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Servando Martinez

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"*I NEED This Job*": A comparative study between a student leader's sense of socioeconomic status and their sense of job security within student affairs

Servando Martinez

Criminal Justice and Communication Studies

A. Patrick Roger-Gordon

Communication Studies

May 10, 2019 | May 23, 2019

To the Pace University Pforzheimer Honors College:

As thesis advisor for _Servando Martinez_, I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

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Thesis Advisor

_____

Date

Abstract

This study contains an analysis on the potential correlation between a student leader's self-reported sense of socioeconomic status and their self-reported sense of job security and vulnerability. This study reviews multiple facets of socioeconomic status and its inclusion in matters of student affairs, most specifically for Housing and Residential Life. Unfortunately, many college students across the nation are persistently experiencing the effects that their socioeconomic background has on their overall development. Individuals from a low socioeconomic background typically have a significant lack of resources that ultimately affects the way they learn, develop and integrate through social, professional and academic affairs in comparison to individuals who come from a moderate to high socioeconomic background (Walpole, 2003). In order to discover areas of improvement for student affairs divisions in managing these issues, I have conducted an analysis to explore the existence of the aforementioned correlation. A survey has been administered to 77 Resident Assistants at Pace University's New York City campus to garner further insight on their perceived sensations, which were then measured on a Likert scale in order to provide quantitative statistical data on the correlation between the primary attributes of both job security and socioeconomic status.

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Introduction

In an era where college students consistently feel responsible to achieve higher

levels in leadership, professional development and success in extracurricular endeavors,

it is important to note that one feels an added pressure when working towards these

heights in the midst of an economic recession, political division, and development.

Many students are currently feeling the need to gain multiple titles, whether it be by

gaining an internship, a desirable leadership position on campus, or an opportunity to

showcase their success and place them on the track to better living, regardless of their

economic status. In my experience, I have come to realize that many students are

currently balancing these internships, leadership positions, and opportunities, while

working multiple jobs in order to continue to afford all of the expenses of college and

student life in a fast-paced environment. It is no secret that a coveted position on many

college campuses is that of being a Resident Assistant (RA). Becoming an RA typically

provides a student leader with paid room and board by the university. The cost of living

on these college campuses increases annually, placing added pressure on students to

maintain their status as college students, while also thrusting them into further amounts

of debt. Therefore, many students attempt to minimize this financial burden as much as

they possibly can by becoming an RA. In exchange, student leaders taking on the RA

role must adhere to the demanding expectations of the role. In my experience, I have

come to realize that one's performance is affected by how secure they feel in this role.

For example, individuals who are in desperate need of a job may typically work harder

in order to keep the position rather than risk poor work performance in the many duties that come with any role. When looking at this concept through the lens of Student Affairs, the same ideals reign true. These individuals works diligently to maintain their positions on campus as student leaders, especially with roles in residential life, in order to maintain their compensatory packages. If someone feels that they do not need a job to survive or continue succeeding in their collegiate career, they may only seek to achieve the bare minimum requirements of a position or subsequently begin performing poorly due to lack of motivation. However, it is interesting to see if this result is because of a lack of interest or a lack of fear in losing one's job.

This is a topic very important to me as a student leader coming close to enter the workforce post-graduation. I became a Resident Assistant during my freshman year for the following term and it has been one of the most surreal, rewarding experiences in my collegiate career. When I first arrived on campus, I immediately attempted to become as involved as I possibly could with many departments and organizations so that I could grow as an individual and become a well-rounded student leader. Although I garnered many leadership positions on campus, becoming an RA was the most significant due to both the compensation and the opportunity. I was heavily interested in the other facets of the role that would provide such as professional development of multiple skills, the sense of belonging and community that comes with being an RA, and the sense of involvement that the position allows students to immerse themselves in. Nevertheless, the compensation was a significant factor for me as it has been essential to allowing me to stay an undergraduate student in New York City and continue developing and

succeeding as a student leader. I personally feel that this may have meant so much to me because of my past experiences as someone who sprouts from a low socioeconomic background.

When I lost my father, my family immediately lost a lot of our financial revenue and quickly became a low-income family, struggling to prosper in California. Eventually, we lost a majority of our finances, resources and other important tools for families, specifically young individuals. However, I ultimately had to experience a level of homelessness while I was in high school up until I graduated and began preparing to move to New York City to attend Pace University. This part of my life has always been a significant motivator for me to continue striving for success despite not being open about this topic to many individuals. With this said, one could imagine how meaningful it was to receive an email from a member of professional staff saying that I had been selected to be a Resident Assistant. Not only did this opportunity mean I could now continue to grow as a leader, student, and person, but it gave me a home - a home I could call my own for at least the next 3 years. Reflecting on those past 3 years, I can certainly say that I have become much stronger as a leader.

