lengthen findings detailed in the literature review, which recognized the opportunity to incorporate mindfulness-based practices in organizations and can more specifically extend to staff in higher education to begin to establish a cultural shift toward more holistic professional development. Within the interviews and responses, participants shared the value of creating intentional spaces that increased present moment awareness within the work environment. Mindfulness practices nourished intentional experiences, which could potentially develop the person, in turn strengthening the organization through its people and further generating equity for the staff. A cultural environment where contemplative and reflective mindsets increase communication and encourage positive connection to the university culture set a

precedence for leadership decision making that can sustain mindfulness practices within the institution.

When advocating for equity in higher education, outcomes also highlight the need for more research studies regarding staff and mindfulness practices, and the potential benefits associated with institutions adopt a contemplative culture. More specifically, a natural collective agreement arose among participants regarding the awareness of the changing needs of students, perception of institutional goals, and the recognition of the needs of staff. The agreement of the benefits of mindfulness practices suggests that generating personal and collective mindfulness-based learning environments, as well as opportunities for practice within a work environment could generate more opportunities for research.

Future Research

There is a need for studies that explore how leadership understands the role of personal mindfulness practices and the value of mindfulness within frontline work in higher education. Many of the frontline employees in the focus groups took it upon themselves to develop their own personal practices of mindfulness. However, with more research opportunities to better understand mindfulness experiences among professionals, the following areas will help to provide future insights for frontline professionals.

Leadership and Work Culture

Leaders can clearly see the outcomes that result from a goal-oriented approach. However, this study's research suggests that purposeful leadership approaches that appreciate and value cultural practices created around internal awareness (Rendón, 2009) could strengthen an employee's use of mindfulness practices. When institutions align

intended organizational values with a practice of mindfulness in higher education, internal values emerge to find connection with institutional values. While stress is inevitable and may impact work and progress in the changing higher education environment, identifying stressors as opportunities for growth through mindful awareness and contemplative practices highlights that a mindful organization is equally important to how staff view themselves within the institutional mission of frontline work.

Discussions of how staff shared the mindfulness techniques or their experience with staff might generate supportive data to future studies of better understanding mindfulness. Interacting with leadership at the decision-making level of institutions might bring insight into stressors in the work environment who may or may not practice mindfulness. Having conversations with the students of frontline staff might also get insight into the benefit of mindfulness practice. Research on strategies for institutional leadership to understand mindfulness or other contemplative cultures could assist in highlighting the connections that staff make with the organization's mission, or identify the missing connections with leadership decisions. Providing research on effective mindfulness training for higher education organizations or ways in which organizations can incorporate mindful language into missions and values could also strengthen outcomes which determine if incorporating contemplative practices assists with coping with job-related stress and reduction of employee attrition ((Beer, 2010; Burke et. al, 2016).

Curriculum Development and Generational Work Experience

Research on the impact of mindfulness training could be performed with a more specific focus on student affairs professionals' years of experience and age. Research on

student affairs professionals who attend graduate programs and who have been exposed to regular mindfulness practices and contemplative exercises could create timely discussions before or during the early stages of a student affairs professional's career. In academic affairs, there are many faculty who currently incorporate mindfulness in other undergraduate and graduate courses. It may be that studying departments at institutions, such as Naropa University, discussed earlier in the literature, that have adopted the contemplative culture (Beer et al., 2015) could serve as a model to connect and explore future topics for frontline employees would be useful. Additionally, one participant in the reflection of the study wanted to know more regarding how mindfulness impacts generational outlooks on mindfulness for staff. Research that involves the ways in which staff use mindfulness at varying ages could also influence the types of practices preferred in the work environment.

Quantitative and Mixed Methods Research

While qualitative studies have developed in the social science areas to include psychology, social work, and education-related fields, using a quantitative or mixed-method approach could provide a useful baseline for the needs of student affairs staff (Harrison, 2014; Lynch & Glass, 2019). Numerical data might support the need of approaching mindfulness as a culture to reach larger sample sizes of participants in student affairs and less as a strategy for individualized persons or specific offices. While this study provided informative areas for TRIO student affairs professionals, there are many student affairs offices that include other types of frontline staff. Research might explore mindfulness practices in athletics, advisement, financial aid, and other student

affairs-related fields. This type of exploration might highlight stressors or employee needs that vary by office and service to students.

Researcher Process Reflections

As a member of a research community, it is imperative that I reflect on my own processes in this study and consider what I learned that may inform others who want to do research in the area of mindfulness and contemplative practice. This study worked well in a virtual group session where participants discussed as a group, as well as reflected individually, the combination of which extended participant lived experiences in very positive ways. These methods provided a generative application for this particular topic. Additionally, the methodological choice of virtual focus group interviews provided more access for student affairs staff. I took on a constructivist lens to better understand participants' lived experiences. This perspective, paired with the use of technology as a platform to collect responses, provided both the participants and me an opportunity to understand their practices and connections at deeper levels. With this knowledge, there are other qualitative experiences that can potentially happen in future studies within the right conditions.

Significant meaning arose within the group experience as participants enjoyed interacting with others who also discussed mindfulness at home and work. Additionally, similar responses occurred in the follow-up reflection question. The contemplative answers helped me, as a researcher, understand if I needed to provide more clarification during the presentation of the contemplative tree, such as for the next focus group. Additionally, having the participants write responses allowed participants to further reflect on, and strengthen, what they said during the Zoom meeting. Later in the synthesis

of the material, I began to recognize the value that the participants previously acknowledged.

For future researchers who might conduct a similar study, I recommend that investigators create a three-part series of interviews. The first part of the research could involve a focus group session with a discussion of the contemplative tree and how participants' practices might fit within the tree model. The contemplative model helps to situate mindfulness and contemplative practices within the session. Once discussion occurs in this first session, the next step in a three-step research process might require that participants provide written responses to all or some of the questions asked during the interview. Finally, requesting that participants return to focus group interviews on Zoom to discuss how they might create a more contemplative culture with their mindfulness practices could start more group discussions of mindfulness and initiate more connections with the other participants. This third step could generate more dialogue surrounding the university and the needs of frontline staff who use and need more mindfulness practices in the work environment to support students and encourage a contemplative organizational culture. As discussed in the literature, a collaborative approach in the focus group could provide similar opportunities in the work environment to create a beneficial multilayered experience for employees (Beer, 2010; Grossenbacher & Quaglia, 2017).

