

## Supervision of New Professionals in Student Affairs: Assessing and Addressing Needs

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*This qualitative study examined the supervision of new professionals from the perspectives of new professionals and their supervisors. Analysis of interviews with four new professionals and their supervisors suggested the following: (a) supervisors supervised the way they wanted to be supervised, (b) new professionals had difficulty identifying and/or articulating what they wanted or needed from their supervisors, (c) seasoned supervisors appeared to be better diagnosticians of new professionals' needs than novice supervisors, (d) some supervisors lacked the skills necessary to diagnose accurately the supervision needs of new professionals, and (e) there appeared to be little direct connection between identified supervision needs of new professionals and professional development activities.*

Student affairs is a profession that has a large cohort of new professionals that enter its ranks yearly. At many institutions nearly half of a student affairs divisions' staff will be relatively new to the field (less than five years experience; Carpenter, 1991). As in many fields, new or emerging professionals in student affairs provide much, if not most, of the direct delivery of programs and services (other than physical and mental health) to students. Somewhat disturbingly, one study estimated that new professionals abandoned the field at a rate of 60% within six years of entering (Holmes, Verrier, & Chisolm, 1983). Most recently, it is reported that the attrition rate of new professionals, during the first five years, is between 39% and 68% (Ward, 1995). Regardless of the exact percent, clearly retention of new professionals is essential to the health of student affairs as a profession. New professionals are both the present and future of student affairs, and as such, a more thorough examination is needed of their work and life experiences.

This research study was designed to increase understanding of new professionals' needs by filling, in part, the information gap that currently exists. A second purpose of this study was to determine supervision needs as defined by the new professionals and to compare those with their supervisors' perceptions of their needs. In other words, do new professionals (NPs) and their supervisors perceive the world through the same lenses? Ultimately,

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having a greater understanding of NPs' needs can facilitate intentional staff development that is purposely created to meet the needs of emerging professionals.

The goal of this article is to first present the literature regarding new professionals, their supervision, and the issue that emerges regarding new professionals growth and development. Next, an outline of the research study is presented along with findings of the study. A discussion of findings and the implications for practice complete this article. It is important to note that many of the references used in this article are somewhat dated due to the lack of current research on the topic. While some of the research may not be applicable to current practice, the information serves as the only foundation to understand and address the needs of new professionals. It is also important to note that a thorough literature review of other disciplines, such as business and human resource management, was also conducted; however, because of the nature of student affairs work and because of the nature of this study, the information was less applicable and was not utilized in this project.

### **Attrition and Supervision**

#### ***Attrition from the Field***

Writers have speculated as to why large numbers of neophyte practitioners leave the field. Some blame the problem on a lack of job satisfaction (Bender, 1980). Others claim the lack of autonomy given in entry-level positions, as well as the rigid administrative structures of such initial positions, are contributing causes (Wood, Winston, & Polkisinik, 1985). There is little research reported that clearly identifies the factors that contribute to the early-departure phenomenon. Thus, researchers are left to speculate the cause. The causes could be lack of institutional fit, poor career decisions, or overly idealistic or unrealistic expectations of the first position. Winston and Creamer (1997) suggested that low starting salaries, difficulty in moving beyond entry-level, the need to be geographically mobile, the low regard in which student affairs is held on many campuses, and frustrating work environments are significant causal factors in new professionals exiting the profession early.

#### ***Importance of Supervision***

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the nature of the supervisory relationship between new professionals and their superiors also may be a major factor in the attrition of new professionals. At least some new professionals report that they have left the field because they became disillusioned about the purposes of student affairs and the kinds of duties they were expected to perform (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Stamatakos (1978) asserted that the supervisor is crucial to the success and performance of new professionals. Coleman and

Johnson (1990) further supported this thought by saying: "Effective supervision is essential to the development of a new professional" (p. 13).

Winston and Hirt (2003) identified, based on an open-ended e-mail questionnaire of the supervisors of new professionals, principal challenges of supervising new professionals as (a) helping new professionals understand the institutional culture and politics, (b) showing patience, (c) assisting new professionals in seeing the big picture, (d) understanding the new professionals' work ethic, (e) dealing with a lack of sufficient supervision time, and (f) addressing errors and mistakes in judgment. In a separate open-ended, e-mail survey of new professionals, Winston and Hirt (2003) identified new professionals' perspectives of the supervision they had received/were receiving. Their criticisms of supervision included (a) lack of structure by the supervisor, (b) lack of autonomy (manifested primarily as micromanagement), (c) infrequency of direct feedback on performance, (d) lack of proper recognition of the new professional's limitations, (e) lack of emotional and material support, (f) ineffective communication, (g) lack of consistency in dealing with issues and persons, (h) being a poor or negative role model, and (i) insufficient professional sponsorship.

Although the research regarding supervision of staff at all levels is limited, when one examines the available research related to supervising new professionals, the literature is even more inadequate. If the future of student affairs is in the hands of new professionals, and their success is contingent, at least to a large degree on good supervision, supervisors need to provide adequate support, intentional and constructive supervision, and purposeful professional development programs (Marsh, 2001). The first step in this process is fully understanding new professionals' specific supervision needs and implementing strategies to meet those needs.

### *Staff Supervision*

It has been established that the student affairs literature provides very little in the area of supervision of new professionals. As such, one is left asking are supervision practices based on theoretical principles such as Chickering and Reisers' (1993) vectors of psychosocial development, adult development theory (Marsh, 2001), practices grounded in supervisors' personal experiences (Arminio & Creamer, 2001) or new professionals' self-identified needs?