Nevertheless, becoming an RA while identifying as coming from a low socioeconomic background came with its challenges. I often felt fear that I could not make mistakes as I would be at risk of losing my job and therefore lose my home. This certainly came with its own healthy mix of paranoia and unnecessary anxiety regarding my performance. I constantly strove to complete the requirements asked of me to succeed in the role, despite seeing some of my colleagues making mistakes or not

following certain aspects of the job. I continued to work toward becoming a better RA because, for me, there were no other alternatives. I either had the option to sacrifice many other things in order to overwhelmingly succeed in this role or I could potentially lose my position, home and any hope of finishing my undergraduate degree. Therefore, I had to do well in this position. Reflecting back on these sensations, I realize that it was never as dire or severe as it seemed. I credit this sensation of immense fear and worry to my insecurity in my socioeconomic status.

Furthermore, the job-action process within student affairs is a contributing factor to many student leader's stress when it comes to protecting their standing in a particular position. Typically, individuals could be given a verbal warning, written warning or placed on probation or a performance improvement plan. Nevertheless, these potential consequences typically enact concern in student leaders and employees alike. For someone determined to avoid being fired, being given a verbal warning for a minor mistake feels metaphorically catastrophic. These common stressors do play a part in how individuals may feel regarding their sense of security and vulnerability in a role. However, I continue to suspect that one's socioeconomic status is a leading factor in one's work performance and sense of job security in a particular role, both in student affairs and many other dimensions of occupational performance.

Additionally, when someone needs a job, it may translate into performance within that job and I feel that that is a strong indicator in both one's desperation and their sense of security within that role. Therefore, I used the aforementioned motivators

for wanting to conduct research on this topic so that I could find a potential correlation between one's sense of security and one's sense of socioeconomic stability.

<u>First impression analysis</u>

When looking into socioeconomic statuses and the realm of student affairs, not much research has been conducted to see if there is any relationship between socioeconomic status and sense of security within a student affairs position. However, much research has been done on the effect one's socioeconomic status has on their overall ascension to actually attending college and their general retention rates throughout U.S. colleges and universities nationwide. I found that many studies agreed that if one comes from a low socioeconomic background, then they did not have the proper allotment of resources or tools as others did to help them stabilize a foundation to advance in their academic career. Because of this, many folks who do actually attend a university often transfer or drop out because of a few different reasons. However, the two primary reasons I noticed throughout my first impression analysis was that many of these individuals could not continue to study at a college because they were unable to afford the remaining years or because they looked around at the student population around them and noticed that there was a significant deficit in individuals who come from a similar background. I also believe that this relationship goes even further for undergraduate students. These individuals struggle in many facets of college life because of their previous socioeconomic status. Despite struggling, they are certainly able to

succeed, but it is certainly more difficult than the folks who come from a foundation

that provided them with the academic and developmental resources they needed to

prosper in a rigorous college setting. Individuals coming from a low socioeconomic

background, in my opinion, are typically insecure in their standing at the university and

in any positions that they hold on or off campus. This project will begin to analyze the

existence of any relationship between one's socioeconomic status and their sense of

security in college, particularly in a leadership role on campus. I will use a sample

population that consists particularly of team members on the Residential Life team.

Literature review

Socio-Economic Background

Socioeconomic status is defined as the "the social standing or class of an

individual or group that is often measured as a combination of education, income, and

occupation" (Okiaga, 2013, 38). Ultimately, socioeconomic statuses have been examined

to reveal that there are many inequities in access to resources and support in accordance

with issues directly or indirectly related to privilege, power and control. This economic

and sociological measurement of an individual's work experience or one's social and

economic position in relation to others of differing levels is a significant factor in many

individuals lives. One's education, occupation, and income are measured to determine

their socioeconomic status compared to other individuals in the nation. Socioeconomic

status (SES) is used as a measurement to determine the levels of economic division

within the nation. It is broken into three levels: high socioeconomic status, middle or average socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status. This describes the placement for an individual and their family when looking at income, occupation, and education. Socioeconomic status seems to have a direct relationship with one's range of physical and mental health problems and is often attributed to one's health standing, overall (Schwartz, 2003). These problems are often derived from environmental conditions in their workplace or social predicament. One's education and resources differ dependent on which bracket of socioeconomic status they and their family are placed in. Priorities are different on each class as their importance may not be as stressed in certain communities as others.

One's socioeconomic background is significantly influential for many individuals in various capacities. However, a student's sense of socioeconomic status, specifically, has the potential to impact their extracurricular involvement, social immersion and overall academic performance in universities. Low-income students enrolled in four-year universities often lack the financial, social and educational resources that accompany students who come from the middle class to upper-middle class backgrounds (Okioga, 2013, 40). The support that these students receive is significant and quintessential in one's development, learning, and overall academic experience. Furthermore, poor families have less access to resources in their community from the beginning of one's academic development. Therefore, students with a low socioeconomic status suffer cracks in their learning foundation and sense of security or

stability. Student development and learning are negatively affected by "having inadequate resources and limited access to community resources" (Okioga, 2013, 40).

