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Impact of Professional Development on Higher Education Professionals: Specific to the Areas of Registrar and Admissions

Jana Jaraysi

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IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
ON HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS:
SPECIFIC TO THE AREAS OF REGISTRAR AND ADMISSIONS**

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the School of Education
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June 13, 2024

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Shelly Shaffer, School of Education, and has been approved by all members of the supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Professional Programs and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.


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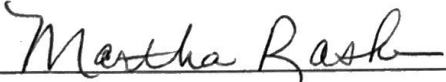

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of a year-long professional development program on higher education professionals, explicitly focusing on the Admissions and Registrar fields. While existing research has primarily concentrated on the connection between professional development and general Student Affairs roles, there continues to be a significant gap in understanding the distinct impact of such programs within the specialized roles of Admissions and Registrar professionals. This research seeks to address this gap by shedding light on how professional development initiatives shape the professional landscape within higher education.

Using an exploratory qualitative case study approach, this research centers on analyzing one prominent leadership program, Program L, addressing the research question: what impact does one leadership program, Program L, have on Admissions and Registrar Professionals? By examining survey responses and conducting semi-structured interviews with participants from Program L's first five cohorts, four overarching themes emerged: mentorship, assurance, network, and professional growth. These themes provide valuable insights into the impact of Program L on Admissions and Registrar Professionals who participated in the program.

In an educational landscape where the significance of ongoing professional development is increasingly recognized, the findings revealed a positive impact on both individual professionals and their respective work environments. As higher education institutions strive to support professional development opportunities, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge advocating for tailored programs that

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empower professionals to thrive in their roles and contribute meaningfully to advancing the field.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Attending my tenth professional conference for a regional association dedicated to Admissions and Registrar work in the fall of 2023, I began to wonder how professional development opportunities have impacted me throughout my career in higher education (*note: journals referring to this field often capitalize the words Admissions, Registrar, and Student Affairs. To adhere to the style of the field, I capitalize these words throughout this manuscript). Attending conferences allowed me to reconnect with colleagues from across the region; I had opportunities to present, share my experiences with new members, and listen to colleagues who shared ideas to explore. I could not help but think: What do others gain from attending conferences and participating in webinars or leadership programs? Attending the annual conference gave me a sense of renewal and a positive outlook on my work in higher education. I also appreciate the field of Admissions and Registrar, and I recognized that new members attending the conference were learning through attending professional development opportunities. I hoped they built connections to the association that had given me so much over the years.

Reflecting on my own professional development journey sparked a curiosity about its broader impact on my colleagues. This curiosity led to the exploration of professional development in the realm of higher education, which connected to much of my coursework in my doctoral program. It turned into a research project focused on understanding the effects of ongoing learning and growth in the Admissions and Registrar field.

Background

The connection of professional development to professions has been a topic of interest since the nineteenth century (Abbott, 1988; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Wilensky, 1964). Wilensky (1964) investigated how professions were developed, the meaning of professionalization, and how it caused various inquiries among scholars. Once criteria for a profession were developed, professional associations and universities (i.e., professional development) evolved in order to provide instruction related to necessary skills needed within the profession (Abbott, 1988; Wilensky, 1964).

Key Roles in Student Affairs: Admissions and Registrar Professionals

Higher education professionals can have various responsibilities and roles within Student Affairs. Function areas encompass academic advising, Admissions, adult-learner services, campus recreation, career services, community engagement, financial aid, enrollment management, academic support services, registration, compliance, assessment, research and evaluation, student housing, and other functions (NASPA, 2022). Some studies focus on the relationship between professional development and general Student Affairs or competency-based research (Haley et al., 2015; Schreiber et al., 1994). It is important to note that Admissions and Registrar departments can be housed in other areas of a campus system, such as the Academic Affairs division or the Business and Finance division.

Admissions and Registrars play a crucial role in the success of their institutions (Frazier, 2022; Nicola & Butt, 2023). Admission professionals tirelessly recruit future students for their respected institutions of higher education. They often travel throughout the fall: visiting high schools, community events, and fairs across their state and, in

some cases, the country. Admissions professionals' winters are filled with application review and decision-making, closely followed by spring, where they work to help students say "yes" to their institution of choice. Come summer, the work repeats (Nicola & Butt, 2023). It is a continuous cycle that many people leave after a few years due to burnout, finding other roles within higher education or leaving the industry altogether (Nicola & Butt, 2023).

Registrar responsibilities are vast. They manage curriculum, reporting and data analysis, transcripts, grades, graduation ceremonies, FERPA compliance, legal awareness, and compliance and work to improve policy (Frazier, 2022). They work with multiple constituents, not only with students but with staff, faculty, and external stakeholders, as a bridge to many across institutions. Registrars and their teams ensure students know how to use their degree audit to track progress to graduation; they work with external stakeholders like policymakers or community colleges to develop articulation agreements, ensuring that what is taken at one institution will be accepted at another. Their role continues to evolve as the demand for higher education changes.

Waters and Hightower (2016) conducted an exploratory qualitative study on the role of the Registrar and the participants' perspectives of the profession. One of the outcomes identified skills that were deemed essential for the role of a Registrar by participants; they included: "articulate communicator, organized, knowledgeable about higher education, interpersonal skills, and visionary and able to see the big picture" (Waters & Hightower, 2016, p.29). The outcomes noted by Frazier's (2022) description of the role of a Registrar gave readers another glimpse of what they truly do:

Interwoven with the day-to-day critical policy and procedural responsibilities that support the success of institutions and stakeholders, a Registrar has the capacity to be an intermediary and an advocate for a learning community's academic missions and goals. From striving to help students succeed through their programs of study, to supporting faculty curricular and logistical needs, to ensuring that key administrators and staff have the right data to make informed decisions, Registrars can see both the bigger picture needed for institutional progress as well as the ground-level success initiatives that help individuals thrive in the world of higher education. (Frazier, 2022, p. 58)

Admissions and Registrar staff must stay updated with the latest trends, regulations, and best practices in their field as change continually occurs. Frazier (2022) stated, "The professional tasks of a Registrar require a great deal of professional acumen and industry knowledge, and for many Registrars and professional associations, they are often the foci of training and professional development" (p. 57). For the Admissions professional, especially new to the industry, Nicola and Butt (2023) emphasized the importance of investing in staff to help them grow. "Research has shown that employees highly value professional development opportunities and are less likely to leave organizations that promote their continued learning" (Nicola & Butt, 2023, pp. 46-47). Nicola and Butt (2023) expressed that this investment in employees helped retain staff and connect their interests in the industry. Creating a connection between Admissions and Registrar professionals is one of the vital roles of professional development in this area, focusing on enhancing skills, advancing careers, retaining employees, and contributing effectively to professional organizations.

Professional Associations

Professional associations provide development and connections with others in the same industry, open up opportunities for knowledge through sharing experiences, and allow for space and time to network with colleagues with like-minded interests (PACRAO, 2023). Within the Student Affairs profession, several organizations provide professional development opportunities, education, and identified core competencies for the Student Affairs profession (ACPA, 2023; NASPA, 2023). The two prominent national organizations for Student Affairs professionals are the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) (ACPA, 2018; NASPA, 2023).

NASPA was founded in 1918 as an association for deans and advisors of men and continued to evolve (NASPA, 2023). In 1996, institutes were developed to provide professional development opportunities for members. ACPA began as the National Association of Deans of Women (NADW); in 1931, ACPA was adopted as the organization's official name, and it continues to flourish with publications and professional development opportunities (ACPA, 2018). It is noticeable from various NASPA and ACPA reports that these associations work collaboratively; in 2011, ACPA and NASPA held a historic vote for possible consolidation of both associations but fell short (ACPA, 2018). Nevertheless, many reports and studies used in this current study demonstrate collaboration between both associations.

Within the Admissions and Registrar professions, members can join several specific professional associations on a national, regional, and state level outside of the Student Affairs organizations. The National Association for College Admission

Counseling (NACAC) was founded in 1937 as an organization dedicated to serving students transitioning from high school to higher education (NACAC, 2023). With over 26,000 members, the majority of which are Admissions, recruitment, and high school college and career counselor professionals, there are opportunities to join at a regional level through regional associations, such as the Pacific Northwest's regional organization called Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling (PNACAC). Founded in 1985, PNACAC provides and organizes regional college fairs, events, and conferences for members who are Admissions professionals and high school counselors (PNACAC, 2023).

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) is a nationwide Admissions and Registrar organization established in 1910. Its mission is to “provide professional development, guidelines, and voluntary standards to be used by higher education officials regarding the best practices in records management, admissions, enrollment management, administrative information technology, and student services” (AACRAO, 2023, para.1). The regional affiliate of AACRAO for the Pacific Northwest is PACRAO. The Pacific Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers held its first conference as a Pacific section of AACRAO in 1923 (PACRAO, 2023). It continues to expand in the region, offering leadership opportunities through conferences, webinars, and specific institutes for members. The Pacific Northwest regional associations have been instrumental in my personal professional development.

Leadership Development Program

Understanding the various associations for Student Affairs and the area of Admissions and Registrar means learning about their impact on professionals within those higher education divisions. Programs sponsored by these organizations have been studied, and research has been published and disseminated about this work. The results of these studies have the potential to benefit members and university partners by offering data and information about professional development, which could in turn impact students and future members of the organization.

Current Study

This study focuses on learning about professional association members involved in a professional development program hosted by one of the regional Student Affairs associations.

Program L (note: all references in the study and participants received pseudonyms, including identifying any specific leadership development program), a group within one of the regional professional organizations for Admissions and Registrar professionals, was developed as an opportunity to support emerging professionals with professional development opportunities through a purposefully constructed curriculum that exposed participants to literature, mentorship, group conversations, guest speakers, and more. Members experienced virtual monthly meetings, connected with mentors, had specific readings throughout the year-long program, and participated in the annual conference for the regional association. One of the goals of Program L was to encourage members to be formally involved in the association, giving back to the association and the profession as a whole. This study investigated participants'

experiences from the last five cohorts from Program L, investigating the program's impact and participants' overall professional development experiences.

Theoretical Frameworks

The three frameworks used in this study provide a lens for this related to three key components: constructivism, professional development, and leadership. These frameworks help to analyze the significance of the findings.

For the current study, the professional development received by participants in Program L is similar in structure to the professional development studied by prior researchers (Biggs, 2006; Borko, 2004). Using frameworks that have already been applied to educational research makes sense since these professionals work with students and, in their roles, guide students in decision-making and unfamiliar processes.

Constructivism

Constructivist learning theory, one of the first theories created by Piaget, who studied the development of children, emphasized that individuals gain knowledge through the interaction of experiences and ideas (Brau, 2018). Constructivism can be applied to higher education professionals and their professional development. “Constructivist learning theory can be used for a better understanding of experiential learning, self-directed learning, informal learning (e.g., mentoring, coaching, online, self-direct, active learning), and incidental learning (e.g., task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction)” (Chuang, 2021, p. 7). This approach emphasizes learners' active role in constructing knowledge and understanding rather than being passive recipients (Biggs, 2006). Participants gain understanding through experiences,

interactions, and reflections, engaging in discussions and reflecting on their practices and newly acquired skills.

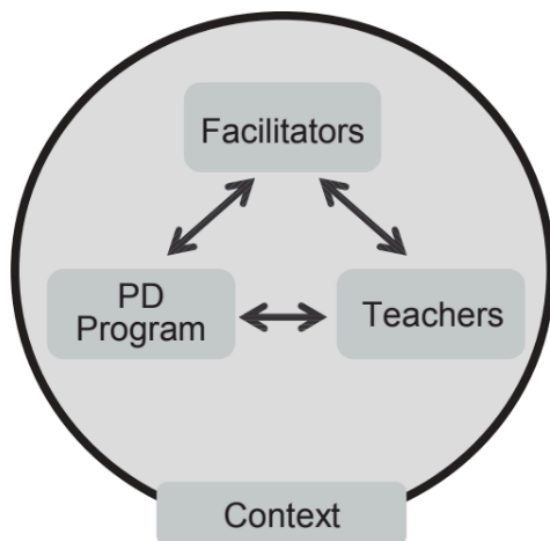
Biggs (2006) highlighted the potential impact of constructivist learning theory on teaching methods and the need to change how learning occurs through his alignment of constructive theory and instructional design literature to create “Constructive alignment” (Biggs, 2006, p. 347). Meaning what teachers design needs to support what the student or learner is meant to learn. Through reflection, learners identify areas for growth and seek out new learning opportunities, creating a cycle of continuous improvement. This supports Chuang’s (2021) connections to adult learning, applying the learning theory through mentors and favor collaborations to continually gain knowledge.

Professional Development System

Borko (2004) developed a professional development system grounded in extensive research on the various phases of the system (see Figure 1) and the interplay of its constituent elements. This system aims to provide teachers with the necessary support to enhance their professional development and achieve positive outcomes. The elements of the system include the professional development program, teachers who are the learners, the facilitator who guides teachers, and the context in which professional development occurs. Though this system was originally designed to study the impact of professional development programs on teachers, the system works well for investigating the impact of professional development on professionals within many other fields, as well. Specifically, this framework aligns with the design of Program L, including learners, facilitators, and context.

Figure 1

Elements of a professional development system (Borko, 2004)

***Theoretical Model of Leadership***

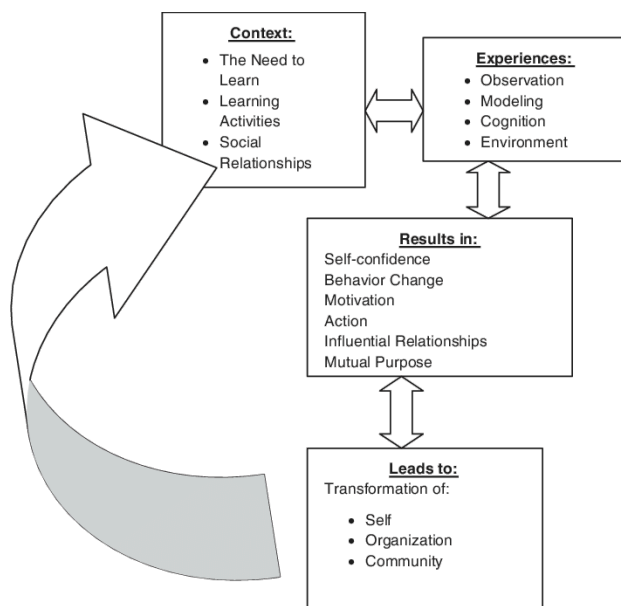
Black and Earnest (2009) developed a theoretical model of leadership (see Figure 2) that evaluated leadership development programs. The model centers on the context and experiences of a motivated group of learners. “The participant’s experiences occur through observation, modeling, cognition, and environment” (Black & Earnest, 2009, p.186). In the model, the results of the experiences and context could include: self-confidence, behavior change, motivation, action, influential relationships, and mutual purpose. As a result of the leadership development program, Black and Earnest (2009) claim that transformation of self, organization, and/or community can result.

The model acknowledges that the learning process is dynamic and cyclical. Growth and development can occur with each opportunity or experience. The model

also acknowledges the environment or setting in the leadership program being experienced.

Figure 2

Theoretical Model of Leadership (Black & Earnest, 2009).



Purpose of the Study

This case study provides insight into the effectiveness and impact of one professional development program (Program L) offered by a regional organization for Admissions and Registrar professionals in higher education. It aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of one professional development program, Program L, offered by a regional organization. It focuses on Admissions and Registrar higher education professionals who participated in Program L for the past five academic years. For the purpose of this research, the "impact of professional development" is defined as the changes in these professionals' career growth, leadership skills, and any other changes resulting from Program L. It contributes to the existing knowledge base about

ongoing professional development and provides valuable insights to higher education professionals and associations.

Research Question

The research question is an initial exploration into professional development within higher education areas of Admissions and Registrar. It aims to investigate the relationship between Program L and its influence on participants' professional growth.

- What impact does a leadership program, Program L, have on Admissions and Registrar professionals in higher education?

Summary

Understanding the history of professional development, the importance of roles within institutions of higher education, and the associations that provide professional development services is critical to learning about the impact of Program L on its participants. Through studying the experiences of higher education professionals who have participated in and completed Program L, this study will contribute to existing literature about higher education and professional development to support Student Affairs professionals. The findings of this study will be used to give back to the profession of admissions and registrar professionals who rely on professional development to learn outside their institutions. It will also aid in discussing the importance of professional development and continued learning.

Chapter 2 contains a review of existing literature related to professional development. Chapter 3 shares the study design and methods. In Chapter 4, findings from the study are presented and discussed, while Chapter 5 connects the findings to prior research and makes connections to future research directions.

Important Definitions

- *Professional Development* has several interpretations; for this study, professional development will be known as improving oneself through activities such as internal and external services such as conferences, involvement with an association, staff meetings, internal committee work, webinars, certification programs, professional seminars, mentorships, and workshops (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).
- *Admissions professionals* work within enrollment management units under Student Affairs at most institutions. Their primary responsibility is to recruit future students to their respective institutions (Nicola & Butt, 2023).
- *Registrar* is a key position within the Records and Registration departments that manage curriculum policy, articulations, class logistics, academic and student support, and transcripts are some of the aspects of this position (Frazier, 2022).
- *Professional associations, such as NASPA and ACPA*, are professional organizations for specific functional areas or on a larger scale. They provide professional development opportunities through conferences, webinars, certification programs, and continuing education.
- *Program L* is a year-long professional development program for Admissions and Registrar professionals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To gain a deeper understanding of the role and importance of professional development in higher education, relevant literature can provide valuable insights into the "why," "how," and "what" questions one may have. Examining the origins of professional development in the higher education profession, specifically in the context of Student Affairs staff development, can help to narrow the focus on one approach to ongoing education (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998) and inform strategic decisions around investing in professionals at various stages of their careers (Chernow et al., 2003; Schreiber et al., 1994). Additionally, it is essential to examine the specific impact that professional development can have on an individual's career and leadership skills. This literature review begins by discussing the concept of professionalization and its key factors, followed by examining the critical components of professional development and their impact on professionals and organizations.

Professionalization

In the mid to late 1960s, a change occurred in the various occupations trying to professionalize (Hall, 1968; Wilensky, 1964). A phenomenon at that time was a widespread trend of occupations wanting to identify themselves as professionals. Wilensky's (1964) analysis of professionalization was designed to highlight key factors that contributed to the professionalization of an occupation. Key factors included a specialized body of knowledge, a training period, a strong sense of ethical responsibility, and a degree of autonomy and control over who became a professional in the field (Wilensky, 1964).

Hall (1968) strongly connected with Wilensky's (1964) work, focusing on the professional model and characteristics of an occupation to become a profession. The professional model included attitudinal and structural criteria. They included the need for the structure of the occupation, formal education, entrance requirements, the person who was called to the field, and the structural process of levels to become a professional (Hall, 1968). Hall (1968) quoted Wilensky's (1964) attributes of what a profession needed as part of the model. Wilensky's (1964) attributes consisted of creating a full-time occupation that met the needs of society, a training school that was connected or affiliated with a university and forming professional associations and a code of ethics.

Klegon's (1978) summary of work surrounding professionalization was an evolving process as the level of autonomy and control was determined, as well as external factors that impacted professionals, including social forces affecting expertise and knowledge. Similarly, Abbott's (1988) found that professions were not static; they were dynamic and changed due to social, political, and economic environments. The growth of professions was primarily due to the growth of environments, expansion of higher education, and increasing complexity of knowledge (Abbott, 1988). Professional development emerged as a critical component of education and career advancement for higher education professionals. "Across professions, from teaching and nursing to engineering and architecture, there are increasing pressures toward the pursuit of more effective, efficient, and evidence-based practices that deliver improved outcomes for clients whether they be students, patients, or clients" (Webster-Wright, 2009, p.702).

Professional Development

Schwartz and Bryan (1998) provided an overview of professional development within Student Affairs as it can represent many forms such as individual, group or program, departmental, divisional and through professional associations. There are also types of professional development, such as formal which involves active and intentional activities, nonformal takes on many forms ranging from brown bag lunches to professional association training, and informal includes job shadowing, modeling and mentoring activities (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Evans (2007) views professional development as enhancing a profession. Nguyen's (2018) study summarized professional development as "processes and activities that change the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions of individuals" (pp. 32-33).

Schwartz and Bryan (1998) provided one common meaning of professional development for Student Affairs, is the activities experienced by the professional, such as skill-building, knowledge, and better service to others. Professional development activities can consist of internal and external services such as conferences, involvement with an association, staff meetings, internal committee work, webinars, certification programs, professional seminars, mentorships, and workshops (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Outside of Schwartz and Bryan's (1998) work, several research studies about professional development, focused on the relationship between professional development and Student Affairs, it was clear that several definitions of professional development existed (Haley et al., 2015; Janosik et al., 2006; Murphy & Calway, 2008). These definitions, as related to Student Affairs, are highlighted below:

- “Professional development is about learning new skills and deepening knowledge” (Haley et al., 2015, p. 325).
- “Professional development should be an intentional process, no less important to understand and pursue diligently than our best work with students” (Janosik et al., 2006, p. 229).
- “Professional development is necessary for professionals to keep themselves up to date within their profession in areas of: technical, legal, conceptual and/or social change” (Murphy & Calway, 2008, p.425).

Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) analyzed existing literature to define key components of Student Affairs, including what professional development means to the profession. The conclusion reached by Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) after highlighting several authors noted is “professional development is the career-long process of professional improvement” (p. 275). Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) synthesized existing literature about professional development and professionalism in Student Affairs and found four challenges the profession needed to consider and improve to serve students and institutions better. They were:

1. Intentionality of practice as a challenge to intuition, “natural ability,” and experience
2. Peer review of practice as a challenge to individual “initiative,” isolation, and “privacy.”
3. Consultation and community as a challenge to competition
4. Professional accountability as a challenge to “standards.”

(Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007, pp. 279-281)

These challenges encouraged Student Affairs professionals to rethink how work was completed together, how continued education could improve staff, and how students were served. Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) claimed, “The challenges of professionalism and scholarly practice show that simple activity and hard work are not enough, not even close. Only continuous reflection, commitment, learning, and growth are acceptable” (p. 281).