Although little is known in this area, research has established that practitioners hold beliefs about the competencies they expect new professionals to demonstrate (Barr, 1997; Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Rosen, Taub, & Wadsworth, 1985; Schuh & Carlisle, 1991; Wood et al., 1985). "As a new professional, a great deal of information will need to be mastered in a relatively short period of time," asserted Barr (1997, p. 491). Such areas of master identified in the literature include (a) an understanding of the conditions of

employment, realistic expectations of the supervisor, applying theory to practice, understanding institutional culture (Barr, 1997); (b) managing time, communicating effectively, planning leisure time, dealing with physiological stress, gaining control of personal feelings (Wiggers, Forney, & Wallace-Schutzman, 1982); (c) having good interpersonal skills (Burkard et al., 2005), maintaining quality working relationships, quality administrative and organizational skills (Burkard et al., 2005; Ostroth, 1981); and (d) technical and functional competence (Wood et al., 1985). It seems that the responsibility for developing the mentioned skills becomes the sole province of the new professional with little responsibility placed on the supervisor. The idea is reflected by Coleman and Johnson (1990) who stated that “the likelihood that ... [new professionals] continue in the profession is influenced by the extent to which they understand their personal and professional development, as well as what the individual and supervisor do to ensure a satisfactory experience in such development” (p. viii).

In student affairs, there are successful and effective administrators that fail to meet the needs of those they supervise (Coleman & Johnson, 1990). Some literature alludes to the concept of supervision in times of trouble. Winston and Creamer (1997) reported that “supervision is often seen as important only when working with employees who have problems or who are new to that specific organization” (p. 181). Effective supervision emphasizes a combination of growth for the individual while fulfilling the goals and mission of the institution (Janosik & Creamer, 2003; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997; Winston, Hebert, & McGonigle, 1985; Wood et al., 1985).

Saunders et al. (2000) found that intentional encouragement of professional growth and renewal is crucial to realizing positive outcomes from the supervisory relationship. These opportunities could be in the form of formal professional conferences, in-house seminars, or information discussions of the skills needed to achieve an employee’s ultimate career goals. Schuh and Carlisle (1991) stated that effective supervision hinges upon the supervisor understanding the needs of each individual staff member and responding directly to those needs. In a study conducted by Armnio and Creamer (2001), quality supervisors were defined as individuals who are “ethical and principled educators constantly and consistently, seeking to accomplish goals through synergistic relationships in supportive environments” (p. 43).

Winston and Creamer (1997) introduced the concept of synergistic supervision as a new model for supervision. This concept calls for “a cooperative effort between the supervisor and the staff member that allows the effect of their joint efforts to be greater than the sum of their individual contributions” (p. 196). Intentional collaboration between the two individuals yields the most

successful supervision experience for supervisor and supervisee, and creates the most efficacious outcome for the institution, but, research illustrates that there is often incongruence between supervisor and supervisee's perceptions and needs (Winston & Creamer, 1997; Winston & Hirt, 2003).

### The Issue with New Professionals

Much of the literature regarding supervision in student affairs is focused on staff development programs (Newton & Richardson, 1976; Wood et al., 1985; Young, 1985) or the desired competencies of new professionals (Barr, 1998; Hirt & Winston, 2003; Rosen et al., 1985; Schuh & Carlisle, 1991; Wood et al., 1985). Although there is little research on the supervision of new and emerging professionals other than the recent books by Janosik et al., 2003 and Magolda and Carnaghi, 2004, calls for continued staff development, programs, and models to further the growth of professionals continues (Coleman & Johnson, 1990; DeCoster & Brown, 1991; Hirt & Winston, 2003; Newton & Richardson, 1976; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Because the available literature has a limited scope regarding needs of new professionals, this translates to an unknown foundation for the necessary professional development programs required for today's up-and-coming student affairs practitioner. Is there a full understanding of the needs of the new professional as such programs are being developed? Based on a review of the literature, the answer is "no." Thus, a purpose of this study was to determine the supervision needs as defined by new professionals and compare those with supervisors' perception of new professional needs. With this foundational information, practitioners can be more intentional and purposeful in the type of supervision and staff development programs that are provided to new professionals.

The four interrelated research questions which guided this study were these:

1. How do new professionals describe the supervision they received during the previous 12 months?
2. What needs did new professionals report having during the previous 12 months?
3. What were supervisors' perceptions of the supervision needs of the new professionals they supervised during the previous 12 months?
4. Is there a difference in the supervision needs as perceived by new professionals and the needs as perceived by their supervisors?

## Methodology

In this study, the term *new professional* was used to describe individuals in the first three years of their professional careers. The new professionals were individuals who graduated from a professional preparation program and who worked in a traditional student affairs functional area such as student activities, residence life, or Greek affairs. *Supervisor* refers to the individual directly responsible for the management and evaluation of the new professional.

### Process

The researchers conducted a qualitative study. Five individuals were selected from two institutions in the southeastern U.S.; however, only four of the selected new professionals and their direct supervisors were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. The selection of participants was purposeful. Supervisor/supervisee pairs were selected based on their functional area so that different types of new professionals would be represented. The new professionals were no more than three years beyond receiving their master's degree. Additionally, only new professionals whose direct supervisor agreed to participate were included.

**Participants.** The senior author contacted two institutions and asked for the names of all new professionals in student affairs. Individuals on the list were then contacted via e-mail. A brief overview of the study was given to each potential participant. Individuals willing to participate in the study were asked for permission to contact their direct supervisors. Several individuals were unwilling to give permission; therefore, they were not selected as participants in the study. Some stated that they did not have a "good" working relationship with their supervisor; others felt their supervisor did not know them well enough to answer a battery of questions. A total of four individuals declined to participate in the study. As a result, the sample may not adequately represent the more negative supervisory relationships.

