An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma Resolution by Student Affairs Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This two-phase, sequential mixed methods study explored how student affairs professionals resolved professional ethical dilemmas. A student affairs professional was defined as an individual whose educational background and work experience are in student affairs. An ethical dilemma is defined as a situation in which two ethical principles are at odds rather than a simple matter of right versus wrong (Kitchener, 1985). A professional ethical dilemma is an ethical dilemma in the context of a person’s work-related experience.

The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of how representatives of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) resolve professional ethical dilemmas. Data were collected by interviewing the representatives.

The second phase of this study was confirmatory. An online questionnaire was designed and administered to members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) who held positions similar to those held by participants in the phase one sample. The questionnaire was designed to confirm the findings from phase one about ethical dilemma resolution.

The study found that despite the complexity of ethical dilemmas in terms of the multiple ethical issues involved and the multiple roles they play in these dilemmas, student affairs professionals use a relatively simple resolution process of serious reflection and engaging others such as colleagues and university representatives to understand the implications of the dilemma and its resolution so that they can weigh the
considerations pertaining to themselves and the wider organization within the context of the ethical principles involved in that dilemma and make a decision that they believe is ethical.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma Resolution by Student Affairs Professionals

The challenge to make ethical decisions faces professionals in every setting. There is no shortage of reports in the media about individuals failing that challenge. The business and government sectors earn negative press with the news of a federal investigation of a prominent lending institution and flagrant examples of fraud (Ex-Dynegy staff charged with fraud, 2003; U. S. attorney probes Freddie Mac, 2003). A state attorney general is forced to resign her position because she used her position to garner special treatment by the police for her boyfriend (State attorney general resigns over ethics violation, 2006). The crisis of ethics is not limited, however, to the corporate world and government.

In the world of higher education, observers note a similar trend towards unethical decision making across many sectors of the higher education enterprise. Some of these incidents involve professional schools. The Stanford University Medical Center adopts much stricter guidelines pertaining to physicians’ dealings with pharmaceutical companies to address issues of potential ethical violations (Mangan, 2006a). A recent survey of M.B.A. students finds that 56% of the respondents admit to cheating (Mangan, 2006b). In addition, unethical decision making has been documented in other areas of higher education. Faculty members conducting research are also coming under fire. There is an alarming increase in allegations of researcher misconduct to the Department of Health and Human Services (Langlais, 2006). Graduate students tell of faculty advisors who pressured them to break rules of ethical research practice such as ignoring
contradictory data (Langlais, 2006). Even the design of some research methods has raised ethical issues. One example can be found in the field of ethnography (Nathan, 2005; Patton, 2002). This research methodology often involves the researcher going “under cover” to study subjects. Whether the potential contribution to knowledge conflicts with and is more important than the research subjects’ right to know that they are being studied is an ethical conflict (Patton, 2002).

Many incidents of unethical conduct by people employed by colleges and universities are also reported. College faculty and administrators are removed or leave amidst charges of inappropriate use of institutional resources and position (Ashburn, 2006; Basinger, Evelyn, & Mangan, 2003; Foster, 2003; June, 2003; Pulley, 2003). A university president, for example, spends almost $500,000 for improvements to his residence without authorization (Pulley, 2003). A community college system terminates its president with charges of nepotism and the inability to fulfill his responsibilities while under investigation for alleged wrongdoings (Ashburn, 2006).

Students themselves are also a part of this alarming propensity towards unethical decision making. An effect of the Enron and WorldCom scandals is that M.B.A. students indicate that they would leave their job before they would fight over making ethical decisions (Mangan, 2002). Numerous accounts of coaches making unethical decisions coincide with student athletes being found guilty of similar transgressions (Former UConn defensive back pleads guilty to larceny, 2006; Wolverton, 2006). The prevalence of cheating is found not only in professional schools but also at the undergraduate and high school levels of education (Educational Testing Service, 1999; Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2002). Scholars and researchers justifiably ask what impact unethical decision
making might have on future corporate presidents, government leaders, educators, and researchers (Langlais, 2006).

Future corporate presidents, government leaders, educators, and researchers are often students enrolled at universities and colleges. While college presidents, professors, and coaches garner much of the spotlight for unethical decision making, the challenge to make ethical decisions is also important for student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals work in such areas as judicial affairs and residential life and have frequent contact with students. Student affairs professionals work with students’ academic and non-academic college experiences, often through a relationship that involves daily or ongoing interaction. By virtue of their positions within an institution’s community, student affairs professionals serve as role models both for their colleagues and their students (American College Personnel Association, 1993; Winston, Jr., Creamer, & Miller, 2001; Young, 2001). Their day-to-day responsibilities call them to guide the student, unit, and university in matters of ethical decision making (Winston, Jr., Creamer, & Miller, 2001; Young, 2001). As a result, student affairs professionals have the potential to greatly influence students, either positively or negatively.

With the vast attention given to the ethical transgressions from the boardroom to the classroom, there is a search for answers. Many people are unfamiliar with the field of ethics and turn to those who have studied ethics both in theory and in practice. As society becomes more complex and diverse, ethicists recognize the increasing interest in their field and strive to help professionals understand the role of ethics in their lives (Kitchener, 2000; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).
Kitchener (2000) provides a good starting point for examining ethical decision making by defining ethics as “a branch of philosophy that addresses questions of how people ought to act toward each other, that pronounces judgments of value about actions … and that develops rules of ethical justification” (p. 3). She adds that ethics comes into play when professionals are “faced with deciding between competing moral obligations or between competing claims about what is ‘right’” (p. 2). One manner in which individuals can support ethical conduct is to develop a code of ethics that can support a professional’s efforts to make ethical decisions. Professionals should thoughtfully identify their personal values to inform the development of such a code of ethics (Kitchener, 2000; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). However, personal ethics alone will not always provide the basis for a decision that is ethically defensible (Kitchener, 2000). Ethicists suggest that professionals follow a hierarchical sequence of ethical reasoning that builds upon their personal values (Kitchener, 2000; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

When faced with an ethical problem, the first line of defense for professionals is their professional standards or code of conduct (Kitchener, 2000; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). An attorney can refer to the “Model Rules of Professional Conduct” provided by the American Bar Association (2006). Medical practitioners have the AMA Medical Code of Ethics that is provided by the American Medical Association (2001). The two leading student affairs organizations provide professional codes of conduct that address the issue of ethical decision making for professionals in the field of student affairs (American College Personnel Association, 1993; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1999).
The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) gives its members the *NASPA Standards of Professional Practice* (1999) to guide them in their efforts to make ethical decisions (Appendix A). The document is an overview of how NASPA expects its members to conduct themselves in their professional roles (Janosik, Creamer, Hirt, Winston, Saunders, & Cooper, 2003).

While the *NASPA Standards of Professional Practice* is broad and has an institutional perspective, the professional code presented by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) is more extensive and puts the emphasis on the individual member (Janosik et al., 2003) (Appendix B). The *ACPA Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards* provides its members with a detailed set of standards by which they can live their professional lives. To make it user-friendly, the ACPA statement is organized into four categories. These categories are the profession, students, institution, and society (Hotelling, 1990). The ACPA statement serves members by providing guidance on what to do if a member has a concern about the ethics of a particular action or situation. The *ACPA Statement* recommends that the member first speak to the person involved, then turn to the institution for assistance, and, if necessary, then consult the organization (American College Personnel Association, 1993).

The *NASPA Standards of Professional Practice* and the *ACPA Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards* can help student affairs professionals resolve their ethical questions (Evans, 2001; Hotelling, 1990; Upcraft & Poole, 1991). However, there are times when these professional codes do not provide the guidance a member seeks (Kitchener, 2000). While a review of the codes for student affairs professionals reveals an effort to state expectations simply and clearly, individuals seeking specific guidance from
the codes may not find the language in the code useful. For example, the *NASPA Standards* states the importance of treating people with “equal consideration” (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1999). On the other hand, the *ACPA Statement* uses the word “equity” rather than “equal” in its statement of how people are to be treated (American College Personnel Association, 1993). The ACPA code even goes so far as to state, “When there are greater needs than resources available or when the interests of constituencies conflict, justice requires honest consideration of all claims and requests and equitable (*not necessarily equal*) (emphasis added) distribution of goods and services” (American College Personnel Association, 1993, p.90). Student affairs professionals comparing the NASPA and ACPA codes could be confused if they are seeking specific direction on the fair treatment of others.

One way student affairs practitioners can be assured they are making ethical decisions is to be knowledgeable about broader ethical principles, especially if and when professional codes and standards fall short (Hotelling, 1990; Kitchener, 1985 Kitchener, 2000; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003). To educate practitioners on broader ethical concepts, the *ACPA Statement* provides a brief overview of ethical principles (American College Personnel Association, 1993; Hotelling, 1990; Kitchener, 1985; Kitchener, 2000). These concepts provide background and context for professionals making decisions. There are five ethical principles with which student affairs professionals should be familiar.

The first two ethical principles that practitioners ought to know are beneficence and nonmaleficence. Beneficence refers to the concept of “benefiting others” (Kitchener, 1985, p. 22) and nonmaleficence refers to the concept of “doing no harm” (Kitchener, 1985, p. 21). Beneficence and nonmaleficence can be thought of as the yin and yang of
acting responsibly (K. S. Kitchener, personal communication, April 12, 2003). Rather
than using technical terminology of ethicists, the *ACPA Statement* states that its members
should “act to benefit others” and “do no harm” (American College Personnel
Association, 1993, p.90). It goes further to state that the principle of benefiting others is
the primary value of the profession (American College Personnel Association, 1993).

The third ethical principle that student affairs professionals need to understand is
fidelity. This principle addresses “loyalty, truthfulness, (and) promise keeping”
(Kitchener, 1985, p. 25). Fidelity involves people being able to have confidence in one
another or earning another’s confidence (Humphrey, Janosik, & Creamer, 2004). The
*ACPA Statement* simply states that its members need to “be faithful” (American College
Personnel Association, 1993, p. 90). The document also uses the words “truthful,”
“honor,” and “trustworthy” as part of its statement regarding fidelity (American College

The fourth ethical principle that student affairs professionals should know is
autonomy. Kitchener (1985) describes autonomy as the principle that involves respecting
the rights of the individual, including a person’s freedom of thought and choice. The
principle of autonomy calls upon student affairs professionals to respect and prioritize an
individual’s rights (Humphrey et al., 2004). According to the *ACPA Statement*,
practitioners must “respect autonomy” (American College Personnel Association, 1993,
p. 90). Student affairs professionals should recognize students’ freedom to choose and act
as long as such choices do not threaten or harm others (American College Personnel
Association, 1993).
The fifth ethical principle important for student affairs professionals to understand is justice. Justice pertains to “treating equals equally and unequals unequally but in proportion to their relevant differences” (Kitchener, 2000, p. 30). This principle guides student affairs professionals to treat people fairly and impartially (Humphrey et al., 2004). The *ACPA Statement* directs its members to “promote justice” (American College Personnel Association, 1993, p. 90). The document has more detail about this ethical principle than any of the other principles. The value of equity and diversity are presented as important aspects of the ethical principle of justice (American College Personnel Association, 1993).

The NASPA and ACPA professional codes provide members with very important information about expectations for ethical decision making. However, Winston (2001) found that many practitioners are either unaware of these codes of conduct and/or do not employ them. Questions have been raised as to whether the concepts and/or the language of these codes are creating obstacles to student affairs professionals being able to successfully use the codes (Winston, Jr., 2001).

The charge to make ethical decisions can be a challenging one for student affairs professionals. Practitioners report a need to make decisions in situations involving a range of ethical principles and circumstances. Janosik, Creamer, and Humphrey (2004) found that many cases of unethical decision making reported by student affairs professionals involve the principle of justice (treating people unfairly or unequally). One example involves a residence hall director spending time outside of the workplace with several resident advisors (Janosik et al., 2004). The resident advisors not included in these activities could feel uncomfortable or unfairly treated. The practitioner’s decision to
spend time with a select few could be considered unethical by violating the principle of justice.

Other reported ethical challenges for practitioners involve questions of how to help others and still uphold the principle of fidelity (Janosik et al., 2004). It is not unusual for student affairs professionals to acquire information about colleagues or students to which they are not sure how to respond. For example, a co-worker may admit to a colleague that she has a substance abuse problem and the colleague has concerns about how to help or whom to tell (Janosik et al., 2004). If the professional is faithful to the co-worker and keeps her confidence, then the co-worker’s health may suffer serious consequences. But if the colleague shares this information with a supervisor, then the colleague has not followed the ethical principle of fidelity to the co-worker.

For student affairs professionals, however, the challenge is that their work with students and colleagues places them at the epicenter of today’s ethical crises. The challenge is further exacerbated by the fact that often the decisions are frequently more complex than a simple “right versus wrong” (Benjamin, 2006; Humphrey et al., 2004). An example of a “right versus wrong” ethical situation is when a student is caught cheating on a calculus exam. Justice is the only ethical principle at stake here and to be fair to all the students in the class, the professor should hold the cheating student accountable for his or her action. However, individuals often face situations that are more complex and difficult than catching a student cheating on an exam. Consider a situation in which a student asks a professor to delay taking the final exam because he just learned that his father has been diagnosed with cancer. The professor may wonder if the student deserves special consideration or if such treatment would be unfair to the other students.
The desire to employ the ethical principle of nonmaleficence (“do no harm”) competes with the equally strong desire to respect the ethical principle of justice (“treat people fairly”). In this example, there are no clear-cut choices. Rather, such a scenario creates an ethical dilemma in which two possible courses of action compete and making an ethical decision requires a search to identify (and follow) the path of greater good (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2002; Kitchener, 1985). Recognizing the complexity of balancing competing ethical interests increases the appreciation for difficulties facing today’s student affairs professionals to make ethical decisions.

Ethical dilemmas are a fact of life for student affairs professionals. For example, practitioners are often privy to confidential information about a student. A student confesses to a hall director that he cheated on a test. An under-aged student does not want a dean of students to report the fact that she has been drinking. Such situations pit the ethical principle of fidelity (the student being able to trust that a confidence will be protected) against the ethical principle of justice (if the information concerns a violation of university rules). The student affairs professional is challenged to decide which ethical principle to uphold.

Another type of ethical dilemma reported by student affairs practitioners involves competing loyalties (Janosik et al., 2004). A student affairs professional expresses concern about not knowing when to tell a supervisor that she is job searching (Janosik et al., 2004). The employee must weigh the ethical principle of fidelity to self against the principle of fidelity (loyalty) to her employer and institution. Such an ethical dilemma might not have a resolution that will be entirely satisfactory (Kitchener, 2000).
Student affairs professionals serve as their institution’s moral compass (Kitchener, 1985; Winston, Jr., Creamer, & Miller, 2001; Young, 2001). This role accentuates the importance of resolving situations ethically. Because professional codes are not a panacea for resolving ethical dilemmas, it is crucial for practitioners to be knowledgeable about the ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, autonomy, and fidelity (American College Personnel Association, 1992; Kitchener, 1985; Kitchener, 2000). However, many student affairs professionals are unaware of these ethical principles or have difficulty applying them in the world of student affairs (Lampkin & Gibson, 1999; Upcraft & Poole, 1991). For assistance, professionals should look to the work of several practitioners and researchers for additional suggestions and insights concerning ethical decision making.

Nash (1997), for example, discusses his experience of teaching ethics to graduate students studying to be student affairs practitioners. He uses a case study method to give his students practice at applying ethics theory to a real-world situation (Nash, 1997). Students must answer a series of 10 questions that identify the major moral themes, explore background beliefs that should be considered and, ultimately, come to a defensible decision (Nash, 1997). Nash’s goal is to help student affairs practitioners understand the complexity and importance of resolving in an ethical manner the dilemmas that await them in their chosen profession (Nash, 1997).