Looking at professional development in a different context, versatile enough to relate to multiple professions, Webster-Wright’s (2009) authentic professional learning (APL) framework went beyond the traditional professional development delivery. APL was focused on fostering meaningful learning experiences, claiming that learning happened in real-world practice (Webster-Wright, 2009). The shift was in the request to go beyond impact and programs and to foster a culture of inquiry, collaboration, and reflection in professional communities. Argyris and Schon (1974) expressed that reflection and learning were essential for professional development; practitioners must reflect on their experiences to identify and learn. It is critical that professionals can reflect (Biggs, 2006) and process what they learn, as well as transfer the knowledge to others within their organization, taking what they learn into practice (Murphy & Calway, 2008).

Nguyen’s (2018) studied professional development and its connection to educators, pulling key components from various studies. Nguyen (2018) identified the primary purposes of professional development for educators:

- (i) to provide management and leadership knowledge and skills;

- (ii) to identify effective instruction methods that support teachers in instruction improvement;
- (iii) to effectively implement institutional practices;
- (iv) to influence student achievements by supporting and developing successful teachers;
- (v) to build shared leadership and high-quality institutional cultures;
- (vi) to consolidate the institutions' positive norms and assumptions and
- (vii) to strengthen leadership skills and improve student learning outcomes and organizational performance. (Nguyen, 2018, p. 34)

Nguyen (2018) claimed that how teachers and higher education educators learn from or experience professional development may vary depending on the types of offerings, such as workshops, year-long programs, or webinars. The development of the programs and goals was vital to the impact of professional development; furthermore, connecting session topics to the current careers of participants and awareness that each participant was different was also crucial to the success of the professional development offering (Nguyen, 2018).

Design and Time

As per Boyle et al. (2004), ongoing research on teachers' professional development involvement resulted in outcomes that can be translated into higher education: the design of a program and time spent or longevity in a professional development program or activity. Of the participants involved in long-term professional development, 77 percent changed one or more aspects of their teaching practices (Boyle et al., 2004). The long-term professional development activities experienced by

the teachers' included observations and sharing practices, which can be related to the work done in Student Affairs.

Parkhouse et al. (2019) synthesized several empirical studies about professional development and its impacts on teachers. One of the areas the researchers coded for was duration and length of time. Parkhouse et al. (2019) found one empirical study showing that shortened professional development activities were not seen as a negative; however, focusing just on the duration of an activity can take away from what was beneficial about a professional development program and what the participants learned.

Long-term professional development, carried out over time, was more impactful compared to one-time-only opportunities (Gurley et al., 2015). The investment made in year-long programs or thoughtful creation of sessions and speakers for a professional development opportunity provided a return of growth to participants (Haviland et al., 2011).

The design of a professional development program was key for learning due to the length of the program, the space, the environment, and the topics selected (Channing, 2020). Participants of Channing's (2020) study shared, "[...] leadership education programs assisted them in developing several critical leadership competency areas such as communication and human relations skills" (p. 145). Carefully designed and purposeful topics for year-long programs, conferences, or space for networking were important pieces that impacted the effectiveness of professional development for participants in the study.

Webster-Wright (2009) found that effective professional learning over time and within a community was essential. Community was built through an environment with like-minded individuals with the same position, passion, or career. Professional associations within Student Affairs are an example of a community like Webster-Wright (2009) suggested.

Higher Education Professional Associations

According to Gerda (2006), the profession of Student Affairs was initiated by a group of 18 women who were Deans of Women within higher education institutions. They convened to discuss their leadership roles, membership, and purpose, eventually forming what we now know as Student Affairs. The topics they discussed during their meetings are still relevant today and continue to be discussed among Student Affairs professionals nationwide. The association provided them with a platform to learn from each other and gain insights into what was happening on other campuses. This is still the case today, as associations continue to provide members with opportunities to learn from one another. Below are excerpts pulled from various studies focused on Student Affairs professional associations:

- Professional associations have an obligation to ensure the quality of professional preparation and practice, to provide continuing professional education, and to recognize those practitioners who take steps to improve their knowledge and practice. No Student Affairs association has fully operationalized or embraced these ideas. The future of our profession rests on the willingness of those who lead these associations to do more in this crucial area. (Janosik et al., 2006, p. 228)

- The use of professional organizations as a major reference--this involves both the formal organization and informal colleague groupings as the major source of ideas and judgments for the professional in his work. (Hall, 1968, p. 93)
- In brief, a professional association is an organization consisting of mission, objectives, structures, and processes centered about the education and development of a voluntary membership situated in the intersecting contexts of specific fields of knowledge and practices, clientele, and values. (Rusaw, 1995, p. 217)

Rusaw's (1995) work is evidence of the role of professional associations as providers of formal and informal learning and creating change and building relationships in external environments. Janosik et al. (2006) emphasized that professional development was not just reading journals, networking, and attending conferences; more was needed due to the growth of knowledge, technology, and attitudes toward the profession. Janosik et al. (2006) recommended formal programming, continued professional education, and competency-related development to go beyond informal activities.

Specifically, the new direction for professional associations in Student Affairs is adopting a Student Affairs curriculum that focuses on core competencies to help guide the development of conferences and continuing education. If, at the national level, associations are not developing continuing education credits and conferences with purpose, regional-based associations should move forward to do it on their own (Janosik et al., 2006).

“The greatest benefit of professional contact in an association comes with repeated personal contact and affiliation” (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998, p. 8). One of the main functions of the national, regional, and state associations is to bring members together for conferences. Conference attendance is about networking, remaining up to date on current trends and practices, and building skills (Pittman & Foubert, 2016). Being a member of a professional organization creates the opportunity to learn through and give back to the profession. Kamen and Apple (2023) focused on engagement theory to learn if the members were involved in the national association and what they got from it. They found four major themes: the importance of a strong introduction to the organization; the role of ongoing engagement; mentorship and professional development; and influencing change (Kamen & Apple, 2023, p.58). The findings led the association to continue to enhance services and resources and be more engaging, recognizing the impact of their members in the organization's evolution (Kamen & Apple, 2023).

Professional associations are the guardians of professional standards (Murphy & Calway, 2008). Two main national associations for Student Affairs, ACPA and NASPA, mentioned in Chapter 1, provide members and non-members with conference activities, competencies for Student Affairs professionals, and topics around assessment and diversity (ACPA, 2018; NASPA, 2023). Functional-specific associations for Admissions and Registrars are seen nationally with AACRAO and NACAC, and regionally based associations (e.g., in the Pacific Northwest, PNACAC for secondary education counselors and Admissions, and PACRAO for Admissions and Registrars). Since these associations serve a key role in the development of Student Affairs professionals, a lack

of empirical studies using practices from these groups is an identified gap, and this current study will add to the literature in this area of professional development for Admissions and Registrar professionals.

Experience Levels of Student Affairs Professionals

Chernow et al. (2003) conducted a study to explore professionals' level of involvement in associations at different levels of their Student Affairs careers. Using a professional development model developed by Carpenter and Miller (1981) (as cited in Chernow et al., 2003), researchers worked to understand professional development needs or involvement based on each stage of a professional career. Chernow et al. (2003) outlined the stages beginning with the formative stage, where the professional may be entry-level or new to the profession; the application stage is continuous as the professional attends conferences and workshops but focuses on accumulating work experience; during the additive stage professionals take on leadership roles in associations, contribute to journals and give conference presentations; and lastly in the generative stage, professionals become consultants and leaders at the top of their associations (Chernow et al., 2003).

Using Carpenter's (2003) professional development model, which highlights different levels of professional development pending the staff member's experience and role, Haley et al. (2015) examined professional development behaviors among Student Affairs educators to determine the intentionality of professional development plans. Regardless of what stage a Student Affairs professional was at, intentional professional learning and development plans needed to be processed and developed to continue learning and increase skills to pair with the changes occurring in the field (Carpenter &

Miller, 1981; Haley et al., 2015). Carpenter and Miller (1981) wrote, “It is important to note that professional preparation is career-long” (p.10). The researchers urged others to recognize that there were different levels of professionals and shifts and changes often occurred due to time and position changes.

Like Chernow et al.’s (2003) study, Roberts (2005) surveyed to understand the differences between the varying levels of experience in Student Affairs professionals. The findings concluded that senior-level professionals and new and mid-level professionals had strong communication skills and benefited from professional associations that could be tailored to their experience level (Roberts, 2005). There were differences in technology experience, with the newer professionals having a higher competency level than senior-level administrators. Moreover, mid-level professionals had more experience than newer professionals within supervision and management (Roberts, 2005). Roberts's (2005) study supported Winston and Creamer’s (1998) research on supervisors' understanding of and design of professional development plans specific to the person’s level of experience in Student Affairs, which stated that one size does not fit all for continual growth. The needs of people differ based on experience level.

Grabsch et al. (2019) examined Student Affairs professionals' self-reported professional development needs by professional experience level. The findings revealed that professional development needs varied by professional level, similar to the findings of Chernow et al. (2003) (Grabsch et al., 2019). The key takeaway that can support professional development organizers is that each level needs development and customization. For new professionals, basic skills and knowledge are needed. For

mid-level professionals, opportunities around leadership and management skills are needed. For senior-level professionals, opportunities around strategic planning and change management skills are needed.

In summary, several researchers (Chernow et al., 2023; Grabsch et al., 2019; Haley et al., 2015; Janosik et al., 2006) studied professional development and professionals' field experiences. The common theme was the need for customized professional development plans based on the person's needs. Even within conferences and associations, there is a capacity and need for intentionality behind speakers, sessions, webinars, and programs so they are tailored to the professional's role and experience level.

Professional Development Connected to Career Growth

Murphy and Calway's (2008) research sparked further curiosity to study the impact of professional development on career development. They found, "[...] attention needs to be given to individual professionals in relation to their career development, which is represented by their knowledge, skills, and understanding together with their ability to practise as professionals" (Murphy & Calway, 2008, p. 440). Professional associations and participation in professional meetings are important to career development (Mata et al., 2010). Mata et al. (2010) shared their own personal experiences as members of a health education association; they met and found common interests that led to continuous collaboration and involvement in professional development opportunities that supported each of their careers.

"Clear values, a well-defined sense of identity, and self-directedness, combined with adaptability and flexibility, have considerable influence on career success" (Wilson

et al., 2016, p. 557). Wilson et al. (2016) examined the factors of professional identity of mid-level Student Affairs professionals (a population not often studied) in relation to career commitment, career entrenchment, and demographic characteristics. The authors found that mid-level Student Affairs professionals had a strong professional identity due to deep satisfaction, a sense of belonging to the field, and a connection of values between personal and professional life (Wilson et al., 2016). Gander and McInnes (2021) found networking to be one of the primary connections to career advancement. Connecting with other professionals resulted in empowerment to change careers (Gander & McInnes, 2021).

According to Gander and McInnes (2021), professionals can impact their own careers and career satisfaction through professional programs that help improve opportunities and the need for continual learning to be satisfied at work. Coomber (2018) identified the need for early discussions around career pathways when developing professional or training programs. Underhill (2006) studied the last 20 to 25 years of research surrounding mentorship programs and their organizations. They found, in relation to mentorship programs and career outcomes, a slight advantage existed for those in mentorship programs versus non-mentorship programs (Underhill, 2006).

Purdy's (2016) study touched on multiple themes connected to professional development and professional organizations. Purdy's (2016) mixed-method study design found, "Over three-quarters of the alumni viewed the experience at the Institute as having an overall positive and recurring or profound impact on their personal life and career" (p.22). Not only did the Institute impact alumni's careers, but they also reported

greater job satisfaction after completing the Institute. Professional development or mentoring programs noted in this section overwhelmingly found that participants gained in their professional and personal lives after participating in a professional development program.

Mentorship

Mentorship is a key component of professional and personal development. As described by Calhoun and Taub (2014), from the lens of Student Affairs professionals, mentorship serves two broad categories: 1) career functions such as coaching, providing visibility, protection, and work assignments and 2) psychosocial functions such as modeling, support, and guidance. Professionals within an institution, who may be faculty or staff, experience mentorship through intentional programs, informally through everyday interactions at work or among other professionals, or through formal relationships lasting for several years (Tran, 2014).

In Kamen and Apple's (2023) study, respondents credited a mentor as helping them navigate both the profession and the association. They found that the value of peer-to-peer mentorship had long been central to developing new volunteer leaders for the organization and was why AACRAO embraced the mentorship model (Kamen & Apple, 2023).

Mentorship is a partnership between a mentor, who traditionally has experience in a field or area of interest, and a mentee seeking guidance and support (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). Mentorship can also come from unexpected places, such as close community members or one's organization (Tran, 2014). It can be more of a peer-to-peer relationship where commonalities connect professionals (Baumgartner et

al., 2019; West, 2019). It can also create change, as noted in the following excerpt from Tran (2014):

The multidimensionality of mentorship referenced by one participant in this study, “mentoring up,” “mentoring down,” and “mentoring across,” can serve as a catalyst for institution change. Mentoring not only serves as a support mechanism to help leaders achieve their career goals, but also plays a critical role in shaping the leaders’ work in higher education and the change they seek to make. [...] This is evident in Phoebe’s work in which she makes a strategic effort to create institutional change by providing “mentoring up” for her supervisors, “mentoring across” for her colleagues, and “mentoring down” for her students. (p. 313)

Tran’s (2014) findings illustrate the complexity of mentoring relationships and the role of mentors and mentees. A person could be both a mentor and mentee at the same time, filling multiple roles depending on the context or situation.

Augustine-Shaw and Funk (2013) studied first-year superintendents who participated in an organized mentorship program, Kansas Educational Leadership Institute. Its design was to support new professionals who worked as superintendents providing mentorship, information, and guidance. The mentorship program, as described by mentees to the researchers, showed common themes of a safe and trusting environment, value of face-to-face mentoring, reflective practice which built trust in oneself, networking, building capacity, and mentee affirmation of the program’s support (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). This study could relate to Student Affairs and the current study due to the longevity and flexibility of the mentorship model.

Mentoring can have different impacts on different professions and people. Tran's (2014) findings on the impact of women of color in academia illustrated varying experiences, but all participants noted that their professional success was due to having mentors. West (2019) highlighted the issues that some women of color experienced while working at predominately white institutions. West (2019) found access, getting mentoring, and experiencing peer mentoring all impacted the participants' experiences in the professional development program (Summit). Summit provided a space for mentoring to take place, which was one of the main themes found in the study (West, 2019). Furthermore, the connection to others with senior-level positions and the space to meet impacted the participants.

Mentorship can lead to better job satisfaction, as noted in Calhoun and Taub's (2014) study, which focused on the impact of mentorship for entry-level men in Student Affairs. The study noted similarities to studies focusing on the impact of mentoring on women. "Women in Student Affairs who had strong female mentors had a better professional experience. Similarly, the findings of this study on entry-level men suggest that mentorship in Student Affairs for men also may be related to higher satisfaction and a better experience" (Calhoun & Taub, 2014, p. 190). As the Student Affairs field tends to have more females than male professionals, the connection and more exposure to senior-level men in leadership aided in the development and growth of male entry-level professionals.

Mentorship leads to growth and leadership. Channing (2020) conducted a quantitative study on how leaders learned. One of the main learning methods was through mentorship. Mentors lead by example, are observed, and are experienced in

sharing their own experiences of practices about what worked and what did not (Calhoun & Taub, 2014; Channing, 2020). A level of influence and trust emerges from a mentorship relationship, and it creates a positive impact on a professional's development. In another study, cultural awareness increased for participants in a leadership program as exposure to people who were different from them led to self-awareness and awareness of others (Black & Earnest, 2009).

Professional Confidence

The intentionality of a professional leadership program helped create a sense of empowerment or confidence a participant may have not been expecting to gain (Henderson-Harr et al., 2016). Participants of an assistant principal academy felt confident and informed after going through the program; it gave others a sense of purpose (Gurley et al., 2015). In Henderson-Harr et al. (2016) study, "Protégés' confidence levels and self-worth increased due to a stronger sense of purpose" (p. 9). With the support and guidance of mentors, participants experienced a noticeable boost of confidence and courage throughout the program, preparing them for their work environments. Gurley et al. (2015) highlighted that pushing boundaries and taking risks led to heightened self-confidence and the ability to navigate various work environments and situations.

The professional growth that emerges from a mentor-and mentee-relationship can help professionals feel confident about the decisions they make, feel empowered to take another step forward in a career, or feel able to become a strong leader (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). This was also found in Espinoza and Garfield's (2023) work, where over time as Garfield supported Espinoza through her early years of

tenure, the mentor and mentee relationship was impactful. Mentorship can provide support and lessons to new professionals from someone experienced who can help them through unique situations or challenges. An experienced professional can guide and lead a mentee, so they feel capable of handling such experiences in the future.

Black and Earnest (2009) found that mentees improved in various areas: individual, organizational, and community based. In individual growth, participants saw improvement in “personal growth, self-confidence, personal power, creative thinking, valuing of time, business skill-building, and modeling behaviors” (Black & Earnest, 2009, p.191).

Self-Assurance. Bandura (1977) developed the self-efficacy theory, cited in the literature over 110,000 times; when people believe they can do something, they feel more confident they will accomplish it. The theory examines how people’s beliefs in their abilities affect their outcome—by reflecting on the past and thinking of the future (Bandura, 1977). It is connected to confidence in oneself and how confidence impacts actions. Versland (2016) examined practicing principals' perception of preparation programs and self-efficacy. They found that principals experienced self-efficacy as they empowered others, taught students, and provided professional development, which increased their confidence (Versland, 2016).

Packard and Jones's (2015) study of leadership programs for human service managers resulted in significant improvements in the participants' job performance and self-efficacy. They found several key components that were necessary for leadership development:

Some combination of off-site training/development program, 360-degree feedback, the use of instruments filled out by participants on their management styles or characteristics, executive coaching, mentoring, assessment centers, action learning such as real-world problem solving, and plans for applications of new knowledge and skills on the job. (Packard & Jones, 2015, p.155)

Depending on what a program uses as main components in their curriculum, the components can contribute to skill enhancement and aid in the belief participants have in their capacity to succeed and grow professionally.

Purdy (2016) studied the impact of a leadership institute on nurses and other healthcare professionals. The impact of the Institute from participant responses showed confidence as leaders were validated through their experiences, and they took risks, new projects or roles, and dealt with challenges more confidently (Purdy, 2015). “Confidence was built through content presented (theory, language, tools) and through interactions with other leaders” (Purdy, 2016, p.21). The Institute was thoughtful of its process, and it impacted the participants in several ways, specifically through self-reflection (Purdy, 2015), connecting back to Bandura’s (1977) work on the importance of thinking of past actions and preparing for what is ahead.

Imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is a phenomenon of individuals who doubt their accomplishments and fear being considered frauds despite existing success. It is characterized by inadequacy and a lack of belonging (Slank, 2019). Slank (2019) researched whether the imposter phenomenon was connected to the environment and/or how others were treated. The researcher noted that imposter syndrome was a growing research area in psychology. Espinoza and Garfield (2023) described the

importance of mentorship and friendship as they supported each other in several ways, one way being connected to imposter syndrome. Espinoza battled with imposter syndrome and the sense of not belonging in academics as a tenure-track Latina (Espinoza & Garfield, 2023). Her mentor helped decrease those thoughts and support her tenure-track journey.

Networking

Building a network means building connections for growth and learning. Mentees in a professional program described networking as not feeling alone, providing information, and learning more about people within their state (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). Networking also helps young professionals curious about future careers or graduate or doctorate-level work (West, 2019). The ability to rely on others at the same conference or professional program is essential, especially for women and people of color. “Having a network of support is critical to the success of women of color in the academy [...]” (Tran, 2014, p. 307).

Networking helps professionals grow; the connections between colleagues or professionals outside of the field aid in professional growth due to the learning that emerges, including future opportunities (Levrant et al., 2021). Learning from conversations, more networking, and learning about other roles at an institution or school environment helps build a bond by knowing others are going through the same challenge (Gander & McInnes, 2021; Gurley et al., 2015). Black and Earnest (2009) found that on an organizational level, participants in a leadership program saw improved networking, communication, and management skills.

Several researchers noted that participants sought more professional development through conferencing, networking, events, and in-person and virtual professional development opportunities (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013; Levrant et al., 2021; West, 2019). Some participants created their own opportunities, as noted in Levrant et al. (2021) research, as they need more, “The creation of these opportunities will enable emerging professionals to better serve their institute and university leadership, as well as expand their opportunities to grow professionally within the field. Those professionals who are already creating their own networking and professional development opportunities may become leaders in this effort” (p.132). The participants in Levrant et al. (2021) created their own networks with peers and other colleagues to benefit their personal development and growth as the connection with others is beneficial.

Conclusion

The literature review highlights the importance of professional development and career growth for Student Affairs professionals. The findings suggest that each level of professionals has unique needs and competencies that require customized development opportunities. Professional associations and meetings provide a platform for learning and collaboration, which can lead to career advancement. Mentorship and networking for Student Affairs professionals and other higher education professionals aid in the learning and growth of skills and knowledge needed to navigate the field's challenges and changes. Overall, the research also reminds us of the importance of professional development, as stated by Schwartz and Bryan (1998):

Professional development may be the best means to achieve such growth and renewal. It may also be the only means to encourage and reward the development of staff at all levels. Colleges and universities are heavily dependent on human capital, so attention to and reinvestment in that capital, our most valuable resource, is time and money well spent. The worst choice is to ignore or overlook professional development. (p. 12)

Lastly, the literature review emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and development for professionals to succeed in their roles and to advance their careers. The vital role of mentorship and networking in fostering professional development is evident across the research. However, there is a need for more specific research related specifically to Admissions and Registrar professionals.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In order to study the phenomenon of Program L, participants' voices are necessary. Participants' experiences cannot be shared simply by the percentage of those who stay on the job or receive a certificate. These quantitative measures do not share the full story of what was experienced within a twelve-month professional development program. Therefore, a qualitative case study is necessary to understand the problem, understand the setting, empower participant voices, and have the flexibility to express what is explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) note, "We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices" (p. 45). The phenomenon being studied is essential to describe the experience's common meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This phenomenological case study focuses on gathering in-depth information from higher education professionals who participated in Program L. The following research question will guide the study:

- What impact does a leadership program, Program L, have on Admissions and Registrar professionals in higher education?

Understanding more about Program L

Program L is an application-based program where each participant applies to join. As noted in Chapter 1, applicants are selected based on factors such as location, years within higher education, or specific professional fields such as Registrar or

Admissions work and written statements. The selection committee works to create cohorts that represent the students who are served and include diverse experiences to help the learning environment.