Ultimately, five supervisor-new professional dyads were interviewed for this study. In one instance, data were collected from the dyad, but the new professional requested to withdraw from the study after the interviews had been conducted. Therefore, the analysis reported in this study was based on four supervisor-new professional dyads from two different universities in the southeastern United States.

Although the data collected were treated as confidential, because of the matched nature of the data, it may be possible for participants (new professionals and supervisors) to discern the source of some of the material. As a result, all participants were informed of this limitation during the informed consent process which occurred prior to the data collection.

*Institutions.* Institutions are referred to as Institution “A” and “B.” Institution A describes itself as a selective, public, land-grant university in a college-town setting. The student body has about 14,000 undergraduates and 5,000 graduate students. The primary missions of the institution are teaching, research, and public service. Institution A is classified as a Doctoral/Research University – Extensive (Carnegie, 2005). Institution B, is an urban, public, Doctoral/Research University – Extensive (Carnegie, 2005). Approximately 10,000 students attend institution B, which is known for its academic excellence and scientific/technical research reputation.

*Data collection.* Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. All interviews were tape recorded, and a list of open-ended questions was used to guide the process. The interview protocol was used primarily to assure that the same topics were addressed in all interviews. The interviewer had the liberty to deviate from the protocol to follow-up and probe to assure a deeper understanding of the person’s experiences. Once the interviews with the new professionals were completed, their supervisors were then interviewed using a somewhat parallel form of the protocol used with the new professional. Following the interviews, memoing was used to “describe and define concepts, deal with methodological issues, [and] offer initial theoretical formulations” (Babbie, 2004, p. 379). This strategy was used as a way of controlling for individual bias and increase the repeatability of the study. Information gained from memoing was also reviewed by both researchers and used to refine and slightly modify the interview protocol.

It is important to note during the data collection phase scheduling a face-to-face interview with one of the supervisors, Lisa (pseudonym), was not possible due to her relocation to the western U.S. Therefore, a phone interview was conducted with her. As with the others, the interview protocol was followed, and the interview was recorded, transcribed, member checked, and analyzed.

### *Data Analysis*

The audio-tapes of each interview were transcribed and evaluated for completeness and relevance. Telephone follow-ups were employed when necessary to clarify responses. Member checks (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were also done on all transcripts to ensure accuracy and completeness of each interview.

Once all transcripts were verified by participants, the researchers examined the information to ensure all data were present and complete, as recommended by Patton (1990). Content analysis, defined as “the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (Patton, 1990), was used to analyze the interview transcripts and field notes. Each transcript was examined independently and categories identified. Once the categories were identified for all transcripts, the researchers combined the information to separate

description from interpretation (Patton, 1990). A peer debriefing (Miles & Huberman, 1994) exercise was utilized to control for reviewer bias. Once discrepancies were resolved, and final themes were agreed upon, the data were examined for congruence and incongruence between (a) the collective group of new professionals and supervisors, (b) each individual new professional and his or her supervisor, (c) the new professionals, and (d) the supervisors' interview protocols.

### *Limitations and Biases*

The number of research participants from which data were collected was small, and the participants came from a single geographical area. Additionally, because the study is qualitative, the researchers served as the instrument for data collection, and therefore, present biases engrained by their experiences and backgrounds. A discussion of each researcher is provided as a guide for understanding potential bias.

*The researchers.* The senior author was in the first five years of professional experience at the time of the data collection. The other researcher had over 30 years experience in the field, primarily as a student affairs administration faculty member. The senior researcher's work experience was limited to residence life and housing at three different universities (two public and one private), and the other researcher's work experience, besides teaching, includes general student affairs administration at a small, public college.

Aspects of the supervision received by both researchers illustrated both poor and excellent experiences; however, overall supervision they received could be described as lacking or poor. Through informal questioning of friends and colleagues, the researchers found that their own experiences of supervision, when new to the field, were similar. As such, the desire to better understand the supervision experiences of new professionals became an area of interest. Specifically, the researchers wanted to understand better what supervisors see as the needs of new professionals and how this impacted new professionals personally and professionally.

All of the interviews were conducted by the senior author. The other author listened to some tapes, read transcripts of the interviews, defined categories, and participated in peer debriefing, but had no direct input in collecting data other than assisting in designing the study, creating the interview protocol, and acting as a sounding board to the senior author as the data collection progressed.

Because one's epistemology approach influences much of the research process (design, data collection, analysis and interpretation), it is important to note that the researchers of this study operated from a constructivist perspective. In this theoretical frame, it is believed that "meaning is not discovered, but

constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Those who define themselves as constructivists also believe “different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). A firm understanding of this concept is critical to understanding the results of this study and the frame in which the researchers interpreted the data.

### *Participants' Backgrounds and Experience*

For clarity purposes, a status label was added to the end of each participant's pseudonym. Those who are new professionals are denoted by a pseudonym name and status – New Professional (NP). Similarly, supervisors are listed by a pseudonym and their status – Supervisor (S).

*Kelly (NP)* was in her second year as a new professional in student affairs. She completed a master's degree in education and used independent study courses to specialize in student affairs. Her program was practicum based and provided her with multiple on-site experiences; she had little developmental theory or professional foundations courses in her degree program. It was the practicum experience in student activities that was the most interesting. As a result, upon graduation she sought a position in that functional area. Until *Kelly (NP)* took her current position at a southern university, she had not been out of the northeast U.S. Her position title at Institution A was associate director. *Kelly (NP)* advised one student organization, supervised student workers, oversaw the campus pub, and was responsible for planning activities with the student union.