Benjamin (2006) shares the belief that new student affairs professionals need guidance in making ethical decisions. The author recognizes that new professionals may have had some exposure to ethics in their program of study (Benjamin, 2006). However, Benjamin argues that new professionals may be close in age to the students with whom
they are working (Benjamin, 2006). As a result, there are likely to be possible ethical dilemmas such as students asking the professionals out on a date or to join a group of students at a weekend party. To address ethical problems that might arise, Benjamin (2006) suggests that student affairs professionals speak directly to the person about whose actions they are concerned. Another step all practitioners can take is to include exercises in resolving ethical dilemmas in their professional development training (Benjamin, 2006).

Adding to the belief that student affairs professionals benefit from assistance with ethical decision making, Humphrey et al. (2004) offer a model to inform and guide student affairs professionals in making ethical decisions. The authors suggest that practitioners can make ethical decisions by following a process that incorporates ethical principles, character traits (e.g. respect and caring), and professional values (e.g. service and community) (Humphrey et al., 2004). Rather than having student affairs professionals feel that they are tied to only one way of thinking and handling complex situations, the model describes the integrated nature of ethical principles, character, and professional values to provide student affairs professionals with sound options in responding to and making decisions that are ethical (Humphrey et al., 2004).

While there are several sources of help for student affairs professionals to resolve ethical dilemmas, there is still more to learn. This study aims to advance knowledge and strengthen practice in the student affairs field. Practitioners find the professional standards difficult to use (Winston, Jr., 2001), limited research on ethics in student affairs is conducted, and reports continue to be made that highlight unethical decision making in higher education and society overall. The call for research that directly informs practice
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has already been sounded (Kezar, 2000). In addition, results of this study build on the previous work of Janosik et al. (2004) and Humphrey et al. (2004) to answer the specific question of how student affairs professionals resolve ethical dilemmas in practice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study was to explore how student affairs professionals resolve professional ethical dilemmas. The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of how student affairs professionals resolve professional ethical dilemmas. Due to the exploratory nature of phase one, it was important to use a purposeful sample that would provide rich data. Therefore, data were collected by interviewing 18 representatives of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). In 1979, CAS began its promotion of standards to guide student affairs practitioners on student development, learning, and achievement (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, n.d.). CAS is comprised of 37 member organizations representing more than 100,000 professionals. CAS has developed standards for 34 different functional areas in student affairs including academic advising, student leadership programs, and distance education programs. Each functional area’s standards include a discussion of the ethical considerations for that area. As a result, CAS members are familiar with and engaged in the topic of ethical dilemma resolution.

The second phase of this study was confirmatory. A survey was designed to confirm data collected in the phase one interviews. The survey was administered electronically to members of a professional student affairs organization. Due to the confirmatory nature of phase two, a random sample of a related population was used.
Survey respondents were selected from NASPA members with professional titles comparable to the titles of participants in the phase one interviews.

Research Questions

The research design had two phases. The research questions were the same for both phases since the second phase was designed to confirm the data collected in the first phase of the study. The research questions were:

1. What kinds of ethical dilemmas do participants describe (e.g., who is involved, what are the circumstances, what are the possible outcomes)?
2. How do participants resolve their ethical dilemmas?
3. What considerations do participants think about when resolving their dilemmas?

Significance of the Study

It is critical that higher education research provide insight and new knowledge that is tied to practice (Kezar, 2000). This study was designed to satisfy that criterion in part by exploring the professional experiences of student affairs professionals where ethical dilemmas are both unavoidable and not going away any time soon (Young, 2001). Just as society continues to struggle with ethical dilemmas, so, too, will student affairs professionals. Consequently, this study was significant in its potential to better inform the day-to-day practice of student affairs professionals in the resolution of ethical dilemmas.

Limitations

As in any study, this research had its limitations. The limitations primarily concerned the method, the participants, and the focus of the study.

The first phase of the study used an interview conducted by phone. On the one hand, this technique allowed me greater access to participants than might have been
possible if the interviews were conducted in person. In-person interviews would have required more funding, more time, travel, missed work for the researcher, and less flexibility in scheduling. Interviews by phone also increased the sense of anonymity because the participant and I were not face-to-face. However, interviewing by phone took away my ability to witness the body language of the participant, which might have given additional data for the study. This method meant I could only use the participants’ words as data.

The second phase of the study used an online survey. Survey research has inherent limitations. For example, I strove to design a survey that was long enough to serve the purpose of confirming the first phase of the study yet was short enough to encourage respondents to complete the survey. The trade off to this approach was that I probably did not collect all the data I might have with a more extensive survey. The online survey also did not allow me to ask participants questions to clarify or serve as a member check. Therefore the credibility of the second phase was limited.

Also limiting this study was the choice of participants for both phases. The first phase required student affairs professionals knowledgeable about ethics in student affairs. For that reason, members of CAS were chosen. Only 37 individuals serve in this capacity. These individuals, however, are invested in the issue of ethics and student affairs administration so I traded quantity for quality in the first phase sample.

For the second phase, use of an online survey resulted in limiting the number of participants. Only student affairs professionals with computer and Internet access (both for initial email contact and the actual survey) could participate. While many practitioners have this access, there are still student affairs professionals that do not.
An additional limitation of the study is its focus on the study of ethical dilemma resolution. Various studies suggest that there is a lack of knowledge in this area by student affairs professionals (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Janosik et al., 2004). Consequently, respondents were not fully informed of the vocabulary or conceptual frameworks associated with ethical decision making. There was a need for me to refrain from filling in gaps in knowledge yet try to confirm a base level of knowledge of concepts and terminology by participants. This possible gap between participants and me could have limited the findings of the study.

The topic of ethical dilemma resolution is context specific. Consequently, data collected were limited to the specific ethical dilemmas provided by the participants. Another study with different participants could yield different dilemmas and different findings. With these limitations in mind, data from this study was still able to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals.

Organization of the Study

This study was comprised of five components. The first two components of the study set the foundation. The first component was the introduction of the study. Included in this section were the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, and the organization of the study. The second component provided a review of literature pertaining to research and practice relevant to ethical dilemma resolution.
The third component presented the method used in this study. Being a two-phase, mixed methods research design, there were two samples to discuss. The third component also looked at the data collection procedure and data analysis used for each phase.

The fourth component of this study examined the findings of the research. This section presented those findings by phase and by theme as related to the research questions. The overarching proposition was also discussed.

The fifth component of this study provided a thorough discussion of the findings of the study. The implications for future practice and research were also presented.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study was designed to examine how student affairs professionals resolve ethical dilemmas. An important step in research is to review relevant literature. Two critical issues were involved in determining which literature to be relevant to this study.

The first important issue was the fact that the term “ethical dilemma” was often misused. Many authors used this term when describing situations in which a person was challenged to make a choice between an ethical path and an unethical path (right versus wrong). According to ethicists, this is not an ethical dilemma. Just because circumstances might make selection of the ethical path difficult, that fact alone does not make it an ethical dilemma per se. Rather, an ethical dilemma is a situation that involved the challenge of choosing between the greater good of two ethical paths. Literature had to be evaluated as to whether it truly involved ethical dilemmas or not.

The second critical issue involving the selection of literature relevant for this study was that much of the work about ethical dilemmas did not explore the resolution of ethical dilemmas. Instead, authors examined such things as contributing factors to ethical dilemmas and descriptions of situation or profession-specific ethical dilemmas. As a result, the literature review provided more of a background for this study of ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals rather than directly informing the focus of the study.

With these two issues taken into account, the result was a relatively small amount of relevant literature to review. Discussion of the relevant literature was organized into
two areas of interest. The first area of interest pertained to ethical dilemmas and their resolution in non-higher education professions. Specifically the professions of medicine, health care (including social work), law, and business were studied. The second area of interest was literature about resolution of ethical dilemmas in higher education. Within the higher education field, the focus of the literature review narrowed to the specific topic of ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals. I reviewed both literature from a theoretical perspective and a research perspective for each area.

Ethical Dilemma Resolution in Non-higher Education Professions

I began the literature review for this study by using a broad lens. I first examined relevant theory and research in the professions of medicine, health care, law, and business. This approach recognized the attention given these professions in the discussion of ethical decision making. These professions have also existed for many more years than the student affairs profession. As a result, there were more opportunities for questions and experiences to stimulate relevant research and theory to review.

Within this area of interest, the very nature of the available literature supported consideration of three of these professions together. Medical professionals (e.g., doctors and nurses) and health care providers (including social workers and psychologists) dealt directly and indirectly with local, state, and federal laws in their daily practice. Lawyers represented individual health care providers as well as hospitals in many situations. The prevalence of this professional interaction and the resulting relationships contributed to the majority of reviewed literature.
I also examined literature concerning business professions in a separate section of this area of interest. Auditors, financial advisors, and compliance managers were the subjects of research that was reviewed.

*Ethical Dilemma Resolution Theory from the Fields of Medicine, Health Care, and Law*

Within the medical, health care, and legal professions, there were two primary contributors to the literature regarding ethical dilemma resolution theory. Beauchamp and Childress (1983) studied ethical dilemmas and their resolution in the field of biomedicine. Kitchener (2000) built upon Beauchamp’s and Childress’ work to inform her colleagues in psychology about ethical dilemma resolution. Authors who examined ethical dilemma resolution by health lawyers also provided literature to review for this study.

*Biomedicine and ethical dilemma resolution theory.* Beauchamp and Childress (1983) provided an understandable definition of ethics as the “systematic examination of moral life…designed to illuminate what we ought to do by asking us to consider and reconsider our ordinary actions, judgments, and justifications” (p. xii). The authors also warned that “sometimes the answers cannot be as tidy as we might wish” (p. xii). They viewed an ethical dilemma as a situation in which “reasons on each side of the problem are weighty ones and none is in any obvious way the right set of reasons” (p. 4).

Practitioners were then given a conceptual, four step model to resolve ethical dilemmas (Beauchamp & Childress, 1983). The steps involved progressively more complex levels of reasoning. First, a person might initially make a judgment or decision as to what action will be taken. To justify a decision, a practitioner should then take the second step and examine the rules or code of the profession. If the professional code
proved inadequate, as a third step a practitioner should then turn to ethical principles that can provide a broader foundation for a decision. The fourth and final step a practitioner can take to guide the resolution of an ethical dilemma would be to consider ethical theories. Ethical theories are generally defined as a body of related rules and principles such as utilitarian theory.

Beauchamp and Childress (1983) did not suggest that this conceptual model was the end of the discussion. Rather, they offered the model to support efforts to bring some sense of “order and coherence to the discussion of these problems” (p. ix). With that thought in mind, practitioners need to be mindful of the limits of the model.

Beauchamp and Childress (1983) cautioned biomedical professionals that disagreements about ethical dilemma resolution can sometimes be based on different understandings of the basic facts involved at the first step of the model. The challenge to reach consensus is further complicated by the multifaceted backgrounds and beliefs of the participants. They suggested practitioners should approach a situation with an appreciation of the various factors pertaining to both the circumstances and the stakeholders.

A concern about the second step of the model is that professional codes do not offer all the answers (Beauchamp & Childress, 1983). Professionals should realize that merely following a code of standards does not relieve them of the responsibility to make ethical decisions. They must be engaged in their practice and consider the model especially when the codes are lacking.

Another limit of the model is that ethical principles are not absolute (Beauchamp & Childress, 1983). The authors suggested that ethical principles might have different
weights but that the weight of an ethical principle can depend on the situation. They offered the case of medical and health care providers considering whether a patient should live at home or in an assisted living facility. In such a situation, autonomy does not always take precedence over beneficence. Just because a patient appears autonomous, that ethical principle should not automatically override the ethical principle of beneficence. Practitioners must consider both the risk and the benefit of following each ethical principle by gathering as much information as possible. Such factors as the current and future state of health, the safeguards in place for each option to protect the well-being of the patient, and the impact (financial, psychological, and physical) of each option must be taken into account. For some patients, autonomy might be the better choice while for other patients beneficence might be the better choice. The authors maintained that ethical dilemma resolution cannot be distilled to a pre-determined scoring system. Instead, resolution of ethical dilemmas required thoughtful, systematic consideration of the situation, the stakeholders, and the ethical principles involved.

Beauchamp and Childress (1983) offered a series of discussions in which each ethical principle was highlighted and considered in various practice-based situations. For instance, a close examination of the ethical principle of justice included the consideration of fairness, distributive justice, comparative justice, and diversity. The authors contended that justice has a number of theoretical bases. Furthermore, they suggested that recognition of the diversity of life required an effort to employ any and all aspects of the different theories that applied to a given situation. For instance, a very common ethical dilemma in biomedicine involved research on diseases. Some patients might be given a test drug that other patients might be denied due to the expense of the test drug. In such a
case, distributive justice suggested that it was unethical to withhold the test drug. Comparative justice suggested that in the case of scarce resources the decision to withhold the test drug was not unethical. Biomedical practitioners and policy makers need to recognize the different theories and push to bridge the gaps between the theories to identify a course of action that is ethically defensible.

Beauchamp and Childress (1983) contributed to the relevant literature for this study by providing understandable discussion of ethical dilemma resolution theory. Their model was a foundation that organized the various levels of reasoning involved in ethical dilemma resolution. From the model, practitioners were guided through an examination of the ethical principles and real-world situations involving the various principles.

Through thought-provoking presentation of ethical dilemmas and possible ways to resolve them, Beauchamp and Childress (1983) raised awareness and appreciation of the challenges facing biomedical practitioners to be ethical. However, they refrained from presenting ethical dilemma resolution in concrete terms. Rather, they offered more than one side to various ethical dilemmas. The authors then posed questions and concepts to facilitate discussion by biomedical practitioners about ethical dilemma resolution. This approach reiterated the need for other professions as well as individual practitioners to engage in this important topic. Psychology was one of the professions to also study ethical dilemma resolution.

*Psychology and ethical dilemma resolution theory.* Kitchener (2000) took up the challenge offered by Beauchamp and Childress (1983) by exploring the issues of ethics in the profession of psychology. Extensive discussion of professional codes, ethical principles, and their implications in daily practice reiterated much of Beauchamp and
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Childress’ work. The significance of Kitchener’s work was that it was set in the professional context of psychology.

To resolve ethical dilemmas in psychology, Kitchener (2000) used Beauchamp and Childress’ (1983) model. First, the author discussed the role of the code of professional standards by the American Psychological Association (APA). Kitchener expressed concern that psychologists often have minimal knowledge about their professional code. The author suggested that colleagues should become more familiar with the code.

A very important strength of Kitchener’s (2000) work is that she also advised practitioners to appreciate the limits of their professional code (Upcraft & Poole, 1991). These limitations included the restrictive, detailed language and the various stakeholders that influenced its contents. For example, concerns of possible litigation and desires to enhance the profession were possible motivators for parts of the code.

Another critical limitation of any professional code is that codes cannot cover all situations (Kitchener, 2000). Following the model of Beauchamp and Childress (1983), psychologists were advised to refer to ethical principles as their next line of defense in resolving ethical dilemmas. Kitchener (2000) provided useful discussion about each ethical principle. For example, beneficence was carefully examined. Psychologists learned that there were two practical aspects to this ethical principle. First, beneficence meant psychologists must take good care of their patients, keeping their best interests a major consideration. Second, beneficence required psychologists to be vigilant about balancing the possible positive result of a treatment decision with the possible negative result of a treatment decision. For example, institutional research boards must balance the
value of the research versus the possible harm to a participating patient. With each ethical
principle, psychologists gained practice-based illustrations of how that principle could be
involved in their daily work.