The program is designed to support professionals who want to grow professionally or to prepare for the next leadership role at their institution or association. A significant component of the program is the mentorship framework. The program includes various meetings that consist of large group meetings, monthly small group meetings and one-on-one meetings with each individual's mentor. The mentors for the program are notable in the Admissions and Registrar fields and involved in the regional association, some holding past board member seats for the association. They are selected based on interest, willingness to be a mentor, and current involvement in the association. Their dedication to the association that sponsors Program L is seen by several of the members of the association which contributes to their role as mentor.

Program L started in 2018 and currently has five completed cohorts and one in progress (see Table 3.1). The 65 participants of the past five cohorts were included in the recruitment for the current study.

Table 3.1

Number of participants per cohort

Cohort Year	Number of Participants
2018 - 2019	15
2019 - 2020	15
2020 - 2021	12
2021 - 2022	11
2022 - 2023	12

Note. Online documents collected from publicly available information (2024).

Research Design

This qualitative study used an exploratory case study methodology to understand how Program L impacted Admissions and Registrar professionals. Case study as a research method allows for an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon happening among people, an organization, or an event (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An exploratory case study aims to study a phenomenon to explore and add to future research studies (Priya, 2020). By exploring the experiences of Program L participants, the results will aid in the future planning of the program itself and contribute to research about professional development for Admissions and Registrar professionals.

Participant Communication

After receiving the Institutional Review Board and the regional association's Board approval, the initial email was sent to 60 past participants from the past five years. Of the total 65, five did not receive emails as they were no longer in the profession or within an institution. Emails were obtained from the regional association's board and also from using institutional websites as some past participants had changed institutions. The recruitment email included the study's introduction, the reason behind the request for involvement, and a survey shared via Google Forms with consent to participant information prior to the start of the survey. Two other emails were sent to participants as reminders to complete the survey to support this research (see Appendix A).

Survey Design

The sampling survey was loosely based on the survey designed by a Student Affairs study conducted in March 2022 (NASPA, 2022). The descriptive questions included the institution's size, the participants' functional area, and their years in the profession. Short answer open-ended questions were developed to learn more about each participant. "An open-ended question, unlike a leading question, establishes the territory to be explored while allowing participants to take any direction they want" (Seidman, 2019, p. 91). The questions were designed to encourage participants to reflect on their experience in Program L and share how it impacted them to date. The final question was whether the individual was prepared to delve further into the subject matter by being interviewed in detail. The questions, the demographic, and open-ended, short-answer questions were all essential to targeting five respondents for the second portion of data collection (see Appendix B).

The survey collected initial data from each participant. This survey included career and institution information about each participant, as well as eight short answer, open-ended questions about their Program L experiences. Once the survey was closed, 30 past participants had provided anonymous responses, a 50 percent participation rate. Fifteen participants offered to be interviewed for the second part of the data collection process.

Interview Design

Five participants were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Interviewing is "[...] an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2019, p. 9). A

semi-structured interview allows participants to share their experiences firsthand, expand on their responses, or allow for further exploration into another related topic. The interview questions were developed with the research question in mind, with room for other questions related to professional development to be added if needed. Interview questions were developed using Seidman's guidelines for semi-structured interviews (2019) (see Appendix C). Before starting the interview process, three experts in the field of higher education, familiar with the topic of professional development, reviewed the interview questions and provided feedback to the researcher.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were collected throughout the study. First, career and university survey data were collected from all participants who completed the survey (N: 30 for the participants in the cohorts), as well as eight open-ended survey questions regarding participants' experiences in the program. Five people were selected to be interviewed using survey data.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing tool, as many participants are located in various cities in the western United States. Zoom allowed for easy connection, audio and video recording, and transcription of the interviews, which ensured data validity. Zoom interviews were scheduled for an hour based on the participant's schedule. All Zoom interviews were recorded. Consent for audio and visual recording was obtained from each interviewee.

Another data source was documents. Each participant was asked to provide a copy of the written portion of their application to Program L to learn more about their professional experience before participating in Program L. This artifact served as an

additional data point for the comprehensive study. It aided in comprehending how the professional development opportunity of the program impacted their personal and professional life based on what they initially wrote in their application and their subsequent reflections about their experience over time. Only one of the five interviewees provided their application responses.

I also collected documents from Program L's publicly available online information, including program descriptions and the literature used for each cohort. Each cohort received 8 to 10 books related to professional development or leadership development that guided discussions throughout the year through one-on-one mentor meetings or during group discussions with the cohort (see Table 3.2). Table 3.2 includes a list of all books used by the five cohorts; some books were used by multiple cohorts while others were used only once. Understanding the literature used during each cohort's experience supported the responses from the interviewees and what they learned through their experience in Program L.

Table 3.2

Books from Program L, including all past cohorts' books

How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
Start with Why by Simon Sinek
The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker
How to Be an Inclusive Leader: Your Role in Creating Cultures of Belonging Where Everyone Can Thrive by Jennifer Brown
Talk like TED by Carmine Gallo
Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard by Chip Heath and Dan Heath
StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath

How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership by Robert Birnbaum
Change the Culture, Change the Game by Roger Connors and Tom Smith
Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek
Change Leadership in Higher Education: A Practical Guide to Academic Transformation by Jeffrey L. Buller
Leadership Lessons: Vision and Values for a New Generation by Louise Lonabocker and Heather Zimar
The Emotionally Intelligent Leader by Daniel Goleman
Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity by Kim Scott
Transformational Encounters by Doris M. Ching, Lori S. White, Robert D. Kelly, and Anna K. Gonzalez
Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life: One Conversation at a Time by Susan Scott

Note. Online documents collected from publicly available information (2024).

Participants

Most of the cohort members were based in the Pacific region of the United States, working at colleges and universities. The cumulative collection of participants encompassed several states, institution sizes, and functional areas within Admissions, Enrollment Management, and Registrar (see Appendix D). Facilitators and mentors reviewed applications to select the top 12 to 15 participants to join a cohort.. Five years' of completed cohorts of Program L totaled 65 potential participants.

“Convenience sampling is used by researchers involved [sic] in selecting individuals or groups that happen to be available and are willing to participate in the research at the time” (Omona, 2013, p. 181). From the survey data, interview participants were selected based on willingness to participate and other factors (e.g., year of cohort, size of university, etc.). The second layer of interviewee selection used

criterion sampling in which individuals are selected based on the criteria noted above (Omona, 2013). Selecting participants from each cohort and from various institutional characteristics was important. The survey respondents were anonymous. Each participant who was willing to be interviewed received a pseudonym.

There was an overwhelming interest in moving forward with the research from participants. Fifteen participants provided their contact information to be included in the selection process for an interview. Five interviewees were initially selected to align with the past five cohorts. From there, the criterion sampling selection process focused on representation from distinct institutional characteristics: a private institution, a public four-year institution, and community colleges. This ensured diversity in institutional type and professional expertise, ranging from Admissions to Registrar roles and other relevant functional areas to learn from interviewees with different experiences and professional backgrounds. Lastly, the size of student populations at their respective institutions was carefully considered to offer a broad spectrum of educational settings. The five participants and brief characteristics are noted below in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Interview Participants

Name	Cohort	Years in Higher Education	Years in Current Role	Number of positions supervise	Functional Areas	Institutional Sector	Enrollment Size
Lara	2018 - 2019	6 - 10	1 - 5	Six	Enrollment, Registrar	Public, four years	5,000 - 9,999
Layla	2019 - 2020	11 - 15	1 - 5	Four	Enrollment, Registrar, Compliance	Public, two years	5,000 - 9,999
Rose	2020 - 2021	Over 20	6 - 10	Ten or more	VA Educational Benefits Processing	Private, for-profit, four years	15,000 or more

Jax	2021 - 2022	Over 20	1 - 5	Nine	Admissions, Enrollment, Student Technology, International students, Transfer Students	Public, two years	15,000 or more
Rem	2022 - 2023	11 - 15	1 - 5	One	Registrar	Public, four years	15,000 or more

Note. All survey participants' characteristics can be found in the Appendix D. Interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms.

Meet the Interviewees

Lara. Lara was interviewed on March 12, 2024. The conversation lasted 35 minutes, and she shared much about her experience. She was part of the first leadership program cohort that started in 2018. She works at a public four-year institution serving between 5,000 - 9,999 students. She has been in her current role for one to five years yet has worked in higher education for six to ten years. Lara's background includes working outside of higher education, which provides her with a different lens and ability to identify differences between various organizations. She currently supervises six employees, focusing on enrollment management and Registrar.

Layla. Layla's interview was 53 minutes long on March 10, 2024. She works at a public two-year community college that serves 5,000 - 9,999 students. She was a part of the 2019-2020 Program L cohort, which experienced the pandemic impact during the latter part of their program. Nevertheless, since then, she held various leadership roles within the regional association. She supervises four staff members in the compliance, enrollment management, and Registrar fields. Layla has experience in higher education for 11 to 15 years, serving in her current role for one to five years.

Rose. Rose was interviewed on March 11, 2024, and the conversation went slightly over 53 minutes. She was part of the 2020-2021 Program L cohort, which experienced parts of the pandemic during the program. She works at a private, four-year institution that services over 15,000 students. Her role has shifted over the years and is currently housed in the Registrar's office. She supervises more than ten staff members and has the most years in her current position compared to the other interview participants. Rose has over 20 years of experience in higher education.

Jax. Jax's interview on March 11, 2024, lasted for 56 minutes and was filled with many experiences and examples from his years in higher education. He was part of the 2021-2022 cohort; he had participated in some of the previous year's cohorts but completed the 2021-2022 cohort year. Jax spent over 23 years in higher education, serving the last 7 to 8 years in a senior position at one institution and recently changed institutions. He works at a public, two-year college that serves over 15,000. Jax brings a wealth of experience in admissions, enrollment management, student success technology, international students, transfer students, and policy and process. He supervises nine staff members in the transfer field with over 20 years of experience in higher education. Jax also participated in an institutional-led leadership academy early on in his career.

Rem. Rem recently completed his 2022-2023 Program L cohort. His interview took place on March 14, 2024, and lasted 59 minutes. He works at a public, four-year institution that serves over 15,000 students. Rem works within the Registrar's office, supervising one staff member and bringing 11 to 15 years of experience overall and one to five years in his current position. Rem leads another organization outside of his

career, where he stays connected with alumni that support students of color at various institutions.

Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) provide step-by-step methods for interweaving and analyzing the collected data: survey, transcribed interview responses, artifacts, and documents. Utilizing their Data Analysis Spiral (see Appendix E), managing and organizing data was my initial step (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collected is stored in a personal Google drive that can only be accessed by Single Sign-On. Each participant has a folder comprising their Program L application, if provided, Zoom recording, and interview responses transcribed into a Word document. Then, a separate folder holds the survey responses from the anonymous participants. The list of literature from each Program L cohort and memos of their application responses are part of the research folder in Google Drive.

Coding

“The process of coding is central to qualitative research and involves making sense of the text collected from interviews, observations, and documents” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190). The open coding process began with reading and memoing initial codes on hard copy versions of the interview responses with notetaking in the margins. The exact process occurred with the survey responses; all responses per short answer questions were combined to review and analyze for common themes, identifying similarities and differences among responses. The common codes and themes were all placed in a spreadsheet to collect all handwritten codes from the interview transcripts and the survey responses. Identifying patterns and pairings or similarities were

developed from the initial review of the codes. There was a frequency of some phrases or words and many other codes that paired with similar themes. In total, 545 codes were developed through open coding.

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend “lean coding.” “This approach is called lean coding because it begins with five or six categories with shorthand labels or codes, and then it expands as review and re-review of the database continues” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190). Detailed descriptions of what emerged from the participants' responses aided in developing main codes or themes and subcategories based on the results.

Using MAXQDA

With the support of a computer analysis program, MAXQDA, all 545 initial codes were uploaded from the Excel document developed from opening coding. MAXQDA helps “systematically evaluate and interpret qualitative texts” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 212). It allows for visual mapping and identifying themes and has a MAXApp app for easy memoing, data gathering, and coding, which uploads directly into the database. The data collected in MAXQDA can be transferred into Excel or SPSS. As the already-developed codes were uploaded, the transcripts of the survey responses and interviews were uploaded, too. Once all documentation was in MAXQDA, codes matching different sections of the transcripts were identified using the system. To assist in narrowing down the codes, I exported the “Code System” twice. The initial time was to review every code and begin identifying connected areas. This analysis helped narrow down codes to the top 28 codes.

Once the codes were reviewed using the printed code system, MAXQDA allowed for moving and shifting the placement of codes within the Code System. This helped narrow all codes down to 428, specifically, color coding the main 28 codes and grouping codes together. The last step of the data analysis was visually representing the themes and subthemes through a code table. Analyzing the 28 codes, four emerging themes along with associated sub-themes were developed due to continually revisiting the codes through the computer software and handwritten notes. See Table 3.4 to view the main themes and supporting subthemes.

Table 3.4

Main themes and subthemes developed from the analysis of all materials

Major Theme	Connected Subthemes
Mentorship	mentors, holistic support, mentors are your cheerleaders, program design
Assurance	imposter syndrome, advocacy, confidence, involvement, not alone
Network	connections, networking, relationships and friendships
Professional Growth	learn, leaders and leadership, skills, resources, books, perspectives, and career growth

Validity

Creswell and Miller (2000) share that validity is challenging for researchers to write about to ensure their work is credible. “Qualitative researchers routinely employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits. Researchers engage in one or more of these procedures and report results in their investigations” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). For this study, three validity procedures

were used to ensure the credibility of the results. The first was triangulation, which is the collection of multiple sources of information such as surveys, interviews, documents, and artifacts (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morse, 2015). The second was member checking; this procedure takes the data collected and interviews transcribed back to the participant to ensure the information is correctly collected for data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morse, 2015). Lastly, the third validity procedure is researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity requires the researcher to share their background, experience, and connection to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study, triangulation occurred through multiple sources. It was through the thirty survey responses, the five interviews, online websites with Program L details and resources, and member artifacts in the form of copies of participants' applications of who provided them to be selected for the leadership program. Only one interviewee could find and share their application for Program L. Then, in the form of member checking, the interview transcript was shared with the participants to ensure that what will be asked and answered is what they experienced through the interview process. All five interviewees received their transcript version of the interview; three responded, confirmed the transcript, and provided minor grammatical edits back to the researcher. Another level of member checking took place through my research advisor to ensure the information was transcribed and coded properly. All validity procedures support the study and results.

Researcher Bias

Professional development opportunities and the association used in the case study were critical to my development as a higher education and research professional.

I have been attending professional associations related to the enrollment services field for over 15 years as a professional in Admissions. Presenting at conferences, participating on panels, attending webinars, and reading professional books have all been a part of my professional development over the years. I have attended and contributed to the Board of the regional association which supported this research. However, I have not participated directly in a year-long professional development leadership program. I have promoted Program L to the association's membership and staff working within the Office of Admissions at my home institution.

My curiosity about the impact of professional development has been at the forefront over the last ten years, particularly as I supervise new and senior-level professionals in Admissions. In my current role, supervising a variety of professional staff, it is important for me to think about professional development opportunities and reduce barriers for my staff to attend, participate, and experience a variety of professional growth outside of what is being offered internally. Being aware of such bias and ensuring that it does not impact the study, member checking is essential, and utilizing existing documentation directly from the participants as a validity practice is important (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Limitations

The limitations of this study are primarily centered around the narrow focus on a single, year-long leadership program, Program L, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Participants were exclusively drawn from this program, which may introduce bias as they had to apply and were selected to participate in Program L. A more diverse sample could have been drawn from conference attendees, members of regional

associations, or staff participating in institutional professional development programs. The focus on Program L may not represent the experiences of many members of the Admissions and Registrar-specific associations.

Each interviewee was asked to provide a copy of their Program L application during the participation process. Only one of the five participants was able to find their application responses. Only minimal use of the application process was included in the study. As this research study is being conducted, a current cohort is experiencing Program L. The study did not include them as they had yet to experience all the readings and assignments.

Lastly, as the researcher, I knew some interviewees from previous professional development activities. This could have influenced responses assuming that I knew more or less about the program or personal journeys. However, triangulation and member-checking were used to reduce any bias or lack of validity in the study.

Summary

The methodology section of the study focuses on the research design, data collection, and data analysis. The study used an exploratory qualitative research design with a single-case study approach to study a phenomenon. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with five professionals from the Admissions and Registrar fields in higher education institutions who participated in Program L offered by a regional professional association. The interviews were conducted virtually and recorded for later transcription. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to the impact of professional development

programs on the participants' professional growth, organizational contribution, and career advancement.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the research. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of a year-long professional development program for higher education professionals to investigate the research question: What impact does a leadership program, Program L, have on Admissions and Registrar professionals in higher education?

These results, as noted in Chapter 3, derived from surveys, individual interviews, documents, and online materials, illustrate many factors contributing to the impact of professional development in higher education on professional staff. This chapter shares the main themes found in the data: mentorship, assurance, network, and professional growth. It highlights the many voices of survey respondents and interview participants, using their words to describe the impact of professional development, a key component of qualitative research reports (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using the voices of the participants helps readers to visualize and humanizes the findings.

Mentorship

The survey results and individual interviews noted mentorship as an emerging theme. Mentorship, mentors, support, and encouragement, all words associated with the mentorship theme, were coded 64 times across the data. The impact of the mentors who led the leadership program on the participants' experience was an important finding. Even after the year-long program ended, several past participants noted they continued to reach out to their mentors for various reasons.

Mentors

An essential part of the leadership program was the mentorship model, where each participant received a small group mentor, was exposed to other mentors in the program, and had one-on-one time with their small group mentor. Some individuals who applied and participated in the leadership program sought out mentorship, “I was looking for growth opportunity, professional development, peer relationships, and mentorship” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

Mentors provide other professionals with someone to connect with on various levels, professionally and personally, to support and help guide careers, solve problems, and share their experiences in any field (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). Mentors have experienced growth over their careers, as well as dealt with conflict and other unique situations; they enjoy giving back and helping others grow.

They became a resource that could be trusted. Jax shares, “I think the most memorable is moreso the overall ability to have them [mentors] as a resource that to this day I still trust” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). As per Augustine-Shaw and Funk's (2013) study of superintendents in a leadership program, Jax's knowledge that he has resources through the program's mentors and can reach out to them when needed mirrored the findings in their study. His mentor and others in the program became trusted colleagues to help with problems, provide advice and provide insight into what other institutions compared to the common university practice of leaning on consultants no one knows. An anonymous survey response explained why the trust existed, “The mentors and leaders of Program L were highly experienced and noteworthy in their career, adding to the value and validity of the discussions and follow-up counsel” (February 2024). Another survey participant said, “Being paired with an amazing mentor

and cohort was a bonus because it was another channel for me to be able to seek advice from those who have been in the profession longer than I have” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). These survey respondents shared insight into how the mentorship model used in Program L was effective due to the mentors’ expertise and the trust that was built.

Others were surprised that mentorship continued past the program. Rose mentioned, “Even though we don’t meet monthly anymore, I still feel a strong bond with my mentor [...]. I know I could reach out to any of those three individuals if ever I needed anything, and they would make time for me” (interview, March 11, 2024).

Holistic Support. Mentors played a significant role in some participants’ lives, providing support and a sense of reassurance for small steps or big moves within the professional world. This support often went beyond the program curriculum and centered on career moves, job advancement, and other issues. Jax shared:

After Program L, the ability to move into a new career at a new institution was smooth and welcoming. In my new career, it was a transition; however, with the mentorship and connections to "refer-back" allowed the transition to be exciting. The decision to move into a new institution was also supported by [Program L] as my mentor assisted in the decision-making to accept a new position and how to best begin my new role. (Jax, survey, February 2024)

A survey participant also credited their mentor for a significant life change, “During the middle of my [Program L] cohort, I was given the opportunity to directly advance into my current role. I don’t think I would have had the confidence to say yes if it wasn’t for [Program L] and my mentor” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). This connects with

several studies related to professional growth and mentorship (Coomber, 2018; Gander & McInnes, 2021; Levrant et al., 2021).

Another survey participant shared that the mentorship was personalized to them and that they felt heard and supported based on what was occurring in their professional world: “The mentorship I was given was personalized to me and about what I had going on in my work life. I felt heard, and supported” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). As per Chernow et al. (2003), this participant’s experiences speak to the importance of professional development programming that is specific to the needs and experience levels of the cohort.

Connecting with Tran’s (2014) findings about mentoring up, mentoring across, and mentoring down, Layla’s mentorship experience related directly to how her mentors in Program L “reach[ed] down to bring people up.” She shared:

[...] in your own area you start to doubt that there are true leaders, and so when you have those people who are across the board in different positions in different states have different roles, but you can see them as leaders, and they're mentoring you and they're helping you in they're, they're just being them and not even realizing the impact that they have on you personally, but professionally. And just. It's just everybody seeing everybody grow and the kindness and what they can do and hearing them talk and all of the presentations and stuff. It's been just, it's been an incredible process [...]. Those mentors have definitely been the leaders reaching down to bring people up. And that's really what we need. More across the board everywhere [...]. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

Layla's experience illustrated the level of trust and respect she had for mentors' experience not only in her own field or institution, but across other institutions and fields, as per Calhoun and Taub (2014) and Channing (2020).

Mentorship is a powerful tool. It is a key component in the leadership program and is powerful for many organizations (Nguyen, 2018). Mentors help individuals achieve their personal and professional goals. It is a process that keeps giving back.

Rose has been a mentor for the past three years for a group at her institution. Layla became a mentor for Program L due to her experience in the program. Lara began gaining more prominent leadership roles at her institution and on the Board of the regional association. Rem unofficially became a mentor for student staff in his office and guided his external organization even more than before. Jax has shared his experience with his staff and has initial conversations with staff about the program and overall professional development. He mentioned his past mentors, outside of Program L, who have also pushed him to have tough conversations that shaped him.

[...] I mean this wholeheartedly that I had, I had pretty good mentors. And pretty good executives that have ran me through the wringer, you know. And brought me through some self-conversations and all that to a point where it's like, you get emotional. [...] And they're honest conversations. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

The mentors in the Program L change with each cohort; however, most of the participants had a couple in common. Overall, the data revealed that each mentor was positively mentioned as an agent of change in the interviewees' lives, often by name. Mentors helped the participants in the program grow professionally and helped many not feel alone as a couple of cohorts struggled through the pandemic, leaning on each

other for guidance and reassurance that everything would be okay. A past participant shared their experience, “Wonderful mentorship experience and just positivity and support from all the [Program L] faculty. This was especially meaningful because [sic] I was participating in the program during the height of the pandemic” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Together, the mentors and participants worked through policy, travel, and staff care changes.