Theory

Theoretical constructs used for this research supported that more investigation regarding frontline staff who contribute to the success of educational attainment is necessary. The findings discussed earlier suggest that a culture of contemplation and

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awareness, incorporated into the values of organizations could increase the growth of the institution and its employees. When leaders can increase support of frontline staff by showing they value introspection and intrapersonal awareness, frontline roles could serve as a valuable strategy to meet objectives and support students towards retention and graduation efforts. To support this observation, the study provides insight on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (addressing psychological safety and the opportunities to reach self-actualization in work environments), the contemplative cognition framework (identifying processes of intention, attention, and awareness), and the spirituality framework (seeking personal growth and development within an organization).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In the book, *Maslow on Management*, Maslow (1998) provided insight regarding human behavior in the workplace through his observation of factory workers. *Maslow on Management* was an update to *Euphyscian Management*, which published in the 1960s. In the updated book, leaders and scholars within business also shared their insight of Maslow's views. Scholars in the commentaries of his management principles emphasized that Maslow knew that having internal reflection all alone in a "cave" has not worked in the upward movement toward self-actualization on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model. One scholar went on to say that Maslow identified that a person's "… inner problems can be projected out into the world, i.e., just to be worked on with less anxiety (Maslow, 1998, p. 17)."

Many of the stressors discussed in the responses from the participants assisted with their realization of how to move forward in their work with students. Additionally, feelings of uncertainty regarding leadership decisions allowed staff to rely on daily

practices of meditation and the attention to those thoughts to help to identify and/or let go

of the emotions associated with the stressors surrounding work. Participants who shared

examples of their moments of awareness regarding mindfulness practices suggest that

employees can move toward self-actualization within their lives and incorporate work as

an additional means to tapping into potential and motivation. The image of Maslow's

hierarchy from the literature review highlights examples of the potential hierarchal steps

that can occur for employees.

Figure 1

Ways that organizations meet employee needs on Maslow's Hierarchy
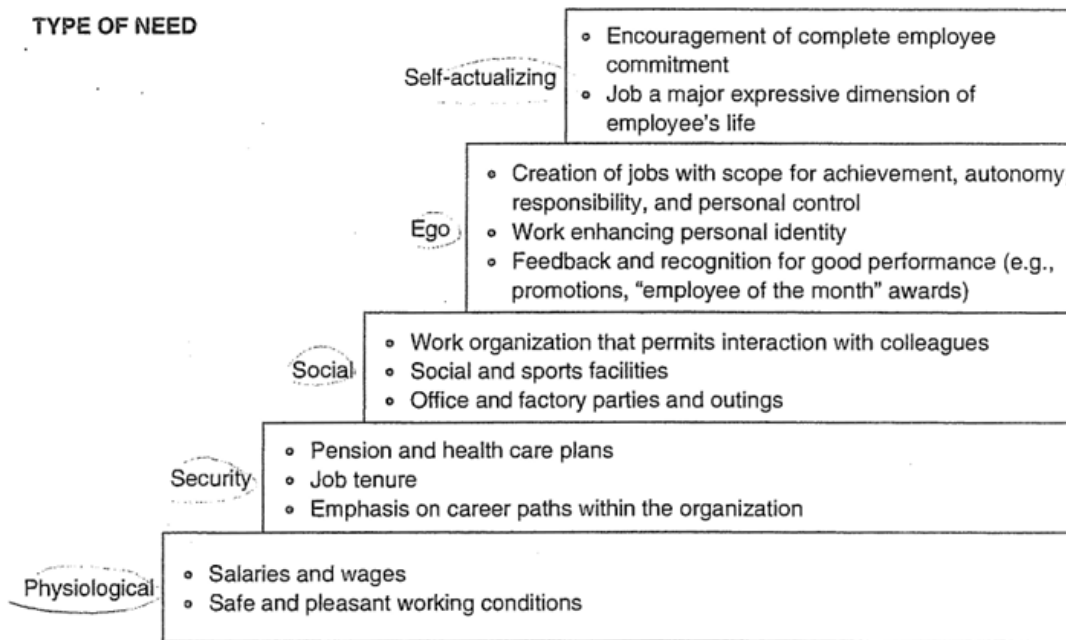
Utilizing Maslow's idea and recognizing institutions that provide access to higher

education also contributes to Maslow's identification of the importance of "great work"

through the social betterment of educated citizens. Participants recognized the social

"good" of supporting students who required TRIO services for disadvantaged students.

But also because we connect with students in so much more holistic ways because

of the nature of our program. So we're not just talking about what class and what

professor and study skills, although all those things are important. And so, we

come across people and their fullest human experience. So whether that's

homelessness or abuse, whether it's active or prior, whether that's domestic or

sexual child abuse that they might have encountered. And connecting students

with services on campus and throughout the community to help them get the

services they need.

When frontline staff recognized their importance to their frontline roles, staff began to use their awareness to make informed decisions about how they interact with students and others in their environment for supportive services. The same daily trials that challenge leaders to grow in the corporate environment regarding large decision-making could translate into the work environment for frontline staff in higher education. This means that with mindfulness practices, challenges and stressors have the potential to reveal demanding circumstances as opportunities to internally grow using external work environments. This type of awareness highlighted more details in the spirituality framework.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1998) is a widely used framework that provides a useful guide of human growth toward self-actualization. The model, as used for this research, provided useful examples (ways to be operationalized) that provided additional insights into the data, particularly personal wellbeing and how it interacts and influences the workplace, and vice versa.