*Kelly's (NP) supervisor* was *Jessica (S)*, who did not possess a degree in student affairs. Both her undergraduate and masters work was done in English. She entered the field of student affairs by default via the student media office when her husband moved to the area. Through the years, she worked in various functional areas, most recently as a director at Institution A. She had been a supervisor for five years and was currently pursuing a doctorate in higher education.

The second new professional was *Sally (NP)*. She was in her second year as the assistant director at Institution B. *Sally (NP)* graduated with a master's degree in student affairs from a university in the southeast. Her practicum, internship, and work experiences were in the area of career counseling. She supervised three graduate students, several student workers, and two professional staff members. Her job responsibilities included overseeing the career library, serving as a career counselor, coordinating the graduate school fair, and serving as the liaison to an academic college.

*Sally's (NP) supervisor* was *Francis (S)*. *Francis* had been a supervisor for over 10 years and entered the field in her words “haphazardly.” After she graduated with a master's degree in training and development, she worked in industry for

five years. She spent several years working in a human resources position for a company, and later she took a position at Institution A advising engineering students. After several career shifts and promotions, she currently served as the associate director. She had been in this position for seven years.

The third new professional was *Stan* (NP). He completed his master's degree in higher education. During his tenure as a graduate student, he worked as an assistant coordinator in residence life. Upon graduation, Institution B offered him a full-time coordinator position. He stayed in that position for one year before moving to his current position at Institution B. It was during his first full-time year at Institution B that he worked with *Lisa* (S). Job responsibilities while working with his supervisor *Lisa* (S) were the total management of an all-female community comprised of multiple buildings. *Stan* (NP) was in the somewhat unusual position of serving on the search committee at Institution B that led to the hiring of *Lisa* (S)—his former supervisor.

*Lisa* (S) had a great deal of experience in student affairs. She completed her master's work in student affairs at a university in the mid-west and had worked in the field for over 10 years. She served in various capacities from initially being a hall director to being an assistant dean of students. When her husband transferred positions, she began interviewing for positions within that area, finally taking the assistant director position at Institution B. She had extensive experience in supervising staff—both paraprofessional and professional.

*Anita* (NP) was the final new professional interviewed. She completed a master's degree in higher education and student affairs administration from a university in the southeast. She accepted her current position as coordinator in residence life because of the challenge that it posed. At the time of the interview, she supervised 18 paraprofessional staff members, advised the campus residence hall association, and was responsible for the management of a 1,100 bed residential facility. *Anita* (NP) was in her third year at Institution B.

*Anita's* (NP) supervisor was *Michelle* (S). *Michelle's* (S) undergraduate degree was in communications. She spent a period of time in the business world before returning to a university in the northeast to obtain a master's degree in counseling. She began her work in housing as a graduate student assistant and continued in housing through the years. At the time of the interview, *Michelle* (S) was an assistant director of housing where she had responsibility for an area housing approximately 3,000 undergraduates. *Michelle* (S) had been in the student affairs field for 6 years (all at Institution B).

### Findings

Four main themes emerged from the data: (a) new professionals' perceived supervision needs, (b) supervisors' perceptions of new professionals' needs,

(c) incongruence between new professionals' and supervisors' perceptions, and (d) the presence of the diagnosis phenomenon. Each theme is discussed below.

### *New Professionals' Perceived Supervision Needs*

Regarding the supervision received, the descriptions new professionals (NPs) provided shared both common and unique elements. Stan (NP) and Kim (NP) mentioned being frustrated with job related tasks whereas the other two NPs mentioned supervisor-specific frustrations. Kelly (NP) and Stan (NP) had what they classified as "good supervision experiences." Anita (NP) had a poor experience, and Sally (NP) was undecided about the valence of her evaluation. This observation suggests that the NPs had a wide range of supervisory experiences. Although there was a great deal of variety among the new professionals' experiences, two experiences emerged as crucial—opportunities to freely express frustrations in a safe environment, and the desire to have a personal relationship with the supervisor. ●

The new professionals in this study clearly expressed a need to vent or express their job-related frustration from time to time. They valued having a non-judgmental person, preferably their supervisor, who would listen to concerns and feelings of disappointment, displeasure, and anger. For some, the need to simply express frustration was sufficient. For others, having the supervisor serve as a sounding board or devil's advocate was also appreciated. Sally (NP) described her opportunities to vent as critical to her professional success.

Being there to listen to me [is important]. . . . Sometimes she [supervisor] plays devil's advocate. . . . She has helped me to think about things in other ways, other than the way I was thinking about it. So, it has helped me grow in the way I am thinking about situations . . . [by] gaining perspectives. . . .

Kelly (NP) also described her supervisor as a good communicator, "a person who will just let you vent.... In my opinion, what stops people from success is not having an outlet for frustration. She [my supervisor] might not be able to give you the tools to make the job get done, but she can . . . help you offset the frustration."

Another shared characteristic of good supervision entailed having a personal relationship with the supervisor. New Professionals were not asked a question regarding the relationship with their supervisor; however, when asked "What have I not asked you?" each new professional discussed the personal relationship they shared with their supervisor. For Anita (NP) who had a supervisor who tried to create a "sisterly relationship" with her, the relationship was seen as a hindrance to her personal growth. Anita felt pressure for personal intimacy that she did not desire. She wanted a more "balanced" relationship of personal and professional. She explained,

I feel like she is more of a friend than someone who is going to come down hard on me; ... it feels like we are on the same level sometimes, and sometimes I just want that supervisor [to] ... hold me accountable, call me on the carpet.... I need her to be my supervisor, and be like, "I am your supervisor, and I am holding you accountable for what you are not getting done, and I am going to give you the support to get done what you need to get done...."