Furthermore, they worked through personal situations, balancing work and life. “It was great to connect with my leads [...] because I was in limbo trying to figure out what I wanted to do next in my career. I really value time with my family and if that meant being comfortable where I am at and not going onto leadership, I should be okay with that. They helped me talk it through” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The mentorship program allowed participants to have personal conversations, be realistic about work and family, and balance all aspects of life. The space for personal conversations is similar to Espinoza and Garfield’s (2023) study of their relationship, which was a mix of mentorship and friendship, connected not only on an academic level but also a personal level.

Lara’s responses to her thoughts about her mentor generated a question to dig deeper into understanding the importance of her relationship with her mentor, as noted below. She continued to share, “And when she presents and has sessions and things like that, it’s just you, just feel just all the love, and just everything [sic] emitting from her. And it’s just so wonderful, like if I have an ounce of that, just a little bit, right? I was really happy that she ended up being my mentor through the program” (Lara, interview,

March 12, 2024). Through presentations and their relationship, Lara received support and a model through her mentor.

Outside Guidance. Many of the participants mentioned the value of having a mentor outside of their institution. This allowed mentees to share and lean on the mentors in different ways than if the mentor had been in the same institution, removing fear of reprisals from their work peers. Lara described the impact of the program and her mentor on a new career opportunity and the timing. The support of her mentor gave her the empowerment to take a chance with a new role, the little push that professionals need when new opportunities arise and doubt might come into play (i.e., Imposter Syndrome (Slank, 2019); self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977)):

If it wasn't for [Program L] and, I don't know if I'd be sitting in the position that I am in currently without [Program L] so shortly after I completed that. Or was in the process of completing the last little bit of my cohorts. Our associate Registrar was leaving, and I don't know if I would have felt ready enough to step into this role if I hadn't gone through the experience with [Program L]. And having the support from my mentor, and you know, having her like, DO IT, like you, you are ready, and like having her as a cheerleader to let me know that I can do the things was really nice. (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024)

Mentorship is pivotal for many professionals, not only those involved in the leadership program. More experienced professionals in the same field make it easier to trust what mentors say and for individuals to feel prepared or ready to manage the challenge or situation ahead (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). For Lara especially, her mentor gave her the confidence she needed and reassurance when figuring out what to

do or understanding different aspects of the Registrar world as she was new to the field. She speaks about the impact of her mentor:

A lot. It was just nice, especially being I was really new. I had only, let's see, been in higher ed for about 18 months. When I was I moved into the customer service role. So, within like two years, I was doing [Program L] super new. But it was nice to be able to have that person to lean on and ask questions. And we would have our one-on-one calls in it wouldn't just necessarily be about what we were doing in [Program L], which is kind of like, what are you doing at work? How are things going? Can I help you with anything? [...] Because I would get super hesitant if I don't know if I'm doing this right. Maybe I'm doing it wrong. You know. She was always just super supportive of like. Yes, you're doing it correctly. Yes, you're doing it right. Yes, you're moving forward. (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024)

There may have been some doubt about doing her everyday job initially in her career, but Lara's mentor supported some of those feelings of inadequacy when away (Slank, 2019).

In another section, Jax noted how his mentor helped him decide to pursue a new career.

I will tell you that I consulted with my mentors and [Program L] in taking this position, like OK. Was it? What do you guys think about this? You know, here's the thing. They helped me kind of do the pros and cons. So indirectly that kind of stuck with me. As to you are with a set of practitioners that's been in their field that were trusted and what's stuck with me is that they now have a trust circle I

can go into that's outside of my immediate higher ed system that I can consult with them, and they've helped me. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

What stood out about Jax's experience with his mentor is their presence outside his education system; his mentor's presence from an entirely different state created an added layer of trust. Another example Jax shared was regarding how to take on a new role and begin to build. His mentors were able to provide feedback and the next steps due to their experience and external connections. He shared,

And it was good because it was really nonbiased. It was nonbiased because they weren't coming from the [state]. They didn't know the politics of the [state] and that's what I needed. You know, I already knew the politics of the state [education], but they didn't have that. And I needed that unbiased side. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

Jax's mentor played a critical role for him during time of change and the experience from a person outside of Jax's home state was vital to talk openly and authentically.

Mentors are your cheerleaders.

As Lara noted above, mentors become your "cheerleaders." Individuals whom a mentee depends on for guidance in a leadership program or navigating challenges like managing a pandemic. Throughout all five participant interview responses, mentors were called cheerleaders (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024), "literal sunshine," (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024), a class on their own (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024), angels, consultants (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024), confidants, and genuinely amazing people. These responses illustrate the importance of the mentor /mentee relationship

not solely being based on knowledge and experience. Rather, these mentors created an environment of acceptance and comfort for their mentees.

The attitude of the mentor created space for participants to feel comfortable reaching out; they did not feel intimidated because the mentors were so approachable. “My mentor is a lovely human being; they are sunshine. The way they would talk about approaching conflict or change management was with a much softer approach than I had done in the past. That really helped me take on a softer approach and be more empathetic” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). This response illustrates the impact that modeling had on participants who were able to see a different management style in practice and begin to adopt it into their own practice. Layla experienced someone in her corner and supporting her, “So it's just nice to have, you know, like that cheerleader being like, yes, you are doing things correctly” (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024).

Jax mentioned the importance of space and people as his mentors became part of his “trust circle.” He shared, “[...] but actually the space and people that you were with became kind of your consultants and trust circle” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024).

Many may consult with their close colleagues or previous supervisors about career change. However, the uniqueness of having a mentor in the same field, with years of experience and built trust, to help with a life-changing decision is only found in some organizations as they are more formal (Cooper & Miller, 1998).

At times, new professionals or those who have been in the field for many years need a person to help them realize their existing experience and skillset, provide reassurance, or simply be a “sounding board.” Rem’s experience with his mentor added confidence and the realization that he was on the right track.

I had [Dee]. And it's like every time I'm like, even like with my final project I was like. I don't know if this fits. I don't know if this is good, and she's like no, that's great like double down and go for it. And that was kind of what she did throughout. The process is like we would have our smaller group meetings to me and two other people, and then she was our mentor, and we go over the assignments and kind of go over what is needed to be discussed. And what's needed was due. And if we had any questions on the materials that discuss and really just use kind of like a sounding board for us to run our ideas by her and like. Oh, this is what I pulled out of this reading like, am I on the right track or not? Cause it's like this we, you know, like I didn't know anybody involved before I joined. (Rem interview, March 14, 2024)

Again, mentors in the leadership program were “cheerleaders,” positive and empowering individuals who helped build the essential component of the program throughout the year. Many of the interviewees stated they could pick up the phone today, call their mentor, ask questions, and experience support and conversation from their mentor from the program (Anonymous, survey, February 2024; Jax, interview, March 11, 2024; Rose, interview, March 11, 2024). Gurley et al. (2013) found similar sentiments, with participants sharing that they could reach out to anyone in the academy if they had a question or needed.

Sometimes, mentors can push professionals outside their comfort zone to help them grow. The benefits of mentorship include increased confidence, improved skills, expanded networks, and greater career satisfaction (Baumgartner et al., 2019).

Effective mentorship requires commitment, trust, and open communication from both parties.

The Program Design

As noted above, mentorship was a huge impact for many of the participants in the leadership program. There are expectations noted on the program website about what it means to be a mentor and a mentee; it ensures that those who want to participate understand the program's framework (online documents collected from publicly available information, 2024). Not until further analysis did the connection between the mentorship portion of the program and the purposeful design of Program L emerge. The facilitators and participants, along with the environment of the experience, was part of the importance of the program design, as per Borko (2004). The design included the larger cohort meeting, the small group meeting with the mentor, and one-on-one meetings that occurred virtually each month. The design also included resources available throughout the program. This long-term design connected with Parkhouse et al. (2019), who found that the duration of professional development was important.

An important component of Program L's design was how the participants meet monthly. Due to members all living in different states, connecting via Zoom was an important environment for the program. The virtual meetings which occurred monthly, connected participants from all areas of the country. With the ability to still build connections virtually (Irby et al., 2022). Layla shared how her cohort met each month.

But it's just how it's all separated together. Like you have your whole meeting with the entire cohort, then you have your small group meeting with your other

peers, and then you have your one on one. So, you can just really you know, make those conversations like, okay, like what, what about you know, the different types of colleges and tell us why you guys continue to have us learn Birnbaum. And do all of these things and so it's helpful because then we also get to hear like more of it in the way that a lot of the assignments are broken up as if the books are lengthy, you don't have to read the entire thing. Sometimes you're set to a section. And so, I think they also strategically have everybody in that small group in a different section so you can just go back to it together and if there was a couple times that we would work with other people in a small group, so needing to work on how to schedule those meetings and work on the extra time and how you can work together remotely. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

Layla's reflection indicated this professional development was impactful due to the longevity of the experience, as per Gurley et al.'s (2015) findings. Layla also mentioned the various meeting formats and how each contributed to her overall experience.

The commitment from the mentors and mentees is a strong indication of the investment in the program. The program not only begins at a conference, but it also ends at a conference, coming full circle. This ensures that participants see one another in person twice during the cohort year and then virtually each month in between. Rem described this experience and wished to see the cohort in person throughout the year.

I do wish that we were able to meet in person at some point throughout the program. It was all on Zoom. Besides the first meeting and the last meeting. Which I understand it'd be difficult trying to get people from, I mean, we have people from Hawaii and Nevada, and everything in between. [...]. Like

everybody's nervous. Nobody really knows each other outside of like the mentors, and it's just kind of like nervous excitement, energy, and it was like super early in the morning (speaking to the first meeting at the conference). So, it's like people slowly waking up and the coffee start hitting, and then like. By the end of the meeting, we have things, like everybody's feeling confident, feeling good about it, and the conference itself, and then, like the last meeting, it feels almost like a reunion. (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024)

Rem shared his experience from the initial meeting (in person), mentioning being initially nervous (e.g., “Nobody really knows each other outside of like the mentors, and it's just kind of like nervous excitement, energy”), but then starting to build a bond with others (e.g., “everybody's feeling confident, feeling good about it”).

The notion that you spend a year with a cohort online and feel the last in-person meeting at the conference is like a “reunion,” literally a gathering of people who have been together before. Programs that do not exceed a year or do not meet consistently such as one-day workshops or 60-minute webinars, which are more focused forms of professional development, do not tend to experience the feeling of reuniting with others who have become friends and close colleagues (Garet et al., 2001). As Rem notes, the benefit of a twelve-month program is the ability to connect and build a bond, even though he would have preferred less virtual and more in person interactions with his colleagues and mentors.

The one-year program design was intentional. The reason behind a one-year program or the outline of the group meetings was not publicly shared; nevertheless, similar to Garet et al.'s (2001) findings about professional development and teachers,

intensive programs have a greater impact than shorter professional development opportunities; however, Henderson-Harr et al. (2016) found that programs that are too long are also not ideal. There is a fine balance of time and curriculum, which Program L may have achieved.

Program L's program culture helped one participant feel comfortable participating during the meeting times. "The relaxed nature of the cohort meetings. It was purely focused on improvement and sharing knowledge and that was very enjoyable and made me more likely to contribute consistently" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Whether it was intentional or not, an area that could be further explored is the structure of the meetings. How mentors led their sessions and the group involvement helped participants feel included and a sense of belonging.

Layla became a mentor for Program L after completing her cohort experience; she was able to make connections from what she experienced to the behind-the-scenes process. She shared that the curriculum was both designed by the program itself, with input from the mentors. She said, "Now being in the faculty role, I see how we have kind of select what books we choose and what kind of lessons we kind of choose" (Layla's Interview, March 10, 2024). It is a strategic process and a thoughtful design to help mentees learn. Again, Layla shares more about the intent of the program design. "[...] giving them (mentees) different skills, giving us the ability to believe in our leadership roles. And then each of those people (mentors) just really demonstrates what a leader is and letting us see that and letting us know what we feel is a good leader can exist [...]. And so, I think that allows us to adapt and hone skills and what we want" (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024). Since each mentor may have a different style of leadership,

the experiences in the individual small groups might have differed slightly for each participant; however, the mentors worked together to create a cohesive experience for each of the participants.

The selection of participants for each cohort was also intentional. Layla shares the structure of the cohorts and the development of a safe place.

I think the way that it is structured to try to have varied across states and the type of institutions you have is one. So, you can have those open and fluid conversations, learn more about other institutions and see the connection that you have between like your university and or you know public and private university to community college. While it's different we have similarities and what can we learn from others? But I also think it's like a safe place. It's a safe place for us to be able to have those difficult conversations or ask for help and I don't know. If you wouldn't necessarily have that if your boss was sitting in there with you or a colleague that you maybe don't trust on a level or, someone from across the board. So, I think the way that it's strategically kind of trying to choose who participates is definitely a benefit [...]. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

The response emerged from an initial question about what would happen if internal coworkers or supervisors were the mentors as stated earlier (see Outside Guidance). I was curious about her response to explore if there is an impact from the people who are part of the leadership program. The response above indicated who was selected to be mentors and mentees, which was an important part of the leadership program. The ability to learn from others from different states and levels of experience aids to the overall learning process of a professional leadership program. It is not only the specific

curriculum, the in-person conference meetings, the monthly Zoom meetings, or the length of the program, but each of those pieces coming together to develop an experience that has impacted most of the past participants.

Assurance

Assurance became an umbrella theme that connected participants' confidence and knowledge to their perceptions of the program. Many noted the level of confidence, assurance, advocacy, courage, self-awareness, and encouragement in their experiences within the leadership program. The Assurance theme was coded 83 times throughout the survey and interviewee responses. Assurance is closely related to confidence; both are connected to self-belief, trust in self and others, knowledge, and judgment.

Confidence

Confidence emerged through the analysis process of the survey responses and interviews. Participants experienced confidence through their Program L activities and lessons, and interview participants often mentioned "confidence" as an important impact of the program. Confidence was anticipated as a topic in the interview questions, as there was a lack of prior studies related to confidence and professional development in Student Affairs. However, as this theme emerged, I found studies in other disciplines that spoke to the impact of professional development on confidence building (Haviland et al., 2011; Purdy, 2016).

One participant shared how the program helped them realize they had all the skills needed within them, "The fact that [Program L] genuinely prepared me for a leadership role by boosting my self-confidence. Everything was already in me, I just

needed to [sic] feel empowered, encouraged, prepared to take on a leadership role” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another member acknowledges how the topics and discussions helped with their confidence, as they said, “More confidence. I think talking about ideas and seeing others grapple with similar topics gives alternate perspectives, develops empathy, and encourages voice” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Both of these participants cited the program itself as being a confidence booster. First, “everything was already in me” illustrates that this participant was able to see their own skills in a new light as a result of the program’s activities and discussions, as per Bandura (1977). Another notes that the discussions themselves aided in confidence through being able to see “alternate perspectives” and relate to other people’s “similar” struggles.

The program's space allowed one participant to share and feel safe doing so, which led to the program's impact and confidence. “Yes, it gave me confidence and a format to explore and voice dynamics happening at my institution and my team” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Whether this respondent felt more confident in their own university (voicing concerns after discussing with their Program L cohort) or in voicing concerns to their Program L cohort rather than staying silent is unclear; however, this participant definitely experienced a confidence boost due to the program.

Rose described confidence as pushing oneself and taking risks, developing skills, or enhancing skills one did not think they had. When Rose was asked how professional development became important in her professional journey, she shared,

Professional development especially through programs like [Program L].

Certainly, provide me with confidence. [...] just that comfort, right, of having to

stretch and grow and push yourself outside of your comfort zone (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024).

Through Program L, participants understood one's strengths and weaknesses, which emerged through experience, including increased skills, which loosely relates to Chuang (2021) focused on constructivist learning theory, learning through experiences and Slank's (2019) focus on imposter syndrome. "Yes, I'm more confident and have more vision. I understand my strengths and weaknesses better and take the time to make sure to connect to my employees. Also, my communication has improved, especially when public speaking and setting expectations" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Mentioned over eight times in survey responses and interviews with Rem, Rose, Layla, Lara, and Jax, specific strategies that helped them to build specific skills, such as presenting and public speaking stood out. Communication improvement likely stemmed from the specific program activities, such as presenting to their cohort and reading *Talk like TED*, which helps professionals learn the elements of a strong presentation.

Layla's work environment was not ideal; there was a lack of support then, and she sought an opportunity to gain more professional development. She sought out Program L and joined the second cohort. She noted how Program L gave her the confidence to handle some of the demanding situations at her workplace. "So, I believe the Program L gave me the confidence to do it and like working with my team and the team being able to get through times that we've gotten through" (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024). Layla's response closely matches the results of the study by Gurley et al.

(2013), where the assistant principals in the academy were impacted to influence their teams and support them.

The leadership program did not heavily emphasize mainstream leadership styles like transactional, transformational, or servant leadership (Dinh et al., 2014). While some program resources, such as the book *How to Be an Inclusive Leader*, touched on a leadership style, I was curious to understand how professional development influenced their leadership approaches. Participants expressed a range of responses when asked about the program's impact on their leadership styles. Some noted positive changes attributable to the program, while others reported no significant alterations to their leadership styles. "I don't think my leadership style changed very much; however I definitely became more confident in my leadership style as a result" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). "The [Program L] gave me the confidence I needed to move forward in my career. That change affects my leadership style daily. I want the best for my teams, and I do my best to get it for them, even when challenges present themselves" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). As per Gander and McInnes (2021) study, individuals noted that confidence-building impacted their leadership and day-to-day work as illustrated by the survey respondent above.

As Jax participated in a leadership academy within his state earlier in his career and completed Program L in the past five years, his confidence has continued to grow. He shared how his involvement led to an important role in commencement at his institution at the time and needing to build a team for commencement. "Well, that's one thing I enjoyed, you know, getting through a leadership academy, a leadership program is being able to feel confident about pulling people in when you might most likely

wouldn't initially feel comfortable" (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). From that experience, he shared how his interaction with law enforcement, who was helping with the event, influenced his thoughts about leadership. "And I think that's what leadership is too, is that being [sic] able to recognize when you do need the help" (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). As Admissions and Registrar professionals, there is an expectation, pending experience level, to manage staff, challenges, situations, all things good and all things bad (Frazier, 2022; Nicola & Butt, 2023). Yet, not always hear that leadership requires one to ask for help. Jax's experience within leadership programs led to continuous growth outside of a formal professional development experience. Jax experienced professional growth through informal activities.

Involvement. In particular, several responses from participants included how their confidence increased, leading them to become involved and know they can take on roles they doubted. For example, survey responses included the following:

- "Also, the experience I had with [Program L], it helped give me the confidence that I could take on that role (Board position) and succeed in it" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- "Participating in the [Program L] gave me the confidence to become more involved in the [regional association], joining other committees" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- "I've presented at several conferences since that time, and I think participating in [Program L] helped me to see what I bring to the profession and boost my confidence in my own abilities and instincts" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

- “The amount of confidence I gained to take on bigger challenges that I didn't think I was ready for, but in reality I was” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

Each survey response illustrates that involvement in Program L gave them the confidence to become involved and take on challenges. The involvement they noted included board positions, regional associations, presenting at conferences, and taking on more considerable challenges.

The feeling of not being alone or isolated arose from the participants' realization that they shared everyday experiences and challenges with others in the program. Change can impact one's professional and personal life. Recognizing they were not alone aided in a person's confidence level. It's not about them having a network; it is that they see other people struggling with the same problems or problems. Taking time to reflect on their experience and connect that others are similar to them increased their level of confidence and “can-do” nature (Bandura, 1977).

I had a lot of doubt I was dealing with after my personal loss. After I left my previous role, I talked with those I had supervised, and their feedback brought some of my confidence back. Attending the [regional] conference and [Program L] workshop while there was the best experience I've had since participating in the program, because I felt a sense of belonging and comfort knowing there are colleagues outside of my institution I can turn to. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

Because this survey respondent realized their experiences were not unique, they felt confidence, belonging, and comfort, which allowed them to lean on themselves and

others. Layla also underwent changes in her work environment; her participation in Program L impacted her confidence, knowing she had people to lean on and was not alone. When she encountered a situation at her institution that others in Program L experienced in the past, she was able to get advice and assistance from them regarding the situation, and this allowed her to approach the challenge with renewed confidence due to the ability to lean on their prior experiences. Especially in a work environment that internally did not result in support or growth. Through the program, she built her confidence, sharing,

And that's what helped give me that confidence. Having people to go to as well. And just like not needing to reinvent the wheel, we all kind of go through similar or very different things in different ways, whether it be the programs that we use. And I think just like knowing, okay, we're on the right track or we're not alone. And having those just giving you resources to help you to have that confidence that you're not alone in it. You're going on the right track in that later that you want to be can exist. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

Both examples illustrated how Program L aided in providing a mirror of their experiences and increasing their efficacy (Bandura, 1977) toward solving the problems.

Imposter Syndrome. Individuals who doubt they belong at the table, in a space, or a particular job experience imposter syndrome (Slank, 2019). People can feel inadequate, have doubts about their abilities, experience anxiety, and question if they can do the job, the project, the activity, and so on. Three participants mentioned how they have felt “imposter syndrome” in their career and how participating in a leadership program helped them overcome some challenging thoughts (Anonymous, survey,

February 2024; Rem, interview, March 14, 2024). One survey participant responded to the question of what was most impactful with an eye-opening statement, “Finding out that most black and brown folks, like myself, have impostor syndrome” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The discussions for professionals of color within the program aided in realizing they are not alone in some of their thoughts.

Rem shared a bit about his experience in the program and the people he interacted with, as his years of experience are fewer than those of others in his cohort. He shared,

And you know it's like almost imposter syndrome a little bit you like. I don't know because everybody kind of got different titles, and what some people are [sic] the head boss and some people are frontline workers and is everything in between. And so it was like, okay, you know, it's like, I don't know if my idea is good or not, because, you know, this person in here got 20 years, or this person got this, you know, this person got their Ph.D. And I, and even thought about it yet, or and so that was like probably the biggest thing that the mentorship through the program. But just given confidence and letting you know you're on the right track. Your ideas are valid. No, please do contribute. You know, we value your contributions.

(Rem, interview, March 14, 2024)

During the program, his mentor and others around him assured him that he belonged in Program L and what he said and contributed was valuable. The impact of the people in the program helped reduce anxiety and, through action, showed Rem was in the right place in Program L. Rem's response also illustrates some hesitancy to contribute to the discussion due to his lack of experience or next steps in continued education compared

to others in the program; however, he was encouraged to participate and share his voice.