Kitchener (2000) addressed the challenge of ethical dilemma resolution by
exploring three approaches. The first approach was to consider some ethical principles as
absolute. That is, such principles were to be followed regardless of the situation or
circumstances. The second approach to ethical dilemma resolution was to believe that
ethics were defined by the individual, not a pre-conceived principle. People, not
principles, determined the correct decision. The third approach to resolving ethical
dilemmas was to view principles as prima facie. Prima facie in this context meant that
principles were always relevant and should not be denied unless careful reflection
identified an ethically stronger principle or duty. The author suggested that viewing
ethical principles as prima facie was the appropriate approach for psychologists
(Kitchener, 2000). With this approach, professionals could be very intentional in their
consideration of the circumstances of the situation and the intended and potential
unintended consequences of each principle’s path. The practitioner should strive to
balance the pros and cons of each principle. If one principle appears to have more weight
in a given circumstance, that fact should guide the choice to be made. For example, some
might argue that truth should always come first. But if telling the truth could cause great
harm (such as a professional revealing the location of an abuse victim to a spouse) then
the weight of doing no harm requires the professional to not provide the victim’s location
(Kitchener, 2000).
While the concepts of balance and weight provided more tools for ethical dilemma resolution, Kitchener (2000) maintained that there was still likelihood that some ethical dilemmas might not be resolvable. Circumstances might be too complicated or not completely known by the professional. Kitchener (2000) did, however, provide colleagues with a theoretical plan to employ when faced with ethical dilemmas. Practitioners should be reflective, gather all information that is available, and consider all options (Kitchener, 2000). They should review the APA Code and, if necessary, consider applicable ethical principles. Kitchener (2000) also recommended that practitioners confer with colleagues. The decision should be based on a thoughtful process that included use of ethical principles so that the psychologist could defend that decision. The author reiterated Beauchamp and Childress’ (1983) work as a way to warn that colleagues must recognize the possibility that there is not one path (ethical principle) that is clearly better than the other (Kitchener, 2000). Kitchener (2000) emphasized the complexity of ethical practice, research, and teaching of psychology. But the author also provided practitioners with examples of how ethical dilemmas might be resolved in their field through the employment of codes and ethical principles (Kitchener, 2000).

While Beauchamp and Childress (1983) and Kitchener (2000) made notable contributions to the theoretical study of ethical dilemma resolution in biomedicine and psychology, professionals in other fields of medicine, health care, and law had another source of relevant literature. The health lawyer serves as a prime example of the intersection between the medical, health care, and legal professions. Within this profession, ethical dilemmas faced by members of all three professions were examined in the literature.
Health law and ethical dilemma resolution theory. The discussion of ethical dilemma resolution by health lawyers used a very pragmatic approach. Practitioners were advised to examine other professional codes if the standards of their profession were inadequate (Krause & Saver, 2004; Parsons, 2001). Health lawyers were also cautioned to know as much as they could about the health field they represented (Krause & Saver, 2004; Schwartz, 2006). At the same time they needed to adhere to the law (Krause & Saver, 2004; Parsons, 2001), health lawyers were warned not to do so blindly and thus oversimplify the real world challenges they faced (Parsons, 2001; Schwartz, 2006).

The examples of ethical dilemmas usually involved health concerns versus legal obligations (Parsons, 2001; Schwartz, 2006). Schwartz (2006) outlined one scenario where a doctor faced the choice of treating an illegal immigrant or reporting the patient to the authorities. The ethical principle of “do no harm” (nonmaleficence) conflicted with the ethical principle of justice. The question was how the health lawyer should advise the physician. Should the lawyer have restricted the discussion to only legal options or should there have been a consideration of the values connected with nonmaleficence? Furthermore, there were serious consequences attached to either path that was chosen. Treating the patient could have sent the physician to prison. Turning in the illegal immigrant could have caused suffering and even death for the patient. Consequently, the scenario accurately examined an ethical dilemma.

However, there were scenarios presented that were not ethical dilemmas, but rather challenges between being ethical or unethical. For instance, practitioners that served on their hospitals’ research review boards were prime candidates for ethical challenges (Krause & Saver, 2004). The authors suggested that health lawyers might be
torn between their role as protector of the hospital’s legal affairs and their role as advocate for patients’ rights. It was not, however, an ethical dilemma if the hospital wanted the lawyer to make a decision that placed the hospital’s financial ambitions over patient care. It might have been a difficult situation, but it was not an ethical dilemma.

The mixture of ethical dilemmas and ethical challenges weakened the value of this literature. Furthermore, the authors did not provide many insights into ethical dilemma resolution by health lawyers. Schwartz (2006) posed many questions but did not give any direction to the health lawyer. Krause and Saver (2004) discussed the different arguments for various issues such as providing clients with both legal and illegal but not ethical options. Parsons (2001) suggested that health care practitioners should confer with their lawyers and colleagues. The primary contribution of this literature to the study was a rich appreciation of the complexity and difficulty facing the ethical health lawyer and the gap in theoretical literature about ethical dilemma resolution in this field.

Medicine, Health Care, and Law Ethical Dilemma Resolution Research

Literature about research into ethical dilemma resolution in the medical, health care, and legal professions was very limited. Healy (2003) interviewed social workers to examine their experiences in making treatment decisions for their clients. The ethical dilemma often presented itself as a choice between beneficence and autonomy. For example, the social worker had to weigh concerns about the clients’ care (beneficence) against the clients’ right to live at home (autonomy).

Interviewees reported three factors that made these situations more complicated (Healy, 2003). The first factor that added to the social workers’ concerns was the inability to always identify with certainty the current and future medical condition of the client,
such as the person’s level of cognitive abilities. Secondly, social workers reported that demands of other professions contributed to the challenge of resolving ethical dilemmas. Interviewees reported the prevalence of medical and legal staff to choose beneficence in the form of safety over autonomy in the form of client independence. The third factor complicating social workers’ practice was that the limit of their medical expertise and the pressure by other professions resulted in social workers questioning their decisions. But they also reported that if they came to the same conclusion after additional reflection, then they often took a stand for that decision.

Healy (2003) concluded from this qualitative study that practitioners needed to be very knowledgeable in the areas of physical and mental health. Social workers also needed to appreciate the interrelationships between physical and mental health care. At the same time, practitioners had to be willing to serve their clients’ best interests even if that caused dissension with other professionals. Social workers were encouraged to take the lead in bringing ethics into consideration when client care decisions were being made.

The medical, health care, and law professions explored ethical dilemma resolution in theory and through research. The business profession also offered limited literature related to these topics. Rather than theoretical work, this literature was research-based. 

Business Ethical Dilemma Resolution Research

With as much attention as the business profession has garnered in the popular press about ethics, it was interesting to see the small amount of research being conducted to inform this issue. One of the primary studies relevant to this topic involved auditors. Financial advisors and compliance managers were involved in a second study.
Auditors and ethical dilemma resolution research. Interest in developing an international professional code for auditors prompted an exploratory study of 195 European auditors to investigate resolution of ethical dilemmas (Arnold, Sr., Bernardi, Neidermeyer, & Schmee, 2005). A scenario was presented to the participants in which auditors acquired information during an audit about one client that would negatively impact another client and other stakeholders. The participants had to resolve the dilemma of maintaining confidentiality (fidelity) versus informing other stakeholders (beneficence). The study examined both the decision itself and the reasoning used by participants to reach that decision.

Arnold, Sr. et al. (2005) found that professionals in six of the seven Western European countries did not differ significantly in their expectations that beneficence would be chosen over fidelity. Auditors reported that they would use information gained from the first audit to develop and justify the negative audit of another client. The researchers discovered, however, that the auditors varied in how they reached this decision. Researchers used a model of moral reasoning developed by Rest (as cited in Arnold Sr. et al., 2005). Participants from three of the countries used the most developed stages (Stage 5 and Stage 6) of moral reasoning to reach their decision. These stages included consideration of the bigger picture of other stakeholders’ well-being and the question of fairness to those stakeholders if the confidentiality was kept. Respondents from three other countries did not use Stages 5 and 6 to a significant degree in their decision making process. Participants from one country employed Stages 5 and 6 only minimally.
The findings of this study were significant for efforts to develop an international code of professional standards for auditors (Arnold, Sr. et al., 2005). The existing professional code emphasized the importance of respecting confidentiality. At the same time, the authors suggested that auditors had a duty to serve all stakeholders, not just their clients. Participants were in general consensus as to the choice of beneficence rather than confidentiality, but there was no consensus on the reasoning used to come to that decision. Those interested in developing professional standards seeking to build on the results of this study would be challenged to address the topic of confidentiality in a manner that resonated with such a diverse group of rationales. Being an exploratory study, the researchers did not provide answers to this quandary but rather suggested need for more study.

Financial advisors and compliance managers ethical dilemma resolution research. An ongoing study is also examining ethical dilemma resolution in the business profession (Fielding, 2006). Through a series of surveys, financial advisors in Australia are being asked to identify ethical dilemmas in given scenarios and discuss what tools and values they use to resolve those dilemmas. The study also explores if the participants’ decisions agree with their organizations and what gaps, if any, exist between participants’ values and their organizations’ values. Current compliance managers provide the organizations’ perspective. In this research, an ethical dilemma is defined in accordance with ethicists’ definition of being a choice between two ethical principles (J. Smith, personal communication, December 18, 2006). The results of this study have not yet been reported.
This study of financial advisors and compliance managers is relevant to my study for two reasons. First, the ethicists’ definition of ethical dilemma is being used. Second, the survey explores how the participants identify an ethical dilemma and how they resolve such dilemmas. The expected completion of this study is 2009 (J. Smith, personal communication, April 28, 2008).

Ethical Dilemma Resolution in Higher Education Professions

As was the case with the non-higher education professions, my review of the literature revealed a lot of popular press about unethical decision making in higher education. However, theoretical and research-based literature about ethical dilemma resolution was found only in the area of student affairs. Authors built upon the theoretical work of ethicists from other fields such as Beauchamp and Childress (1983) and Kitchener (2000) to explore ethical dilemma resolution in the context of student affairs.

*Student Affairs and Ethical Dilemma Resolution Theory*

Ethics plays a part in many decisions that student affairs professionals must make everyday (Blimling, 1998; Canon, 1989; Kitchener, 1985; Winston, Jr., Creamer, & Miller, 2001; Young, 2001). As society becomes more and more litigious and political, student affairs professionals are increasingly pressed to make the right decision (Blimling, 1998; Upcraft & Poole, 1991; Winston, Jr. & Saunders, 1998). Additionally, the higher education landscape continues to grow in complexity with more stakeholders and more at stake (Levy & Kozoll, 1998; Upcraft & Poole, 1991). The problem is that there is no simple recipe for how to resolve those situations in which more than one ethical principle is involved.
For student affairs professionals, the challenge of resolving ethical dilemmas begins with recognizing an ethical dilemma when it appears (Canon, 1996; Levy & Kozoll, 1998; Nash, 1997). This first step is further complicated by the ever-increasing diversity of students that the profession serves (Levy & Kozoll, 1998; Sundberg & Fried, 1997). Such diversity can create multiple perspectives of a single situation (Levy & Kozoll, 1998; Sundberg & Fried, 1997). Levy and Kozoll (1998) suggested that when faced with such daunting circumstances, student affairs professionals must not run away from the challenge because not making a decision is in essence making a decision.

Authors suggest that the next and very critical step is to have the knowledge and commitment to make a choice and see it through to the end (Blimling, 1998; Winston, Jr. & Saunders, 1998; Young, 2001). Not only must student affairs professionals resolve ethical dilemmas, they must be able to defend those choices (Canon, 1996; Kitchener, 1985). At the root of this challenge, student affairs professionals are advised to reflect, identify, nurture, and be true to their set of personal and professional values that will help them resolve ethical dilemmas (Canon, 1996; Fried, 1997; Winston, Jr., & Dagley, 1985; Young, 1997; Young, 2001).

Oftentimes, however, personal and professional values are not enough to resolve the complex situations involving two competing ethical principles. In such cases, student affairs professionals should then turn to their professional codes for guidance (American College Personnel Association, 1992; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 1997; Kitchener, 1985; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1999). Student affairs professionals facing an ethical dilemma, however,
should recognize that professional codes often will not provide an answer (Blimling, 1998; Kitchener, 1985; Winston, Jr. & Dagley, 1985; Young, 2001).

Practitioners should then consider the ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, autonomy, and fidelity when challenged to resolve an ethical dilemma (Canon, 1996; Kitchener, 1985). Beneficence deals with helping others (Kitchener, 1985). Nonmaleficence concerns itself with not hurting others (Kitchener, 1985). Justice pertains to the ideal of being fair (Kitchener, 1985). Autonomy respects individual rights while fidelity is described as dealing with matters of loyalty and truthfulness (Kitchener, 1985). From these broad definitions, student affairs professionals must apply ethical principles in the context of their daily work. For example, student affairs professionals should recognize that the ethical principle of nonmaleficence can involve psychological harm as well as physical harm (Kitchener, 1985). A policy that unfairly limits a particular student population’s opportunities might require a student affairs professional to address the unethical policy with college administration (Kitchener, 1985).

Building upon their basic understanding of ethical principles, professionals should expect their real-world experience to involve situations in which more than one of these ethical principles is involved (Kitchener, 1985; Young, 2001). Frequently there are sound arguments for the selection of either principle. Consequently, practitioners must realize that oftentimes one ethical principle is not the clear-cut, “correct” choice over another ethical principle (Fried, 1997; Kitchener, 1985). Rather, the identification of the relevant ethical principles for a given situation can help professionals determine the appropriate
criteria for understanding the situation and making a decision (Kitchener, 1985; Talley, 1997).

When there are conflicting ethical principles, however, there is no agreement on or suggestion of the ranking of these ethical principles. In fact, such a notion is dismissed (Fried, 1997). Rather, student affairs professionals should consider ethical principles from the three views of absolute, prima facie, and relative (Kitchener, 1985; Lampkin & Gibson, 1999). These three views represent a continuum of flexibility from inflexible (absolute) to prima facie (should be followed but can be broken if justifiable) to relative (flexible, no repercussions if broken) (Kitchener, 1985; Lampkin & Gibson, 1999). For example, in some circles, confidentiality (fidelity) might be viewed as absolute. That is, a doctor should never share information about a patient with someone else. However, others might argue that confidentiality (fidelity) is a prima facie principle which means it depends on the situation. The law has supported this view in the Tarasoff court case (Beauchamp & Childress, 1983) in which society’s safety (nonmaleficence) preceded the doctor’s obligation to the patient (fidelity). For student affairs professionals, the question of flexibility in adhering to an ethical principle should be addressed in ethical dilemma resolution (Kitchener, 1985; Lampkin & Gibson, 1999).

However, mere consideration of these five principles often does not resolve ethical dilemmas in today’s complicated world (Canon, 1996; Upcraft & Poole, 1991). With a sound, working knowledge of ethical principles, practitioners can then take a critical first step in ethical dilemma resolution. They can identify the problem and the relevant ethical principles (Canon, 1996; Kitchener, 1985; Levy & Kozoll, 1998). When
two ethical principles are identified, however, student affairs professionals are often stymied as to how they proceed from there.

To resolve an ethical dilemma, student affairs professionals should balance the positive and negative outcomes of competing ethical principles (Kitchener, 1985; Nash, 1997). They must weigh the degree of good and bad that will result from each path chosen (Kitchener, 1985; Lampkin & Gibson, 1999; Nash, 1997). That balancing act also involves the consideration of the individual or group versus the larger community (Brown, 1985; Kitchener, 1985; Young, 1997).

Relying totally on ethical principles as presented by Kitchener (1985), however, might be ill-advised (Lampkin & Gibson, 1999; Upcraft & Poole, 1991). Practitioners are typically not ethicists and therefore have problems using ethical principles in their daily work (Lampkin & Gibson, 1999). Upcraft and Poole (1991) suggested that Kitchener’s principles were not universal and do not fit well in the context of student affairs.