The Spirituality Framework

Human behavior in the workplace indicates that the potential for self-growth, awareness, and personal development from daily work challenges provide alignment with the effort of building spiritual intelligence (Zohar, 2010). In many research areas, student affairs staff have identified meaning and value through their commitment and service to students (Colyvas, 2012) expressing their beliefs, personal values, and personal experiences. Sometimes, spiritual capital develops from that awareness of their personal growth of how they respond to their own personal situations.

In the corporate world, Zohar (2010) encourages spirituality in the workplace to associate meaning, value, and reflection to provide opportunities for transformation for a company as an entity. For a frontline professional, this might look similar within the context of their role as frontline staff. Mindfulness practices among the participants were also connected to personal growth and awareness, their reflection on the experience, and how it applies it to their well-being.

> *I say that because a lot of times, even though I was engaging in those mindfulness practices, I was still getting stress headaches, and migraines, and that was when I was able to realize, "Okay, you need to take a break." Because I was trying to push through, and keep going, as [she] says. I wasn't being forgiving of myself, and knowing that, "You've done all you can for today, take a break and pick it up tomorrow. It'll still be there."*

The spirituality in this context shows that mindfulness provides the practice of internal check-ins with oneself and understanding what that awareness means to them.

And after the pandemic, I recognized that it's okay to pause, and it's okay to really

understand, and recognize that I need a break. And it's okay to take a break. And

so, I think that that is the difference, is that I'm actually really more aware...

This statement also speaks to the value of internal awareness associated with an

employee who uses their internal practice to inform their work and mental capacities.

Recall, often in student affairs environments, many employees try to meet the

environment's needs to the point of burnout (Davis & Cooper, 2017; Marshall et al.,

2016). Internal qualities, such as developing spiritual capital, increasing self-awareness,

and recognizing appropriate action within the work environment could provide another

avenue of building spiritual intelligence.

The spiritual intelligence framework provided insight into participant responses

about organizational and individual growth and awareness. Within the organization,

participants' responses highlighted that institutions support values like social justice

which causes an individual to continuously ask themselves if they uphold these beliefs

for their students. This theory also helped to identify the tie to the practice of the

employee's intrinsic growth through participant stories and reflections.

Contemplative Cognition Framework

The contemplative cognition framework addresses the cognitive impact of

practices such as mindfulness and how they influence attention-focused operations. Using

three mental processes which include intended attention, attention to intention, and the

awareness of transient information, this framework helps to determine if a practice is

considered contemplative in nature (Grossenbacher and Quaglia; 2017). While the theory

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mostly applies mindfulness-based cognitive activities like meditation and mental processes, the theory can also apply to situations that require mental focus.

In the focus group interviews, ***intentional attention*** to introspection allowed mindful practices (i.e., yoga, walking, or breathing exercises) to help participants set a goal to pay attention to their thoughts during their meditative practices and then apply that awareness to intentional acts during the workday.

> *[At Home] Getting personal space and yoga I do as well. Most of those things I do outside of the office. Inside of the office, I may do more deep breathing. I may write sometimes if it gets ... I definitely try to get personal space [At Work].*

From these practices, participants brought about ***attention*** to ***intentional*** present-moment activities within their daily lives and work environments.

> *When I am working from home, I have the ability to engage in any practice when I have the time... I will still engage in some light meditation if I am overwhelmed, and I do make little notes to myself about the day and the events therein.*

 Many participants wrote down their thoughts at work when they arose and brought attention to reflections at home after work.

Finally, association with ***moment-to-moment awareness/transient information*** (thoughts, senses, and emotions) also occurred at the workplace and in their personal practices. One participant described this type of experience as being fully aware of the moment to solve a problem brought by a student. Unexpected student concerns or policy directives like these would require an employee's fullest attention to understanding and listening to a person's needs while also being aware to set aside other situational needs, thoughts, and/or feelings during work at the time.

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I guess for me, a radical presence really sums up, of whatever is happening in the

moment, it's to be present to it, whether I like it or not, whether it fits my

expectations, or my paradigm, or my values. I have no control over what's

happening outside. I do have some degree of control of what's happening inside,

if I'm willing to cultivate that. So, that radical presence to what is in the moment,

and then staying open to it, so I can respond in a way that's true to me, and I feel

is compassionate to the situation, versus reacting in a way that I'm not going to be

satisfied with ultimately.

As shared by other participants, having moment-to-moment awareness during personal

yoga and meditation practice seemed to help increase awareness of transient information

in work situations in instances where undivided attention presents itself. Recall the

statement from the earlier section.

But breathing exercises, daily yoga and meditation would remind me to focus on

what's within my control.

The contemplative cognitive framework suggests that the act of meditating (or other

mindfulness practices) and meditation (or reflective awareness) suggested by Ramsey

(2021) in his mindfulness practitioner course, can increase a mindfulness state within the

moment and might also present as a person's mindfulness trait, the more the mindfulness

practice occurs.

The contemplative cognitive framework provided specific mental processes to

address mindfulness practices. However, the theory contains very complex psychological

factors that may not be as applicable for a focus on the practices of student affairs

practitioners and leaders. While the theory suggests that the cognitive model could apply

to non-cognitive mindfulness practices, including physical or spiritual practices, the complexity of the components of intention, attention, and moment-to-moment awareness are likely more useful in fields focused specifically on mental processes. Therefore, this theory provided some useful application in my study, but, to be truly useful in practice in organizational environments, additional examples how to apply the theory to the practice environment would be helpful.

Practice

The research findings in the chapter provide an opportunity to generate organizational discussions about mindfulness and contemplative practices to support the changing needs of higher education. Beginning to create a work culture that encourages well-being and using mindfulness and other contemplative practices can support the future of higher education, allowing higher education to survive the many changes that may occur within the educational climate. Practices that allow staff to generate a culture involve:

> (1) Learning opportunities and discussion of mindfulness practices and
>
> (2) Intentional personal and collective reflective opportunities to increase awareness about their connection to their work and provides valuable insight to the organization.