One survey respondent experienced through actions and modeling that provided a sense of belonging and purpose, which countered their feelings of imposter syndrome. The excerpt is powerful to understand through the eyes of someone else how important mentors and the people involved are to participants. The quote below could fall under many themes, but it falls under the overall theme of assurance due to its impact on the participant in demystifying how leadership should be in their field.

The most impactful aspect of Program L, other than the relationships established, is that the faculty and some participants modeled and articulated so clearly for me what "your authentic self" is in the workplace. I knew it but to see people so open about their flaws, insecurities, and how unpolished they could be, even as the most senior or hierarchically "the top" of the Registrar's office - was so so encouraging and refreshing and just kiboshed my struggles with imposter syndrome—totally fostered confidence in me. The second most impactful aspect is developing a strong and vivid sense of this work - of my work - as part of an established profession, as a field, not just a job. This sense was totally cemented for me. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

So, this participant voices how seeing the person behind the degree, or the title helped them to understand the attainability of working in this field and becoming a leader. Their feelings of imposter syndrome were nullified after seeing those in leadership roles at other institutions and realizing they were real people. Affirming it is okay to be authentic

that being perfect does not connect to being a good leader. Being authentic is accepted in the professional world.

Another participant felt affirmation in the work they do within their field. “I think I've become more confident and more self-assured in the value that I bring to the table” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Program L helped participants see their value to the program and their personal institutions.

Lastly, connecting with others helped another past participant understand and recognize imposter syndrome. They shared, “I felt a kinship with the other participants. Imposter syndrome is something that comes up often for me, and I sometimes feel like I don't know what I'm doing. With the other participants, I felt more at ease that others were sort of in the same boat as me” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). This relates to what others felt, doubting oneself and not recognizing their existing success (Slank, 2019). It is important because participants were able to see that others in the field struggled with similar issues, both personally and professionally, and they were able to feel a sense of belonging that had not existed before.

The impact of professional development on a person's self-confidence is evident through the many responses and the capacity to navigate challenges both in their professional and personal lives. More importantly, the finding shows the importance of learning from others to know that people are not alone in what they experience.

Advocacy

Advocacy is intertwined with confidence as it encourages a person to speak up for themselves or others, to communicate effectively, and to feel encouraged to take necessary actions to create change. Some participants shared how Program L

impacted their views on professional development and their teams, which led to advocacy. “Program L was very impactful in my professional experiences. Program L gave me the confidence [sic] and to obtain essential skills needed to be an advocate for my team, and to navigate difficult conversations” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). This quote speaks to the experience in a professional program that benefits not only the person involved but also the team they supervise or colleagues they work with. It gives participants the confidence to manage difficult situations when in a supervisory role or leading others through other opportunities at an institution.

Advocacy can come in the form of support. Rem’s experience led him to want to encourage others to participate in the leadership program. He shared, “I’m a [Program L] advocate now, you know. I’m trying to. I’m trying to encourage. I think we have somebody in our office apply applied, or at least they were contemplating this, so I might have to follow up and see what came out of that” (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024). Due to the personal impact he experienced during the program, he sees the benefits of the professional development program and how it helped him with confidence, enhanced skills, and increased network.

Outside of her mentor, Lara has a supportive supervisor who also models a great example. She shared her goals after experiencing Program L and shared about her strong internal support system through her supervisor, sharing “And that’s a lot of like the leadership that I want to provide for my people, is to have that like service attitude, and being able to be there and support them and help remove barriers and advocate for them. Because I’ve worked for so many micromanagers before and managers who just don’t care. And like you’d benefit from [Program L], you’d learn a lot” (Lara, interview,

March 12, 2024). Lara's journey highlights the effectiveness of mentorship and a supportive supervisor, which led her to want a similar leadership style, removing barriers for others and advocating for her team members. She has seen and experienced inside and outside of higher education what it means to be a good supervisor (Winston & Creamer, 1998).

Network

Networking, building relationships, and fostering connections emerged as prominent themes and sub-themes within the study. These aspects collectively formed an overarching theme deemed essential to include as one of the four main themes. Anything with the phrase or response directly related to "network" was coded 30 times in the computer program which assisted in analysis. Other related sub-themes are added to the results. Networking is a common theme among various empirical studies (Gerda, 2016; Levrant et al., 2021; Tran, 2014; West, 2019). Building connections is a powerful benefit to professionals participating in leadership development regardless of field.

Networking

One of the common questions asked in the survey questionnaire and the interview was about the impact of Program L and what stood out to the participants as benefits. Networking was a key response to the participants' experiences. It was a robust finding that supports similar researchers' findings (Gurley et al., 2015). Rose shared how networking was an important outcome of the program.

I really think the networking ended up being far. I knew that it was going to be an important part of the experience. And it by far surpassed what my expectations

were and maybe I hadn't really fully formulated what those expectations were, right? But. Like. I would see people sometimes after that who were in, you know, in my cohort, and you see them, and you just feel like you have an instant connection with them, right?

We even had someone, and I, now I can't even remember who was, it was almost right after. Our [Program L] cohort was over [...] reached out to me. And asked me something and I said, you know what? I said we went through a major change, too. (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024)

As networking surpassed Rose's expectations, it illustrates the importance of building connections throughout the program and the importance of the people within a program. The latter part of Rose's excerpt above continued as she recounted connecting her former faculty mentor from her cohort and another Program L colleague from a different institution to help them discuss a change management process. Rose and her mentor were able to help process and evaluate using a system for the Registrar's office and how the change took place. Without the opportunity of Program L, the network of colleagues may have not existed for Rose or others who participated in the program. It shows the value of meeting others from different institutions, learning about their skill sets, and experiences (Gurley et al., 2015).

For Rem, networking created many opportunities and connections for him throughout the program and after. "Networking, it's bared [sic] many fruits for me. [...]. Networking it, it has been really beneficial through the program. It's like I have contacts that pretty much at any school up and down the West Coast and, and I feel comfortable reaching out to people and asking questions" (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024). He

shared that his expanded network led to presenting with a colleague this year at a national conference. It also connected him with a person from another state whose work is similar to Rem's in the Registrar's office. They talk through struggles and systems effortlessly over email and Zoom. It is a continual connection as they check in occasionally to see if the other person found a new way of managing the project.

One past participant responded to the question if anything about their experience took them by surprise, their response focused on networking and called the experience "networking with a purpose." "It was networking with a purpose. Talking about real topics and issues, not just small talk. I'm not sure that is "surprising," but it is really valuable" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Through the design of the lessons and readings or discussion topics, the space allowed for in-depth conversations versus small talk or surface-level conversations. The discussions lead to greater connections among the cohort members.

One participant was looking for a network or to expand their existing network to help them grow. They articulated their motivation by saying, "I was looking for a forum/group of colleagues outside my organization to first, develop professional competencies and 2nd, to meet and connect with people who have the same kind of challenges and situations that I face in my work that I could reach out to and learn with or from" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). This particular participant recognized the significance of networking as it means building connections with others who could provide support and advice during difficult circumstances.

Sometimes, the institution's budget or the cost of professional development can be a barrier. Layla experienced some of that at her institution, but she was determined

to be part of Program L due to the importance of building a network and support system. She shared in her own words, “Anything I sought out afterwards was possibly on my own dime is what I was told. And I was okay with that because I knew that I needed to grow and that I needed to find a networking system” (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024). Networking held such importance for Layla that she would not let a potential financial obstacle hinder her goals. Layla’s earlier mention of an unhealthy work environment led to the significance of finding a support network, as she did not have that at her institution then. Layla understood that gaining connections would benefit her personal and professional growth.

Jax shared how he had a strong network; however, there is always something to learn from networking. “We network quite a bit, I think through the [Program L] and working with just the way to converse with other folks that are in your space, it’s allowed me to network a little bit more to ask more candid questions” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). Jax’s remarks underscore the importance of reaching out beyond his current institutions or acquaintances he would generally reach out to. His statement links to connecting outside of his institution. Participating in Program L gave Jax the confidence to contact institutions he might not have otherwise reached out to. He ultimately expanded his network to encompass even more colleagues from various institutions in his home state and out of state as connections.

A survey respondent found networking impactful as they used their network after Program L. “The colleagues I was able to network was the most impactful. I have reached out to several for work related items well after this committee” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The support gained from networking results in work-related

questions being asked or presenting with others as essential to professional development. Tran (2014) found networking was vital for their participants, especially women of color in higher education. So, networking goes beyond the time within the program; networking is important for professionals past Program L.

When I asked Lara what professional development looks like to her or how she would describe it to a new team member, she responded:

It's like a great way to start networking and meeting people that do similar positions that you do. And all of a sudden you're finding that if you're running across the situation or problem, you have like this network of people you can reach out to, because we're all in like the same field of work. And we're all sort of struggling with some of the same basic things like I hear it all the time. [...]

Students not opening and reading their emails and difficulties with faculty and difficulties with other departments. So, it's nice to find that support system. [...]

We had some like group projects that we had to do. And so, you know, just like working with other individuals at different institutions who are struggling with different things and being able to collaborate and work together to find solutions was really nice. (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024)

Lara's description of professional development highlights networking and how it can be a support system. Many times, processes and policies in the Student Affairs profession, specifically in Admissions and Registrar work, are similar. It is common in those spaces, one area in which professionals do not need to feel alone.

Jax shared several thoughts related to and connected to networking throughout the interview. In addition to his earlier comments, below are pieced-together responses to show the impact of networking. Jax said the following:

But I think networking has allowed me to feel confident to talk to executive people at their level. [...] I feel confident enough to introduce myself and say this is what I do, and I look forward to, you know, the whole etiquette type of thing. [...] I think through the Program L, you know, people like the mentors [sic], they were folks that have gone through your [sic] roles before working in the Registrar's office, Admissions office and you know to my mentor [sic], as a Vice Provost, it's like I can talk to you. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

Program L played a crucial role in increasing Jax's confidence, particularly in his interactions with higher administrators. This newfound confidence proved invaluable as he transitioned from a more formal institution to a community college characterized by a slightly different, less formal culture. He felt more comfortable talking to higher administrators because he realized the mentors in the program, specifically his mentor, would be considered someone in higher administration. It made them, the mentors, and administrators less intimidating.

Networking and the mentors in the program aided in the development of confidence and connecting with others who have had similar roles or roles some aspire to within Student Affairs.

Connections

Networking led to connections. Connections are the relationships that emerge from developing and cultivating networking relationships. Individuals begin to build trust,

learn about each other, support each other, and grow professionally and personally. Many connections were established through Program L. One survey respondent said, “Attending the [regional association] conference and [Program L] workshop while there was the best experience I've had since participating in the program, because I felt a sense of belonging and comfort knowing there are colleagues outside of my institution I can turn to” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another participant shared how working with a colleague and their connection led to a presentation together, “I found the whole experience impactful. I think the most long-lasting/impactful experience was working with a colleague to present to the group on emotional intelligence, and then growing that into a presentation at the [organization’s conference]” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

The participants’ responses highlight how the connections created within the program fostered a sense of belonging and comfort, providing them with a network of peers to rely on. These connections even led to collaborative presentations on topics of mutual interest. Program L served as a catalyst for bringing participants together in meaningful ways.

One of the benefits of the leadership program is the ability to still connect with the regional association and the new Program L members. Jax shared his experience,

I still get the emails. Hey, this group’s coming in, would you like to come in and share what your experience has been, or [regional conference] is coming up. [...] the ability to have them as a resource that is to this day I still trust (speaking to mentors). And as a reference tool. You know, sometimes you would [sic] need some something, right? You would need some advice on something. [...] But I

think from a professional development like you can pick up the phone, you can get an email to say, hey. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

Jax's experience touches on the importance of the program's design, connecting past and future cohorts together. Rem mentioned that experience, meeting the former cohort, and the feelings involved in an earlier excerpt. Jax's experience touches on staying connected and continual involvement in Program L, even after completion of the program, through invitations to participate and reinforcing the connection with mentors after the program. Ways to reach out exist, and Jax is confident and knows his support system still exists.

One anonymous respondent shared their involvement in regional and national Admissions and Registrar associations has grown. "Neither of this would have been possible if I didn't have the right connections to encourage me to get involved and use the opportunity as a way to also grow and develop my skills" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Again, this is an example of the connections made with Program L and the regional association supporting the program. The right people helped the respondents expand their professional involvement through the association.

Lara was pursuing a new position, and due to her involvement with Program L and the regional association, she had an instant connection with the hiring chair. "Having my background with the [regional association] and being on the Board, really helps paint a picture of like who I am" (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024). Even though that position did not work out, Lara is confident that her connections and involvement outside her institution will provide a step forward. "Now I have a few institutions that I know where I really know the Registrars now and would have a lot of support if I ever

wanted to move to those schools [sic]" (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024). Lara shows a connection with the regional association. Program L has helped her connect with others who know about the program or are a part of the regional association. Lara's experience boosts her work experience and skills; other regional association members know the work and commitment it takes to be involved with professional development.

Rem's connections are far and wide. From his previous work experience in Financial Aid to his work outside of his current Registrar position with a national organization, he knew he wanted to expand.

[...] trying to do more professionally with the groups and stuff that was part of my reason of joining [Program L], is trying to branch out more and connect more with peers. People outside of my like immediate, tiny little circle. (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024)

That is exactly what he experienced; he connected with colleagues across his home institution and with others at national conferences and professional development opportunities. The reason to join Program L was met, Rem met people all across the West Coast and throughout the nation, building his network and expanding his circle.

Developing deeper bonds took place during the one-on-one meetings and small group time. Imagine going from a group of 12 to 15 into a smaller group of three to four, then participating in one-on-one sessions. The levels of interaction were crafted to build strong connections among each cohort. Layla shared her experience:

You have small groups and then you have one on one, so I feel like a lot of times in our small groups we were able to kind of dive into the material a little bit more. And then that's where the faculty member (mentor) kind of just leads more of that

conversation or kind of we can ask them, well, what do you think? And get some of that feedback from them. The time for the overall meetings just goes by so quickly. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

One respondent shared their experience of the small group they were a part of.

The most impactful experience was truly the connection we formed as a cohort and within our small cohort group (we still stay in touch to this day and try to meet all together periodically when we are able to). I love having that connection with professionals across the region and country. It has been so impactful to learn from and share professional and personal experiences. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

Again, the participants' experiences show that the connections in small groups, for some, continue past the completion of Program L. Those connections are from various institutions, expanding the opportunities to learn more from each other.

Some respondents shared how difficult it was to build a connection in the survey responses. One participant shared, “[...] I felt the majority of those in my cohort were from the Registrar's realm, and that is something I had a hard time connecting with. With an Admissions background, I had to work harder to connect experiences to my own, which in turn made it a little harder to learn and adapt strategies” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The same respondent answered the question about what would be one thing they would change. They responded, “Would have tried harder to figure out early who the Admissions people in the cohort and connect more quickly. Went a full year and still not sure who was even from that world” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another respondent shared similar thoughts: “I would have wanted a better mix

of registrar and admissions folks in the cohort. At the time, I had not worked as closely with registrar colleagues, so I felt a bit out of place as an admissions professional” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The struggle to connect can exist in a program and can be studied further when identifying who will be in the upcoming cohorts.

Representation matters to the members to build connections, one survey respondent shared, “I would have liked to have seen more representation for Community Colleges and people not in higher leadership roles” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Without the ability to ask further questions due to anonymity, it is curious to understand if the respondent wished to work with more peers at the same experience level based on their recommendation. It was evident that some participants wanted to expand their network even more and connections. One survey respondent shared feedback regarding the groups, “Maybe more team assignments with different people from the larger cohort would be the thing I would change in order to facilitate the ability to get to know others from the cohort better as well” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Even those respondents who had not yet formed connections expressed a strong desire to do so, highlighting the significance placed by participants on networking and building connections. This is a critical element when studying professional development programs.

Connections do not stop because the program ended. Cohorts stay in touch from time to time. Not all do but most who responded to the survey mentioned the connections. A survey respondent shared, “I also had the chance to connect with a previous cohort, meet in person, and discuss career pathways and additionally ways to develop professional skills in my current role” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

There is a mutual connection between colleagues and learning the importance of networking and connections only strengthened other leadership programs in different fields (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013). “I met some great people and know that I can reach out if needed. I really enjoyed collaborating with my cohort members and seeing different perspectives on topics” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Moreover, more respondents shared they wished for more time and opportunity to connect as shared by a survey respondent, “I was surprised at how collaborative everyone was in sessions, but also how at the end of the program, I realized I barely knew almost anyone outside of my small group +1 or 2 people” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). There is an opportunity to shift some ways of connecting through continual improvement of Program L.

Relationships and Friendships

Friendships and bonds emerged throughout the leadership program experience, and some of those who provided responses were surprised by this outcome.

I did not anticipate that my colleagues and I would get so personal and deep in our conversations. I got to know people on a deeper level, and I was also able to share more of myself as well. The connections were very real, and I learned a lot from hearing about other participants and faculty experiences. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

Another participant said,

[...] it would probably be how quickly we bonded with each other (especially the one to one mentorship and our small cohort group [...]). Even though we don't meet monthly anymore I still feel a strong bond with my mentor, [...] and with my

small cohort group members [...]. I know I could reach out to any of those three individuals if ever I needed anything, and they would make time for me.

(Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

Participants established meaningful friendships throughout their program experience, establishing a sense of trust that their colleagues would offer support when needed.

While this aspect is not extensively explored in existing research, a study by Espinoza and Garfield (2023) illustrated the emergence of a close mentoring relationship and friendship within a mentoring context. However, there remains a lack of research focused specifically on the development of friendships through professional development initiatives.

The supporting theme of relationships and friendships continues from the survey and interview participants:

- “Being paired with an amazing mentor and cohort was a bonus because it was another channel for me to be able to seek advice from those who have been in the profession longer than I have. I truly appreciated the relationships I’ve developed by being a part of the Program L cohort” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- “Getting to collaborate with others in my profession was the experience that impacted me the most” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- “How much I liked and wanted some colleagues to be friends. And that that wish came true” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

- “And you know, like I look at the [regional association] like, oh, I need to see all my camp friends, like you know, it’s like summer camp” (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024).

From respondents' statements, advice, collaboration, friends, and seeing old friends, like at “summer camp” (Lara), stand out. Each individual described a unique bond that persisted beyond their Program L experience, a connection they recalled when reflecting on their experience.

Layla shares, “I think just about all of the relationships and truly friendships that I have built throughout the program. And growing just myself. And feeling confident, like I am not one who will go like watch a movie alone. I will not sit in a restaurant like alone, [...]. But I feel comfortable attending, you know, the [regional conference] by myself, and that is again the confidence that I gained” (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024). Many aspects of the leadership program touched on different parts of participants' lives, with each piece leaving a lasting impression. Gaining the confidence to attend a conference with 350 to 400 members each year to be a mentor through a professional development experience. It was a unique experience for Layla, and she credits it several times throughout her interview, as noted in her other responses throughout the study.

Rose was surprised about the strength of the connections, as for her, they have continued past her cohort year.

[...] then the thought of. Really having some people who I would get to know over that time period across, you know, different states and across different types of institutions. Really learn, learn from them, get their perspective and start to form, you know, those networking relationships. I really had no idea how strong

of a bond you could form, but that was something that just forming those networking relationships was really important. (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024)

During her interview, she shared how it can be difficult to gather a small group due to life changes, but her positive reflection provided a different perspective. She said, "It's been cool that we've been able to be there for each other through all those changes" (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024). She is speaking about new job opportunities, internal changes, and new systems. Even though her cohort may not see each other as they once did, she recognizes that it is due to changes everyone has gone through.

Having networking relationships and friendships that are less formal continues to support the changes and challenges that Admissions and Registrar professionals experience. A couple of respondents shared,

- Not too surprising, but the "you are not alone" in terms of similar challenges or issues was experienced (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- The friendships I developed, the support I received during difficult times. We all experienced many challenges during this year and new leaders. If it was not for the community with in [Program L], I don't think I would have been supported as I was. Being able to bounce ideas or challenges with others made the heaviness of it all not seem so difficult (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

Program L provided a space for people to connect outside of the participants' institutions. And in the particular case for the respondent above, they are speaking to the changes that occurred due to the pandemic. Program L continued throughout the

pandemic, primarily due to the fact the program was designed to be virtual. The support of the program through a trying time helped many professionals bond together and lean on each other when everything changed rapidly (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024).

Professional Growth

As a broad and encompassing concept, “Professional growth” is an expansive umbrella code, identified over 80 times in open coding, not including all sub-themes. It encompasses various sub-themes related to learning from different perspectives through the resources provided in the leadership program, acquiring new or enhancing skills, career advancement, and overall professional and personal growth. The findings from the participants’ responses consistently indicate some form of growth throughout the leadership program.

Growth

Layla experienced growth in various ways. Now, as a faculty mentor and helping select future Program L participants, she sees the other side of the work.

I think more people becoming interested and also from varied parts of their professional life like people who are not just new. But people who have been working in their profession for a while. [...] I think also just wanting to know where they're next step is and trying to find, you know, like they have their own internal questions. And I think when people are seeing that [association] invitation go out for [Program L]. While it might not necessarily be that they're wanting a leadership role, they're just putting to know where they belong. And I think this allows everybody kind of like. Their own niche. Their own kind of opening questions to figure out, okay.

Is it here? Do I go on? Do I go back to school? How can I balance things? And I think its just kind of learning that in some people that are just comfortable where they're at. Also wanting to just grow within them, you know, like within themselves or their own, you know, where they're at, but still grow, I guess, growing where you are. And so that has definitely been interesting to see the differences of everything and I think it's just as it continues to grow, it's just organically happening, it just continues to spread for everybody. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

Layla's experiences in her current involvement in Program L speaks to a great interest in the program among the regional association's membership. While some individuals may not aspire to formal leadership roles, they are drawn to the program to explore their professional identity and find their place within their field. She also highlighted the program's ability to provide a supportive environment where individuals can explore their aspirations, address their concerns, and identify their professional and personal path forward. In return, Layla reflects on the interest of the program from new and seasoned professionals; members have personal questions they are trying to answer and decide what the future might hold.

As Layla experienced the leadership program as a participant and then as a mentor, Lara was a part of the first cohort. Being a part of a new program is a learning experience for the developers and participants. Lara shared, "It was nice, and it was kind of cool, being part of that very first cohort. You know, we were just like the little guinea pigs you're like. This is great. This was not great. Yeah, we didn't get an EQ (Emotional Intelligence) book. I would have loved to have had an EQ book" (Lara,

interview, March 12, 2024). As feedback is shared, the program shifts every so often to meet the needs of the participants.