To facilitate better understanding of the pros and cons of competing ethical principles, student affairs professionals can expand their view by also employing the lenses of character and professional values (Humphrey et al., 2004). Humphrey et al. (2004) suggested a four step model for ethical decision making. The steps were: (a) to identify the problem, (b) to categorize the problem in ethical terms, (c) to reflect on the pertinent ethical principles, character traits, and professional values, and (d) to make an ethical decision. To make the process more user-friendly, each ethical principle was translated into comparable character traits and professional values. For example, beneficence and nonmaleficence related to the character traits of caring, citizenship, and responsibility and the professional values of community, freedom, and service. The
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ethical principle of justice was equated to the character trait of fairness and the professional values of justice and equality. Autonomy was seen through the lenses of respect (character trait) and individuation (professional value). Fidelity was considered with the character trait of trustworthiness and the professional value of truth. Such a model reinforced the earlier-mentioned point that student affairs professionals should identify their individually-held personal and professional values. Those practitioners who did so could make an easier transition to the model by Kitchener (1985) as well as the Humphrey et al. (2004) model. The authors did not suggest, however, that the model was the final word on ethical dilemma resolution. Rather, they offered it as one tool for student affairs professionals to use.

Another tool available to student affairs professionals is to confer with their peers when trying to resolve an ethical dilemma (Brown, 1985; Canon, 1985). Valuable insights can be gained by doing so. Additionally, professionals can also get a richer sense of the situation and the stakeholders by talking with different people rather than looking at the ethical dilemma through only their lens (Benjamin, 2006; Talley, 1997). Student affairs practitioners can look at previous, similar situations to inform their deliberation as well (Lampkin & Gibson, 1999; Levy & Kozoll, 1998).

The authors who theoretically explored ethical dilemma resolution provided thoughtful education and suggestions to student affairs professionals. Literature about the research of ethical dilemma resolution in student affairs was also reviewed.
I found two research studies in the student affairs literature related to ethical dilemma resolution. While neither study specifically focused on ethical dilemma resolution, the authors did provide important findings to inform the current study.

Thomas (2002) conducted a qualitative study into ethical challenges in student affairs by interviewing student affairs administrators about their experiences in the field. All the experiences shared by the participants involved complex circumstances with no one easy answer. This study was valuable in that the interviews provided examples of ethical dilemmas that were described in the everyday language of practitioners. For example, one interviewee described a conflict between free speech of students and conservative values of administrators and alumni. This situation could be viewed as the ethical principle of autonomy (individual right to free speech) versus the ethical principle of fidelity (to the institution’s administrators). Values, core beliefs, and professionalism were terms used throughout the interviews. Being aware of their personal and professional ethics or values provided the interviewees with a foundation upon which they built their practice. Their ethical grounding helped them make sense of a situation and gave them the means to defend their decisions and feel at peace with those decisions. For all of the participants, their appreciation of the importance of ethics in student affairs facilitated their ability to resolve the ethical dilemmas that they faced.

The purpose of the study by Thomas (2002) was to explore why ethics is important in student affairs. The interviews provided examples of incidents in which participants turned to their ethical and professional framework to guide their decision
making. However, the gap in the study by Thomas (2002) was that the participants did not provide insight about how they resolved the ethical dilemmas.

Janosik, Creamer, and Humphrey (2004) also conducted research pertaining to ethics and student affairs. The researchers surveyed 303 practitioners about ethical problems encountered in their everyday practice. The results were then analyzed to determine if the reported incidents coincided with Kitchener’s ethical principles. The data were also examined to see if reported ethical concerns differed by administrators’ gender, years of experience, organizational position, institutional type, or institutional size. They found significant differences in the reported ethical problems by gender, position, years of experience, and institution size.

Ethical concerns differed by gender of the respondents (Janosik et al., 2004). Women identified situations dealing with nonmaleficence more frequently than men. Examples of such incidents included improper sexual advances and social situations where alcohol was inappropriately consumed. The authors suggested that women might be more sensitive to the possibility of these types of interactions being unethical. On the other hand, concerns involving the principle of justice were reported less frequently by women (Janosik et al., 2004). The authors suggested that this result could be connected to studies that found women often have a moral orientation based on the ethic of caring versus an ethic of justice often held by men (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998, as cited in Janosik et al., 2004).

Janosik et al. (2004) also found reported ethical concerns differed by number of years of experience and the organizational position held by the respondent. Practitioners with more experience and consequently a higher-level position reported concerns about
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justice more frequently than practitioners with less experience and lower-level positions. The authors suggested that the additional insights gained by experience and larger responsibilities might explain the difference between the two groups in this regard. Such insights could make student affairs professionals more sensitive to situations involving justice.

Ethical concerns also differed by size of respondents’ institutions (Janosik et al., 2004). Professionals working at institutions with more than 7,500 students were more likely to report concerns about situations involving justice. The authors suggested that bureaucratic structures and role orientation at larger schools might not offer professionals the sense of community or empathy with colleagues or students that smaller institutions might offer its members. As a result, an environment in which a practitioner felt like a face in the crowd might contribute to the higher frequency of concerns about justice.

The research by Janosik et al. (2004) illustrated the various types of ethical concerns experienced by student affairs professionals in their daily practice. The findings suggested that inexperience might influence the awareness of professionals to the prevalence of ethical concerns. The campus climate and culture should also be considered as contributors to situations involving ethical issues.

Janosik et al. (2004) provided a valuable foundation upon which this study was built and inspired. Insights into the types of ethical concerns and the differences among administrative groups were found. Janosik et al. (2004), however, did not take the next step and explore how those ethical problems were resolved.

My review of the literature produced theory and research focused on ethical dilemmas in non-higher education professions such as medicine and law and in the higher
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education profession of student affairs. The majority of the literature was conceptual in
nature. The two research studies from the student affairs profession reviewed in this
chapter provided insights into the nature of ethical concerns but neither study specifically
dealt with ethical dilemma resolution. I found through my literature review that there was
a gap in the knowledge of ethical dilemma resolution in student affairs.

The purpose of this study was to explore how student affairs professionals resolve
professional ethical dilemmas. It was interesting to note that the relatively new profession
of student affairs paid more attention in its scholarly activities to the topic of ethics than
the other professions with more history and experience. It might be that student affairs
professionals feel obliged to make ethical decisions as they fulfill their role in higher
education to serve and educate (Kitchener, 1985; Young, 2001). The call to model ethical
decision making was sounded by student affairs scholars (Blimling, 1998; Young, 2001)
and supports the idea that student affairs practitioners should be the conscience of the
campus (Talley, 1997; Winston, Jr., Creamer, & Miller, 2001; Young, 2001). Young
(2001) went so far as to say that ethical dilemmas were “inevitable” in student affairs (p.
158). However, there are no easy answers (Canon, 1996; Levy & Kozoll, 1998). This
study was aimed at facilitating the efforts by student affair professionals to be ethical in
their practice. Interviews of members of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in
Higher Education (CAS) were the first phase of this mixed methods study. CAS members
discussed ethical dilemmas they faced and how they resolved them. The data were then
analyzed to inform the development of a survey to be used in the second phase of the
study. In the second phase, student affairs professionals provided insights into how they
resolved ethical dilemmas in their daily practice. This study addressed the gap in the
literature and answered the call for research to inform practice (Kezar, 2000) by gaining insight into the resolution of ethical dilemmas by student affairs professionals.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This study used a mixed methods research design to explore how student affairs professionals resolve ethical dilemmas. Mixed methods uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in the collection and analysis of the data (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, personal communication, 2005; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Data are also integrated during the analysis in mixed methods (Creswell, 2003; Creswell et al., 2003; Greene et al., 1989).

Rather than choosing a methodology and then developing the research questions, I identified my research questions and then determined that a mixed methods research design would best serve my needs. This was a sequential, mixed method study that was, first, exploratory and second, confirmatory. As such, I entered the study with an open mind and wanted a methodology that would allow me to examine ethical dilemma resolution as thoroughly as possible, no matter how divergent the data might be. I also needed a methodology that would allow me to ask both exploratory questions and confirmatory questions in one study. Mixed methods met all of these needs (Sandelowski, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study was to explore how student affairs professionals resolve professional ethical dilemmas. A student affairs professional was defined as an individual whose educational background and work experience are in student affairs. An ethical dilemma was defined as a situation in which two ethical principles are at odds rather than a simple matter of right versus wrong.
An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma (Kitchener, 1985). A professional ethical dilemma was an ethical dilemma in the context of a person’s work-related experience. The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of how representatives of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) resolve professional ethical dilemmas by interviewing the representatives. The second phase of this study was confirmatory. An online survey was designed and administered to members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) who held positions similar to those held by the phase one sample. The survey was designed to confirm the findings from phase one about ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals.

The research questions were the same for both phases since the second phase was designed to confirm the first phase. The research questions were:

1. What kind of ethical dilemmas do participants describe (e.g., who is involved, what are the circumstances, what ethical principles are involved)?
2. How do participants resolve their ethical dilemmas?
3. What considerations do participants think about when resolving their dilemmas?

Sampling Strategy

A sampling strategy should make sense (Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003). It should be connected to the purpose and research questions of the study so that there is a realistic expectation of adequate and credible data (Creswell, 1998; Kemper et al., 2003; Patton, 2002). The sample for the first phase of this study was current members of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). One of the major goals of CAS is to help professionals be fair and equitable in their daily practice. This purposeful sample of CAS representatives provided participants who were
knowledgeable about and invested in the issues involving the resolution of professional ethical dilemmas in the higher education setting.

The 37 CAS representatives were invited to participate in my study and 22 members agreed to participate. This number was consistent with Creswell’s (1998) recommendation to conduct 20 to 30 interviews to address credibility concerns. However, when I contacted the 22 individuals to schedule the interviews, one person stated that he was on the list in error because he was not a member of the CAS organization. A second person notified me that after reading the interview questions she did not believe she had any ethical dilemmas to share and consequently declined to participate in the study. Two members did not respond to five efforts on my part (by phone and email) to contact them. As a result, my sample consisted of 18 CAS representatives. The sample consisted of 10 males and 8 females. Eight representatives worked at Research University/very high research activity institutions. Three representatives worked at Research University/high research activity institutions while one representative worked at a Doctoral/Research University. Two members were employed at Master’s Colleges and Universities (Larger Programs). One representative worked at a Baccalaureate College – Arts & Sciences while another member worked at an Associate’s – Public Suburban that served multi-campuses. Three representatives worked at organizations in the education sector rather than higher education institutions.

Among the non-participants, there were two males and two females. One representative worked at Research University/high research activity institutions. One member was employed at Master’s Colleges and Universities (Larger Programs). Another member worked at an Associate’s – Public Suburban that served multi-campuses. One
A representative was employed at a four-year public institution in Canada with undergraduate and graduate level programs. This person notified me that he was not a member of CAS.

The purpose of the second phase was to confirm the first phase’s findings. The sample for the second phase of this study was individuals who were members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) with job titles similar to the phase one participants. This sample consisted of Directors, Associate Directors, Vice Presidents, Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, and Chairs. I requested the names, job titles, and institutions of the NASPA members from the home office. From the 2,372 members who qualified, I selected a random sample of 400 people. I then contacted those members by email and requested their participation in my study. I explained the purpose of the study and included the IRB approval number to verify that my study was in compliance with the proper authority (Appendix C). I explained that by accessing the survey they would indicate their willingness to participate in the study. I provided the link to the online survey and invited them to contact me if they had any questions before or after their participation in the survey. I sent a reminder email one week later. In the first week only 12 surveys were submitted. After 27 days and additional emails, 59 members of the sample completed surveys. This number of surveys did not provide me enough data so I decided to select a second random sample of 400 NASPA members from my list to conduct a second survey. At the end of six weeks, I had collected 118 surveys. I determined that I had enough data to fulfill the purpose of the second phase which was to confirm the findings of the first phase, so I closed the two surveys.
Procedures

The procedural steps in the data collection reflected the two-phase, sequential mixed methods design of this study (Table 1). The phase one data were collected and analyzed first. Then the phase two data were collected and analyzed.

Phase One Data Collection Procedure

In the first phase of the study, the participants were interviewed individually for approximately 45 minutes in a semi-structured interview format. The exploratory nature of this phase sought to discover knowledge about ethical dilemma resolution. Knowledge is found in the meaning people find in things and their recounting of experiences (Creswell, 1998). Interviews provided an open format in which rich, comprehensive data were collected about the phenomenon of ethical dilemma resolution (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). Interviews allowed me to hear directly from the participants what they had experienced and what they thought about ethical dilemma resolution. “When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness” (Seidman, 1998, p.1). The details the participants selected revealed how they made sense of the experience (Creswell, 1998; Seidman, 1998). As a result, interviews were an appropriate data collection procedure to support the exploratory purpose of phase one.

I conducted all interviews by phone. There were two reasons for this approach. First, I wanted to have access to as many willing participants as possible. Second, the physical separation offered participants a more comfortable setting to discuss potentially sensitive topics. I was not able to influence their answers by my body language or in other ways make them feel self-conscious. Rather than interview some participants in
Table 1

**Procedural Steps in Data Collection**

**Qualitative**

Step 1

Purposeful sampling of CAS representatives

N=18

Step 2

Semi-structured interviews by phone

**Quantitative**

Step 3

Purposeful sampling of NASPA members (N=2,372)

Two random samplings of original sample

N=800

Step 4

Online questionnaire

*Note. CAS: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education*

*Note. NASPA: National Association for Student Personnel Administration*
person and others by phone, I decided to be consistent and interview all participants by phone.

There were four parts of the interview protocol. First, the interview protocol included a confirmatory email sent to each participant prior to the interview with the specific interview details such as time and date (Appendix D). In addition, the email provided the purpose of the research study.

Participants also received a hard copy of the Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form to read, sign, and return to me before the scheduled interview date (Appendix E). A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included for the participant’s convenience and to facilitate timely return of the IRB form. This form demonstrated my compliance with the ethical and legal considerations of conducting research involving human participants.

The third part of the interview protocol was the interview questions (Appendix F). The interview questions were sent to the participants prior to the interview to allow them time to think about their responses. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, this step was aimed at also giving interviewees the time to select two professional ethical dilemmas that they would be comfortable discussing. Such a comprehensive email was designed to ensure participants’ understanding of the study and to give them an opportunity to ask any questions before the interview was conducted. The interview questions were related to the research questions (RQs). The first interview question explored RQ1 (kinds of ethical dilemmas). The second interview question investigated RQ2 (process of ethical dilemma resolution). I wanted to learn what steps they took to resolve the ethical dilemma. The third interview question explored RQ3 (considerations used to resolve
An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma

ethical dilemmas). I wanted to find out what criteria, principles, etc. the participants considered during their resolution of the ethical dilemmas. Interview question four examined RQ3 as well (relative importance of considerations used to resolve ethical dilemmas). I wanted to understand how important each consideration was to the participants as they worked to resolve the ethical dilemmas. The final interview question was designed to ensure that interviewees were given an opportunity to add anything that they believed had not been said to that point.

The fourth part of the interview protocol was a check sheet to record the details of each interview such as time, day, and pseudonym (Appendix G). The check sheet was designed to keep me organized and mindful of the general process such as checking the tape recorder and making sure the IRB form was completed. The fourth part of the interview protocol also included another checklist to ensure that all of the research questions for phase one were answered. This checklist was particularly important since I did not want to restrict the participants’ responses to a specific format or order of interview questions.

The participants agreed to the use of a tape recorder to record the interviews through the Informed Consent Form. Tape recording interviews gave me an accurate record of the participants’ responses. In addition to their words, taped interviews memorialized such non-verbal cues as pauses, laughter, and changes in tone. This method also safeguarded me from questions that might be raised later by participants about the accuracy of my recounting of their responses (Seidman, 1998).

During the interviews, I took notes to provide an additional record of the interviews in case anything happened to the tape recordings (Patton, 2002). The notes
kept me engaged and also allowed me to keep track of what was being said. If I had a question, I referred to my notes and asked it when I was not interrupting the interviewee. I made additional notes to record my thoughts and points of explanation or clarification. I noted things such as periods of silence, laughter, or other audible cues. I also used member checks throughout the interviews to ensure that I understood what the participant was saying and thinking. I conducted a final member check at the conclusion of each interview by summarizing the key points and asking for clarification and confirmation by the participant. Member checks protected me from making assumptions. This step also increased the trustworthiness and credibility of my study and thus strengthened the quality of my study (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). In some interviews, the member check generated additional data not previously collected.