Investigating mindfulness in human resource learning areas

Human resource departments typically provide professional development training and provide other employee learning development opportunities to their employees (Morgan, 2006). Mindfulness could be a valuable concept to human resource areas where the organization uses a contemplative practice as an additional tool for staff development.

Research shows that mindfulness skills strengthen the intrapersonal development (Rendón, 2009) needed for interpersonal frontline services (Mather, 2010). Within this particular study, staff recognized that their intentional personal practices helped their knowledge and understanding of those around them, including identifying student needs and the skills necessary to connect with campus and community resources. Mindfulness practices are currently more prevalent in areas such as the new self-help support resources, however, mindfulness practices can move beyond a one-strategy fix-all approach (Hyland, 2015). The practice has the potential to become a part of the contemplative culture for leaders, staff, and students. Learning modules incorporated into human resource platforms and in-person training can start the conversation as to how to introduce mindfulness in applicable work areas. In addition to employee education, discussions and practices among employees strengthen the awareness and connection to the value of mindfulness practices.

Incorporating into graduate programs

Presentations on mindfulness in graduate programs provide areas for discussion with graduate faculty and how a practice might apply to particular curriculum is supportive of strengthening a practice, as the topic is interdisciplinary and integrative. Burke et al. (2016) recommend that mindfulness become incorporated in graduate preparation programs. Introducing a contemplative practice of mindfulness to new professionals could impact a person's mindfulness skills and trait development and assist in understanding how practice can be used as a tool to support new professionals throughout their career. Practices that provide intentional and continuous emphasis on well-being

throughout a graduate course of study could increase the value of mindfulness as frontline professionals advance throughout their personal lives and professional careers.

Inviting mindfulness practices during the workday

Mindfulness and contemplative practices became highlighted as useful in many ways in the classroom. Conferences where higher education professionals discuss topics such as the value of reflective activities, moments of silence, and various practices of mindfulness have supported a contemplative culture in contemplative professional organizations (ACHME, 2019). These types of organizations and conferences can also help staff to connect and customize practices.

Encouraging staff to attend conferences like these where a contemplative tree illustrates the many ways to incorporate mindfulness or contemplative practices into the workday could also support ideas that work for the context of the student affairs professionals and the students that they encounter. Professional organizations focused on mindfulness also provide opportunities to educate students and others outside of the classroom about the benefits of mindfulness in their work environment. One staff shared how they currently include mindfulness.

> *And then we actually have started just doing mindfulness in the office. So, I'll listen to maybe a YouTube 10 minute or so mindfulness practice, and we also have, I forget what she called her title. Maybe our health and wellness outreach? We've actually brought her into several staff meetings to lead us in guided meditation, and we intend to do that for our students this year as well.*

Encouraging discussions, practicing mindfulness together as a collective group, or giving staff a mindful moment of reflection could yield more benefits to a daily work

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environment or strengthen a personal practice at home which reflects into the well-being of the staff member during their workday. Participants in the focus group also shared their appreciation of being able to talk about their experiences as frontline staff with other professionals as a shared experience.

> *TRIO professionals impact the lives of too many students to bring their emotional, situational, and historical debris to a 21st-century conversation with the promise of tomorrow (students). I would love to do more of these types of studies and/or assist in the development of resources to assist TRIO professionals to be a beacon of hope and opportunity to the forgotten populations.*

Another reflection included the following:

> *I wasn't exactly sure what to expect entering the Focus Group and enjoyed the experience as it unfolded. I appreciated the comments of the other two participants and learned from their practices and reflections. There are many avenues into a mindfulness practice and they change with our life experiences and responsibilities.*

It is important to note that mindfulness is not a cure-all practice that organizations can encourage staff to work more efficiently. Organizations should not see contemplative practices in this way. Instead, the work environment should be a channel for supporting staff with intentional reflective activities or mindfulness practices as an undeniable part of a functioning organization that supports the mental well-being of the institutional system. In order to create a supportive work environment, contemplative organization culture is one that embraces mindfulness as a personal and collective support practice to the employee and the institution. Student affairs staff can discover personal meaning and

explore opportunities to encourage mindful practices which could increase awareness of challenges in the face of potential work stressors (Rendón, 2009). This type of organizational practice is less exploitive and more holistic in its development of the culture.

Limitations of the Study

As with any study, this study has limitations that must be considered in transferring the findings to environments other than those of the participants. This qualitative study utilized a completely virtual environment, which may have limited the researcher's ability to fully understand each participant's lived experience. However, this created an opportunity to select varied participant demographics through locations and institutional types. Ideally, fully understanding participants' daily work environment and departmental culture through the visitation of participants in their environment might assist in expanding the context of participant stories. While research precautions provided practices to preserve anonymity, some participants may have withheld some specific information for more generalized responses during the focus groups, which would have reduced personably identifiable information.

It is important to note, as detailed in the introduction to Chapter one that the COVID-19 pandemic occurred during the beginning of this study. Although catastrophic in many ways, the pandemic provided an opportunity to develop the use of virtual environments. Finally, as with most qualitative inquiries, the number of participants was deliberately kept small, and participants could only reflect on their own experiences and environments. Different participants may report differing experiences.

Conclusion

The following section provides closing thoughts to the purpose and research questions proposed in this study. Recall in the introduction of this study, that the pandemic and other political, social, and economic changes in the history transformed the way in which people lived and worked. Higher education was also a site of struggle and triumph over change in the United States. It was within this context that the data for this study was collected. This study provides a perspective on how student affairs staff navigated their world and personal experiences during this time within their professional and personal lives. In the exploration of mindfulness, the study highlighted practices which encouraged internal awareness, growth, and reflection of frontline staff in student affairs.