Anita (NP) singled out Michelle's inability to play the role of supervisor as the most troublesome. The relationship of supervisor and supervisee became blurred significantly by the friendship that was promoted by the supervisor. Anita (NP) states that the "friendship" became a barrier to her development as a professional, and her ability to function successfully in her job.

When there was a "balanced relationship," as reported by Stan (NP) and Kelly (NP), new professionals felt more supported and satisfied in their supervisory relationship and consequently in their roles as employees. As Stan (NP) put it, "It helps to have a personal relationship with your boss. Our home lives and work lives cross over so much due to emergencies, crisis, and after-hours events. It is really important to have an understanding of each other outside of the professional role."

### *Supervisors' Perceptions of New Professionals' Needs*

Commonalities were not as prevalent in the supervisor interviews as they were in the new professional interviews. Needs of the new professional were discussed in addition to a series of questions on, how they approach supervision with their new professional, their own experiences as a new professional and their former supervisor's supervision style.

Supervisors were asked to discuss what they believed the new professional supervisee needed to be successful. Supervisors struggled to state directly what they thought their supervisee needed. They were able to indirectly offer a list of needs through the stories of struggles and problems the new professional experienced. It is interesting to note the two most "seasoned" supervisors (over 10 years of professional experience) saw more needs than the less "seasoned," younger supervisors (who had approximately 5 years experience). Those skill areas identified by the seasoned supervisors were: (a) involvement in professional conferences, (b) involvement in campus committees, (c) networking opportunities outside the department, and (d) bigger picture connections. Both "seasoned" supervisors, Francis (S) and Lisa (S), mentioned that these were areas they could not directly provide, but they felt it was their responsibility to facilitate and create opportunity. The key as stated by both was to get the new professional involved. The four themes common to all supervisors were (a) balance, (b) communication, (c) support, and (d) maturity/big picture thinking. Other areas mentioned, but not common to all

the supervisors were (a) confrontation skills, (b) administrative skills, and (c) staff management/supervision skills.

In all interviews, supervisors were asked how they approached supervision with their new professional, how they preferred to supervise, and how they experienced professional life as an emerging professional. In all cases, supervisors reported that they supervised the way they wanted to be supervised. Most reflected on both positive and negative experiences with former supervisors. They mentioned that it was through their former experiences that they gained and refined the supervision skills used with their new professional. Supervisors did for their staff what they wanted done to themselves, and they do not do for their staff that which they did not want. No supervisors reported tailoring their supervision style to the individual needs of the new professional. In one instance, a supervisor stated, "I am a person who does not like to be closely supervised. I like to be given a broad picture. So, this is what I want you to do [referring to new professional]. Now, go do it. If you have questions, come back. I try to let everyone that I supervise know that." In each case, the supervisor took an approach to supervision (in this incidence labeled by Winston and Creamer (1997) as *laissez faire*) based on their personal preference, and not specifically on the need of the new professional. This finding was common among all supervisors interviewed.

Lastly, supervisors also made it clear that they did provide for the new professional needs when the needs are made known. "... If she will tell me what she needs, I will give it to her..." This statement or a variation of it was heard from all of the supervisors interviewed.

#### *New Professionals' Perspective Compared To Supervisors' Perspective*

An unanticipated theme emerged during the study. Both new professionals and their supervisors seemed to lack the ability to articulate the new professionals' areas of supervision needs or professional experiences. There were stated needs, which were relatively few in number, and implied needs, which were extensive. Understanding the needs, commonalities, and perceptions of the new professionals and supervisors can best be understood by examining the commonalities and differences of each dyad. Below is a comprehensive list of stated and insinuated needs (summarized in Table 1) by new professional/supervisor pairing.

Michelle (S) identified the following as needs for Anita (NP): (a) stronger administrative skills, (b) big picture perspective, (c) confrontation skills, (d) boundary setting skills/balance, (e) lessening the need for control, (f) time to process experiences and vent emotions, (g) decision making skills, (h) personal support systems, and (i) assistance with transition. Anita (NP) on the other hand recognized only one area identified by Michelle (S), but her list of needs was far more extensive. She added the following areas: (a) direct presence of

supervisor, (b) professional support and development, (c) structure, (d) support from the supervisor and co-workers, (e) better administrative skills, (f) supervisor who serves as an advocate, (g) personal relationship with supervisor, (h) someone to anticipate professional and personal needs and facilitate growth, (i) acculturation, (j) better supervision skills, and (k) time with supervisor to vent, process, and discuss problems. Both Anita and Michelle identified the areas of administrative and processing time as needs or areas of weakness. These, however, were the only areas in common.

Lisa (S) identified the following areas of need for Stan (NP): (a) individual time, (b) better communication with certain student groups, (c) structured time, (d) better big picture understanding, (e) professional involvement, on campus, in regional associations, and within the department, (f) developmental conversations, (g) better decision making skills, (h) assistance with transitions, (i) personal support systems, and (j) personal balance. Conversely, Stan (NP) identified his needs as (a) direct involvement of supervisor, (b) support – from supervisor and department, (c) opportunity to discuss, process, question, and vent with supervisor (d) personal contact, (e) structure and less ambiguity, (f) supervision skill development, (g) involvement in big picture discussions, (h) personal relationship with supervisor, (i) acculturation to position, and (j) assistance with personal transition. The shared perspectives were individual time, and big picture understanding.