Paul Landsbergis found that there indeed is an association between low socioeconomic status and job strain. Through a cross-sectional study, Landsbergis discovered that there was a substantial association between job strain and work ambulatory blood pressure among men with a lower socioeconomic status, ranging from 2.7-11.8mm Hg systolic to 1.9-6.1 mm Hg diastolic blood pressure (Landsbergis, 2003). He found that the groups analyzed with high socioeconomic status had a much smaller association. This study speaks to the causation of high blood pressure through job strain and low socioeconomic status. This highlights the health dangers and consequences of feeling insecure within a job whilst being in a period of low socioeconomic status. This further suggests that coming from a low socioeconomic background has a health risk associated with it, which highlights the potential for other negative impacts based on one's socioeconomic background (Marmot & Michael, 2004). When one's health suffers, so does their job performance. If one continues to work under unsatisfactory conditions, they are bound to experience some exhaustion and possible issues with one's mental health. This is very important as levels of health and ability to work are often significant indicators of one's ability to raise their socioeconomic status and succeed in a general sense.

Socioeconomic status (SES) was defined by the American Psychological Association as encompassing "not just income, but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class" (Blustein,

Brown, Lent, Hall & Spector, 2006). They also emphasize the effect SES has on both the society and quality of life attributes in an individual's life. It is clear that one's socioeconomic status plays a large role in both the amount of and the quality of one's subsequent privileges and opportunities. The APA further explains that poverty is "characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors", thus insinuating that, unfortunately, SES is deemed as a generally reliable predictor of outcomes one could encounter across a lifespan, including health, job security, and social ventures (Blustein et al). Therefore, one's socioeconomic status is extremely relevant to all dimensions of social science. In fact, lower socioeconomic status is believed to correlate with lower educational achievement, general poverty, and inadequate health standards. (Blustein et al). The APA states that SES "affects overall human functioning, including our physical and mental health and that inequities in health distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally." Additionally, the APA recognizes that society, as a whole, could benefit from an increased focus on socioeconomic inequities in American youth in an effort to reduce the wage gap among residents of the United States.

  With all of the factors in one's life that a low socioeconomic status effects, it is no surprise that it also may alter one's college experience and outcomes. In fact, students from low-income backgrounds have always been present in higher education, but in very small capacities. To this day, they continue to be an underrepresented group within the student population. In the sphere of higher education, these students are "acknowledged as educationally disadvantaged" (Walpole, 2003). Marybeth Walpole also expresses that

the reason being that many higher education institutions place a more significant focus on "mainstream students." These mainstream students are the typical representation of student life. These individuals come from a moderate to high socioeconomic background, while also utilizing resources or programs they had in high school in order to help them become admitted to colleges such as SAT tutors or sports programs. Although there is a significant focus on these students, an underrepresented group of students continues to go unrecognized, unacknowledged and uncared for on many college campuses. Students who come from a low socioeconomic background are at the highest risk of dropping out of college, getting mixed up with the wrong people or groups and/or failing their courses. These students need access to more resources in order to "make good" with the lack of resources in their lives before attending college (Walpole, 2003). Although many campuses attempt to incorporate programs and events in order to assist these groups of individuals, it is clear that they need continued guidance and assistance. Nevertheless, campuses fail to meet the needs of these students in favor of the "mainstream students." This further perpetuates a lack of representation for low SES students, thus diminishing their sense of belonging or community. The Educational Longitudinal Study states that "A smaller percentage of students of low socioeconomic status (SES) than students of middle SES attained a bachelor's or higher degree within 8 years of high school completion (14 vs. 29 percent), and percentages for both groups were smaller than the percentage of high-SES students who attained this level of education (60 percent)" (ELS, 2002). This supports the gap between these groups in higher education.

Additionally, a study by Krista Soria and Michael Stebleton found that students who are from a low socioeconomic background often identify as first-generation students. For both groups, they typically have low rates of academic engagement and, thereafter, lower retention rates (Soria & Stebleton, 2011). These two issues serve as catalysts for student's involvement on campus. As a result, not many low-income students are able to get involved in leadership positions and occupations on campus. Most of the individuals who do do so by necessity. When these students look around at their involved peers, they realize that they are the minority, thus making it more difficult for them to maintain these positions or feel secure within these aforementioned roles (Soria et al, 2011).