The questions in the interview protocol asked each participant to share two ethical dilemmas. Three participants discussed three dilemmas so the result was a total of 39 ethical dilemmas to transcribe and analyze. Although I had some concerns as to whether several of the dilemmas qualified as ethical dilemmas as defined by my study, I decided to keep all of them during the preliminary phase of the data analysis and re-visit that question later.

After an interview was completed, I transcribed the taped recording into a Word document. I did the transcription step myself because even such decisions as punctuation represent the first step of data analysis “and must be done thoughtfully” (Seidman, 1998, p. 99). I made two copies of the transcribed notes. One copy was stored in a safe place. The second copy was used for the data analysis of phase one. Additionally, the Word version of the transcripts was imported into NVIVO7. This is the software program I
used to analyze the data in conjunction with the hard copies of the transcripts. I also made a list of the interviewees and a summary phrase for each dilemma to provide a means of reference as I proceeded with the analysis (Appendix H).

*Phase One Data Analysis*

The next step of the study was to find the meaning in the data (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). I began the data analysis of phase one by reading over all of the transcriptions to get an overview of the data (Creswell, 1998). Analyzing qualitative data is an inductive, iterative, and exploratory process (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Ely, 1991; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). I approached the data with as open a mind as possible so that I would not impose any assumptions or pre-conceived notions on the data (bracketing) (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). Additionally, qualitative data analysis requires researchers to look at their data multiple times (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). This study followed that approach through a series of analyses that progressively moved towards higher degrees of abstraction while reducing the data to broader analytical propositions (code mapping) (Anfara et al., 2002).

Because there were three research questions, the data were analyzed with all three research questions in mind. I did not restrict my analysis to just the part of the interview in which the interviewee directly responded to the relevant interview questions. I recognized the complexity of ethical dilemma resolution. Consequently, I was on guard for relevant data about each research question throughout the transcription. I did, however, organize the data analysis by research question.
In the first iteration, I conducted a surface content analysis and identified initial codes (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). I thoroughly reviewed each transcription. Analysis of the data was conducted by using both a deductive and inductive approach to the initial coding. Deductive codes were first established from themes identified in the literature. These included the ethical principles identified by Kitchener (1985) and the role of the interviewee in the ethical dilemma (e.g., supervisor, supervisee, administrator). The inductive phase of the initial coding involved open coding for new issues that were not anticipated. I developed a coding table that included words or phrases that provided the necessary detail to eliminate the need for additional definition. For example, I used the codes of “staff” and “former staff.” I also used codes such as “confer with legal” and “did what felt right.” I marked anything that interested me and that I wanted to keep on my radar screen of analysis (Patton, 2002). When I was unsure of something’s value, I marked it (Seidman, 1998). When possible, I used the exact words of the interviewees (in vivo coding). This practice represented the essence of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). I then made a tentative list of the codes I had identified and created definitions for the codes (Seidman, 1998). I used the software program NVIVO7 to organize this information. I conducted this data reduction step multiple times for each interview transcript. Each time I referred to my list of codes to see if I had missed something or if I needed to change a previous coding decision or definition. I also noted any thoughts I had about the data that might help me in developing a conceptual explanation of ethical dilemma resolution (analytical memoing).

This was an iterative process that required continual reconsideration and refinement of the codes (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell, 1998). For RQ1 (description), I
looked for details such as the nature of the dilemma (e.g., involving colleagues, staff, students, etc.), their role in the dilemma (e.g., supervisor, supervisee, advisor, etc.), and the competing principles (e.g., fidelity, justice, etc.). For RQ2 (process), I sought specific steps that interviewees identified in their resolution of an ethical dilemma. For RQ3 (considerations), I looked for specific criteria, principles, circumstances, etc. that interviewees identified as playing a part in their resolution of an ethical dilemma. For RQ3, I also identified the relative importance of the considerations previously named by the interviewees. An unexpected role of the interview question about relative importance of considerations was that it served as a member check for the interviewees’ responses to the three previous interview questions. During their discussions about the relative importance of considerations, they reiterated the description of the dilemma, the process of resolution, and the considerations involved in the resolution. The succinct nature of this reiteration facilitated my understanding and my analysis of the data. When asked about the relative importance of considerations, the interviewees often included the ethical principles discussed in the first interview question rather than limiting themselves to the other considerations discussed in response to the third interview question which had been asked right before this question. Consequently, the data were much richer and more trustworthy.

It was during this step of the analysis that I stopped and re-examined all 39 ethical dilemmas as to whether they qualified as ethical dilemmas as defined by this study. Upon closer consideration, I decided that one dilemma did not involve two ethical principles at odds with each other. Rather, the interviewee told about an incident where a subordinate
An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma 55

had submitted an expense for a guest speaker’s meal that far exceeded university policy. The interviewee said:

And so the scenario was and again the principles that I choose here is reasonableness as far as institutional finances. So it’s institutional policy as number two. But really my first practical thinking about this ethically was, would I personally go to lunch and spend what would be about $45 for lunch for one person? And the answer is “No.” So I had a personal issue there with that. And then the second issue was from an institutional policy perspective. If I had turned in an expense report like that, I know I’d have been getting a call from the controller, and rightfully so. So I recognized we had a challenge, we had a problem.

Upon further review, I concluded that the situation involved the ethical principle of fairness (“reasonableness”) in the interviewee’s view. But obeying the institutional policy (fidelity) was not in opposition to the ethical principle of fairness or justice. The interviewee did not provide insight as to another ethical principle involved in this situation that was vying with either principle so I removed it from the data analysis for phase one. This decision gave me a total of 38 dilemmas for the remainder of the study. As a result, I updated all my files and analyses to date before proceeding with the analysis.

The next iterative step I took was to recognize that in my analysis of the process of ethical dilemma resolution that I had concentrated on the steps but had not looked at the actual resolution itself. So I created a new node in NVIVO and analyzed all the transcriptions to learn about how the interviewees ultimately
resolved the dilemma. This additional code helped me better understand ethical
dilemma resolution. For example, “doing nothing” was how participants dealt
with seven of the ethical dilemmas. But that did not mean that all seven dilemmas
were not resolved. Some participants were able to resolve the ethical dilemma by
doing nothing and in essence choosing one of the principles. Sally was one of
those participants. She faced the dilemma of having received a salary raise during
a budget freeze. While she had included the possibility of a pay raise in her initial
hiring negotiation, she still felt torn between justice and fidelity to self and justice
and fidelity to staff who were not receiving a pay raise. Sally had worked very
hard during the year and believed she had earned the raise. She also had an
obligation to provide for herself and her family and this pay raise would help
fulfill that obligation. But Sally also thought about asking her supervisor to take
the raise and distribute it among her staff who had also worked hard during the
year. She also weighed the principle of nonmaleficence. To decline the raise
would have a negative impact on her income and retirement package. Ultimately
Sally decided to do nothing about the pay raise, thus choosing the principles of
justice, fidelity, and nonmaleficence to self. By doing nothing, she resolved her
ethical dilemma. The data collected with the node of “Resolution of Dilemma”
was useful data in more fully understanding the phenomenon of ethical dilemma
resolution.

The dilemmas shared by participants resulted in 22 codes for the kinds of ethical
dilemmas (RQ1), 18 codes for the process of ethical dilemma resolution (RQ2), and 17
codes for the considerations involved in ethical dilemma resolution (RQ3) (Appendix I). I
could not use NVivo7 to create coding matrices because there were multiple dilemmas within each interview. So I analyzed each code separately, recording which dilemma within each interview had that code. I then created coding matrices in Excel to help me determine which codes were most strongly supported by the data. I then grouped the codes that appeared to hang together into categories. My goal was to find five to six categories for each research question that concisely depicted the central ideas gleaned from the data (Creswell, 1998). Ultimately I identified 19 categories that would best support the research (Appendix J). RQ1 (kinds of dilemmas) had ten categories. RQ2 (process of ethical dilemma resolution), however, had only three categories and the remaining research question (RQ3) (considerations used in ethical dilemma resolution) had six categories. I then analyzed all of the dilemmas again to confirm that these categories accurately described the data (Appendix K).

I then moved to the second iteration of the analysis by returning to the data to search for general themes or patterns that connected categories (pattern variables) (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). The goal was to see if there were any trends or relationships within the data that could be expressed clearly and succinctly. I found five general themes or patterns that clarified and consolidated the data in phase one. There was one theme that related to the first research question. The second theme pertained to the second research question. The remaining three themes related to research question two and research question three.

The identification of these five themes facilitated the progression to the next step of analysis. The overall goal of the phase one, qualitative analysis was to
develop an overarching proposition (Anfara et al., 2002). I returned to the data to determine the strength of each theme. My re-analysis of the transcripts identified specific data that supported the themes that suggested that all five patterns had strong support in the data. Based on this review, I found an overarching proposition that offered a logical and supported explanation of the findings.

The result of the phase one data analysis was insights about the study’s research questions. The kinds of ethical dilemmas were identified. The steps used to resolve ethical dilemmas were also identified through this step. Finally, the analysis provided information about the aspects of the situation considered by the participants in their resolution of the ethical dilemmas. These findings were then used to design the online questionnaire for phase two.

*Phase Two Data Collection Procedure*

Upon completion of the first phase of the study, the second phase was begun. A vital part of mixed methods is the integration of data. This step occurred at this point of the study. From the data collected in the interviews, the kinds of ethical dilemmas and the steps in the resolution process were identified. The aspects of the dilemma considered by the participants in ethical dilemma resolution were also identified.

An online survey was then developed to confirm the findings of the first phase of the study (Appendix L). The participants were asked to identify an ethical dilemma that they had experienced. They were also asked to explain their reasons for considering the situation an ethical dilemma. I wanted to explore RQ2 (process of ethical dilemma resolution) and RQ3 concerning the considerations in ethical dilemma resolution. The participants were provided a list of steps suggested in phase one that they might have
taken to resolve their dilemma. The participants were asked to select the three most important steps that they took in their resolution of the dilemma. The option of “Other” was also available. Participants who chose this option were asked to identify that step or steps that were not included in the list that was provided. The participants were then offered a list of considerations suggested in phase one that might have been taken into account to resolve the ethical dilemma. The participants were asked to identify the three most important considerations they used to resolve their dilemma. The option of “Other” was also available. Participants who chose this option were asked to identify that consideration or considerations that they included in their resolution process that were not included in the list provided. Finally, participants were asked if the ethical dilemma resolution process they had just reported was typical of how they resolved ethical dilemmas.

I sent an email to the phase two sample to request its participation in my study. I explained the purpose of the study. I also explained that the Institutional Review Board approved the consent process of participants indicating its informed consent to participate by completion and submission of the online survey. This statement was designed to document my compliance with the ethical and legal considerations of conducting research involving human participants. I included the IRB approval number and contact information if anyone wanted to verify this representation of compliance. I told the participants that completion of the survey should only take approximately 10 minutes. I sent a reminder/second invitation email to all participants who did not complete the questionnaire after one week. In the first week only 12 surveys were submitted. In my reminder email, I asked people if they decided not to participate to let me know the
reason so I could anonymously record the reasons for non-participation. After 27 days, I had a total of 59 completed surveys. This number of surveys did not provide me enough data so I decided to select a second random sample of 400 NASPA members to conduct a second survey. I modified the email invitation to allow for a primary reason people in the first sample had reported as to why they were not participating. Some respondents said that they did not think they held the appropriate position to be a participant, in particular faculty members of higher education programs. I therefore told the new group that they were in the sample because they were NASPA members and held a job title similar to participants in the first phase of the study. I received emails from 37 people giving reasons for their decision not to participate. Nine people said they were faculty and believed they should not participate. Eight people said they had no ethical dilemma to share. Another eight people said they were too busy. Five people simply said they were not participating and gave no reason. The other reasons given for not participating included that they didn’t work with undergraduates, the topic was too confidential, or that they did not have a student affairs background. At the end of six weeks, I had collected 118 surveys (63 surveys from the first survey and 55 surveys from the second surveys). I determined that I had enough data to fulfill the purpose of the second phase which was to confirm the findings of the first phase so I closed the two surveys.

*Phase Two Data Analysis*

After six weeks, I closed the online surveys and began the data analysis for phase two. A total of 118 people submitted surveys. The online format let me review the results of the surveys both individually and as a whole.
My first step was to review each survey to see if the dilemma presented by the respondent was truly an ethical dilemma as per the definition used in this study. If the dilemma did not involve at least two ethical principles rather than a matter of right versus wrong, then I did not include the survey in the analysis. Sixteen surveys described situations that were not ethical dilemmas. For example, one survey talked about a co-worker who uses her lunch hour to run errands and then eats her lunch at her desk on school time. The respondent said it was an ethical dilemma because “we provide adequate opportunity to eat lunch and she has taken advantage of her situation.” I, however, could not see two or more ethical principles involved in this situation and therefore removed it from my data.

During this step of the analysis, I also found that there were participants who did not explain why they thought their situation was an ethical dilemma as they were asked to do in the first question. For example, one person’s answer to the first question was simply, “Knowing that your boss has lied about a situation.” Without more information, I did not feel it was appropriate for me to fill in the blanks such as whether the person saw this as a situation of nonmaleficence (do no harm to the respondent) versus fidelity (reporting the lie). As a result of incomplete answers to the first question, I removed 20 surveys from the analysis. There were also two surveys that had no answer for the first or fourth questions. The respondents had only answered the second and third questions. I removed those surveys from analysis. Ultimately, there were 80 surveys that described situations that were true ethical dilemmas and thus provided data to analyze for phase two of the study.
I made one additional decision about the remaining 80 surveys. I decided that those surveys in which participants selected more than three answers for question two or three would not be included in analysis for that particular question only. This decision resulted in two surveys not being analyzed for the second question about the steps of ethical dilemma resolution, leaving a total of 78 surveys to be analyzed. This decision also meant that one survey was removed from the analysis of question three about the considerations of ethical dilemma resolution, leaving a total of 79 surveys for analysis.

As mentioned previously, a critical component of mixed methods research design is the integration of data from both phases. This step occurred at this point of my study. I compared the list of steps selected by the NASPA members to the list of steps identified by the CAS representatives. I also compared the list of considerations chosen by the NASPA members to the list of considerations identified by the CAS representatives. Finally, I looked at the overarching proposition that I identified in phase one to see if the phase two findings confirmed that proposition.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The present study was designed to explore ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals. The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the study. Due to the sequential mixed methods research design, the findings for phase one are presented first and the findings for phase two follow.

Phase One Findings

Phase one of the study was a qualitative exploration of how CAS representatives resolve professional ethical dilemmas. CAS members were interviewed and data analyzed. Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process that requires researchers to look at their data multiple times (Anfara & Brown, 2002; Patton, 2002). Analysis of data collected in phase one of this study followed this approach through a series of analyses that progressed to higher degrees of abstraction while reducing the data to broader analytical propositions. The analysis of the data involved three steps.

The first step was to conduct an analysis of the surface content (initial coding) so that I could categorize the codes in relationship to the research questions. The second step was to find themes that further clarified the data. The third step was to find an overarching proposition that would provide an explanation of the findings that was both logical and supported by the data. This process is presented in the Coding Matrix of Ethical Dilemma Resolution (Figure 1).

The matrix shows that the first iteration produced a list of 19 categories of the initial codes through an analysis of the surface content. The categories related to the first
Third Iteration: Application to Data Set

Despite the complexity of ethical dilemmas in terms of the multiple ethical issues involved and the multiple roles they play in these dilemmas, student affairs professionals use a relatively simple resolution process of serious reflection and engaging others to understand the implications of the dilemma and its resolution. Student affairs professionals weigh the considerations pertaining to themselves and the wider organization within the context of the relevant ethical principles and make a decision that they personally believe is ethical.

Second Iteration: Themes

RQ1 1. While there is not a typical ethical dilemma faced by student affairs professionals, ethical dilemmas for student affairs professionals often involve staffing practices such as people they supervise or the person who supervises them.