Francis (S) recognized Sally's (NP) needs as (a) increased experience and education specific to the position and with the institution, (b) supervision skills, (c) greater personal maturity, (d) structured time to discuss situations, (e) direct guidance and support, (f) personal balance, (g) decision making skills, (h) assistance transitioning, and (i) better communication skills. Alternatively, Sally (NP) identified her supervision needs as (a) emotional support from family, friends, co-workers, and supervisor, (b) opportunities to process experiences with supervisor, (c) improved supervision skills, (d) personal relationship with supervisor, (e) acculturation to the institution, (f) support in making the transition to the institution, and (h) room to learn things for herself. Common to both Stan (NP) and Sally (NP) was the need to process experiences with the supervisor one-on-one, assistance with the transition to the current position, and improved supervision skills in working with paraprofessional and administrative staff.

Table 1

*Needs of New Professionals: Comparison Chart*

<b>Dyad Number</b>	<b>New Professional Needs</b>	<b>Supervisor Perceived Needs of NP</b>
Dyad One	Anita (NP)	Michelle (S)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Better administrative skills*</li> <li>● Time to vent with supervisor and discuss problems*</li> <li>● Direct presence of supervisor</li> <li>● Professional support and development**</li> <li>● Structure**</li> <li>● Support from co-workers and supervisor**</li> <li>● Supervisor who serves as an advocate**</li> <li>● Personal relationship with supervisor**</li> <li>● Someone to anticipate professional and personal needs and facilitate growth in these areas**</li> <li>● Acculturation**</li> <li>● Better supervision skills**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stronger administrative skills*</li> <li>● Time to process and vent frustrations*</li> <li>● "Big Picture" perspective at the institution**</li> <li>● Confrontation skills**</li> <li>● Boundary setting skills/Balance</li> <li>● Less need for control</li> <li>● Decision making</li> <li>● Assistance with transition</li> <li>● Find personal support systems</li> <li>● Assistance with transition</li> </ul>

*Table continues*

Table 1 continued

<i>Dyad Number</i>	<i>New Professional Needs</i>	<i>Supervisor Perceived Needs of NP</i>
Dyad Two	Stan (NP)	Lisa (S)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opportunities to discuss, process, question and vent with supervisor*</li> <li>● Involvement in big picture discussions*</li> <li>● Direct involvement of supervisor**</li> <li>● Personal Support from supervisor and department**</li> <li>● Personal contact**</li> <li>● Less ambiguity**</li> <li>● Supervision skill development**</li> <li>● Personal relationship with supervisor**</li> <li>● Acculturation to position**</li> <li>● Assistance with personal transition**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Individual time* **</li> <li>● Better "big picture" understanding of institution**</li> <li>● Better communication with specific student groups</li> <li>● Structured time</li> <li>● Professional involvement (on-campus, in the department and within the region)</li> <li>● Developmental conversations</li> <li>● Decision making skills**</li> <li>● Find personal support systems**</li> <li>● Assistance with transition**</li> <li>● Personal balance**</li> </ul>

*Table continues*

Table 1 continued

<i>Dyad Number</i>	<i>New Professional Needs</i>	<i>Supervisor Perceived Needs of NP</i>
Dyad Three	Sally (NP)	Francis (S)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opportunities to process experiences with supervisor*</li> <li>● Support in making the transition to the institution* **</li> <li>● Improved supervision skills* **</li> <li>● Emotional support from family, friends, co-workers and supervisor</li> <li>● Personal relationship with supervisor**</li> <li>● Acculturation to the institution**</li> <li>● Room to learn things for self**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Structured time to discuss situations*</li> <li>● Supervision skills*</li> <li>● Assistance with transition**</li> <li>● Increased experience and education in position and with the institution**</li> <li>● Greater personal maturity**</li> <li>● Direct guidance and support**</li> <li>● Better communication skills**</li> <li>● Personal balance**</li> <li>● Decision making skills**</li> <li>● Find personal support systems**</li> </ul>

*Table continues*

Table 1 continued

<i>Dyad Number</i>	<i>New Professional Needs</i>	<i>Supervisor Perceived Needs of NP</i>
Dyad Four	Kelly (NP)	Jessica (S)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acculturation to university, region and position* **</li> <li>● Skills in supervising student staff* **</li> <li>● Opportunity to vent emotions and discuss happenings with supervisor*</li> <li>● Information about job and area of responsibility*</li> <li>● Assistance transitioning to the university and community**</li> <li>● Emotional support from supervisor and co-workers**</li> <li>● Clearly articulated structure and organization**</li> <li>● Professional role model**</li> <li>● Standards of accountability in the position**</li> <li>● Confrontation skills**</li> <li>● Higher salary</li> <li>● More administrative support</li> <li>● Personal relationship with supervisor**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Becoming acculturated to the region and institution* **</li> <li>● Managerial skills (supervision)* **</li> <li>● Time to process experiences* **</li> <li>● Acquiring institutionally specific information about the position and areas of responsibility* **</li> <li>● Assistance with transition* **</li> <li>● Budgeting skills**</li> <li>● Establish a balance between professional and personal life**</li> <li>● Decision making skills**</li> <li>● Daily supervisory involvement</li> <li>● Find personal support systems**</li> <li>● Decision making skills**</li> </ul>

\* Indicates commonalities within the new professional and supervisor dyad.