Job Insecurity

Job security is typically defined as the "assurance (or lack of it) that an employee has about the continuity of gainful employment for his or her work life. Job security usually arises from the terms of the contract of employment, collective bargaining agreement, or labor legislation that prevents arbitrary termination, layoffs, and lockouts. It may also be affected by general economic conditions." It refers to the probability of an individual to keep their job, maintaining a very small chance that they will actually lose their job. This concept is rooted in basic economic theory. During times of economic expansion, many corporations and organizations face increased demand which necessitates further investment in both capital and labor. When a business grows and develops, its job confidence or security rates increase as well. However, during

recessions, a business typically looks for ways to reduce its workforce in order to survive in the market. Market forces change the overall supply and demand for labor. The United States of America, in particular, is extremely susceptible to these market forces due to our extensive history of fiscal conservatism. These levels of job security and confidence are usually dependant on the industry one is involved in as they differ depending on the market chain. In the United States, levels of job insecurity are higher for men than women currently, particularly with workers aged 30–64 in comparison to other age groups in the industry (Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2009). The American Journal of Industrial Medicine also denotes that "divorced or separated workers and workers with less than a high school diploma also report higher job insecurity. " They also cite the construction industry as the industry with the highest rate of job insecurity standing at 55% (Alterman, Luckhaupt, Dahlhamer, Ward, & Calvert, 2013). Many researchers have begun to study the impact of job insecurity on health. Job Insecurity is defined as being worried about becoming unemployed, which is a concern to 25% of the United States labor force ("U.S. Employee Confidence Level Reaches Seven-Year High", 2014).

A substantive test and theory-based analysis were conducted by Susan Ashford, Cynthia Lee and Philip Bobko which assessed the consequences of job insecurity. They utilized a measure that that emphasized various concepts regarding the subject. Incidentally, many folks have argued against the concept of job insecurity claiming it to be "fallacious and hyperbolic" because it is typically conveyed as a false sense of insecurity to people looking from the outside in (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 2017). For individuals who feel job insecure, the sensation of anxiety and fear is ever-present and

influential in the way they perceive themselves, the organization and their relationship with their coworkers. However, the aforementioned research indicated that one's organizational, personal and job realities that are "associated with a perceived lack of control" ultimately correlate with one's sense of job insecurity (Ashford et al, 2017). These authors conducted this research study in order to suggest evidence that one's sense of belonging correlates to one's sense of job insecurity and what consequences could occur as a result. For example, the study lists quitting, reduced commitment and decreased satisfaction as potential consequences of job insecurity. If individuals who are feeling job insecure because of their socioeconomic status, they have a higher risk of succumbing to the aforementioned results.

This relates to the student affairs sector as many folks who begin their primary roles in student affairs during their undergraduate careers typically feel a sense of burnout or job insecurity during the latter half of their undergraduate tenure. I hypothesize that one's socioeconomic status has a direct correlation with their senses of job insecurity and occupational vulnerability. This initial sense of insecurity is often brought out due to overall organizational insecurity. Allen (2003) explains that "organizational climate has a direct relationship to employee insecurity." The paper discusses the multi-dimensional nature of this sense of insecurity. It particularly expresses that this nature is often conceived by the managerial approaches that upper management puts forth, whether it be through a coercive or persuasive approach. D.K. Allen concludes the paper by explaining that organizational insecurity on a collegiate level affects one's "willingness to be open and share information, degree of cognitive

conflict and development of interpersonal relationships" (Allen, 2003). Therefore, one's sense of belonging in the organization and the relationships within the organization directly affects that individuals' sense of security within their role or department.

Eva Selenko and Chris Stride conducted research based on content analysis and research participants where they conducted an in-depth analysis of the effects of job insecurity. They expressed that a major consequence of constant job insecurity is the fact that this sense of insecurity "strikes at the core of who we perceive ourselves to be – our identity – and this can have much wider ramifications for society" (Selenko & Stride, 2018). They also found that job insecurity truly alters one's core of both identity and social stability.

The authors initially hypothesized that this heightened sense of job insecurity often led to extremism. The authors refer to a psychological study that expressed job insecurity as one of the most significant workplace stressors, as the constant concern of being laid off, losing your ability to pay bills and newfound knowledge of instability within the organization's future causes folks to experience raised levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. The feeling of not being control and potentially having an adverse future is a consistent worry for many people in the workforce. When one is concerned about losing their job, they may begin to express poorer performance at work rather than using this fear as a motivator. This is an area for further research as suggested by these authors (Selenko & Stride, 2018). This finding speaks to the negative effects job insecurity could have on the organization, society and one's political standpoint, citing job insecurity as a primary cause for political extremism.

The study also explains that jobs, part time or full time, mean more than simply obtaining a financial income. In fact, one's socioeconomic status is, in turn, directly affected by this income, making it an important aspect for one's identity and sense of self. They cite a study of British employees where they found that "people who were afraid of losing their jobs often felt their identity as an employed person was diminished" (Selenko & Stride, 2018). This is an alarming sensation as it, again, cuts to the core of one's sense of identity and social stability. This perception translates to individuals as an alienating experience. These individuals stated that they felt excluded from the status quo and community of "the employed." This isolation affects one's sense of well-being, as well as their behavior at their workplace. Once identifying their sentiment toward their personal job insecurity, they then began to perform the core parts of the aforementioned job less effectively, which negatively affected the interpersonal relationships people construct at work. In fact, this sensation has a pervasive effect on how these individuals attempt to cope with their personal sense of insecurity, which manifests itself in further isolation and inefficiency (Selenko & Stride, 2018). For example, individuals who feel threatened in their security and identity are found to be "more likely to turn against others. Overall, this is an alarming catalyst for a multitude of issues facing organizations today.