RQ2 2. Student affairs professionals engage others to gather alternative perspectives and ensure they have given the dilemma enough thorough consideration.

RQ2 3. Student affairs professionals often have to weigh not only the implications of the dilemma and its resolution for themselves but also the implications for the wider organization.

RQ2 4. Student affairs professionals consider many factors but ultimately they decide to uphold the ethical principle that their personal values deem most important.

RQ2 5. Student affairs professionals take ethical dilemmas and their resolution seriously.

First Iteration: Initial Codes/Surface Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of Ethical Dilemmas</th>
<th>Steps Taken to Resolve Dilemma</th>
<th>Considerations in Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of People Involved in Dilemma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>Serious Reflection</td>
<td>Considerations Included in Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Talk to Others</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do Nothing</td>
<td>Bigger Picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Interviewee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Specific Situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision maker</td>
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<td>Advisor/student support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical Principles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
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<td>Relative Importance of Considerations</td>
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<td>Nonmaleficence</td>
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<td>Uphold Ethical Principle</td>
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<td>Justice</td>
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<td>Circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Coding Matrix of Ethical Dilemma Resolution
research question (kinds of ethical dilemmas) included the types of people involved in the dilemmas (1A), the roles of interviewees in the dilemmas (1B), and the ethical principles (1C). The categories related to the second research question (process of ethical dilemma resolution) identified the primary steps interviewees took to resolve their dilemmas (2A). The categories related to the third research question (considerations used in ethical dilemma resolution) included factors interviewees took into consideration (3A) and the relative importance of those considerations (3B). The second iteration of analysis looked for themes that could be gleaned from the first iteration. From the 38 dilemmas collected in phase one, I found five general themes that clarified and consolidated the data. Two themes pertained to one research question while the remaining three themes related to two research questions.

The first theme related to the first research question that asked what kinds of ethical dilemmas do participants describe (e.g., who is involved, what are the circumstances, what ethical principles are involved). The theme related to this research question was: While there is not a typical ethical dilemma faced by student affairs professionals, ethical dilemmas for student affairs professionals often involve staffing practices such as people they supervise or the person who supervises them.

The second research question was how do participants resolve their ethical dilemmas. The theme related to this research question was: Student affairs professionals engage others to gather alternative perspectives and ensure they have given the dilemma enough thorough consideration.

The remaining three themes related to the second and third research questions. The second research question examined the process of ethical dilemma resolution. The
third research question probed further by asking what kinds of criteria do participants consider when resolving the dilemma. The themes related to these research questions were:

1. Student affairs professionals often have to weigh not only the implications of the dilemma and its resolution for themselves but also the implications for the wider organization.
2. Student affairs professionals consider many factors but ultimately they decide to uphold the ethical principle that their personal values deem most important.
3. Student affairs professionals take ethical dilemmas and their resolution seriously.

*Theme Related to Research Question One*

The first theme is related to the first research question that explored the kinds of ethical dilemmas faced by student affairs professionals. The theme is that while there is not a typical ethical dilemma faced by student affairs professionals, ethical dilemmas for student affairs professionals often involve staffing practices such as people they supervise or the person who supervises them.

First, there was no typical ethical dilemma for student affairs professionals. The ethical dilemmas varied greatly in terms of the people involved, the circumstances of the dilemma, and the ethical principles involved. Additionally, student affairs professionals typically dealt with more than one constituent group and filled more than one role in their ethical dilemmas. The variety of the 38 ethical dilemmas is shown in Table 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituent Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53% (20/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34% (13/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21% (8/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16% (6/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Employee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16% (6/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Stakeholder</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16% (6/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8% (3/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3% (1/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/support provider</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29% (11/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisee</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29% (11/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26% (10/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24% (9/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8% (3/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee chair/member</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8% (3/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Employee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5% (2/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3% (1/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3% (1/38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>90% (34/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmaleficence</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68% (26/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>61% (23/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34% (13/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21% (8/38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages totaled more than 100% because some dilemmas involved more than one constituent group, role, or ethical principle.
While there is a great deal of variety in these dilemmas, student affairs professionals often face ethical dilemmas that involve staffing practices such as people they supervise (29%) or the person who supervises them (26%). An analysis of the 38 dilemmas showed that 61% of them involved staffing practices.

For example, Susan had an employee request a retroactive pay raise. Part of his motivation for the request was that he was approaching retirement and the pay raise would increase his benefits. As the supervisor, her dilemma included being fair to the employee (justice) and her obligation to be a good steward of the university’s resources (fidelity). Susan’s role in this dilemma gave her the authority as his supervisor to address the situation directly. She listened to the employee’s case for his request. Susan also talked with Human Resources. She considered the possible precedent her decision to grant the retroactive request might set. Susan also weighed the aforementioned ethical principles of justice and fidelity. She finally asserted her authority to resolve the dilemma by turning down the employee’s request. Susan chose fidelity by deciding that it would not be proper use of university resources to grant his request. The employee’s additional responsibilities had occurred several years before the request and before Susan’s arrival. After the employee retired, Susan observed that he never returned. She said,

Ever since this individual left who had many, many years of service – he’s never come back. And I’ve often wondered whether, I think we parted on good terms, but it certainly made me feel bad. I felt I had to do the right thing, but I often wonder – is this one of the reasons that maybe affected that? (Susan)

The first theme was based on the first research question that looked at the kinds of ethical dilemmas that student affairs professionals faced. The analysis also developed a theme based on the second research question.
Theme Related to Research Question Two

The second research question examined the process of ethical dilemma resolution. The data from that question suggested that student affairs professionals engage others to gather alternative perspectives and ensure they have given the dilemma enough thorough consideration. Thirty-two of the 38 dilemmas (84%) were resolved by the interviewee conferring with one or more people or sources, either formally or informally. No one turned to someone else for an answer per se or to be told what they should do. Rather they conferred with others to gain perspective or to hear what the person thought about the situation to give them more information with which to make a decision.

For example, Bill struggled with requests from potential employers for references about a former employee he had terminated. Bill did not want to hurt the former employee (nonmaleficence) but he also wanted to be honest with the potential employer (fidelity). He said,

And so I find that, I find that seeking, that seeking, seeking counsel from others, not direction, not decision, but playing this out for other people is helpful for me. Because it can give me some different perspective that I haven't thought of. (Bill)

John shared his general philosophy about the role of talking to others in ethical dilemma resolution. He said,

I tend to talk it over with somebody or somebodies. I try not to be a hero about it (laugh) and do it all myself but I often try to pick out people that I think can provide me with the input I need, okay, in terms of what's the best way to deal with this kind of thing and what's the best way to handle it. (John)

John also said that conferring with others is in part due to the seriousness of ethical dilemma resolution.
An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma

Well, it is important to talk to other people. I don’t think I would ever want to try to resolve something totally on my own without talking to somebody because usually these ethical dilemmas are at a level, they’re at a high enough level, at least for me, that they have other implications that I don’t think I want to be necessarily always solving these by myself. (John) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

This theme brought focus to the second research question concerning the process of ethical dilemma resolution. The data analysis then progressed to bridging the findings from the second and third research questions and generating three themes to better understand the data.

*Themes Related to Research Question Two and Research Question Three*

The second research question explored the process of ethical dilemma resolution. The third research question examined the considerations included in ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals. Three themes related to these questions.

The first theme was that student affairs professionals often have to weigh not only the implications of the dilemma and its resolution for themselves but also the implications for the wider organization. Fifty-four of the 149 reported considerations (36%) were related to the student affairs professionals themselves. Factors included their role or responsibility in the dilemma, their personal values, and the possible professional or personal impact of the dilemma or their decision on themselves.

For example, one consideration of the interviewees is their role or responsibilities in the dilemma. Harry found himself caught between his supervisor and his staff because his supervisor treated his staff very poorly. He felt an obligation to his supervisor (fidelity) but he also wanted to ensure that his staff was treated fairly (justice). Harry considered that one of his
responsibilities as a supervisor was to not add to the difficult situation, but to help remedy it. He said,

It's important in my role not to be part of the problem of which is oftentimes people [will] come gathering and carping about it, complaining about other, you know, institutional issues and people at the institution. So feeling like I needed to be able to listen and channel some of that conversation to be productive, acknowledge that there's a problem and that they had some legitimacy to feel the way they do without getting into the gutter with them and actually kind of, you know, even expressing my own frustration with the situation. (Harry)

Another consideration related to the interviewees is their personal values. Katy was serving as an advisor at her institution. During the course of her work with each one of them, she determined that two of her advisees were dealing with the loss of the same person. She recognized the importance of keeping their confidence (fidelity) since she knew about the situation as a result of her position as their advisor. But she also believed that they could help each other deal with their loss (beneficence). Katy ultimately spoke to each of them about the other person and they were able to help each other through that difficult time. Katy identified her belief in “synchronicity” as playing a big role in her resolution. She pointed out that the person who had died lived very far away from her institution. The odds of these two people knowing him were so slim that she could not ignore it. Additionally, she was struck by the fact that they both were her advisees. Katy said,

I just felt very grateful that I happened to, I guess, for me, it felt like there was some synchronicity involved and that's sort of the way that I sort of express spirituality is synchronicity and I pay attention when things seem like a weird coincidence. And this
felt like too weird a coincidence not to pay attention to and not to take seriously. (Katy)

(Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

Largely because of her value of the importance of synchronicity, Katy talked to each student. They were both grateful for Katy’s decision to tell them about each other. They did meet and provided comfort and support to each other during that difficult time.

Interviewees also considered the personal impact of a resolution. Keylee talked about a dilemma that involved her concern that her supervisor Lloyd had plagiarized her work. Lloyd was a physician who had joined the university staff and was highly regarded by the institution. He had asked Keylee to write the introduction to a document that Lloyd was putting together for the vice president. She did so and it was years later before she happened to find her introduction verbatim in a book by Lloyd. Her dilemma involved being loyal to her supervisor (fidelity) and say nothing, being fair to herself (justice) and report the situation or not harming herself (nonmaleficence) and say nothing. Keylee believed that if she went further with her concerns then she “would have ultimately probably needed to change jobs and go through a lot of personal pain.” Keylee felt that if she had been

…a single, more flexible individual, it would have been much easier to stand on principle…[but] having a husband in school and in school full time that she was supporting and a child who was, you know, preschool …it felt like there was much more at stake than true to self at that point. (Keylee)

Keylee decided she did not want to risk the personal harm to herself and her family and did not report her supervisor to the university.

At the same time student affairs professionals considered implications of the dilemma and its resolution for themselves, they also considered the implications for the wider
organization. Fifty-two of the 149 considerations (35%) related to the bigger picture of the wider organization (such as political implications and legal implications) were identified by interviewees.

One aspect of the bigger picture was political implications. Political implications were reported by interviewees in 10 of the 38 dilemmas (26%). For example, as Director of the Career Center, Jean faced a situation that involved students, the university, and external stakeholders. A student had overheard a professor and recruiter talking about students before interviews were conducted. The professor had told the recruiter whom he thought was worth hiring and whom he thought was not worth hiring. The student questioned the value in participating in the process if the decision was already made concerning offers of employment. The dilemma involved protecting the student (beneficence) while at the same time not harming the recruiter’s company or the relationship between the company and the institution (nonmaleficence). But she also had to consider the political implications of the situation. The reputation of the company was a major political consideration. If the student told others about her experience, students might protest the company’s participation in campus interviewing. The company was also a member of a national organization whose rules specified how to recruit and this recruiter’s actions were not in keeping with those policies. The impact of the resolution of this dilemma on the company’s national reputation had to be considered. The company was also very active at the school both in participation on various boards and in making donations. Jean wanted to resolve the dilemma in a way that would preserve the close relationship between the company and the university. Fortunately, the company responded well. It recognized the problem with its recruiter’s behavior and had all of the students re-interviewed by another recruiter. The student was satisfied that the firm had acted fairly. Jean said,
It could have escalated, and I didn't want that to happen. So it was important for us to come up with a way of addressing this so that we were able to maintain this ongoing relationship with the firm. Again, as I said, they were donors. They were on advisory boards, you know, and it was also important that we were able to do this at as low a level as possible, because I was concerned about the firm's reputation. And I didn't want, certainly didn't want students going around saying, talking about the firm in a negative way. So, yeah, how to, it was important that again the student knew that we were concerned, that it was a legitimate issue. And that we were able to find a fair and equitable resolution from the student's perspective. How the firm dealt with this was a real key piece of this. It could have gotten a lot worse. If it had been a firm who did not agree (laugh) or see the competing, their need, their desire to hire the best people possible and to want faculty input as a way of doing that versus other mechanisms that were more above reproach. (Jean) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

Another political implication in this dilemma was the relationship between the faculty member and the career center. Jean wanted to support faculty involvement in the recruitment process but wanted to make sure it was ethical involvement. Initially the faculty member said that he was only doing what other schools did. He suggested that to do less would put their students at a disadvantage. But after some discussion and sharing of the principles of their national organization, the faculty member understood that he should continue to participate in the process but to do so in a manner that did not harm students by categorizing or generalizing. Rather, he should offer positive examples of students’ abilities and qualities where possible. Jean said,
So that's how we resolved that. And again lots of trying to be very diplomatic, trying to be really clear, use professional principles that were in writing, case law and to back up that and again with the firm again to use all of that, remind them of the principles and practices, try to find a way of resolving the student’s concerns. (Jean)

Another aspect of the implications for the wider organization considered by interviewees was legal implications of the dilemma. Legal implications were considered in nine of the 38 reported ethical dilemmas (24%). Sally’s dilemma dealt with faculty and student complaints about a student named Jane. Jane had a history of disruptive behavior that often approached but never crossed the line of a particular rule or policy. At other times, however, faculty would report that she was a very good student. Sally was not sure how to proceed. She worked at a private school and had the ability to dismiss Jane if she saw fit. But she also knew Jane was a first-generation student who had come from an alternative high school program from another region and was very different from the majority of students at this small school. Sally viewed the dilemmas as one of being fair to Jane (justice) versus being fair to the community (justice). Initially she chose the principle of being fair to Jane. Sally said,

…the campus that I was on had a reputation, somewhat unfairly, but a reputation nonetheless for being sort of an upperclass white place. This student was relatively poor and African-American and from a different region of the country. And so part of what I believed was going on was at one level discomfort not simply with her behaviors but discomfort with her because of prejudice, stereotyping, certainly reinforced by the fact that she was so odd and began to exude problematic behaviors. But at a fundamental level, I also wanted really to make sure that the reactions that other people were having to
her were not simply because they perceived her as “other” and I do think that particularly early on that was part of what was happening. (Sally)

She said, “I guess I really sided with her as an individual, her as a student who had not obviously violated or compromised her right to be enrolled.” Sally met with Jane several times as well as students and staff to explain both her decision and what she expected of Jane in terms of her behavior. Sally monitored the situation. Eventually there was an incident in which Jane made what appeared to be a suicide attempt that required her to be taken to the hospital. Jane’s family refused to get involved. Jane was not a minor so the school could not force the parents to take responsibility for Jane when she was discharged. Sally stated,

The other issue certainly that came into play at some point was the knowledge that there were also some very real legal dimensions that we needed to stay very aware of, because we began to suspect that there could be some mental illness. It very rapidly became a potential ADA issue, because we had a student who was over 21, not a financial dependent that we could tell on her next of kin, on her relatives. All of and this was a college with a pretty traditional student body for the most part so we were very used to the mechanism of working with the family. So from a FERPA standpoint, a HIPA standpoint, we had some real limitations in terms of what we felt we could share particularly early in the situation, because she was absolutely saying, “Don't contact my family” and as it turned out even the contact number she had put down on her emergency forms was not in service. And so all of those questions of when you believe a student’s not competent, who do you turn to? And if it's an ADA issue, you certainly can't dismiss a student for having a disability so it comes back to the behavioral issues which were a
very gray area so I think, because there were so many not just ethical, but ethical/legal, ethical legal almost moral flavors to it. (Sally)

Sally could not legally tell the parents more in hopes of persuading them to get involved in their daughter’s life. Because of the legal implications, Sally decided instead to work with the local mental health community to assess Jane and develop a plan to help her get through the remainder of the semester. Jane agreed to keep a specific schedule of appointments with the local hospital. Additionally Sally received permission from Jane to confirm her attendance at her appointments. Sally discovered that Jane did not comply and as a result Sally decided not to allow her to return to the school after that semester. She said,

And so that was a place where she had in the end clearly stepped over the line. And so I felt more, I don't know the word I want, more comfortable drawing the line with her so clearly because I felt like we really had given her every opportunity and she had not fully complied with what she had agreed to do. (Sally)

The second theme that emerged from data concerning the second and third research questions was that student affairs professionals consider many factors but ultimately they decide to uphold the ethical principle that their personal values deem most important. This theme was particularly interesting since ethical principles were not mentioned during their responses to the interview question asking them to identify considerations they included in their resolution process. It is possible that this interview question was interpreted by interviewees as asking for considerations other than or in addition to the relevant ethical principles. Additionally, while the interview question asked interviewees to discuss the relative importance of their considerations, they tended to talk more about which consideration they viewed as most important. This could be due in part to the fact that the majority (33 of the 38 dilemmas or 87%) of the dilemmas involved
between two and eight additional considerations that they identified. The complexity of reported dilemmas could have contributed to interviewees concentrating on what they believed was the most important consideration.