To further support this conclusion, mindfulness practices in this study were highlighted in varying ways. First, mindfulness differed for participants with varying years of practice, and each practice provided value to the participant when paying attention to their thought, feelings, and emotions, nonjudgmentally. The value of participants' personal practices emerged during the discussion of their interactions with students and others on campus and in the community with frontline duties. Many of the participants came to their own realizations of how their personal practices informed their daily work experiences and personal well-being. Responses from interview questions recognized that institutions do a great job of highlighting the value of the organization's mission and social good, and staff identify with those values. However, many of these organizations do not highlight the importance of continuous development of personal intrinsic values and their connections to the institution. Promoting such a culture could

create contemplative organizations which develop internal reflection that yield positive psychological benefits. Future research that encourages continuous learning and training, as well as personal and collective practices, would serve as a pivotal tool to constantly changing educational environments in U.S. higher education. The skill of mindfulness is one that must be constantly practiced and revisited so the practices may be fully incorporated into the work culture.

Researcher's Post-Study Reflection

Reflexivity allows for the researcher to examine their beliefs, judgments, and positionality during the research process (Patton, 2015). My concluding reflection recognizes the value in practices that bring awareness to my thoughts in an educational environment which supports who I am today. As a staff person who works in TRIO and an alumnus who participated in TRIO programs, I recognize my positionality in how I see the participant stories. I identify with the daily stressors and also appreciate the guidance of others in frontline spaces who brought me to this point in my educational journey. As I reflect on the importance of frontline staff, I recognize the need for a contemplative culture and the associated benefits which result from mindfulness practices supporting employee wellness. As I conclude my journey in this Educational Leadership doctoral program, I recognize the institutional devotion of great work performed in higher education for all students and especially those students supported by TRIO programs. This research highlights mindfulness practices and also brings light to the needed support of both the faculty and staff who hold up the students. Higher education takes on the great work of educating our future. It is at the foundational level where

educational leaders can strengthen their support of frontline staff, despite the changes that
may occur in U.S. higher education.

Summary

Chapter five created an overall summary that re-presented the research purpose
and research questions, and recalled a brief overview of the themes in Chapter Four. A
discussion of research, theory, and practice implications, future research areas,
implications, and limitations of the study were also included. The study's theoretical
frameworks of spirituality, contemplative cognition, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in
Management we discussed and critiqued. The final section of the chapter provided a
conclusion addressing the purpose of the research and the research questions. Following
this section, my reflection on the study within the context of my personal experiences and
beliefs further considered the needs of higher education and frontline staff.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Mindfulness Slides

MINDFULNESS
PRACTICES
AMONG STUDENT
AFFAIRS
PROFESSIONALS IN
HIGHER
EDUCATION

Chez Redmond
Oklahoma State University
Focus Group Interviews
credmond@okstate.edu
405-532-5426

OSU Institutional Review Board

Confidentiality

Pseudonym, if preferred

Data security

Today's Session

- Opening Practice
- Definitions of Mindfulness Practices
- Stories of Practices that Support Daily Work Environments
- Review a Contemplative Tree and create a reflection
- Next steps

Exercise 1: Mindful Breathing

- Box Breathing
- Activity
  - Sit or stand comfortably.
  - Slowly exhale through your nose for a count of four.
  - Slowly inhale through your nose for a count of four.
  - Hold your breath for a slow count of four.
  - Exhale for a slow count of four.
  - Repeat these four times in one sitting, if possible.

Box Breathing

BREATH HOLD

INHALE

Cadence 1:1:1:1

EXHALE

EXHALE HOLD
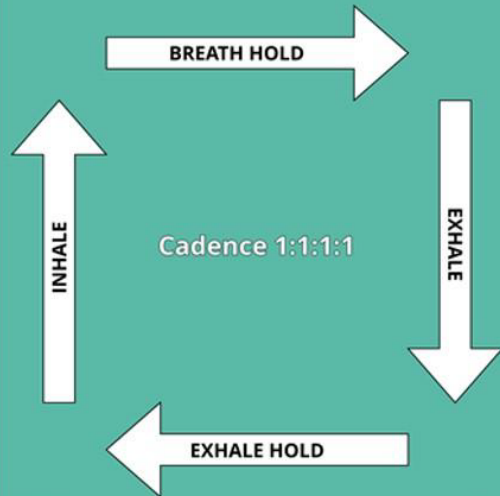
...en to Use:
...erval Workouts
...ore or During Stressful Events
...Part of Pre-sleep Bedtime Routine

Benefi...
Reduces Stre...
Promotes Ca...
Improves Mental Foc...
Improves Mo...

Let's talk about Stress...

- Life or death danger (saber tooth tiger) is no longer the stressful issue...
- The inability to reset is not as easy in our daily interactions (Traffic, Friends, Family, Coworkers, Teachers, and more...)
- Today, we don't realize the "new" saber tooth tiger of chronic stress.

WebMD

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF
LONG-TERM STRESS

Headaches
Depression or anxiety
Forgetfulness
Stroke risk may rise

Muscle pain and fatigue can make eczema or psoriasis flare up

Can make acne or rosacea flare up

More likely to catch colds or flu

Risk of high bp or heart attack may rise

Odds of diabetes may rise

Diarrhea or constipation

Weight gain or loss upset stomach

Sexual problems

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health, American Psychological Association, Mayo Clinic, American Academy of Dermatology, Cleveland Clinic, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Definitions

- Mindfulness
- Contemplative Practices
- Intention
- Attention
- Awareness

A Foundation Built on Research

Mindfulness

- The act of being presently aware and paying attention, without judgment of the thoughts, emotions, or the state of a person at the time (Kabat- Zinn, 1994).