\*\* Indicates a need that was not directly stated, but was inferred.

As the supervisor, Jessica (S) identified the areas of need for Kelly (NP) as (a) becoming acculturated to the region, (b) acquiring institutionally specific information about the position and areas of responsibility, (c) budgeting skills, (d) managerial skills (mainly supervision), (e) balance of professional and personal lives, (f) daily supervisor involvement, (g) time to process experiences, (h) find personal support systems, (i) assistance transitioning, and (j) decision making skills. In turn, Kelly (NP) identified the following as her areas of supervision needs (a) emotional support from the supervisor and co-workers, (b) opportunity to vent emotions and discuss happenings and issues with supervisor, (c) clearly articulated structure and organization, (d) a professional role model, (e) standards of accountability in the position, (f) skills in supervising student staff, (g) confrontation skills, (h) enculturation to university, region, and position, (i) information about job and area of responsibility, (j) higher salary, (k) more administrative support, (l) personal relationship with supervisor, and (m) assistance transitioning to the university and the community. Commonalities included acculturation to the region (South), assistance transitioning, information about position, processing/discussion time, and structure and skills in supervising paraprofessional staff.

The overall findings from this study indicated that there were primarily only two areas of commonality between both the new professionals and the supervisors. "Talk/processing time" emerged as a universal concern to all four dyads, and "improved skills supervising paraprofessional staff" was identified as an area of need by only two dyads.

### *The Diagnosis Phenomenon*

A somewhat perplexing finding related to diagnosis of supervision needs emerged during this study. Both NPs and their supervisors seemed to lack the ability to identify and articulate what the NPs needed in the way of supervisory interventions or designed professional development experiences. We labeled this inability to identify and directly state needs as the diagnosis phenomenon. It is a problem because if neither supervisor nor NP is able to clearly articulate needs, supervision becomes a process of the blind leading the blind.

As the interviews were analyzed, there were stated needs, which were relatively few in number, and implied needs, which were more common and more prevalent in the data. Although supervisors seldom stated directly the need for growth in a specific skill area, there were several broadly stated need areas: (a) better communication, (b) better administrative skills, and (c) improved budget management skills. Identification of broad categories of needed improvement, is perhaps a good starting point; without specificity, but it is extremely difficult for the NP to initiate changes.

The majority of needs identified were implied through the supervisors' stories, examples, and basic descriptions about how NPs were doing in their jobs. The implied needs common to all supervisors in the study were (a) understanding the institution's political structures and limitations, (b) making sound and informed decisions, (c) transitioning both personally and professionally into a new community/institution, (d) finding personal support systems, and (e) balancing one's professional and personal life.

The diagnosis phenomenon was not limited to supervisors, but was also prevalent among new professionals. All new professionals were able to identify a few skill areas or needed changes in order to be more successful. Both supervisors and NPs, however, spoke in broad generalities, which provided little guidance in establishing concrete plans or clear directions. NPs seemed no more adept at articulating their supervision or professional development needs than were their supervisors. If neither the supervisor nor the NP is able to diagnose specific areas of weakness or needed change, the supervisory process loses much of its power to improve performance and support NPs' professional development.

### Discussion

There are five findings which deserve further discussion. In general, supervisors supervised the way in which they wanted to be supervised; more seasoned supervisors proved to be better diagnosticians; supervisors lacked the skills to diagnose new professional needs; a disconnect exists between identifying a problem and devising a professional development plan; and modification of supervisory practice should occur to adequately address the supervision needs of new professionals.

#### *Supervisor's Style*

In this study, supervisors had a propensity to supervise the way they wanted to be supervised. Past experiences, both negative and positive, were the impetus for their supervision style and the source of training on supervision. Data from interviews suggest supervisors are tailoring their supervision style not to the individual needs of the new professional, but are grounding it more in their own personal history and needs. Based on NP interviews, it is important to note that the supervision approach used may or may not be congruent with the NPs' perceived need.

When supervisors and new professionals described their experience working together, the satisfaction for both was far greater when the supervision preferences matched. This fact supports the findings of Winston & Creamer (1997). In one instance, a supervisor stated, she was not one who liked to meet on a regular basis. "I am a pop in kind of supervisor." The NP whose supervisor used "pop-in" approaches, however, felt she was constantly "on

guard.” The NP would have preferred a supervisory approach based on regular supervision sessions with planned agendas. In this instance, the supervisor took a specific approach to supervision which seemed to be based primarily on personal preference, and not specifically on the need of the NP. All four supervisors in this study reported basing their approach to supervision largely on their own personal preference for supervision. None reported any theory based-approach to supervision or any extensive training in providing supervision.

### *Experience and Ability to Diagnose*

There appears to be a direct relationship between years as a supervisor and ability to recognize supervision needs. The two most “seasoned” supervisors (over 10 years of professional experience each) identified more needs than seen by the younger supervisors (who had approximately 5 and 6 years experience respectively). More seasoned supervisors saw things such as involvement in professional conferences, campus committees, and departmental committees as important. We were unable to deduce whether this was a function of length of experience as a supervisor or level of involvement in student affairs professional organizations. The more experienced supervisors were however more professionally involved than the less experienced supervisors. This is an area which should be examined further.

### *Diagnostic Skills*

An interesting finding that repeated throughout the analysis phase was the discrepancy in the number of stated needs versus implied or insinuated needs. Supervisors seldom explicitly identified the needs (improved skills and/or greater knowledge) of their new professionals. This phenomenon was not isolated to the supervisor data as it also occurred with the new professionals. It is important to note that although those supervisors who had extensive experience (10+ years) were able to identify needs, the number of needs these supervisors identified was still far less than the number of needs identified by the new professional.