When I asked Jax to be interviewed, he wanted to share his experience and recognized it also helped him in the process. “It also helps me reflect and be continually grounded of what I learned and what not. And it’s really a big thanks to [Program L]. I will tell you that you know, I had some great mentors and all that, but I didn’t really get into leadership on my own” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). His last sentence led to how he was seen and valued by an HR director at one of his previous institutions, which led Jax to be called into other leadership roles.

Over the years, Jax developed and built teams at previous institutions and was drawn to build a new team at his current community college. “I’ve had the opportunity to do this at my previous [institution] is to kind of build up this team. I’ve had a chance to see them grow” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). That experience for Jax was rewarding and drew him to build a new team at a new institution. He has promoted leadership programs to his staff; he said, “They’re up and coming managers, they’re up and coming staff. And like I said, I think it’s for me going through professional development, going through a leadership academy. I think it gives me my moral obligation to help others now to kind of say, ok, I did this, I survived, I think I’m okay. You know it’s not bad as it is” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). Leaning on his experiences, Jax recognized the positive impact of leadership programs and now shares his wisdom, advice, and motivation for continual growth. He exhibits greater empathy for others who may fear the unknown of professional development opportunities and said, “I survived. I think I’m

okay. You know it's not bad as it is," ensuring his staff knows he has done it too. Jax asks them to trust in the process and embrace the opportunity.

When asked about what the future looks like in regard to her professional growth, Rose shared the following:

One of the big ones is certainly continuing to improve and fine-tune my presentation skills, right, and presenting more. Different places, different, you know, conferences, opportunities, whatever that may be, and continuing to improve that, right? Because when you read something like Talk like Ted. It seems really like you're like, oh yeah, this just seems, and some people just naturally have it, right? And but when you go to implement it. I don't know that that always is, you know, it flows so easily for all of us. And so that's certainly one I'd like to continue to do that and find different places where I can present and kind of fine tune those skills. (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024)

Rose recognized there are opportunities for continual growth and improvement.

Through Program L, she experienced opportunities to grow her skills and plan for the future. Rose shared that she is continuing her education for a slight career change when she nears retirement and is considering courses she needs to take to achieve her future career goals.

Another participant shared about their experience through the final assignment. Each cohort member develops a final project encompassing all the lessons they have learned. They shared,

[..] my [Program L] final project was to develop a summer retreat agenda for the team I was just then beginning to lead. I do feel as if the extra attention I gave

that project for the sake of [Program L] allowed me to be more reflective and intentional, which I believe set me up for success. I came onto the team in a very tumultuous time in both the world and the organization, so to gain my team's trust that quickly was a feat. I do think [Program L] prepared me for this challenge!

(Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

Regardless of cohort experiences, each participant underwent a change in their job roles, leadership, or a complete shift due to the pandemic. The opportunity to participate in a leadership program, gain new knowledge and skills, and apply these insights within their respective institutions. In turn, not only the individual grows but also yields benefits for their colleagues or direct reports. The participants contribute to the collective growth and enhancement of their organizational effectiveness.

Learn

Rose's response to a question about whether her staff can see if she has changed because of the leadership program provided an authentic response,

We're always, we're always learning. And so, some of the, some of the things we talked about, some of the topics I was able to sort of implement in very small ways. And make some changes. Over time. I don't think it's anything big that happens like immediately or overnight. It's some of those. Okay, you know what I can tweak that a little bit? I can tweak this approach with this one individual and then over time you kind of see the benefit of that. But not that like big thing overnight. If that makes sense. (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024)

Her response is genuine and helped her understand that a dramatic change does not occur overnight in how one leads or changes from one professional experience.

However, as more lessons are shared, more discussions occur, and more learning takes place, individuals slowly start to incorporate what they have learned over time (Biggs, 2006; Chuang, 2021).

For some participants, it was who was in the virtual “room” and each person is a contributor, “The most impactful experience was being in a room full of people in positions I aspired to be in and being able to learn from them” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Each mentor comes from a different professional background, and the participants are Registrars or Admissions professionals who also may have other job duties. Overall, people help make a difference in learning and can help develop goal setting for new professionals in the field.

Connected to the program design noted earlier in this chapter, Rose’s response to what is most attractive about Program L, she said “Always looking for opportunities. Especially when they’re good programs, right? Because it’s one thing to just go to an hour-long course, but I think there’s something to be said for doing something that takes place over time, right? And so, I’m always looking for opportunities to learn and grow” (Rose, interview, March 11, 2024). As per Gurley et al. (2015) and Augustine-Shaw and Funk (2013), the research speaks to Rose’s responses to the importance of time in impacting learning and growth.

A survey respondent expressed how the program impacted their ability to present at a conference and impacted others through their message and felt empowered to do it. They shared,

Following the completion of [Program L], I presented in [2023 conference], and this was a big milestone in my career as it was the first time I was presenting at a

conference. [Program L] gave me so many tools and taught me so much about being a leader and allowed me to grow so much, and now I wanted to give back too. I took the opportunity to present at [2023 conference] because that was my way of "giving back" and I hosted an event focused on professional growth. This was impactful for me, and I hope it was impactful and useful to the program participants who attended my presentation. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

The lessons learned from the leadership program continued to support participants after the program ended, as the respondent noted above, presenting at the conference. Jax continued to learn after Program L ended, too. Throughout the interview, Jax spoke about the support of his mentor when he moved onto a new position at the community college. His mentor provided some reminders of what was discussed during the program. Jax's mentor worked with him to develop a new plan when Jax started his new role. His mentor suggested a listening tour to understand the different environments. "I had to learn that, and that's where he kind of emphasized that you're stepping into a different environment that you would be completely new. So, you want to be sure that you're listening and all that. [...] I had to learn how to listen" (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024).

Leaders and leadership. The mentors of Program L are, in essence, leaders with expertise in their fields. They help others become confident and knowledgeable leaders who can influence others and pass their knowledge forward. Participants were drawn to the program leaders, viewing them outside their mentor role as leaders in their respective areas.

What stood out for me is how important being authentic is as a leader - that's there's absolutely no need or value to 'fronting'. I already was working on being open with staff, but [Program L] really cemented for me that some vulnerability - shared or presented appropriately - is totally ok and positive in a leadership position. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

The survey respondents are familiar with leaders who may have a specific image or way of being a leader. Yet, Program L exposed the participants to other leaders in the profession. How they modeled their leadership and treated the program was impactful to cohorts. It was okay to be both and a leader, to be vulnerable, and to be a good leader.

As a participant from the first cohort, Lara recognized the need to be part of a leadership program.

And I think that was just another reason that drew me to [Program L] was because, you know, leadership. It's so much of like soft skills and learning how to understand who you're talking to, and you as a leader, having to adjust your communication for your individuals like. I know my communication doesn't work best for both of my team. So, I have to adjust myself to meet that, so I think it's just yeah. That was just another little, I guess. Tidbit of why, why I wanted to do Program L. (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024)

Lara recognized the need to grow and continually learn how to be a strong leader. Much of what she described as wanting to learn took place throughout her program experience.

Rem worked on improving himself as a leader; he observed the leaders in the program as part of his process of betterment. “That’s probably the biggest thing I took from the leadership program. It’s like everybody does things differently. Everybody has kind of different learning styles and different processes, and different the way they need to structure things in their head and make it make sense to them. In my job as like a supervisor to embrace that and not try to be rigid” (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024). In a different part of the interview, Rem shared more about his thoughts about the connections in the program and continually improving himself.

And I want to get to know fellow educators and administrators and people that are doing kind of the same work and see what skills that I can learn when I can be better at. There’s also, I was just new in my manager roles, my first-time being manager. So, like I want to be the best manager I can be. And you know and really just develop leadership skills. I’ve always considered myself a leader.

(Rem, interview, March 14, 2024)

Rem’s work on improving as a leader is woven throughout his interview. He also recognized that Program L provided some of those skills, and he had a few eye-opening experiences. He learned that there are multiple paths to finding a solution or a way to complete a task and accepted that a process is specific to each person. As he reflected on his experience as a participant who recently finished Program L, it was easy to recognize how the program impacted him. He continues to learn from the program, reflecting back on the lessons he learned.

Several participants highlighted the Ted Talk activity when questioned about memorable activities or interactions. During this exercise, participants delivered brief

presentations lasting approximately five minutes, which were then shared with faculty mentors and fellow cohort members. This activity was consistent across all cohorts, as noted by every interviewee, including a couple whom I specifically inquired about their involvement in the activity. Jax shared how the Ted Talk came to mind as participants had to record themselves and watch themselves present. The details were shared step by step to participants from the mentors. The exercise helped prepare Jax and shared a relatable example.

I think it also prepares you for those impromptu meetings that you get into, like you're going to be asked to talk about this on my own like 5 minutes. But you didn't prep for it and so it stuck in my mind. It's kind of like you may be asked to present something that you're uncomfortable with but also allows you to ask those questions to prep for something that you may not be prepped for. [...] you want to be prepared to be able to ask those questions or hear those questions and anticipate them. And that's what that thing prepared me for. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

The activity spoke volumes for Jax, and he easily translated it to what could happen in a workspace, an impromptu meeting, or a presentation that was not on the schedule. He felt he now had the skills to handle those pop-up situations. Later in the interview, he shared the experience with his staff and reminded them to also be prepared for any impromptu presentations or formal questions from higher administration.

Jax spoke about the impact of some of the books as part of his cohort, which will be noted in detail in the next section. The particular lesson from one of the books was understanding your why and how you help others experience it, too. "But really get your

staff to invest into your why. So, you have a productive staff and I think it comes with time. It comes with skill. But I think it comes with leadership” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). “It comes with skill; it comes with leadership,” the wording is important as Jax speaks to creating buy-in or a vision for his team to understand the reason behind why things such as procedures and policies exist.

Skills. Throughout the year-long program, participants evolved their skills, as evidenced by their responses regarding the impact of professional development. Their perspectives on networking, growth, and the resources offered shows the skills they gained. Additionally, they reflected on how the acquired skills from the program influenced their staff. For example,

One of the big takeaways after completing [Program L] was the importance of empowering and developing my team members. Previously, I tended to take on tasks myself rather than delegating, but now I take time to assign stretch opportunities to my team to build their skills. This not only develops my team members but lifts a burden off me so I can focus on higher-level strategic priorities. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

The respondent demonstrated awareness that delegating tasks to their team lightens the supervisor’s workload and fosters new skills for their staff. The respondent also recognized their role in developing and contributing to higher-level strategic priorities. They emphasize trust in their staff to complete the task, the staff acquire new skills, and the leader's focus can be on higher-level tasks. Not only were the respondents impacted by the program, but so were their staff members.

When asked what skill has been enhanced or if a new skill developed during the program, Layla responded,

I would probably say communication, definitely even more so like written communication to get the point across in a shorter amount of time instead of like drawing it out. Some more pointed communication and direct communication. And just, I think being honest and being able to like stand grounds, we deal with so much policy and procedure and trying to communicate all of that to not just outward to our staff but also to our colleagues. And I think being able to just draw that into a very concise message to people has been helpful because communicating policy is not easy and oftentimes communicating “no” is not easy. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

Layla’s work within the Registrar’s office demands attention to detail, awareness of policies and procedures, and the need to communicate those to campus partners (Frazier, 2022). Program L’s support to help enhance her communication skills is impactful. Providing resources through books and discussions aided Layla in applying what she learned in the program to her workspace.

It was important for Rem to learn and grow as much as possible. He shared in the Program L application the want to grow and be a better leader and he shared it throughout his interview. “I guess my kind of current focus is where you’re trying to just gain as much skills and experience as I can. Like, I really know, like processing stuff, I’m good at and trying to get more into like bigger picture thinking, seeing, you know, being able to look at a problem, try to see things from start to finish” (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024). Rem’s commitment to learning and personal growth is evident in his

participation in Program L. His expressed the desire to enhance his leadership skills and broaden his perspective reflects a dedication to continuous improvement. As he strives to develop a deeper understanding of complex issues and adopt a greater understanding of problem-solving, he portrays a professional's continual improvement and lifelong learning (Carpenter, 2003; Carpenter & Miller, 1981).

Resources

The leadership program offers a variety of resources, extending beyond the books provided to participants. Various topics are discussed in the large and small group times that Layla, Rem, Jax, Lara, and Rose noted. These topics include designing a 90-day plan, gaining budgeting skills, time management strategies, understanding how an institution operates, and implementing change management. The significance of the resources lies in their availability for participants to refer back to whenever needed (Kamen & Apple, 2023). This ensures there is continual support at any time a participant needs.

The advantage of anonymous surveys is the honest responses; respondents shared their thoughts when asked if they could change one thing. They shared, "If it would have known how impactful it was have been, I would have not been so hesitant to work on projects as I was procrastinating much of the work. This was outside our regular responsibilities at work, so often it seemed like a lot of work to do. But I always had many nuggets of knowledge gained. If I would have known how impactful it would have been, my mindset would have been more alert and ready" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). It was a hindsight moment for the participant yet a powerful realization of the importance of their experience in Program L.

Another person provided feedback that might elevate current activities. They shared, “One thing that could be cool is a technical training track where we teach each other tricks of the trade, like creating a presentation on PowerPoint/Prezi, Excel tools, etc.” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The feedback can lead to fun new lessons as participants lean on the assignments and resources as Jax did.

Jax shared that he leans into those items such as a budget example or how to develop a 90-day plan. “I’ll go back to this 90-day plan type of thing and I’m leaning towards the tangibles. And sometimes I have to research you know, my [Program L] notes or go on a website and like refresh my memory. [sic] I have my books we’ve used. I’ll go back” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). A survey respondent shared another example of the impact of the program and resources, “It was incredibly impactful specifically in the resources it provided to me as a leader and the mentorship I was given by my faculty mentor” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another participant leaned into the resources provided, which surprised them as it was not expected to be an outcome of the program. “Overall, I think the most surprising thing is realizing how much I continue to utilize all the tools I’ve received through the participation on the [Program L]” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

The resources provided, whether in the form of notes or books, serve as invaluable references for participants in Program L. These materials offer essential tools to navigate new projects or support staff members in their tasks effectively. Through providing books, assignments, and projects, Program L established a knowledge base centered on professional development and leadership. This compilation functions as a

library, housing a wealth of topics to support each participant throughout their careers in Admissions and Registrar offices and beyond.

Jax also learned a valuable skill through Program L,

How do you say no, you know, that's like I mean type of thing because as a new person, you're kind of vulnerable, right? You know you want to learn. You want to create good relationships and all, but I've also kind of leaned into like saying, OK, time out, I, my cup runneth over a little bit or being able to say no without say no.

(Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

With Jax's new skill, he has impressed his program manager with saying no without saying no. The big question is how Jax did that. "I said it's about redirection. You know something about redirection and pulling other folks that have the skill set that is tangible or more stronger than yours to bring it to them. [...] She goes you just said no, without saying no. Where did you learn that? I'm like Program L I guess" (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). With a deeper dive, understanding if a particular lesson or lessons contributed to learning the skill of saying "no," would have been helpful. However, it is clear what Jax learned throughout the program, recognizing when he cannot take on any more as a professional and advocating for himself was a critical finding. Program L helped Jax redirect within his work environment.

Layla had a similar experience; with the support of her mentor and other colleagues in the association, she learned it was okay to say no, especially knowing her value.

[...] knowing it's okay to say no, knowing what my value and worth was. [...] I fought for it, and I think it was having that support. [...] Those were all the

[association] people. It was like no one else, no one at my school, no one that I had worked with previously could vouch for my current experience to serve in that position. That was very impactful. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

Layla demonstrated strong self-advocacy, saying no when needed and understanding her value and worth. She knew she was the right person for the position within her Registrar office regardless of the lack of support from internal administrators. She found encouragement from her peers within the regional association and from her colleagues within Program L. Layla drew validation from external sources, underscoring the impact of supportive communities and professional networks.

Books. Outside of mentorship, the resources, specifically the books that were used throughout the year-long program are noteworthy. The books are listed on the program's website which lead to the question about the impact of the books used in the program. Each cohort had a slightly different set of books; however, the majority were included in each year thus far. The books are purchased by Program L and mailed to each participant in time for their initial meeting. The books are not read front to back, but by sections to correlate to the topic of the meetings. Or each small group reads a different section to then bring their thoughts on the readings to the larger group discussion. Table 4.1 highlights the books mentioned by the survey and interview participants.

Table 4.1

Top noted books from the survey responses and interviews

How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
Start with Why by Simon Sinek

The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker
How to Be an Inclusive Leader: Your Role in Creating Cultures of Belonging Where Everyone Can Thrive by Jennifer Brown
Talk like TED by Carmine Gallo
Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard by Chip Heath and Dan Heath
StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath
How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership by Robert Birnbaum
Change the Culture, Change the Game by Roger Connors and Tom Smith
Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek
Fierce Conversations by Susan Scott

The impact of the readings was a notable finding. It was powerful to notice the connection of the books to the impact they had on participants' professional growth. One example from a survey respondent said, "Program L helped me grow professionally by preparing me for a leadership role in my office, and the readings and assignments for the program helped me better understand how universities/colleges work, how to navigate and lead change, and how to be an inclusive leader" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another example on how the readings connected to discussions, "The reading and discussions has taught me how to be mindful of how to assess situations through various lenses and with my communication" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

There were a couple of participants who expressed growth in areas related to inclusivity. One participant shared, "I also was significantly impacted by the focus on anti-racism and the experience of looking at institutional and academic policies through

the lens of how to be anti-racist. The sharing from other [Program L] cohort members during that session really opened my eyes to how policies can be made more inclusive” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The second participant mentioned a change in leadership due to one of the readings shared,

Yes, I recognize that I have tried to be more inclusive in my interactions with all people (not only the people I directly work with). We read a book called *How to be an Inclusive Leader*, and this really taught me about being self-aware, and being part of and working towards a work environment where all people can thrive. I think the [Program L] program helped me better understand how to be more self-aware, how to better understand intersectionality, and how to lead a change towards inclusivity. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

A fellow participant shared their experience in the program regarding the same book, *How to Be an Inclusive Leader*. “It made me self-reflect and learn how to become a leader who’s not just professionally skilled, but one who can influence and empower others” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The lessons that stemmed from the book impacted several participants. It opened up their perspectives and how to view certain situations in a different light.

Survey respondents and interviewees mentioned the Art of Gathering as an impactful book and related discussions. “I liked *The Art of Gathering*. Provided a great insight on being intentional with your interactions with people” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). “I was never a fan of meetings that felt unnecessary (meeting for the sake of meeting). [Program L] gave me some resources [to help make gatherings more meaningful through deeper conversations and questions that lead to better

conversation” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The impact of the book continued, another participant shared their thoughts,

The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker. The material from this book really stuck to me for some reason, despite the fact that it was the first book we read. The book made me rethink how we gather, why we gather, who we invite to the gathering and why we invite specific people or exclude people, and how it all ties into what it is the host is wanting out of the meeting. This really has helped me re-evaluate meetings, their purpose, and who needs to be at these meetings (depending on the outcome we want from the meeting). This not only pertains to my professional gatherings, but also my personal gatherings. I found the "why" to be really important here and this book really helped me hone in on that question and planning events/ meetings with purpose and goals in mind. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

When interviewing Rem, he connected *The Art of Gathering* to his professional life, his personal life, and the work he does with his external organization. He shared, “That *The Art of Gathering* was the one for me that it was like out, just a new way of thinking that I never really thought about before, like, you know, just if you don't know why a meeting, why, I have a meeting. And I was like, that's so real. And I just be able to put words to like feelings” (Rem, interview, March 14, 2024).

A single book has impacted so many professionals, revising how they meet and lead meetings and who should be in that environment. The book has provided invaluable guidance to the participants who applied what they learned in Program L to improve their work environment.

“*Start with Why*, Simon Sinek - gave me tools to be able to connect what we do and why and a framework to help others understand the same” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). *Start with Why* was another notable book by participants. Jax shared, [...] one of the things in the [Program L] was the book of why, [...] *Start with Why*. It begins where [sic] you have to use your leadership skills, especially with new staff. [...] to explain the why am I here? Why do I want this? And I had to learn that through professional development and really invest into that. [...] I think that was one of the challenges that I see in building a team, but I had to lean towards kind of the leadership academies and leadership programs that I’ve been into kind of really push on the why. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

Layla enjoyed the same book, “I also liked our *Start with Why*. Because I think it was really important for us to kind of see why we are, why we do the things that we do, and I think sometimes it was drawing you out to like the hard questions that we don't always ask ourselves why we're doing things or. And it was like all of it just seemed very timely, cause again, I went through the COVID year. And so it was, it was helpful to just see all of that” (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024).

Talk Like TED, the book that influenced one of Program L’s assignments, was liked by most; it is a book, more so a guide for anyone seeking to master the art of public speaking and delivering inspirational presentations. Leaders in the Admissions and Registrar fields often present to other colleagues, departments, or to the Board of Trustees at their respective college or university. Sometimes, presenting can make a person anxious about public speaking, but with practice, it can be accomplished. “*Talk like TED* as I was able to improve my PPT presentations and public speaking based on

advice from this book. I learned to tell a story in my PPT rather than just including bullet points of the main points” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

Layla shared her thoughts on the book,

I really liked our *Talk with Ted*. I think it was it like drew us out of our box or I think a lot of us out of our boxes. [...] I would like to facilitate meetings; I just saw that as like a job that was my responsibility. And *Talk like Ted* was like needing to kind of do that very short speech and talk in a very short time. (Layla, interview, March 10, 2024)

The combination of the reading and the presentation assignment increased members' comfort level; they saw improvements in their PowerPoint presentation skills and gained confidence in presenting. Presentation creation and presenting in front of others are skills significant to the roles in Student Affairs.

“In my cohort we read, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* by Dan and Chip Heath, this was an extremely timely read right in the time of Covid. It absolutely wasn't a plan by faculty when picking the book of course, but it was huge to help many of us that were learning how to pivot so rapidly” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). As highlighted by the survey respondent, the book selection was not deliberate, yet it proved to be timely. During periods of significant change (like the pandemic), leaders often find themselves navigating unfamiliar territory. The resource provided support, strategies to handle the situation, and adapt to new challenges. Along with the support from the cohort through the significant change.