Vulnerability in Occupation

McLeod & Kessler (1990) explore the association between socioeconomic status and psychological distress, where they highlight the level of vulnerability folks who come from a low socioeconomic background typically feel. They cite previous research by declaring that folks from the low socioeconomic background are also more strongly affected emotionally by negative life events or experiences than their higher-status counterparts. McLeod and Kessler define vulnerability through 2 aspects. The first being a lack of financial resources, while the second aspect encompasses the: broader class of coping resources, including social support and resilient personality characteristics." They argue that vulnerability, in and of itself, is not simply confined to one's income, but that it also extends further into one's education and occupational status (McLeod & Kessler, 1990). This sense of vulnerability is, therefore, ever present in a student's educational and occupational development. The researchers found that a heightened sense of vulnerability within one's occupation has a positive correlation with a heightened sense of income insecurity and low socioeconomic status (McLeod & Kessler, 1990). Individuals who identify as being from a low socioeconomic background also cite a significant sense of vulnerability when it comes to their occupation and life events they experience throughout their individualistic development in both professional and personal capacities.

Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Psychological Distress: An Examination of Differential Vulnerability by Patricia M. Ulbrich, George J. Warheit and Rick S.

Zimmerman examines the correlation that race and socioeconomic status have with mental health and vulnerability. The study expects there to be a joint influence on one's mental health from their race and SES. The main goal this research attempted to analyze and find evidence of the polymerization of low socioeconomic status and race has detrimental consequences on one's well-being. They found that race and SES jointly contribute to the increase of one's psychological symptoms of distress. The study found evidence that undesirable life events and overall economic problems attribute psychological distress across all socioeconomic groups. The research shows that "persons of lower socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to the impact of negative life experiences than persons of higher statuses" (Ulbrich, Warheit and Zimmerman, 1989). This sets the foundation for a relationship between socioeconomic status and general vulnerability. The authors attribute this relationship to two disadvantages: the fact that people in a lower social class are often exposed to more stressful experiences and that comparable events that affect their emotional functioning. It is declared that these stress coefficients combine chronic stressors and undesirable events to determine the overall economic concern. They ultimately were unable to find clarity in whether or not psychological distress among lower-class individuals was a result of their economic instability or their greater vulnerability to life in general.

Job Expectations in Student Affairs

The realm of student affairs continues to be one of the most continuously developed and transformative influencers in student leadership and its subsequent development for students attending undergraduate institutions. Throughout this period, three themes are emphasized in order to create a more seamless, integral adjustment into the role. The importance of relationships, the institutional fit and general issues of competence and confidence are the themes that are consistently reevaluated throughout these processes.

Although there are many dimensions of student affairs, residential life is a prevalent department on college campuses. Within residential life, the RA's are an important component to bridging the gap between professional staff and residential students. A Resident Assistant (RA) is defined as a "trained peer leader who coordinates activities in residence halls in colleges, universities and other educational institutions" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). An RA may also be known as a Resident Advisor, Resident Mentor, Community Assistant, and many other titles. An RA has an abundance of different roles or responsibilities. They are primarily tasked with fostering a community on their respective floor(s) through programming, mentorship and a resource for students on campus. They are expected to have widespread knowledge of resources on campus that they can direct their residents to. They also must be able to answer basic questions regarding the educational institution, residential life policies and other resources for students. More so, they are tasked with enforcing residential life

policies and practicing the correct protocol. For example, many RAs are responsible for documenting students who are violating terms aligned in their housing agreements such as drug use and physical altercations. They are also considered as guidance mentors for residents and often assist them with problem-solving or are a venting medium for residents who need to work through their emotions. However, they can also refer them to counseling resources. Generally, RAs must be a model example of a student, while upholding personal and professional accountability.

RA's must practice efficient time management by balancing their schedules and interpersonal priorities with the needs of their residents in order to be a supportive resource. Being an RA is a 24-hour job as RA's are constantly doing "rounds" or determining maintenance needs for the residence halls. They also maintain many housing records, documentation and other confidential material in their role. The RA must be a liaison between their floors and the Community Coordinator of the building, a professional staff role. In order to be an efficient liaison, they must write reports, keep accurate records, and maintain effective communication between both parties. RAs are usually required to meet with their residence director to provide updates on their programs, residents and any other subjects that are imperative for professional staff to know about Residential Life in general. They are also responsible for completing random tasks put forth by professional staff to meet the needs of the community (University of Alabama, 2018). Overall, these many duties are typically aligned with the goals, objectives, and values of both the department and the institution. RAs also make sure to address the needs of underrepresented groups of students. As previously

mentioned, RA's are typically compensated with waived housing and meal plans, as well as access to many exclusive perks and opportunities. Some RA's are also compensated monthly.