In all incidences, both new professionals and supervisors identified one list of needs, but also implied a far longer list. The cause of this discrepancy might arise from an inability of supervisors to see the needs of their staff and from new professionals’ inability to fully understand their own needs. The responsibility of the new professional, the supervisor, or a combination of both should be further examined. Winston and Creamer (1997) asserted that it is the responsibility of both supervisors and supervisees in their synergistic supervision model. If both parties are challenged to fully understand and articulate needs where then does the responsibility lie to ensure that the synergy occurs? Are new professionals at a level developmentally to (a) fully understand what they need, and then (b) clearly articulate those needs? This

new professional initiated approach seemed to be the strategy employed by the supervisors in this study. One reported “if they tell me what they need, then I will do what I can to meet it.” This was the prevailing approach of the supervisors; however, for their approach to be successful, NPs must be able to both accurately diagnosis and clearly articulate their own needs. This clearly was not the case in this study.

The difficulty may reside with the ability of new professionals to actually exercise a level of higher order reasoning as well as higher order (independent, self-directed) action. Although an intellectual development assessment was not conducted, the new professionals’ interviews and the memoing field notes (Babbie, 2004) yielded information that lead the researchers to informally place the new professionals intellectual development at the point of being “transitional knowers” (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Further support for this conclusion emerged when new professionals were asked about what was needed in their position. They were able to identify several skill areas, but they were not able to see beyond the short term. A more complex, global perspective was lacking. Asking most new professionals to anticipate and facilitate their own development without assistance from other professionals seems likely to fail much of the time.

### *Translating Problem to Professional Development*

Another interesting finding was in the area of professional development. When examining data, it is important to examine what is present, but it is equally important to examine what is not present. Absent from the discussion of the supervisors was the area of professional development. Where all supervisors either directly or indirectly identified needs of their new professional, they did not translate those needs into a specific regime of professional development activities tailored to address the new professionals’ specific needs. Two supervisors stressed the importance of involvement in campus committees and professional organizations, but this involvement was not directly related to the new professional’s diagnosed needs. One, therefore, is led to believe that it is first diagnosing the need that is the pivotal point in the process. If the need cannot be stated and agreed upon by both parties, then potent professional development seems unlikely.

### *Addressing Supervision Needs of New Professionals*

Only one of the four supervisors was able to make the connection between diagnosed need and concrete plans of action. The others did not appear to see the connection. All four new professionals and supervisors identified a “need to process, talk, and brainstorm.” All four dyads seemed satisfied with that aspect of supervision. For Michelle (S), Jessica (S), and Lisa (S), however, no other practices designed to enhance the growth of the new professional were described. The concept of translating professional needs into a professional

development plan was clearly a void in the data and is something that should be examined further.

### Implications for Practice

It seems that supervisors need to further develop their skills as diagnosticians in order to strengthen their supervisory effectiveness. As a supervisor there are certainly areas of growth that the new professionals are unable to see. Additionally, there are areas of struggle and frustration that supervisors must be sensitive to in order to facilitate development. This study suggests that a new mindset may be required for many supervisors.

There are also other suggestions that can be gleaned from this study. Each area offers an opportunity for greater success, competency, and matriculation for new professionals.

First, greater attention should be devoted to staff supervision in graduate preparation programs due to the extent new professionals identified this as a need. Supervision is also an area that seems to deserve concentrated, prolonged attention from the professional associations as they design and offer professional development activities, workshops, and convention programs.

Second, professional development activities that address staff supervision should include a comprehensive model or models of supervision that can help practitioners break out of the mode of supervising by imitation, that is, uncritically and theoretically supervising as they have been supervised. Many supervisors need to undergo training to become better diagnosticians. They need to be trained on how to make a diagnosis and, *in collaboration* with the staff member, develop this diagnosis into a plan for professional development. Lastly, they must learn to tailor their supervisory style to the individual needs of the new professional.

Third, greater creativity and expenditures are needed to stress the importance of supervision among practitioners. Before there can be any wide-spread improvement in staff supervision in student affairs, most seasoned practitioners need to realize that this area is one in which they could use education and assistance.

Fourth, new professionals must take ownership of their own professional experience. Responsibility for development cannot rest solely in the hands of the supervisor. New professionals need to push and challenge themselves, and they also need to be assertive and seek mentors (who are not their supervisors) who can guide them in their professional growth (Winston & Hirt, 2003).

Additionally, it is clear that the responsibility for development cannot rest solely in the hands of the new professional. Supervisors need to challenge new professionals in their current position and in preparation for their next

position. This takes time. Failure to provide superior supervision has implications for achieving the student affairs divisions' goals and insuring the future of the profession. Good supervision may be one of the most potent tools available to promote the retention of the best and brightest new professionals in the field.

### Conclusion

New professionals are faced with an array of challenges. They find themselves in environments unlike those experienced in the classroom; they have a new level of responsibility, and they are more accountable than ever before. In this new environment, their primary source of support and understanding rests in the hands of the supervisor. Yet, professional literature has done little to educate supervisors on how to best handle new professionals' needs. This document, while expanding upon previously published literature, has only begun to explore the needs of new professionals, and more specifically, the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Human interaction is both a science and an art – it is laced with complicating factors and is not something that can be explained through one study or one evaluation. As such, further research is needed. Only through an enhanced understanding of the needs of new professionals can supervisors and the field of student affairs more intentionally structure the experience of the new professional and maximize their growth, development and success.

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