Another book that helped one participant shift an antiquated system was “*How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership*, by Robert

Birnbaum - I learned about the many structures organizations have and what strengths they each have as well as downfalls. This helped me re-organize the Hispanic ERG from an anarchical structure that was all over the place with no defined leader, to a more hierarchy once which helped us define roles and set expectations” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)—another example of taking the experience from Program L and applying it to an institutional organization.

It is important to identify that some participants did not anticipate the amount of reading that was required, others wished for more time, and there was a need for other modes of information delivery. One participant shared, “I would have made more time to read the books provided more thoroughly and from start to finish instead of just the pieces we were assigned” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another survey respondent said, “It’s really hard to get the readings done, but I would have tried to have more time, or gotten an audiobook version” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The final respondent who mentioned the impact of the reading said, “The only thing I would change about [Program L] is the amount of reading that we did. I think if the books had the options for books on tape, or if there were options for TED talks or podcasts it could have been a little easier to digest. We’re all busy professionals and I was also a grad student at the time, so finding time to read another book was challenging” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The feedback from participants shows the opportunity to diversify information delivery to participants to optimize learning.

The books and resources distributed throughout the leadership program played a vital role in shaping the majority of the overall experience and influenced most of participants’ professional growth. Every respondent highlighted a specific book or two

that resonated with them, leaving a lasting impression and tool to use again in their professional journeys. Moreover, lessons learned from the tools were applied to their departments and positively impacted their staff. The resources are valuable to the program as a whole.

Perspectives

Different perspectives emerged as a valuable sub-theme due to the experiences of participants and the impact they had on them due to seeing things through the eyes of others. Perspectives, new perspectives, and different lenses were coded 23 times. Participants learned how others navigate challenges and opportunities in the workplace. Different perspectives enrich personal and professional growth, leading to influencing others and continually improving as a professional.

The impact of different perspectives was seen through the responses in the survey and interviews. One member shared, “I believe that I’m more well-rounded. This is thanks to the experience which provided exposure to new and different perspectives, as well as insights from my mentors” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another participant learned the importance of asking others to provide input, “One change I recognized was seeking out other perspectives for my ideas. [Program L] showed me there is a lot of value in seeing things from different angles” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

One participant was impacted by understanding there is no perfect way for the work in the Registrar field, they shared, “My eyes opening to see things from a different point of view is the main way I was impacted. There is no one way to run a Registrar's office, there is no perfect student information system, there is no perfect policy or

procedure. Being able to share and hear about our collective experiences and processes in a judgment-free environment was beyond helpful (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Understanding what others go through in their work environment and stating there is no perfect way to do the work provided a sense of relief. Jax specifically shared how learning from others outside of his home state benefited his growth.

When I had [sic] the opportunity to apply for the [Program L] also it gave me an opportunity to see it from a different lens because they're not all system [sic] campuses. So, I said, OK, so I have the Leadership Academy. [...] It was, you know, over almost a decade ago. And then you have the [Program L] part. So, I saw the value from the internal, if you would, leadership academy. But also, I wanted to stay abreast of you know, higher ed issues, trends and things like that, but really get it from a different perspective of out of state institutions. (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024)

Jax continued to share how he had several connections across his home state, however, learning from other institutions helped his professional growth. It shifted his viewpoint on policy work or how certain procedures were designed. The new perspective influenced his future work.

One of the survey questions was around the impact of Program L, a survey respondent shared their insight, "I would say had a positive impact in my personal and professional life. The perspectives and experiences I was exposed to allowed me to view my work, ideas, and problems at work in a different light" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another example, "[...] it gave me insight and different perspectives to make me a better leader and person" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another

survey respondent shared, “Yes, I gained new perspectives in so many areas of soft skills (communication, presenting, purposeful gathering, I could go on)’ (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). The participants’ experiences are an example of how the major themes of mentorship, network, professional growth and assurance are intertwined throughout the program which impacts various aspects of a professional journey.

The subsequent response shows how the diverse mix of experience levels within Program L benefits participants as each person has varied experiences. Each person contributes to the group's overall learning and the program's outcomes. The exchange of information informs and inspires those who may not have encountered similar situations. One participant shared, “[Program L] was impactful in helping me see other perspectives and learn from experiences that others have encountered that I have not” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Lastly, connecting the resources provided, discussion topics, and delivery of the information leads to learning more about the Admissions and Registrar profession differently, becoming an eye-opening experience for participants, as one member shared, “[...] I especially liked learning about our industry from a different perspective each month” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

Career Growth

A critical sub-theme emerged from the responses of participants who experienced change due to their own choices or major changes took place in their institution. Career topics emerged nine times, coded to be included under the umbrella theme of Professional Growth. There were main questions in the survey and in the interview surrounding career growth, as this is a finding in other related studies about the impact of professional development (Chernow et al., 2003; Underhill, 2006).

In asking participants if professional development impacted any career goals, one participant shared, “Yes, it influenced me to reach out for greater career opportunities. I got a new (better) position about a year after completing [Program L]” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another participant experienced a change, “I was able to secure a promotion in my office shortly after completing the [Program L]. I credit [Program L] as directly influencing the promotion” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Connecting the findings from above, connections through networking and mentor support have influenced several changes for Program L members. For example, “One prior goal was to gain more experience and knowledge of the Registrar role, I did end up becoming the Interim Registrar and Director of the department” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Another illustration of the impact of networking and support,

I was finishing out my cohort year when I was hired as a director of Admissions. I believe I was successful because of the professional connections I made in the cohort, the concepts I learned, and just being more aware and engaged in the field. I think I felt far more prepared for the interview process and transition into the role than if hadn't been finishing up [Program L] at the time. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

Some participants did not experience change in their careers, however, found value in the program as they plan for their future careers. Four anonymous participants shared their experiences regarding career changes. They shared,

- “No specific career goals following the [Program L] program. However, I do strive to glean more knowledge from my leader. There are very little

growth opportunities at my institution” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

- “My career goals remain the same, but I feel like they are more realistic and within reach after completing [Program L]” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- “I plan to continue developing my leadership abilities by getting involved with professional organizations in my field and plan to move into next role within the next 3 years” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).
- “Yes. Based on [Program L’s] teachings, [Program L] provided a framework of “how and why” when implementing change especially where equity is involved. As a result, future planning of current and career responsibilities underscore this lens” (Anonymous, survey, February 2024).

Lara shared specific career goals and how she wants to continue moving forward and up. “And I do want to continue moving up and forward with my career. And you know, moving, maybe moving to a school that’s larger, moving to a Registrar position. And even potentially like a VP of Enrollment Management [sic] at some point” (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024). Lara has tracked her career journey within higher education, wanting to gain experience within the Registrar field and ultimately pairing that experience with enrollment services. Program L is a part of her professional journey, providing resources and opportunities through involvement as Lara is part of or was a part of the regional association’s committees.

A survey respondent shared their excitement about the impact of Program L on their career path,

Yes, it has! After completing the program, I was able to become more involved with [the regional association] as a committee and board member. I gained more confidence in presenting sessions at conferences (I have no issues with presenting when someone tells me to present and what to present on). Through networking, it opened up opportunity for me to change positions at another institution and as of recently, I transitioned into an Assistant Director role because my supervisor was able to recognize my leadership and efforts demonstrated. (Anonymous, survey, February 2024)

One of the primary objectives of Program L is to foster increased engagement among its members within the regional association while supporting individuals in their professional development endeavors. The program is achieving this goal, as indicated by the survey participant's account of their enhanced involvement in the association and the subsequent positive impact on their career trajectory. While not all participants experienced role changes or heightened involvement, they nonetheless benefited from exposure to a comprehensive curriculum, gained a valuable addition to their resumes through program participation, and underwent a professional journey they can lean on.

Conclusion

This chapter delved into the findings of the research study, which explored the impact of one professional development program for Admissions and Registrars professionals to explore the impact of professional development. Through the rigorous analysis of survey data and in-depth interviews, several significant themes emerged,

providing valuable insights into the program's effectiveness and professional development benefits.

The thematic analysis uncovered four overarching themes: mentorship, assurance, network, and professional growth. These themes encapsulate the practical benefits experienced by participants, underscoring the program's potential to foster professional growth and advancement. The popularity of Mentorship highlights the need for guidance and support in professional development journeys, while Assurance speaks to the newfound confidence and skills developed through the program. Networks emerge as a crucial element, emphasizing the value of professional connections and personal friendships. Finally, Professional Growth emerges with various components, illustrating the continuous evolution of learning, leadership, and the importance of diverse perspectives and resources.

These findings contribute not only to the existing body of knowledge on professional development but also to the literature specific to Admissions and Registrar professional development by understanding the impact of the program across these key dimensions, meeting the evolving needs of Admissions and Registrars professionals, ultimately fostering and supporting professional development opportunities for higher education professionals.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative exploratory case study aimed to investigate the impact a leadership program had on Admissions and Registrar professionals within higher education. The findings from this study will contribute to the overall topic of professional development in higher education and specifically to Admissions and Registrar professional development. The findings connect to various previous studies that have studied the impact of professional development within Student Affairs and non-higher education programs.

The first section of this chapter connects the findings to past studies and how this study supports existing literature. The second section will cover the implications of the study, followed by recommendations for future research. The findings emerged from the responses of 30 survey respondents and five past Program L members who participated in interviews for this study.

Discussion

In this study, significant themes and sub-themes emerged that influence the understanding of professional development and its impact within higher education. These themes: mentorship, assurance, network, and professional growth support the existing body of knowledge for higher education and also resonate with similar findings in K -12 programs and broader Student Affairs development initiatives, further validating applicability across multiple educational areas.

Mentorship

The major theme of mentorship encompasses the importance of mentors, support from the mentors, and the importance of designing a program. The findings

often connect to studies about mentorship programs that are not directly related to higher education but have similar support and design traits.

Mentor. Mentors (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Cooper & Miller, 1998; Espinoza & Garfield, 2023; Schreiber et al., 1994; West, 2019) played a significant role in the lives of the Program L participants. The program's mentors were experts in their respective fields who provided guidance, support, and a holistic approach to supporting participants professionally and personally (Bozeman & Feeny, 2007; Calhoun & Taub, 2014). Kamen and Apple (2023) surveyed members of a national association for Admissions and Registrars for their study of member engagement. What emerged from their survey results supports this study in that mentors play a significant role in members' lives. Kamen and Apple's (2023) study led to the national association investing in a mentorship model to be more intentional and ongoing in engaging members and the organic mentorship relationship that emerges from conferences and activities; the current findings align with intentionality and an ongoing model of professional development, including mentors.

The program was not designed to give personalized mentorship; however, participants received personalization throughout the program. "The mentorship I was given was personalized to me and about what I had going on in my work life. I felt heard, and supported" (Anonymous, survey, February 2024). Nguyen's (2018) study identified recommendations for professional development for different levels of professionals within a university. They recommended,

[...] Second, the content of professional development programmes should address leaders' unique and different needs at different stages of their careers.

Third, development must emphasize long-term change and with a variety of learning opportunities and formats. Fourth, the professional development of educational leaders must be coherent: content must relate to day-to-day institutional issues or activities. (Nguyen, 2018, p.35)

Nguyen (2018) emphasized the importance of tailoring professional development experiences to participants. Haley et al. (2015) shared a similar finding for professionals with field experience. The importance of the level of professional development and the role mentorship played in that stage of development was similar to the study by Chernow et al. (2003). In addition, participants became mentors “across and below,” as per Tran (2014).

Mentors helped Jax and Layla with career changes, Jax moved into a new role at a different institution, and Layla shifted roles within her existing organization. As described in West’s (2019) study of African American women who attended a full-day workshop before a Student Affairs conference, mentors impacted career development and growth—finding the importance of mentoring for the women who attended the workshop and their career advancement. Furthermore, West’s (2019) showed the impact of the workshop to focus on health, spirituality, interpersonal relationships, mentoring relationships, participation in networking, and continued professional development. Many of the researcher’s findings connected with this study. Underhill (2006) focused on mentoring programs in corporations revealed similar findings regarding the impact of mentoring on mentees’ career development, showing the connection between mentoring and career success.

Mentors were motivators, supporting participants' thoughts of the inability to take on a challenge or role (Slank, 2019). Due to the mentors' experience in their respective fields and experience within the regional association, it was easy for participants to trust them within the program (Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013; Calhoun & Taub, 2014; West, 2019). Channing (2020) affirmed the importance of mentorship and went beyond sharing that a lifetime of mentorship is needed for the continued success of professionals. Emphasizing that mentorship was not a one-and-done obligation, but a lifetime need for continued growth. Tran (2014) showed the importance of mentorship and how it can impact institutional change as mentoring can happen on all levels, up, across, and down, touching several levels of professionals.

Mentors are your cheerleaders. Participants connected their mentors to being a “cheerleader” (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024; Layla, interview, March 10, 2024), consultants (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024), “sunshine” (Lara, interview, March 12, 2024), part of trust circles, advisors, and “angels” (Jax, interview, March 11, 2024). Being involved in a year-long program with the same small group and mentors results in life changes that mentors are there for each part of the journey, as per Cooper and Miller (1998). For Jax, his mentor was from a different state than him which added a layer of trust. His mentor was able to advise him from an unbiased perspective and even after the completion of the program, still reaches out when needed, as he trusts they'll call back or email back to help (Nguyen, 2018). Gurley et al. (2013) study was about an academy for Assistant Principals. The Academy's results connected with the finding of supportive mentors of this study.

Calhoun and Taub's (2014) study of men in Student Affairs and how mentorship impacts them resulted in many connections to this current study. The importance of expertise in the field is reflected in the experience of leading others like Layla to become faculty mentors and giving back to the program and the profession (Calhoun & Taub, 2014). Mentorship was crucial in Calhoun and Taub's (2014) research, and it was a key component of Program L. Program L prepared future participants by sharing an understanding of the mentor-mentee relationship on their association website.

Augustine-Shaw and Funk's (2013) study further supported the impact of mentorship. Mentorship impacted future decision-making, confidence, and assurance for superintendents in the academy. There is one strong correlation between Augustine-Shaw and Funk (2013) due to the length of the programs both being over a year long, with a focus on helping build leadership as part of the program. Evidence that mentorship had positive effects among higher education professionals also connects with Tran (2014).

The Program Design. This particular finding was interesting to uncover. It emerged as a critical and impactful finding as many of the participants, including survey respondents and Rose, Layla, and Lara, mentioned the design of the program from the group design to the length of time of meeting together. In addition, to the purposefulness of the books and resources as part of the program. The program design included a large group, small groups, and one-on-one time with mentors each month which all took place virtually (Irby et al., 2022). In addition, meeting in person at the annual conference, twice, once at the beginning of the program and then at the end. Rem did share he wished they met more during the year in person, however, recognizes all 12 to

15 people in a cohort are from all over the West Coast including the mentors from different states.

Janosik et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of professional associations and the need for a variety of professional development opportunities for Student Affairs professionals. To the point, if national organizations would not provide something, regional associations need to. This current study connected through the support of a mindful and purposeful curriculum and the importance of such to succeed in the profession (Janosik et al., 2006). Grabsch et al. (2019) emphasized the significance of professional competencies within Student Affairs associations, drawing parallels with the findings of Cuyjet et al. (2009). Their study underscores the importance of integrating these competencies into curriculum development for professional development initiatives, mainly focusing on the needs of Student Affairs leaders and the type of professional development they need.

The duration of the program was a focal point during the interview phase, aiming to learn whether an extended timeframe could potentially yield even greater benefits, mirroring the findings of Gurley et al. (2015) study of the assistant principal academy which spanned two years and Garet et al.'s (2001) study. Boyle et al. (2004) studied the impacts of teacher professional development in the first phase of their longitudinal study. The results of their initial study helped guide their next steps. One noteworthy key finding was, "the majority of teachers participating in the longer-term PD activities reported changes to one (or more) aspects of their teaching practice" (Boyle et al., 2004, p.64). Though the long-term PD may not mean a year-long professional

development program, however, it connects to the length of time involved in various professional development activities.

Lara, Layla, and Rem noted the length of time as a one-year program was just right, noting any longer it would have negatively impacted the investment of the participants (Henderson-Harr et al., 2016). Parkhouse et al. (2019) study of nine different teacher development programs acknowledged duration and time as a finding. Difficult to assess each program side by side, some studies did show some shorter programming resulted in impacts and some longer programs did not (Parkhouse et al., 2019). Yet, one study showed that frequent meetings allowed for greater discussions and retention of the information (Parkhouse et al., 2019).

Layla became a faculty mentor for Program L after her completion of the program. She experienced the other side of the program design and reasons why specific topics or lessons were picked. She shared that it was a strategic and thoughtful process to the books and lessons chosen. They were designed to help create an impactful experience. The selection of the cohorts is also intentional. The faculty mentors selected people from varying states, work experience, and program needs. Some leadership programs are for particular careers as in Gurley et al. (2015) or open to all. However, for Program L, people who applied shared where they worked, what experience they had in higher education, and what they hope to gain from the program, noting all of this from Rem's application. The applicant responses help the mentors to create the cohorts.

Assurance

The assurance theme, rooted in the voices of survey respondents and interviewees, shares a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Layla, in her interview, exemplified this growth by acknowledging her evolving confidence and heightened awareness of her own value and worth. Survey participants shared similar sentiments, detailing struggles with imposter syndrome that were reduced by the program's support of mentors and peers, fostering a sense of belonging and shared experience. This discovery is pivotal, marking a transformational shift in mindsets and level of assurance that emerged through Program L's experience for higher education professionals.

Confidence. Gander and McInnes (2021) studied university staff-led career network findings and unearthed a surprising finding about confidence, that the network helped build participants confidence and the survey showed more participants want to build their confidence in the work they do and their future career steps. Similar to Program L, confidence emerged as a strong finding where many survey participants noted their confidence level increased or was boosted. Layla shared that her confidence increased due to the support she had from her mentor. Rem felt the same way, battling a little imposter syndrome but received reassurance from his mentor that he was in the right place at the right time. Purdy's (2016) study of a leadership Institute for nursing and healthcare professionals resulted in learning that alumni involvement increased their role performance, confidence, and self-perception as leaders. The participants of the Institute felt more confident to do their job, similar to Program L participants as they trust they have a support system outside of their institution.

Haviland et al.'s (2011) studied the benefit of professional development with assessment work done at a university. Studying faculty interactions resulted in a growing understanding of assessment, confidence, and improved attitudes. The act of doing and succeeding built their confidence, as it related to Bandura (1977) and Program L, is the growth of self-efficacy. Moreover, reduces the feelings of not belonging or fraud that emerge from imposter syndrome (Slank, 2019). Program L participants experienced imposter syndrome (Anonymous, survey, February 2024; Rem, interview, March 14, 2024), yet with the support of mentors, the activities, and the overall people involved in the program, they did not feel alone and no longer doubt where they were meant to be (Versland, 2016).

Henderson-Harr et al. (2016) studied a pilot mentoring program at a research foundation for SUNY in New York. Their findings are closely related to the increase in confidence, specifically the help of their mentors and constructive criticism. Packard and Jones (2015) evaluated various leadership programs. Their analysis connects with the finding of confidence, as self-efficacy increased due to the program elements.

Network and Connections

Building a network was an essential finding and a benefit to several types of professional development opportunities such as one-day workshops (West, 2019) or a two-year academy as in Gurley et al. (2013) study. Gurley et al. (2013) studied an Assistant Principal academy that was two years long and allowed assistant principals to create networks that increased collaborations and hindered any thoughts of isolation on the job. As the assistant principals in the Academy experienced, so did the participants of Program L. The ability for Rex to have contacts from almost every state on the West

Coast or make connections across the nation was a huge benefit for him. Similar to Jax, his network supported him through trying times and creating a new team at his new institution. Or for Layla, as her network knew her experiences and skillset, and advocated for her success.

“Finally, professional development for institutional leaders must include a collegial network of support that promotes the exchange and discussion of ideas and strategies between leaders” (Nguyen, 2018, p. 35). Professional development opportunities for Student Affairs professionals were also created to develop a space for the exchange of ideas and to compare and contrast work situations, as Gerda (2006) shares in their study of early Student Affairs professional organizations. Creating connections and networking was an important element to professional organizations, which holds true for the professionals who experienced Program L (Gander & McInnes, 2021). Networking emerged as the most significant outcome of member engagement in Kamen and Apple’s (2023) study. Respondents from their study shared the benefit of meeting new people and growing professional references through networking.

Levrant et al. (2021) shared the impact of mentoring on professionals and showed the value of networking to help expand the knowledge base of university professionals. Studies continued to show connections between networking and positive impacts, similar to the findings of this study. Program L's networking theme was due to what occurred during the program year through the participation of the members and connecting during the monthly meetings. Some of the connections led to friendships and bonds that were not expected.

Relationships and Friendships. Mentoring relationships persisted beyond the program (West, 2019). Espinoza and Garfield (2023) studied their mentorship and friendship through narratives of their experiences, as Garfield mentored Espinoza through her first year as faculty. The frequent meetings, open dialogue, and space to share experiences allowed the mentorship to move into a friendship throughout the process (Espinoza & Garfield, 2023). Similar to what some participants in Program L experienced, they built friendships and bonds within cohorts based on similar experiences, and space to have honest conversations emerged through the year-long experience. The shared experiences of the cohorts that took place during the pandemic brought them even closer due to the drastic changes of that time within higher education (Espinoza & Garfield, 2023).

Not specific to a leadership program yet relatable to the importance of professional development experiences leading to relationships, Mata et al. (2010) experienced attending a conference and being involved in a health association, which led to benefits through the growth of relationships and shared resources.

Professional Growth

Learning, resources, perspectives, and career growth all contribute to the empowerment of participants to reach their full potential, achieve career goals, and contribute to their respective fields (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). The professional growth finding encompassed these areas which intertwined to highlight the overall experiences of the participants, including the different levels of learning that occurred. Black and Earnest's (2009) research on the study of leadership programs provides the theoretical model of leadership as a continuous cycle of learning, meeting the needs of the

individuals, and experiences leading to changes such as motivation and self-confidence that impact organizations and communities. The model illustrates the impact of Program L on individuals who have experienced the year-long program. Relating it to Program L, helps understand the theoretical framework and a visual representation of the experience of the program.

Borko (2004) provides the professional development system framework to understand the system encompasses the program, in this study, Program L, the learners are the participants, the facilitators who are the mentors, and the context in which the program takes place. Used to represent the components of professional development in order to be successful for teachers, it is a framework that relates closely to higher education professional development opportunities as the goal of learning and growing (Borko, 2004).