It is important to note that RA's must also be on duty throughout the semester where they remain in the residence halls on call for residents, security, and guests. This is the usual time where RA's get involved in incidents where they need to enforce the policy. Old Dominion University states that the RA's have many duties are for the benefit of the students. They capture this by stating, "These duties require the RA to know all the residents and be able to help each resident if they run into any problems with each other as well as with other things that may follow. Some problems could pertain to relationships, class-work, or institutional questions. The RA should have the skills to either assist the resident or know of a resource that the resident can use to solve their problem" ("Housing & Residence Life", 2016).

To continue analyzing the responsibilities of the role, the RA's must enforce community standards, including alcohol and drug policy and quiet hours. Students may have to submit to a fine, bond, behavioral contract or a subjective consequence dependent on the violation if they violate the policy on campus. These RA's are responsible to monitor floor and building activity and ultimately document these students (Anastasio, 2018). They also must assist with conflict resolution between two or more residents on one's floor, building, or campus in general. This may disrupt the ability to foster community on a floor, but they are able to ultimately rebuild this through programming. They can choose to either do passive or active programs.

Therefore, Resident Assistants must ultimately promote the well being of residents in university housing while practicing academic development and social awareness, especially during such intense transition periods for students. The transition from high school to college is a significant adjustment for students. RA's typically attempt to be intentional with their programming and resources they provide the students in order to meet the various needs of the communities in their respective residence hall and their respective floors. This job is particularly challenging for students who are balancing the many other attributes of college life, including part-time jobs, internships, extracurricular involvement, sports, performances, social activities and any other programs that require the student leader's attention, time and energy As previously mentioned, Resident Assistants have a significant hand in helping students adjust to their life in college and all of the issues that come with that. It is an extremely important position as it impacts many lives. For this reason, student affairs professionals continue to try to perfect the selection process. It is a very selective process and they often cater their interview processes to best fit their needs in order to select high-performing RAs. It is important to select the right candidates to balance and handle the responsibilities that come with the position.

The American Council on Education refers to the Student Affairs realm by stating that "enhancing the development of students has long been a primary role of student affairs practitioners. Identity development theories help practitioners to understand how students go about discovering their 'abilities, aptitude and objectives' while assisting them to achieve their 'maximum effectiveness'" (American Council on

Education, 1937, p. 69). Student Affairs practitioners work diligently to identify

individuals that are good fits for the job. They attempt to discover abilities, goals, and

effectiveness in creating a general sense of identity that allows students to enter the next

phases of their lives. Therefore, these leadership positions are an integral part of any

higher education institution in order to increase their access and retention rates. RAs

help students understand the balance between their own identity and the identities of

others while exposing them to the various dimensions of the term, other. They

ultimately have an influence on these students when they begin to construct the social

constructions of their identity and their personal sense of identity (Jones, 1997;

McEwen, 2003; Torres, 2003; Weber, 1998). This article focuses on understanding how

identity development is conceptualized in student affairs. "The need to understand the

person, context, and interactions between individuals throughout student affairs and

higher education" is an important part of identity development that is present in many

facets of student affairs (Torres, Jones, and Renn, 2009).

The authors of this study propose that "student affairs practitioners need to

rethink some of the key assumptions of their leadership development models and

practices in order to meet the needs of a changing student body." When assessing many

models, researchers found that there are many different strategies in developing

leadership among diverse groups of students (Torres, Jones, and Renn, 2009).

Problem

The overall issue with these components is that students are feeling the effects of increasing job insecurity in many facets of their lives, especially if they are coming from low socioeconomic status. When an individual is faced with job-action, they immediately sense the fear that they will lose their job and the opportunities that come with that role, regardless if the fear is rational or not.

Due to their lack of resources and support in earlier stages in their lives, being a student leader on campus is one of the most rewarding and impactful experiences for students coming from a low socioeconomic status background. Up until now, there has not been any research conducted on socioeconomic status and job insecurity specifically in Student Affairs. Research has found that socioeconomic status certainly psychologically affects an individual's sense of job insecurity, but I am attempting to specify this research to students in particular in order to discover the potential correlation between socioeconomic status and job vulnerability in a student affairs role.

Methodology

A survey measuring multiple facets of job satisfaction, job security rates, and socioeconomic perception was sent out to 77 RAs at one campus. We created a 55-question survey to distribute to the RAs during an In-Service, a departmental wide meeting where we encouraged RAs to partake in the study. The survey was administered online through Qualtrics and was designed in a format to gain insight on their socioeconomic status, level of job insecurity and finally job satisfaction before delving

into the demographics of the surveyed. RAs were asked questions regarding their socioeconomic background, development in the role and previous life experiences. Interviews were then conducted with 5 RAs at the same campus to delve deeper into the findings within the survey. The RAs that were interviewed volunteered to do so after taking the initial survey. Otherwise, all survey responses were anonymous. These 5 Resident Assistants were interviewed on an individual basis where they were asked the same open-forum style questions, allowing them to share their experiences. Their responses were recorded and reviewed in order to provide substantial first-hand feedback on socioeconomic status' relationship with job security.