Interviewees identified between one and eight considerations in their dilemmas. Three categories of considerations were found in the data concerning the importance of the considerations. Personal belief was identified in four of the 38 dilemmas (10%) as the most important consideration. A circumstance particular to the situation (e.g. citizenship status or unethical supervisor) or the impact of the resolution was identified in six of the 38 dilemmas (16%). However, the need to uphold a particular ethical principle was named most frequently (28 of the 38 dilemmas or 74%) as the most important consideration. Furthermore, interviewees’ personal values systems were discussed. They expressed their beliefs and feelings about their decision to uphold that particular ethical principle. The data about this theme are summarized in Table 3.

For example, Mary had to decide whether to honor a union strike (fidelity) and stop teaching her students or to fulfill her obligation to the university (fidelity) since she had already been paid to complete the internship program that summer. She also weighed the principle of nonmaleficence in terms of not harming the students. If they did not complete their internship, they would not be able to graduate on time. Her considerations included the fact that the university had already paid her, institutions participating in her internship program were relying on her students, the possible harm that could be done to her department’s reputation and relationships with other university members who were honoring the strike, and the impact on
Table 3

*Most Important Consideration Identified by Student Affairs Professionals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uphold Fidelity</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>33% (12.5/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphold Justice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28% (11/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphold Nonmaleficence</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>13% (4.5/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Belief</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10% (4/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular Circumstance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8% (3/38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Resolution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8% (3/38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aOne interviewee identified upholding fidelity and nonmaleficence as the most important considerations for one dilemma so each consideration was given a .5 value for the purposes of this table. This decision maintained the correct number of 38 dilemmas.
students who needed her course to graduate that August. She also talked about the fact that as a
tenured faculty member and a person with a relatively secure personal financial situation that the
risk attached to crossing the union’s work stoppage line was less for her than for others. But
when asked about the considerations’ relative importance, for Mary it was ultimately about
upholding the ethical principle of fidelity to her institution and nonmaleficence with her students.
Mary said,

I think for me what it is, is coming from my working-class background. I mean, when
people pay you for something, you finish what you, you finish your obligations, you
know, so I think that’s really what it was, is that I had a contract with the institution, they
had, you know, upheld their side. They had paid me. So I was obligated to, you know,
pay or to finish what I had started …I think, you know, getting paid, getting paid was
important and so was ensuring that students could graduate on time. Those were the two
that were primary. (Mary)

Mary’s words conveyed that it was her personal conviction based on her upbringing that gave
her the basis for her decision to uphold fidelity to her institution and nonmaleficence to her
students.

In another example, Bob was the director of student activities. He found out that a student
leader was actually not enrolled that semester yet he was still actively participating in his
organization. People at the university thought it would be more harmful to the group to remove
the student leader than to allow him to continue in his role. Bob considered the impact of his
decision including the possible precedent he might set by allowing the individual to continue as
if he were enrolled and the possible harm to the organization to remove the leader. Ultimately it
was his personal conviction to uphold the ethical principle of fidelity and be truthful that guided his resolution of the dilemma. Bob said,

I think that my expectation always for myself is to keep myself as honest as possible with students and if I have that drive on my own side, and that's what I have to be doing, then I have to expect that they do the same with me. And to me that's always resolved many of the ethical issues because I guess I saw it more black-and-white, that it was important that way, not to be vindictive, but just that it was more a part of the learning experience.

(Bob)

So while the ethical dilemmas had many layers and parts, interviewees came back to the essence of the topic of ethical dilemma resolution. The majority of them recognized many kinds of dilemmas and many considerations, but in the end it was about upholding an ethical principle.

The third theme that bridged the second and third research questions was that student affairs professionals take ethical dilemmas and their resolution seriously. I found that serious reflection was used in the resolution process of 87% of the ethical dilemmas. In 33 of the 38 dilemmas, interviewees discussed thinking, reflecting, weighing, balancing, and identifying options and relevant ethical principles. Other steps of serious reflection included referring to their educational background, their profession, their professional standards, and prayer.

For example, John served as a member of the committee reviewing students’ final projects for graduation. When a student submitted unacceptable work, it was not just a simple matter of rejecting the student’s project. John had to weigh the different choices the committee had. To only reject the project with no additional action would have meant the student did not graduate at the end of that semester. To accept the work that included incorrect information could have had implications for the academic standards of the department. John also talked about
the student’s feelings about the situation as well. He said, “When you look at ethical dilemmas, I
guess, you're looking at, we're looking at, okay, what are the consequences of acting one way on
the ethics versus another way? And what's going to come out of this?” John went on to say,

I try to look at what might be good for the individual but I also have to weigh that against
what is the institution’s role, what kind of context are we living in and I look for some
kind of a balance if I can achieve it. At least that’s the way I try to go about doing it if I
can. In other words, if I can stay consistent with the university policies, the university
procedures, the, if you will, the ethical stance of the university. But at the same time, find
some solution that is palatable to the individual I’m working with. (John)

In 23 of the 38 dilemmas (61%) reflection by the interviewee included identifying the
relevant ethical principles. As another example, Jean had an employee who had been doing a
very good job in a position funded by a grant. When it came time to make the position a
permanent one, the university diversity office wanted her to hire someone else. As Jean thought
about the dilemma, she identified “competing principles of fairness, institutional policy, doing no
harm (laugh) you know, there are just so many issues and principles, competing principles in that
particular situation.” (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.) She went on to say,

And then I basically sat down and went through a process of kind of taking each of the
principles and thinking about what is most fair, what is, where does harm come in or not
come in? Who benefits? Who doesn't benefit? (Jean)

The seriousness with which interviewees engaged reflection was frequently mentioned by
interviewees. Bill, another research participant, was facing the decision of whether or not to
terminate an insubordinate employee. He was concerned about the negative impact of his
decision on the individual both personally and professionally (nonmaleficence). Bill also
considered how different decisions would affect his staff members and their ability to serve their students. He felt an obligation to the staff to make sure the office was able to fulfill its duty to serve the students (fidelity). He said,

When you start considering the pros and cons, the costs and benefits of each one of those decisions, that's where the ethical dimensions come into play, and it becomes, the decision becomes more arduous for, it did for me to decide. (Bill) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

Bill went on to say,

And so that was the, those were the steps that I took [which] were carefully analyzing the pros and the cons, the advantages and disadvantages of each probable decision I could have made. And it took a great deal of emotional strain going through that. (Bill) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

Their serious approach to ethical dilemmas and their resolution was also demonstrated by their recognition of and willingness to take the risk associated with their decisions to uphold the specific principle. Interviewees’ discussion of each dilemma included the risk connected with certain options. The risk ranged from dissatisfaction of staff to termination by a supervisor. Their discussion of the resolution recognized the various factors involved in the dilemmas but they showed clear assessment of the possible risks and the strength of character to follow the path they viewed as the one serving the greater good.

For example, Don had been asked by the faculty to support its vote of no confidence in the president. He wanted to be loyal to his colleagues (fidelity) but he also wanted to fulfill his obligation to the president who was his supervisor (fidelity). He finally decided to tell the president what was going on. Don said,
I felt that my loyalty to the institution and I think this is probably, rather than to the person, is how I resolved the dilemma. I was so concerned that a vote of no confidence would hurt the institution that I decided the best way to go forward in this was to protect the institution, that there was a higher good. I had always been trained that mother, mother being the institution, should always come first and if we all operated in that vein then the learning would be the best, the learning opportunities would be the best that they could be. And so regardless of the politics, I needed to protect the institution. I was most worried since I served at will to the president I was, I really thought that he was going to fire me on the spot. I mean, and I was willing to put my job on the line for the institution but I really, I was hoping he wouldn’t and he didn’t. (Don) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

However, for Don, the decision to talk directly to the president did not turn out well. He said:

But I think it forever scarred me professionally with the president. I think at that point, I think that the president was angry at me for having been in a position that they trusted me more than they trusted him. And my days at that institution, that happened about a year and a half before I left and that last year and a half was pure hell. I was really glad to get out! Really glad to get out because I think he had turned all of his anger and frustration on me rather than seeing me as a friend that came to his aid to help him through this situation. He saw me as a threat. (Don) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

Another example of this theme was found in a dilemma that Tess faced. Tess was serving as a search committee chair at the same time that she was being reviewed for tenure. Her ethical dilemma involved her concerns about the involvement of her supervisor and department head in
the search. Tess’ supervisor had structured the job description in such a way that a personal friend of his was a perfect fit for the position. On the other hand, the department needed someone with a very specific skill set and background. Tess wanted to make sure that she was fulfilling her obligation to the department head as the search committee chair to oversee a search with which he would be satisfied. She also wanted to be true to her own set of values concerning honesty. Tess stated,

I needed, in my own mind, to make sure that this really was in the best interests of the department and we really were doing this in a way that was ethical and that was above board. And that we weren’t sliding someone in in a way that violated our ethical standards and university policy. (Tess) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

But she was not sure how her department head would respond to her questions. Since she was in the midst of her tenure and promotion process, she was risking harm to her relationship with her department head and thus her possibility of tenure if he did not respond well to her questions. Tess did not want him to view her as someone who was not willing to fulfill her obligations to him. It was possible that there was nothing wrong with his involvement and the search itself. Tess was torn between her obligation to her department head and herself and her desire to not harm herself. She chose to be true to her value of honesty. Tess said,

But I decided ethically, I couldn't just keep my mouth shut and do what I was told. I had to ask all those questions. Or I just couldn't live with myself. So in some ways, the competing values for me there were, you know, toeing the party line because of promotion and tenure or being true to myself as a professional and as hopefully an ethical
human being. And the latter had to win out for me if I was going to feel good about who I am. (Tess) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

But while Tess was clear about her ethics and her commitment to those ethical principles, she further elaborated about the risk she was willing to take to follow her decision. She said,

Well, I think that as an academic, people who haven't been faculty, I don't think can have any conception of just how powerful the promotion and tenure process is and how little power you feel when you're untenured and how careful you have to be. I think for me, it was doubly hard because I taught for eight years at another institution and I had been promoted and tenured there, came to [name of school], which viewed itself, and rightly so, as a higher-tiered institution, and so I had to go through promotion and tenure again. So not only was I not at that point promoted and tenured, but I had been. So I understood the differences between being an untenured assistant professor and being a tenured associate professor. And I knew what that meant. And so I knew the line I was walking here, especially because it was happening during my promotion and tenure year. But I felt that it was so important that despite being in a position that was certainly vulnerable, I had to speak up about this. And professionally it was a risk, but to me it was a risk I had to take. (Tess) (Underlined words were emphasized by interviewee.)

Fortunately for Tess, her department head responded well to her questions and she concluded that both ethically and legally they were conducting the search properly.

To this point I had completed the first two steps of the analysis as depicted in Figure 1 (categorizing the data through surface content analysis and finding themes). I then proceeded to move to the third iteration of the data to develop an overarching proposition that would provide a hypothesis or theory based on the data. To do this required me to continue the constant
comparative analytical approach and look again at the themes to see what underlying patterns I could find that crossed themes and form a theoretical construct or hypothesis to be the overarching proposition.

**Overarching Proposition About Ethical Dilemma Resolution**

The ultimate goal of qualitative research is to find an overarching proposition (Anfara et al., 2002). Upon further analysis of the five themes developed in the second iteration of the data, I developed the following overarching proposition about ethical dilemma resolution. Despite the complexity of ethical dilemmas in terms of the multiple ethical issues involved and the multiple roles they play in these dilemmas, student affairs professionals use a relatively simple resolution process of serious reflection and engaging others to understand the implications of the dilemma and its resolution. Student affairs professionals weigh the considerations pertaining to themselves and the wider organization within the context of the relevant ethical principles and ultimately make a decision that they personally believe is ethical.

The first part of this proposition was built upon the theme about the first research question that examined the kinds of ethical dilemmas. The proposition states, “Despite the complexity of ethical dilemmas in terms of the multiple ethical issues involved and the multiple roles they play in these dilemmas…” The first theme discussed the lack of a typical ethical dilemma. It further stated that staffing practices were oftentimes at the center of dilemmas. The theme reiterated that student affairs professionals face very complex ethical dilemmas. Dilemmas were complex on many levels. There were eight different constituent groups. The majority (20 of 38 dilemmas or 53%) of the dilemmas involved more than one constituent group. Interviewees identified nine different roles. Thirteen of the 38 dilemmas (34%) found interviewees fulfilling two roles. All five
ethical principles were included in the interviews. Ethical dilemmas as defined by Kitchener (1985) meant there had to be at least two principles at stake. Twenty-two of 38 dilemmas (58%) involved three or more principles. In addition to the multiple layers of constituent groups, roles, and principles were the many considerations that interviewees included in their resolution process. Only five of the 38 dilemmas (13%) had one consideration. The vast majority of dilemmas (35 of 38 dilemmas or 87%) dealt with between two and eight additional considerations. The data supported the first part of the proposition that the ethical dilemmas faced by student affairs professionals are very complex.

The second part of the proposition was developed from the theme that was generated from the second research question about the process of ethical dilemma resolution. The proposition states, “student affairs professionals use a relatively simple resolution process of serious reflection and engaging others to understand the implications of the dilemma and its resolution …” The second theme had looked more closely at how seriously student affairs professionals treat ethical dilemmas as well as the process that they use that includes talking to others. Further analysis of this theme contributed to the understanding that student affairs professionals most often use a relatively simple, two part process to resolve ethical dilemmas. Faced with such complex ethical dilemmas, it might have been thought that student affairs professionals would need a complicated resolution process. The interviewees reported 18 different steps that they used to resolve their ethical dilemmas. Upon further analysis, however, the 18 steps were grouped into three categories of serious reflection, talking to others, and doing nothing. Eleven of the 38 dilemmas (29%) included the step of doing nothing in their
resolution. The most frequently used steps were engaging in serious reflection (33 of 38 dilemmas or 87%) and talking to others (32 of 38 dilemmas or 84%). Furthermore, interviewees identified both of these steps in 26 of 38 dilemmas (68%). The data supported the second part of the proposition that student affairs professionals most often use a relatively simple two part process of engaging in serious reflection and talking to others to resolve ethical dilemmas.