Learn. Channing's (2020) findings illustrated how learning occurs, identifying the importance of competencies within development. Channing (2020) noted that a prominent theme is experience being the most effective method of learning leadership, as challenges occur, lessons are learned and learned from mistakes. Taking on an active role in learning will increase skills and reflection on improvements or changes (Biggs, 2006). Through the experience of a professional program, interacting with others, building a network, and working with others continues to be a way to learn identified by Channing (2020) and Rusaw (2015). Channing (2020) continued to share that formal leadership development programs helped leaders learn leadership. Leadership education programs assisted them in developing key competencies such as

communication and human relations skills which Layla emphasized her growth in communication skills.

Carpenter and Miller's (1981) study of professional development in Student Affairs highlights some key points in connection to this study's findings. They note, "It is important to note that professional preparation is career-long. If a person stops intentionally growing and preparing, then more complex and higher-level developmental tasks will be impossible to accomplish or master" (Carpenter & Miller, 1981, p. 9). Coomber (2018) also shares the importance of developing a learning and development culture. This study shows the importance and impact of providing opportunities for professional staff (Webster-Wright, 2009). Murphy and Calway (2008) emphasized the importance of continued professional development in their study of professional associations. And the importance of learning to enhance professionals' engagement, motivation, knowledge, and understanding to be adaptable and able to do their jobs (Murphy & Calway, 2008).

Resources. The review of the materials and professional books provided to participants is vast, the finding does not emerge in many research studies within higher education. While literature addressing the impact of professional books remains relatively scarce, in fields like secondary education, sciences, and healthcare, the use of books is a common practice with documented benefits. Studies, such as the meta-analysis by Mol and Bus (2011), highlighted favorable outcomes associated with printed books, with increased comprehension and increased impact of leisure reading as people grow in life. There is potential for exploring the impact of professional books within various disciplines, including within higher education professional development.

Nevertheless, one study of membership engagement with the National Association for Admissions and Registrar showed members valuing the resources provided by the association, in specific to short surveys, publications, webinars, presentations, meetings, FERPA interpretations, and accessible website (Kamen & Apple, 2023). An area for further exploration beyond Program L is delving deeper into books and resources as a way to impact professional development directly. The participants in this study shared how the resources impacted their everyday work, how they handled meetings differently, how they viewed policies and procedures with a new lens, and how they passed those resources onto their other colleagues and staff members. This finding played a large role in the impact of professional development.

Perspectives. Several research studies present findings that are related to the benefit of a different perspective such as Baumgartner and Brunner's (2019) study and Henderson-Harr et al. (2016) study due to peer mentoring and the space for discussions. Henderson-Harr et al. (2016) supports the findings of this research study around the benefits of conversations and discussions, especially around being an inclusive leader and anti-racism, on the impact of considering other perspectives or viewing situations with a different lens. Rusaw (1995) contributed to recognizing that professional associations influence change in and diversifying viewpoints.

Opposite of the perspectives finding, Parkhouse et al. (2019) review of teacher programs, focused on the lack of discussions that lead to changes in perspectives and noted it as an opportunity for professional programs to improve content and strategies surrounding conversations about racial, socioeconomic, and other cultural differences. Whereas in this study, through the materials and books participants received, they were

impacted by the program and those who participated in the study shared how their perspectives or lenses changed throughout their cohort year.

Career Growth. Purdy (2016) found a small connection between the program's impact on professional lives and both work engagement and career satisfaction. Coomber's (2018) work emphasized the importance of purposeful career pathways and discussions of growth in one's career journey. Within the finding of career development for Program L participants, many did not speak to direct conversations about career development within the program, moreso, spoke to the impact of the program on their career journeys, leading some to new jobs or gaining confidence to set boundaries within their current institutions similar to what Layla did.

To close, Haley et al.'s (2015) study on Student Affairs professionals emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development. They said, "The ongoing professional development of Student Affairs professionals is critical for maintaining viability both as individual professionals and for the field as a whole, especially during a time when the value and activities of higher education are scrutinized for relevance" (Haley et al., 2015, p. 324). Recognizing the changing field of higher education, Haley et al.'s (2015) study showed the importance of professional development due to the field Student Affairs professionals are in. Furthermore, similar to school, learning happens outside of the classroom, similar to learning through professional development opportunities.

Implications for Practice

This research acknowledges and adds to the current literature on the impact of professional development on Student Affairs professionals, in specific Admissions and

Registrar professionals, a group often overlooked in studies related to professional development, are integral members of the higher education community. Despite being part of a broader demographic, each role within an institution significantly influences student support and success. Through this study, Admissions and Registrar professionals have demonstrated how professional development opportunities enhanced their growth, knowledge, and confidence. This, in turn, has positively impacted their immediate teams and deepened their understanding of their purpose within higher education.

The findings of this study offer valuable implications and strategies for future development of professional programs and the impact they have on higher education professionals. It is important to note that Program L is a unique program within professional development options. The intentionality of the program design was a key factor that influenced the findings of this study and the success that many participants experienced. If other programs wish to replicate or follow a similar design, it is important to be aware of multiple components such as the mentorship, the mentors, resources provided such as the books, year-long design, length of time spent within meetings, and opportunities to meet with colleagues in large and small groups as essential part of the whole experience.

The four major themes each play a critical role in a professional development program that goes beyond a seminar, conference, webinar, or informal professional networking event. Notably, mentorship played a critical role in various aspects of the participants' lives. The selection of mentors based on their professional experience, understanding of the significance of Program L and willingness to contribute back to the

community were essential to the program. Both mentors and mentees committed their time to this process, resulting in the expansion of networks and support that extended past the program's duration.

Among the four findings, assurance emerged as a particularly interesting discovery. It not only reflected the confidence levels of professional staff but also shed light on the experiences of those grappling with imposter syndrome and questions of purpose. Importantly, it revealed that individuals, despite feeling isolated in their self-perceptions, are not alone in their experiences.

Regardless of level or years of experience there are opportunities to increase self-efficacy and become confident in the work and confident in one's personal life. Whether confidence was a goal of the program's design or a positive outcome, it is one of the key findings of the impact of professional development. Recognizing its significance, future program designers of professional development initiatives can integrate this understanding into activities and lessons, as well as curate relevant books and resources. This ensures that professionals learn their purpose, worth, and value within their respective fields.

Networking, the third finding, consisted of connecting with others, building relationships and bonds over time which was a positive outcome of the professional development program. Many found it surprising, like Rose, who did not account for the bond she built with her small group. The dedication of time and going through similar lived experiences aid in the impact of connections built throughout the program. It also increased many of the participants' networking circles, expanded their connection pool, and gave them the ability to reach out to colleagues from different states for advice or to

plan future collaborations such as presentations at a conference. Networking is a process that keeps giving back to the community and the professional and ensures they do not feel alone in navigating challenges within their work environments and higher education as a whole.

The last finding of this study encompasses several sub-themes that need to be recognized to support future professional development initiatives. The overarching theme, professional growth included learning, skills, resources that lead to growth, perspectives that impacted mindsets, and career growth in specific. These findings fall under the umbrella of professional growth as they impact more than their personal lives; they impact how higher education professionals contribute to their institutions, decision-making, and their future career paths. The growth they experienced enhanced their existing skills. More importantly, they have resources through notes, networking, books, and past activities on which they can lean on. Continuous learning and growth are evident in the professional lives of the participants through the tangible resources and experiential learning offered by the program.

Recommendation for Future Research

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into the transformative effects of a professional development program tailored for Admissions and Registrar higher education professionals. This study focused only on Program L, no other existing programs across the nation were compared to Program L. Future research might consider additional professional development mentorship programs or other Student Affairs year-long programs to compare and contrast the impact of such professional development programs.

Numerous survey respondents and interviewees expressed admiration for their mentors, prompting a recommendation for future research and delving into the dynamics of mentors within a year-long leadership program. To answer the wondering of what about the mentors and their professional journeys make them the people the mentees in Program L connected with so strongly.

Another research topic to explore is learning more about the way the instruction happened in the program and diving into the virtual aspect of the program; how e-learning occurred, and what impact it had on participants compared to a fully in-person leadership program would be an interesting research study. Lastly, a study on a new cohort of Program L, from their initial meeting to their last meeting; how did the 12 to 15 people evolve over 12 months, and what did they learn during that time frame? There are many avenues to learn more about professional development, confidence, networking success, and overall professional growth. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge for Admissions and Registrar professionals. The study serves as a starting point for an evolving subject of the impact of professional development.

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APPENDIX A: Participation Emails

Initial Participation Email

Subject: Participation Request in Doctoral Research

Hello NAME,

I hope this email finds you well. I am Jana Jaraysi, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Eastern Washington University. I am writing to inform you about an opportunity to participate in a research study about professional development and its impact on the professions of Admissions and registration within higher education. You are receiving this request due to your involvement in [Program L]. The research focuses on the benefits and effects of a leadership development program. Please find more details about the study in the survey link below, including a consent form.

Participants will be asked to complete a survey; a link is below. By filling out the survey, your responses will be used in the research study. If you wish to participate in the interview portion of the research study, there will be a question on the survey to further your involvement. Furthermore, your [Program L] application can be used in the research study and will be requested.

Survey and interview questions will center around involvement in [Program L], your experiences, likes, challenges, growth, surprises, and favorites portions and books. Participants are free to answer any questions. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed through Zoom if selected to participate. "Washington State law provides that private conversations may not be recorded, intercepted, or divulged without permission of the individual(s) involved."

Participants and the development program will receive pseudonyms. Your privacy and confidentiality are vital and will be taken seriously throughout the research process. If shared information that includes your or the organization's name is exposed, it will be remedied immediately, and all documents will be updated. Lastly, participants will view the transcription of the interview portion of the research study for vitality and assurance what was shared is what you approve to be used for the findings. Once completed and approved by EWU's School of Education, the final dissertation will be shared with the [Program L] and [regional association] Board members.

If you have any questions or concerns before completing the survey, please contact me at jjaraysi@ewu.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Shelly Shaffer, at sshaffer1@ewu.edu.

If you wish to participate in the survey, please click the link below. This permits me to use your information in the research study.

[SURVEY LINK](#)

Sincerely,
Jana

Second Reminder Email

Subject: Research on Professional Development: [Program L] Survey

Hi NAME,

I hope this email finds you well. I am reaching out to all past [Program L] members to talk a bit more about the “why” behind the survey. If you’ve completed the survey, THANK YOU! And you’re welcome to disregard this message unless you want to know more about my study.

Early on in my higher education journey, I participated in several professional development opportunities; I was a part of the [regional association] board for a number of years. So, when asked to select a topic for my research, professional development was one of my top interests. A couple of [regional association] colleagues helped further guide me in framing the question around the impact of professional development on Admissions and Registrar professionals. To understand more about what we learn outside our normal tasks and the impacts on our profession.

I understand your time is valuable, but I assure you that your participation will significantly impact my research and the organization's growth as I intend to share my findings with the [regional association] Board. All data will be anonymous or receive a pseudonym. I am especially looking forward to connecting with some members for an in-depth interview to learn more.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to complete the survey, I kindly ask that you take a few moments to do so. The survey link is available to you via the [Google form link](#). The survey is quick and easy to complete and should take no longer than 15 minutes of your time. Please complete the survey by **Wednesday, February 28**.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I am happy to address them and provide any additional information you may need.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I truly appreciate your contribution and look forward to hearing your feedback.

Have a great day,
Jana

Final Reminder

Hi NAME,

I hope the week has been going well for you. I am writing to remind you (final reminder! Yay!) about the survey I sent for my professional development dissertation study.

If you have already completed the survey, thank you very much for your participation, and I can't wait to share the outcomes!

If not, please take a few moments to complete it via the Google form link. I am looking for a few more survey responses to increase the data for the research study on the impact of professional development.

As a past member of [Program L], your input is especially valuable in understanding the impact of professional development on Admissions and Registrar professionals (main topic!).

The survey is quick and easy to complete and should take no longer than 15 minutes of your time. Please remember to complete the survey by the **end of the day** (11:59 pm) **on Thursday, Feb 29** (the former date was today). All data will be anonymous or receive a pseudonym.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am happy to address them and provide any additional information you may need. Thank you for your time and consideration during a busy season.

I genuinely appreciate your contribution and look forward to reading your feedback.

Enjoy your day!

Jana

APPENDIX B: Survey Questions

Characteristics of Participants

How many years have you been in the higher education profession?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- Over 20 years

How many years have you been in your current role?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- Over 20 years

How many full-time staff positions do you supervise?

- Zero
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five
- Six
- Seven
- Eight
- Nine
- Ten or more

Which of the functional areas are relevant to your work? (Select all that apply.)

- Admissions
- Compliance
- Enrollment Management
- Financial Aid
- Registrar

- Other: TYPE IN

Please select the sector of the institution where you are currently employed.

- Public, 4 years
- Private, non-profit, 4 years
- Private, for-profit, 4 years
- Public, 2 years

Please select the total enrollment of the institution where you are currently employed.

- Less than 5,000
- 5,000-9,999
- 10,000-19,999
- 20,000 or more

Which cohort year did you participate in for [Program L]?

- 2022-2023
- 2021-2022
- 2020-2021
- 2019-2020
- 2018-2019

Would you recommend the leadership program to other colleagues or staff members?

- YES
- MAYBE
- NO

Short Answer Questions

Please provide a short answer to the following questions. This allows the researcher to learn more about your experience.

1. What was your reason for applying to [Program L]?
2. Was [Program L] impactful in your professional experience? If yes, please share the most impactful experience.
3. Did you develop career goals since completing the leadership program, if so, what are they?

4. Please describe a specific professional development experience since participating in [Program L].
5. Several books were a part of the program; which is your favorite and why?
6. Did you recognize a change in your leadership style due to [Program L]? Please explain.
7. What was the most surprising experience during your participation in [Program L]?
8. If you could go back in time and change one thing about [Program L] or what you experienced, what would it be?

Would you be interested in being interviewed as part of a study about the impact of professional development based on your experience within [Program L]?

- YES, my information is below.
 - Open text box
- Maybe another time, thank you!

If you said YES, please provide your name and the best email address to reach you at.

APPENDIX C: Semi- Structured Interview Questions with Program L participants**Introductory Questions**

1. What is your current position at your institution?
2. Have you taken on leadership roles at your institution?
 - a. What leadership role did you take?
 - b. Have those roles occurred before, during, or after completing [Program L]?
3. Do you have professional development goals?
 - a. What are they?
4. Do you have a current or past involvement with a regional association?
 - a. If so, what has been your involvement?
 - b. Have you taken on any leadership roles?

Focused Questions

5. What attracted you to apply to [Program L]?
6. A. Thank you for sharing your application statement... I noticed... This stood out...
B. Would you be willing to share your application statement with me so I can follow up?
7. How did you define professional development prior to completing [Program L]?
 - a. After [Program L], how do you define professional development?
8. Did you have a favorite activity or interaction during [Program L]? If so, can you elaborate?

9. Several books were provided and used during the [Program L] experience.

Please describe your favorite book and why it was influential to you. (jump here depending on the answer)

10. Have you continued to use materials or books after [Program L]? If yes, please explain.

a. Follow up: you said XYZ on the survey response. Can you share more about it?

11. Has [Program L] had an impact on your life, professionally or personally? Please explain

a. Potential follow-up questions: Has your professional work life changed?

12. (To follow up on a previous question) What career job position did you have when you started [Program L]?

a. Has your career job position changed since being involved in the Leadership training?

13. Have you gained skills from [Program L] and/or other professional development experiences?

a. If so, what are some skills you gained?

14. To follow up on a previous question... since the end of [Program L], have you advocated for professional development for yourself, your colleagues, and/or staff?

15. What role did mentorship play in your participation in [Program L]?

a. Can you share a specific example of how mentoring has influenced your career?

- b. How would an additional year of mentorship impact your professional growth?
 - c. What was your experience with your faculty mentor?
 - i. Follow up: would it have been different for you if they were from your same institution, or was there a benefit they were not?
16. What role did networking play (while participating in or in your participation with) [Program L]?
- a. Have there been any networking opportunities due to [Program L] involvement? Has that played a role for you going forward?
 - i. Is there a primary mode of communication for your cohort or with other cohorts after the program is completed?
 - 1. Do you stay in touch with colleagues from [Program L]? If yes, please elaborate.
 - ii. Do you use social media platforms or utilize the association's tools?

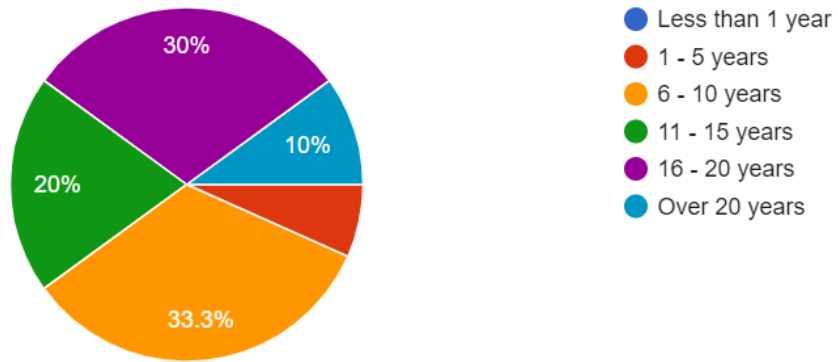
Concluding questions

- 17. What was most memorable about the program?
- 18. What question do you wish I had asked about your experience?
- 19. Anything you want to add to the interview?

APPENDIX D: Characteristics of Participants for the Survey Questions

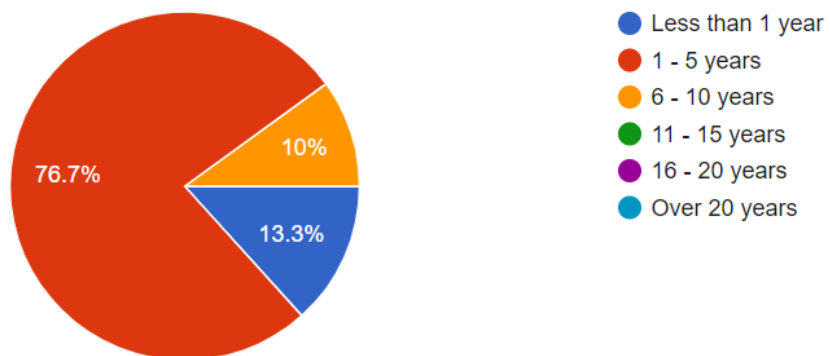
How many years have you been in the higher education profession?

30 responses



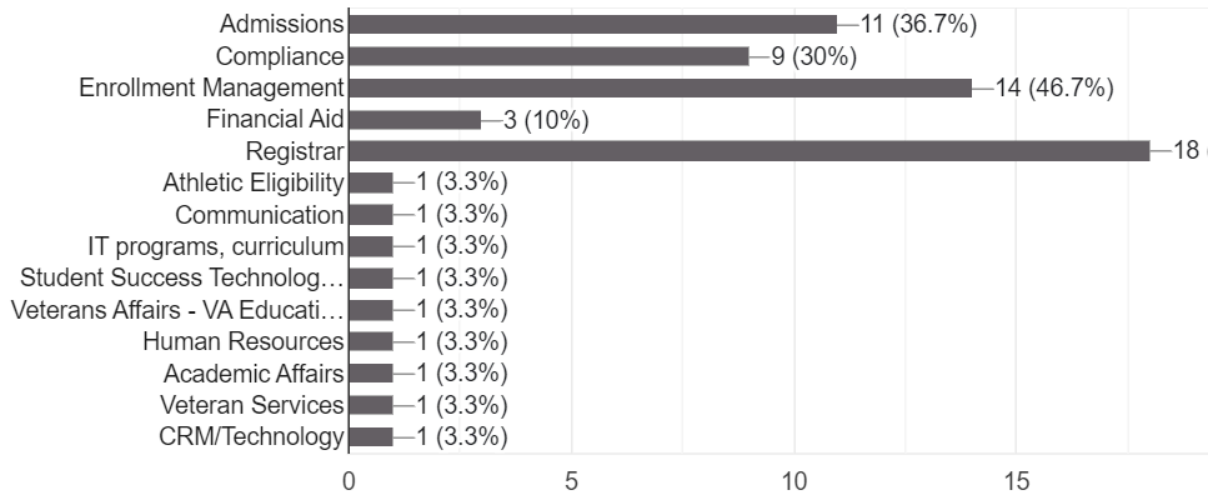
How many years have you been in your current role?

30 responses



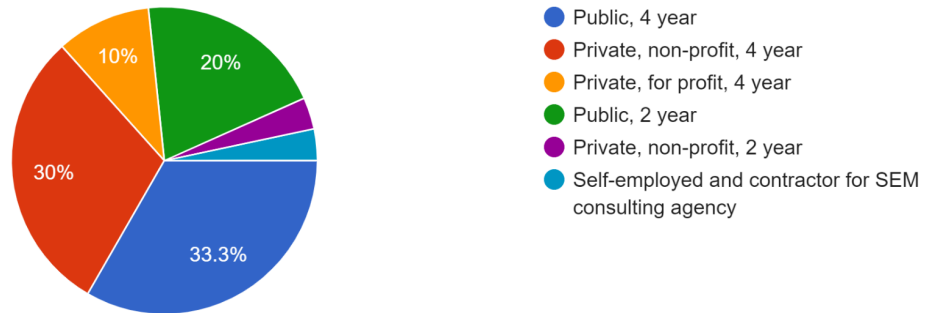
Which of the functional areas are relevant to your work? (Select all that apply.)

30 responses



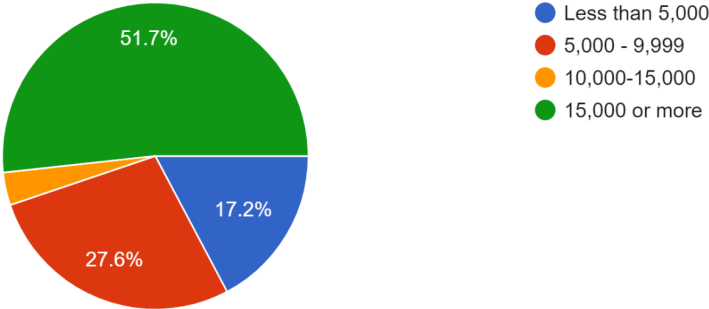
Please select the sector of the institution where you are currently employed.

30 responses



Please select the total enrollment of the institution where you are currently employed.

29 responses



APPENDIX E: The Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