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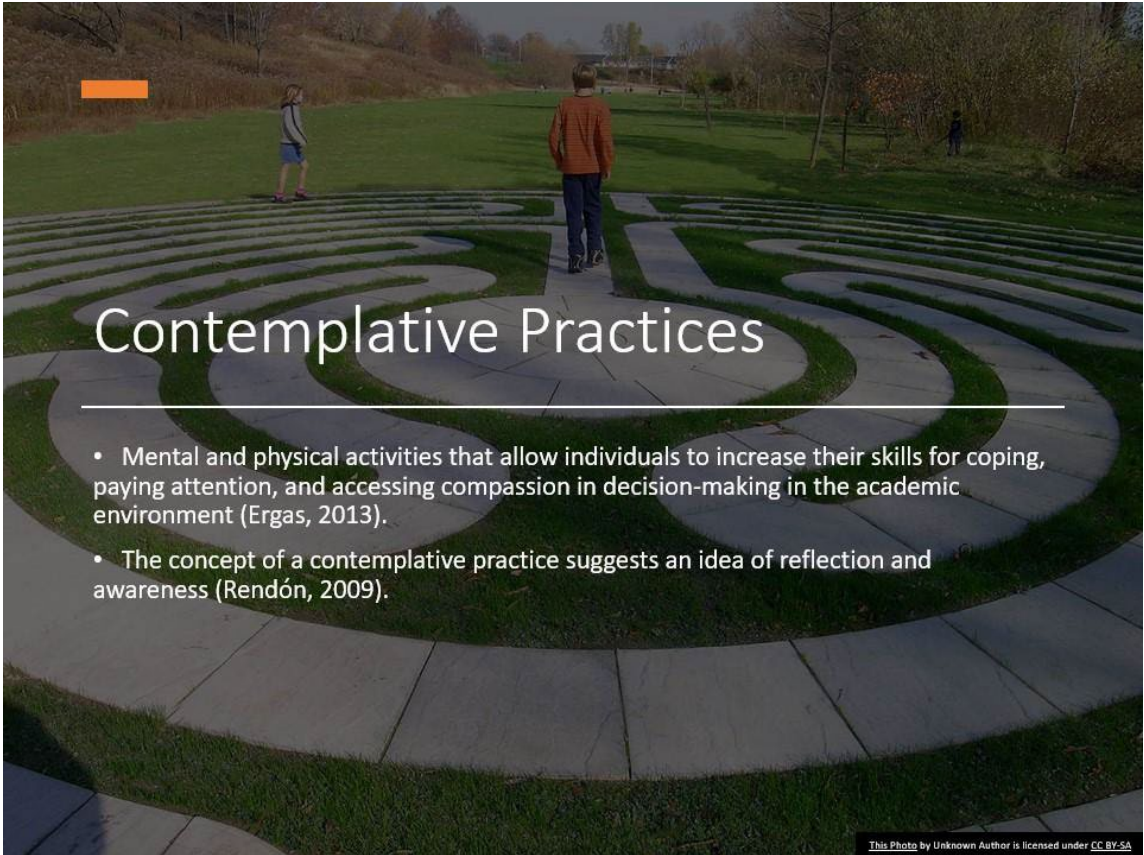
Contemplative Practices

- Mental and physical activities that allow individuals to increase their skills for coping, paying attention, and accessing compassion in decision-making in the academic environment (Ergas, 2013).

- The concept of a contemplative practice suggests an idea of reflection and awareness (Rendón, 2009).
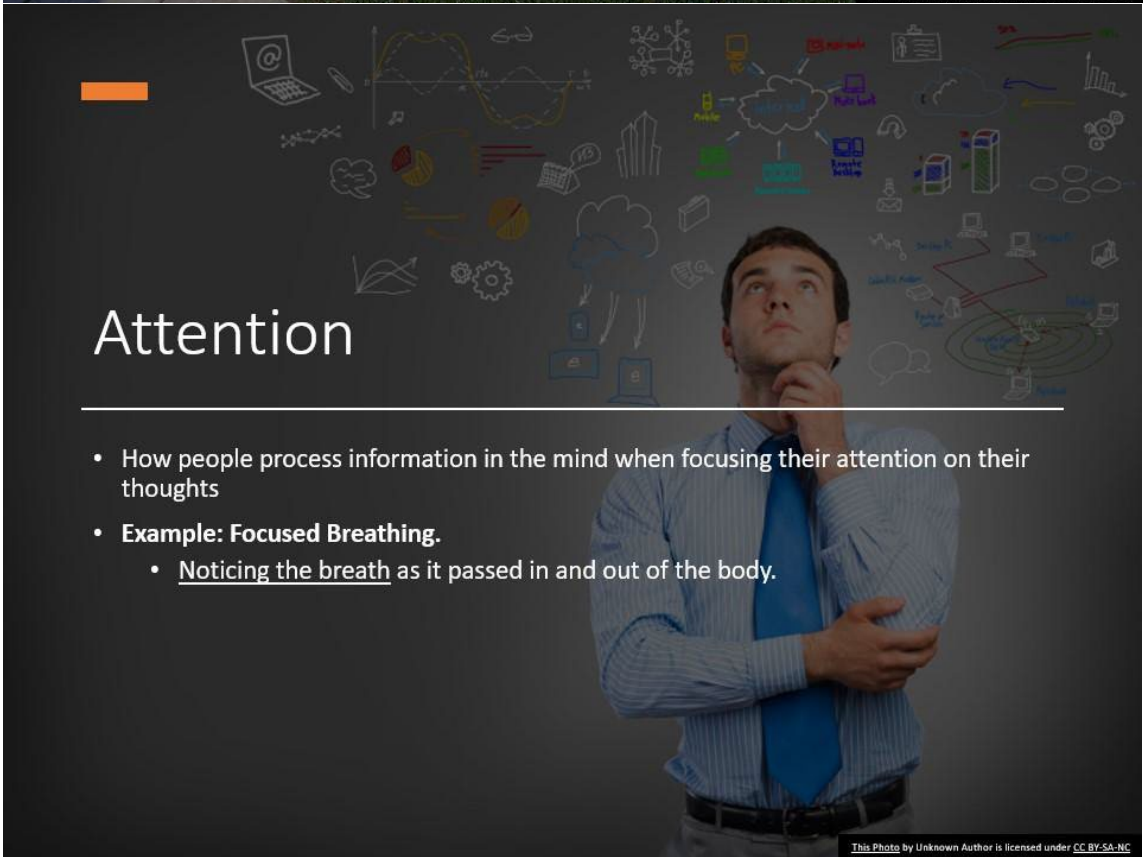
Attention

- How people process information in the mind when focusing their attention on their thoughts

- **Example: Focused Breathing.**
  - Noticing the breath as it passed in and out of the body.