Once we finalized and completed the Pace University IRB, participants were gathered through a monthly departmental meeting. The survey was administered to approximately 77 individuals. There were a total of 41 responses over the span of one month. All responses that were not in accordance with our primary essential question were discarded as a dummy variable. The question, "Which do you identify as?" was our essential question to ensure only responses from Resident Assistants were being analyzed, weeding out Senior Desk Assistants, Social Media Coordinators, Leadership Development Coordinators and members of professional staff. Thereafter, we had a total of 40 responses left to be analyzed. The survey covered topics such as homelessness, food insecurity and economic challenges in order to find potential correlations. Responses were then quantified on a Likert scale in order to translate accurate, comparative statistics regarding the aforementioned concepts.

Findings:

Overall, the findings suggest that many folks who identify as coming from low SES feel vulnerable with their positions. 77% of those reporting as Low SES also reported feeling moderate to highly vulnerable, whereas only 53% of those reported as moderate to high SES reported that same level of vulnerability. 77% of individuals who identify as a low SES also stated that they feel they are at risk of losing their job, while 53% of moderate to high SES reporters said they are at risk. This percentage breakdown was the same for both inquiries. Those who reported as coming from a Low SES continuously showcased concern for their status in their position. 64% of folks who identified as coming from an average socioeconomic background stated that they do not feel job insecure within their position in res life. 88% of individuals who identify from a low socioeconomic background declared that they have, indeed, said "I need this job," whereas only 78% of the other individuals said they have communicated the same sentiment. Therefore, there is no statistical significance in that correlation, specifically. Of the 75% who stated that they would not be able to attend university if they did not have the RA position, over half of those respondents also identified as coming from a low socioeconomic background. Many respondents felt that the impact of the role played a large factor in the perceived risk of losing the position. In fact, 90% of respondents stated that the job was very impactful in their undergraduate experience. 70% of those individuals also shared the existence of perceived fear. They acknowledged that they feel at risk of losing the position and are subsequently afraid of losing said

position. Of the respondents who were afraid to lose their position, 57% emphasized that they do not feel that they can make the same mistakes as their wealthier counterparts.

Although some folks feel that they are vulnerable because of their socioeconomic status, others feel that the way departments are currently being run at Pace may also contribute to that feeling. Although no one deliberately said that they feel like they cannot be secure because of their socioeconomic status, through my analysis I sense a strong correlation between people who came from poorer backgrounds to feel more insecure within their position in student affairs. In fact, when asked whether or not their sense of socioeconomic status has affected how secure they felt in their role, individuals from a low SES said it does impact them, as opposed to individuals from a high SES who said it did not affect how secure they felt.

When Resident Assistants were surveyed and asked what initially motivated them to become an RA, free housing was indicated as the second highest motivator behind leadership development. When they were asked what continued to motivate them to stay RA's they also indicated free housing as the highest motivator. With that said, it is interesting to note that this was a significant motivator for folks who identified on either side of the spectrum of socioeconomic status.

 RAs generally had positive attitudes toward the responsibilities of the job, including helping residents, enforcing policy and being a resource. Recommendations for enhancing the continuum of care provided to distressed residents and staff members were discussed. Findings suggest that a sense of low socioeconomic status increases a

sense of job insecurity. 56% of survey participants feel that their socioeconomic status has affected their level of security in their role. 88% of those participants also identify as coming from a low socioeconomic background. This research could be considered in the selection processes of other residential life candidates and leaders on college campuses as well as a means to change the format in which the department interacts with the RAs in order to create a comfortable environment for all employees, despite socioeconomic status. Implications for improving the current process of RA integration and retention at colleges and directions for future research are discussed.

Furthermore, interviews with various RA's showed insight on their feelings of the role and its correlation with socioeconomic status. One individual stated that they "need this job to go to school and get a degree, but it feels like I'm always at risk of losing it. I don't feel stable or secure." Another individual said that "this job was the best thing to happen to [them] in college, but I'm always nervous that I'm not good enough." It was interesting to see that individuals who feel like they need the position or love the position still feel a sense of job insecurity. This speaks to the caliber of how integral this position can be in one's undergraduate career as the benefits of the role can truly change one's chance at an education and collegiate experience.

Overall, I found it interesting to gain insight from two individuals in particular - one who chose to quit once the department did not provide an ideal arrangement and one who has struggled to maintain her role in the department, but feels that they were unable to attend the university without the compensation she receives. One individual, who identifies as coming from an upper-middle socioeconomic background, stated that

they were willing to sacrifice free housing and pay for living arrangements for the next year rather than deal with a few of the choices the department made for the following year. She declared that she was happy to have taken control of the situation, but was upset to be missing the experience that comes with the role. It is imperative to note that this individual defines her decision as "comfortable." On the other side of the spectrum, the latter individual feels that they have had to be adaptable in departmental changes because there was no other option and they would often sacrifice comfort in order to keep their position. This individual identifies as coming from a very low socioeconomic background. These two different perspectives provide an interesting perception of how these two groups of student leaders address dissatisfaction and the coinciding return on investment.