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Intention

- Creating a goal for the practice
- Motivation for practicing
- Continuing practice, during a period of time
- **Example: Walking meditation.**
  - Focused on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance moving from one place to another.

Awareness

- Opportunity to develop and process information received moment by moment
- Conscious experience for further processing
- Not identified as attention
- Example: Body scan meditation
  - Being aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of your body.
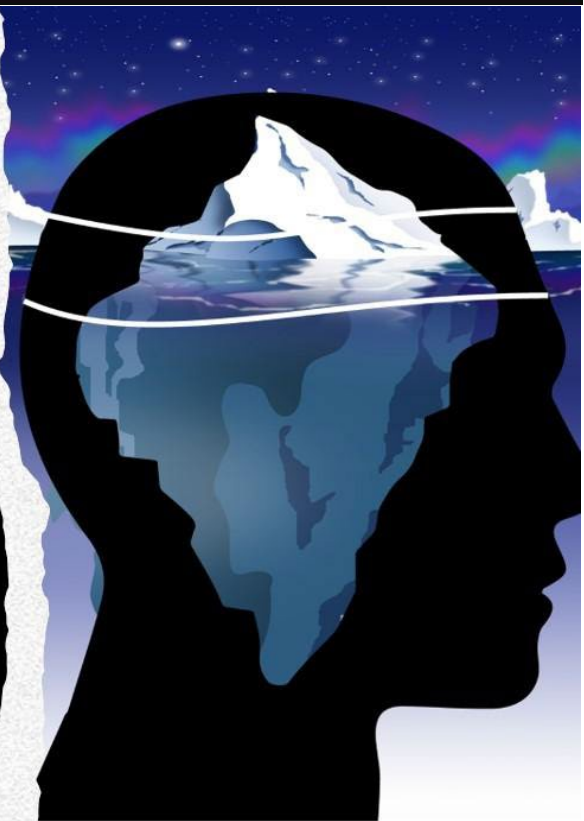
Discussion

- What other practices do you consider mindfulness?
- Guided questions
- Recorded for transcription and coding
- Process of rechecking themes in 30 to 45 days

Contemplative Tree

- Branches – Grouping of Practice
    - Stillness
    - Generative
- Leaves
    - Activities that cultivate awareness and inner connection within
    - Not every activity or leaf is represented

The Tree of Contemplative Practices

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society
www.contemplativemind.org

Mindful Reflection

- A questionnaire was emailed to you.
- Please use the reflection as an opportunity to write uninterrupted three to five minutes.
- As a contemplative practice, write as if you were sharing with someone else your overall experience in the focus group.
- Please provide any context that might arise from your reflection or give more context to your definition of mindfulness it relates to your practice.
- Submit within 2-3 days of focus group interview.

Thank you! Next Steps...

Define mindfulness using *this link* or email Chez Redmond to chez.redmond@okstate.edu

Focus Group participation is compensated with $20 Amazon Gift Card after reflection submission.

Invitation for participant checks to review themes and clarity on responses sent in 30-45 days.

More contact information, contact me at credmond@uco.edu or Kerri Kearney, PhD – kerri.Kearney@okstate.edu

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Sending Email Address: chez.redmond@okstate.edu

Subject line: OSU Study seeking participants for focus group interviews

Hello,

My name is Chez Redmond, and I am a doctoral student conducting qualitative research at Oklahoma State University in the Higher Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am researching the impact of mindfulness on TRIO Professional in Student Affairs.

This qualitative study aims to understand how mindfulness practices influence TRIO front-line workers in Student Affairs in Higher Education.

Exploring mindfulness practices among TRIO Professionals will add to the limited body of research that supports front-line workers in higher education, balancing and improving the quality of the lives and work experience of individuals who support the university's needs through front-facing student interaction.

After an initial presentation for interest in the study and recruitment from the presentation, 8 to 10 participants willing to participate in a focus group via video conference will incentivize them with a $20 Amazon gift card.

If interested, please take the survey here.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact the researcher(s) by phone at 405532-5426 or by email at chez.redmond@okstate.edu or my advisor, Dr. Kerri Kearney, at kerri.kearney@okstate.edu.

Attached is a flyer for more information. Please pass this information on to other TRIO professionals who you believe they might be interested.

/attached/ Mindfulness Recruitment Flyer

Appendix C

Recruitment Email List Serve

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AMONG STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

Researcher(s): Chez Redmond and Dr. Kerri Kearney, Oklahoma State University

The following qualitative study is looking to interview TRIO professionals working in
student affairs. To participate in a focus group interview, volunteers will discuss
mindful and contemplative practices that helps them to cope with the daily duties of
balancing organizational metrics and student needs.

This study will help educators in colleges and universities learn more about
improving mindfulness practices. For future studies, this research can help to provide
insight designed to improve mindfulness training programs that support future staff
development in higher education.

Participation is entirely voluntary. To participate, we will ask that you complete the staff
demographic information soon in order to contact participants within a week of
submission. This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes. While the survey
asks for identifiable information, the survey will remain confidential. Up to twenty
participants for 2 focus groups of up to 10 volunteers per group, will be selected for a
60–90-minute focus group interview. Volunteers will receive a $20 Amazon Gift
Card for their participation and completion of a reflection. For time scheduling, we
hope you take the survey as soon as you are able to do so.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact Chez Redmond at
chez.redmond@okstate.edu. Additional contact for the study can be contacted at
Kerri.Kearney@uco.edu.

Appendix D

Recruitment Questionnaire

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AMONG STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

Researcher(s): Chez Redmond and Dr. Kerri Kearney, Oklahoma State University

The following qualitative study is looking to interview TRIO professionals working in
student affairs. To participate in a focus group interview, volunteers will discuss mindful
and contemplative practices that helps them to cope with the daily duties of balancing
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Participation is entirely voluntary. To participate, we will ask that you complete the staff
demographic information soon in order to contact participants within a week of
submission. This survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes. While the survey asks
for identifiable information, the survey will remain confidential. Up to twenty
participants for 2 focus groups of up to 10 volunteers, will be selected for a 60–90-minute
focus group interview. Volunteers will receive a $20 Amazon Gift Card for their
participation and reflection. For time scheduling, we hope you take the survey as soon as
you are able to do so.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact Chez Redmond at
chez.redmond@okstate.edu. Additional contact for the study can be contacted at
Kerri.Kearney@uco.edu.

1. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
   d. Prefer not to respond

2. Which category below includes your age?
   a. 17 or younger
   b. 18-20
   c. 21-29
   d. 30-39

e. 40-49
f. 50-59
g. 60 or older

3. Do you consider yourself White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or some other race?

4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
   a. High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
   b. Some college but no degree
   c. Associate's Degree
   d. Bachelor's Degree
   e. Graduate Degree

5. Please select your institutional type
   f. Public 2 Year, Community college
   b. Public 4 Year, College or University
   c. 4 Year, Doctoral Granting University
   d. For-profit 4 Year
   e. Private 4 Year

6. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
   a. Employed, working 1-30 hours per week
   b. Employed, working 30-39 hours per week
   c. Employed working 40+ hours per week

7. Does your position require that you work directly with students within your daily work responsibilities? This can include a caseload of pre-assigned students or students who walk into your office to receive services that you provide.
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Does your position require that you are aware of university or program objectives and goals in order to support the organization?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. Do you currently have a contemplative practice like mindfulness, meditation, tai chi, yoga, or any type of activity that helps you to be more present during the workday?
   a. Yes
   b. No

     c. If yes, please describe your practice (s).

10. If you answered yes to question 8, please indicate length of time with practice. (Days, Weeks, Months, Years etc.)

11. Number of Years in Student Affairs

12. Number of Years in TRIO Programs

13. Would you be interested in sharing your experience regarding mindfulness or other contemplative practices in a future focus group study? (Selected participants will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for their participation)
     a. Yes
     b. No
     c. If yes, please provide your email address and more information will be emailed regarding the study.

14. For additional anonymity, please provide a pseudonym for the focus group interviews (if preferred). Please note that actually names will not be used in the study.
     a. Pseudonym:

Appendix E

Recruitment Flyer

Appendix F

Focus Group Interview Questions

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AMONG STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Researcher(s): Chez Redmond and Dr. Kerri Kearney, Oklahoma State University

Focus Group Interview Questions

Student Affairs Role in the Organization

1. In what ways do you believe your role as a TRIO Professional contributes to the organizational success of your institution and TRIO program?
   - How would you describe stress associated with your role?
2. What are some of the impacts of the university expectations on your role as a student affairs professional?
3. In what ways does the organization and its mission impact your personal growth?

Mindfulness and the Personal Employee Practice

4. How do you define mindfulness?
5. What type of mindfulness practices do you use?
   - What type of personal mindfulness practices do you use outside of the workplace?
   - How does the practice differ in the workplace?
6. How do your mindfulness practices influence you in the workplace?

Appendix G

Email After Focus Group

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AMONG STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

Researcher(s): Chez Redmond and Dr. Kerri Kearney, Oklahoma State University

Thank you for participating in the mindfulness and contemplative practice research study
focused on TRIO student affairs professionals.

This is the next step in the focus group study.

- Please provide a reflection of your personal experience with the focus
group interviews. document to this <u>link</u>. (No survey yet)

- Please use the reflection as an opportunity to write uninterrupted three to
five minutes. As a contemplative practice, write the reflection as if you were
sharing with someone else your overall experience in the focus group. Please
provide any context that might arise from your reflection or give more context
to your definition of mindfulness it relates to your practice.

- Please confirm your email address in the survey link provided above.

Once completed, your electronic $20 Amazon Gift Card will be emailed to your preferred
email address.

In 30 to 45 days, I will reach out to participants who would like to participate in a
presentation of themes that emerged from the interview and visual tree responses.

Thank you for your participation.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact Chez Redmond at
chez.redmond@okstate.edu. Additional contact for the study can be contacted at
Kerri.Kearney@uco.edu.

-Chez Redmond

Appendix H

IRB Approval Email

From: IRB Office <irb@okstate.edu>
Sent: Thursday, July 22, 2021 11:10 AM
To: Kearney, Kerri <kerri.kearney@okstate.edu>; Redmond, Chez S
<chez.redmond@okstate.edu>; Redmond, Chez S <chez.redmond@okstate.edu>
Subject: Approval of Exempt IRB Application IRB-21-306

Dear Chez Redmond,

The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the
following application:

Application Number: IRB-21-306
PI: Chez Redmond
Title: Mindfulness among TRIO Professionals in Higher Education
Review Level: Exempt

You will find a copy of your Approval Letter in IRBManager. Click IRB - Initial
Submission to go directly to the event page. Please click attachments in the upper left of
the screen. The approval letter is under "Generated Docs." Stamped recruitment and
consent documents can also be found in this location under "Attachments". Only
the approved versions of these documents may be used during the conduct of your
research.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the
  research protocol must be submitted for IRB approval before implementation.
- Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period.
- Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair within 5 days. Adverse events are
  those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the
  research; and
- Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete by submitting a
  closure form via IRBManager.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Best of luck with your research,

Sincerely,

Dawnett Watkins, CIP

_____

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board
Office of University Research Compliance
223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078
Website: https://irb.okstate.edu/
Ph: 405-744-3377 | Fax: 405-744-4335| irb@okstate.edu

VITA

Chez Shaú Redmond

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AMONG TRIO PROFESSIONALS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational
Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,
Oklahoma in May, 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Graduate Certificate in College Teaching in
Curriculum Studies, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May
2022

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Adult and Higher
Education at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2009.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Business Administration in
International Trade at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma
in 2006.

Experience: Senior Director, TRIO Student Services,
University of Central Oklahoma

Professional Memberships:

Council for Opportunity in Education, Washington, D.C.
Southwestern Association of Student Assistance Personnel
Oklahoma Division of Student Assistance Programs