Overview

Through the 40 responses we received from a survey being sent out to 77 individuals that fit the study description, it seems that there is some correlation between a student leader's sense of self-reported socioeconomic status and their sense of job security within a specific student affairs role. Nevertheless, the statistical significance is not as substantial stipulation recommendations for further research in order to garner more insight. Many individuals reported needing the RA position because, without it, they would not be able to attend their respective universities. The indicators on the survey showcased placed these individuals on a de facto spectrum of socioeconomic status based on their personal perceptions of their role in the nation's wealth

distribution. This placement correlated with their perceived sense of job insecurity by conveying that people who do not have much to fall back on in terms of housing and financial resources feel that they cannot make the same mistakes as their more privileged colleagues. It was interesting to see that there is quite a mixed response when perceiving one's feelings toward their role versus their sense of socioeconomic status. Many folks stated that feel vulnerable in the department, but they do not feel insecure in their role. 59% of survey respondents stated that they believe their socioeconomic status affects the way that they perform as an RA for the Office of Housing and Residential Life, meaning that their standing in the department is dependent on their socioeconomic status. We also attempted to indicate this by looking at whether or not individuals felt they were at risk of being fired or if they felt they could make the same mistakes as their colleagues. Only 19% of those surveyed stated that they feel they are currently at risk of being fired, as opposed to 56% of survey takers who stated that they do not have the same ability to make the same mistakes as their colleagues. Overall, it was interesting to see how subjective one's sense of socioeconomic status and job security are, especially when looking at it through a perspective of privilege.

Conclusions

While there seems to be a correlation between work performance and sense of job security, questions remain whether or not that sense of security comes directly from the socioeconomic security. It can sometimes be difficult to see this correlation without any bias. As someone who has a personal connection to this topic, I can sense this correlation from my personal experience, but it is important to look further into this correlation in order to decipher areas of improvement for Student Affairs. However, my findings regarding a student's sense of socioeconomic status and their sense of job security certainly indicate the potential for strong correlations and further research. It is evident that students' sense of socioeconomic status affects the way they experience their time as an undergraduate student within a higher education institution, yet there is a lack of research on whether or not this socioeconomic status translates to one's sense of security within a student affairs role. It is essential that entities begin to look into this possibility in order to further analyze how to incorporate best practices when corresponding with student leaders on college campuses. In many capacities, students need to feel secure in their professional and academic development opportunities. In order to assist students in experiencing a sense of security, one must first understand the impact the respective students' socioeconomic status has on that sense of security. Therefore, the research analysis I have conducted has emphasized the need and the presence of strong implications for further research. Researchers could begin looking at the separate consequences socioeconomic status has on a student leaders' involvement

on campus and success within that involvement. It is not enough to get a student involved when they first arrive at a university. They must be able to excel, develop and grow through their experience of being involved on campus. However, if students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are not given enough attention or resources to keep them engaged, the risk of leaving the university increases. More so, this particular group of students may fail to comprehend and perceive hierarchical systems are just or fair. If a student from a low socioeconomic background is able to prevail by securing a highly sought-after role, but are greeted with a lack of community, representation, and likeness, they are bound to feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable in their organization, department or grouping. If this holds true, the individual will not be able to feel secure in their role or within their teams, thus suggesting the potential of abandoning the leadership position and the coinciding benefits. As we have discussed, the compensation of a role as a Resident Assistant is essential for many students on or below the poverty line. If they must sacrifice this position, they are sacrificing assistance in securing their degree. More so, these individuals are then forced to either remain in an uncomfortable and insecure position or bite the bullet by resigning and working diligently to find alternatives. Nevertheless, the individuals who remain in the position will continue to feel a sense of insecurity and fear of not performing well that may continue with them into the workforce. This alters one's overall cognitive perception of work performance, as a whole. Seeing wealthier counterparts negate their responsibilities or duties with no fear is bound to destroy some aspirations or expectations of upward mobility, job satisfaction or effective collaboration.

Although people from poorer backgrounds are continuously challenged in society to succeed at even half the level of their wealthier counterparts, it is important to use the insight from the aforementioned correlations to dismantle societal standards of best practices within student affairs and higher education. Establishing universal expectations for all students regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and other identifiers are beneficial in increasing a sense of comfort or security in the students who have not received the same resources or assistance as others. Poor students are more than just success stories to boast about in promotional material from a surface-level perspective, especially when they are riddled with anxiety or fear surrounding their sense of belonging on a college campus as a student leader. Change must be made in order to address these discrepancies before society sets the tone for future opportunities and experiences of insecurity based on socioeconomic background.

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