The third part of the overarching proposition was developed from crossing the themes from the analysis of research questions two and three. Research question two examined the process of ethical dilemma resolution and research question three studied the considerations that student affairs professionals included in their resolution process. The proposition states, “Student affairs professionals weigh the considerations pertaining to themselves and the wider organization within the context of the relevant ethical principles and ultimately make a decision that they personally believe is ethical.” The first of these three themes studied the types of considerations student affairs professionals included in their resolution process. I had found that 54 of 149 considerations (36%) involved in ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals dealt with themselves and 52 of 149 considerations (35%) pertained to the wider organization. The second of these themes recognized the many factors under consideration in ethical dilemma resolution but it further stated that student affairs professionals hold personal convictions that upholding ethical principles is the most important consideration and act accordingly. Interviewees identified this consideration as most important in 28 of the 38 dilemmas (74%). Furthermore, the data supported the third theme that student affairs professionals take ethical dilemmas and their resolutions seriously. One of the two most
frequently used steps was engaging in serious reflection (33 of 38 dilemmas or 87%). The role of personal values was also found in the fourth and fifth themes, thus supporting the third part of the overarching proposition that student affairs professionals personally believe their decision is ethical.

The analysis of the themes and examination of the third iteration of analysis supported the development of this overarching proposition. The mixed methods research design of this study then moved to phase two for its findings. The purpose of the second phase was to determine if the data confirmed the findings of phase one.

Phase Two Findings

An essential part of mixed methods research design is the integration of data from both phases. This step occurred when I used the data from the first phase to design the online survey for the second phase. I integrated data again at this point of my study. I compared the list of steps selected by the NASPA members to the list of steps identified by the CAS representatives. I also compared the list of considerations chosen by the NASPA members to the list of considerations identified by the CAS representatives. Finally, I looked at the overarching proposition that I identified in phase one to see if the phase two findings confirmed that proposition.

Steps of Ethical Dilemma Resolution

Participants in phase two were asked to select the three most important steps that they took in resolving their ethical dilemma from a list that was generated from data collected in the first phase of the study. The option of “other” was also offered in case there was a step that was not included in the list that a participant wanted to choose. The data from this question are summarized in Table 4.
### Table 4

*Steps Taken in Ethical Dilemma Resolution by Phase Two Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I thought about, reflected on, weighed, and balanced the elements of the situation.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I conferred with other(s) informally.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I conferred with other(s) officially.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I identified my options.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I did what felt right.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I identified the ethical principles involved in this dilemma.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I thought about the profession of student affairs and its mission and philosophy.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I talked to those directly involved in the dilemma.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I conferred with Human Resources.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I referred to upper administration or university.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I referred to the standards of my professional organization.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I prayed.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I tried to negate negative effects of my decision on those involved in the dilemma.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I conferred with legal counsel.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I did nothing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I thought about lessons learned in my graduate program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. I conferred with my professional association. 0 0%

18. I resigned. 0 0%

*Note.* Number for each consideration refers to order of item in the online survey.

*Note.* There was a total of 78 surveys with responses to the survey question about steps of the ethical dilemma resolution used. The percentage was calculated by dividing the number of surveys that selected that step by 78.
The three steps most often selected were “I thought about, reflected on, weighed, and balanced the elements of the situation” (76%), “I conferred with other(s) informally” (37%), and “I conferred with other(s) officially” (31%). The three most often identified steps taken by participants in phase one were think, reflect, weigh, and balance the elements of the situation (74%), identify options (74%), and talk to those involved (68%). I found that phase two confirmed the most often cited step of think, reflect, weigh, and balance the elements of the situation. However, the other two steps in the second phase were related to but not exactly the same as in phase one. Phase two participants identified steps that involved talking to others (informally and formally) but not the specific people that phase one participants discussed (those involved). So while the phase two data only confirmed one of the three specific steps from phase one, there was a broader confirmation of the concept of talking with others. It is important to note that phase two participants did select “I identified my options” almost as often (29%) as their third choice. Keeping in mind that there were nineteen possible steps from which to choose, this finding contributed to the conclusion that there was overall agreement between the two phases in terms of steps of ethical dilemma resolution. I then analyzed the data from the surveys concerning considerations involved in ethical dilemma resolution.

Considerations in Ethical Dilemma Resolution

Participants in phase two were asked to select the three most important considerations that they included in resolving their ethical dilemma. Their choices were presented in a list that was generated from data collected in the first phase of the study. The option of “other” was also offered in case there was a step that was not included in the list that a participant wanted to select. The data for this question are in Table 5.
Table 5

*Considerations Included in Ethical Dilemma Resolution by Phase Two Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. I considered the impact of the resolution on others.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I considered my responsibility or role in the dilemma.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I considered the bigger picture of the situation (e.g., long-term effects of the resolution or impact of the resolution on my institution).</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I considered the legal implications of the dilemma and/or my decision about how to resolve the dilemma.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I considered my responsibility to my profession of student affairs to uphold its values, such as caring and promoting student development.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I considered the personal situation of someone directly involved in the dilemma.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I considered the possibility of setting a precedent either within my office or at my institution.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I considered whether this situation was a true ethical dilemma or not (that is, whether it involved two or more ethical principles).</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I considered whether this was a teachable moment, depending on how I resolved the dilemma.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I considered my personal values.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I considered the political implications of the dilemma and/or my decision.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I considered the possibility that one of my choices might give the appearance of unethical behavior on my part even when I wasn’t doing anything wrong.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I considered the degree of power or authority I had in the dilemma.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. I considered how the different resolution choices might affect me either personally or professionally. 6 8%

5. I considered others’ responsibility in the dilemma. 5 6%

13. I considered whether or not I had a clear and complete understanding of the situation. 4 5%

16. I considered the individual specifics of the dilemma, such as the timing of the person’s actions (versus the bigger picture of the situation). 3 4%

18. Other 1 1%

*Note.* Number for each consideration refers to order of item in the online survey.

*Note.* There was a total of 79 surveys with responses to the survey question about considerations of the ethical dilemma resolution used. The percentage was calculated by dividing the number of surveys that selected that consideration by 79.
The three considerations most often selected were “I considered the impact of the resolution on others” (48%), “I considered my responsibility or role in the dilemma” (41%), and “I considered the bigger picture of the situation (e.g., long-term effects of the resolution or impact of the resolution on my institution)” (34%). I then looked at the three most frequently cited considerations provided by participants in phase one. They were interviewee’s responsibility or role in the dilemma (58%), personal values (53%), and the bigger picture such as long-term effects of the resolution or the impact of the resolution on their institution (47%). Two of the three considerations in phase one were confirmed by the phase two data. Participants in both phases indicated their responsibility or role in the dilemma and the bigger picture of the situation as important considerations in their resolution of the ethical dilemma they faced. It is important to note that the number one selection of phase two (impact of the resolution on those involved) was the fourth most frequently identified consideration by phase one participants (40%). With 18 possible considerations offered, the fact that the phase one and phase two participants chose three of the same top four factors supported my conclusion that the phase two data confirmed phase one’s finding.

I then moved to the final step of data analysis. I reviewed the overarching proposition that I identified in phase one to see if the phase two findings confirmed or failed to confirm that proposition.

Overarching Proposition and Phase Two Data

The overarching proposition identified in phase one was that despite the complexity of ethical dilemmas in terms of the multiple ethical issues involved and the multiple roles they play in these dilemmas, student affairs professionals use a relatively simple resolution process of serious reflection and engaging others to understand the implications of the dilemma and its
resolution. The proposition further states that student affairs professionals weigh the considerations pertaining to themselves and the wider organization within the context of the relevant ethical principles and make a decision that they personally believe is ethical. I turned to the data from phase two to see if I found confirmation for this proposition.

The first part of the proposition referred to the fact that student affairs professionals face complex ethical dilemmas with multiple ethical issues and multiple roles. The dilemmas provided by participants in both phases included numerous constituent groups (such as student and supervisee) and roles (such as supervisor and faculty) held by the primary actor in the situation. The one difference was that some dilemmas in phase one involved people formerly associated with an institution whereas there were no dilemmas of this kind in phase two. The dilemmas reported in phase two reflected this complexity and variety and thus confirmed the first part of the overarching proposition. Data from phase one and phase two are provided in Table 6.

The second part of the overarching proposition said, “…student affairs professionals use a relatively simple resolution process of serious reflection and engaging others to understand the implications of the dilemma and its resolution.” Phase two participants indicated the three most important steps taken in their ethical dilemma resolution process were “I thought about, reflected on, weighed, and balanced the elements of the situation,” “I conferred with other(s) informally,” and “I conferred with other(s) officially.” These steps were consistent with the overarching proposition from phase one of the study.

The third part of the overarching proposition stated, “Student affairs professionals weigh the considerations pertaining to themselves and the wider organization…” The three considerations most often selected in phase two were “I considered the impact of the resolution on others,” “I considered my responsibility or role in the dilemma,” and “I considered the bigger
Table 6

*Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Student Affairs Professionals as Reported by Study Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of Dilemma</th>
<th>Phase One</th>
<th>Phase Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constituent Group</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Employee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Stakeholder</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Phase One</th>
<th>Phase Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/support provider</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisee</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee chair/member</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Employee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. The percentages totaled more than 100% because some dilemmas involved more than one constituent group or role.

Note. The percentages for Phase One were calculated by dividing the number of dilemmas with that constituent group or role by the total number of dilemmas of 38.

Note. The percentages for Phase Two were calculated by dividing the number of surveys that described an ethical dilemma that included that constituent group or role by the total number of surveys analyzed of 80.
picture of the situation (e.g., long-term effects of the resolution or impact of the resolution on my institution).” These considerations confirmed the overarching proposition in that phase two participants considered themselves in regard to their responsibility or role in the dilemma and the impact of the resolution on others, including the wider organization through consideration of the bigger picture of the situation.

The fourth and final part of the overarching proposition was that student affairs professionals resolve ethical dilemmas “within the context of the relevant ethical principles and make a decision that they personally believe is ethical.” Five steps (“I identified the ethical principles involved,” “I thought about the profession of student affairs and its mission and philosophy,” “I did what felt right,” “I prayed,” and “I referred to the standards of my professional organization”) were related to this part of the proposition. Two considerations (“I considered my responsibility to the profession of student affairs to uphold its values, such as caring and promoting student development” and “I considered my personal values”) were also relevant. Fifty-six of the 80 surveys (70%) identified one or more of these steps or considerations. The frequency of these particular steps and considerations that dealt with ethical principles, values, and commitment to the student affairs profession therefore confirmed the final part of the overarching proposition.

Comments by participants found in the first and fourth open-ended questions also provided confirmation of the final part of the overarching proposition. The first question asked participants to describe an ethical dilemma that they had faced and why they believed it was an ethical dilemma. One participant reported a situation in which a president wanted the participant to hire someone that he or she did not believe was qualified. Among the concerns was the belief that to hire this person would “reflect on my personal integrity.” The participant ultimately
presented reasons for opposing the possible selection but said that he or she would respect the decision if made and then “would immediately begin a job search.” The president chose to conduct a full search and a person was hired that the participant believed was qualified for the position. The reference to “personal integrity” suggested the person’s desire to act ethically.

Another participant talked about the dilemma of working with a supervisor who believed “that you should evaluate staff lower as opposed to higher” out of concern that “if you gave someone a high set of scores, they would stop working hard.” The participant was worried about alienating the supervisor but also “believed that we should rate them (the employees) fairly.” The desire to be fair is a part of upholding the ethical principle of justice. Thus, this participant’s response supported the idea of dealing with ethical dilemmas “within the context of the ethical principles involved in that dilemma.”

Additionally, this person provided more insight in the fourth and final question of the survey that confirmed the last part of the overarching proposition. The last question asked if the process of ethical dilemma resolution described in the survey by the participant was generally how the person resolved ethical dilemmas. The participant said, “Yes,” and went on to say, “I choose the path that will let me sleep at night. This is what I believe has helped me to sleep at night during my career.” Further evidence of the importance of making “a decision that they believe is ethical” was found in the final question’s answers from others. For example, one person said, “I think the one I use the most to solve ethical dilemmas is my own sense of integrity. Can I look at myself in the mirror and be pleased with what I see there?” The notion of integrity was also found in the following answer: “I want to make sure that at the end of the day I can say that I acted with integrity and with a moral approach.” Comments such as these by
participants in phase two supported the last part of the overarching proposition. Thus, the overarching proposition in total was confirmed by the second phase of the study. The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study was to explore how student affairs professionals resolve professional ethical dilemmas. The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of how CAS representatives resolve professional ethical dilemmas by interviewing the representatives. The second phase of this study was designed to confirm the first phase findings. An online survey was designed and administered to NASPA members who held positions similar to those held by the phase one sample. I found that phase two confirmed the phase one findings pertaining to the steps and considerations as well as the overarching proposition of ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The following chapter discusses the study’s findings and implications and is organized in the following manner. The first section provides an overview of the study. The second section discusses the findings of the study. The chapter then presents a discussion of the implications for future practice and future research. Limitations of this study are also included in this chapter. Finally, some general conclusions are drawn.

Overview

This study explored how student affairs professionals resolve professional ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma was defined as a situation in which two ethical principles were at odds rather than a simple matter of right versus wrong (Kitchener, 1985). A professional ethical dilemma was an ethical dilemma in the context of a person’s work-related experience. The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of how CAS representatives resolve professional ethical dilemmas by interviewing the representatives. The second phase of this study was confirmatory. An online questionnaire was designed and administered to NASPA members who held positions similar to those held by the phase one sample. The questionnaire was designed to confirm the findings from phase one about ethical dilemma resolution.

Discussion of the Findings

Based on the findings of this study, there are five key conclusions that can be drawn. These conclusions pertain to the ethical dilemmas themselves, the process of ethical dilemma resolution, and the considerations of ethical dilemma resolution. The relative role of personal values and the commitment to be ethical are also discussed.
Complexity of Ethical Dilemmas

A critical piece of this study was recognizing the fact that an ethical dilemma is not a situation of simply dealing with right versus wrong. Rather, according to Kitchener (1985), an ethical dilemma is more complex because it involves two rights. However, I found that ethical dilemmas can involve multiple ethical principles, making them even more complex than first anticipated. Additionally, ethical dilemmas are more complex on a number of levels beyond the ethical principles involved. Such things as the roles played by the person and the different people involved contribute to the complexity of the dilemmas faced by student affairs professionals. There were many instances in which a person held more than one role and/or dealt with more than one constituent group. The many variations and combinations of these elements create so many possible scenarios that there is no “typical” ethical dilemma for student affairs professionals.

At the same time, I found that there was a prevalence of dilemmas involving staffing practices. An additional aspect of such situations is the power or positional authority held by anyone in the situation. How much power a person has can affect how the situation is or is not resolved. Thus, the complexity of the dilemma increases.

What this finding means is that with each additional principle, role, or constituent group, the ethical dilemma increases in complexity. Ethical dilemmas are not only challenging because they deal with at least two principles. These situations are frequently complex for other reasons as well such as the roles and the people involved in the situation. It also means that dilemmas are not restricted to one aspect of the practice of student affairs. The end result is that practitioners must be prepared to face ethical dilemmas anywhere and any time.
This finding is important for three reasons. First, it supports the idea practitioners might have that ethical dilemmas can be overwhelming and complicated. But rather than having this anecdotal impression of ethical dilemmas, this finding provides specific, real-world ways in which these situations can be complex. It takes the concept of ethical dilemma out of the world of theory and puts it into the world of practice. This practical information can serve both new and experienced professionals in the field to become more knowledgeable about the kinds of ethical dilemmas they might face. Second, this finding, at the same time, forewarns practitioners that there is not a typical dilemma or that there are areas in which such challenges cannot occur. It is important for professionals to appreciate the potential of ethical dilemmas throughout their day-to-day practice. This finding can help put ethical practice and dilemmas on their radar screens. Finally, the area of staffing practices has a high level of potential to create an ethical dilemma. All professionals are supervisees. They might also be supervisors. This fact reiterates the notion that ethical dilemmas can develop for anyone. It is therefore of paramount importance that practitioners know about ethical dilemmas and how to resolve them.

A Relatively Simple Resolution Process

While the first finding dealt with the very complex nature of dilemmas, it is particularly surprising that these very complex dilemmas did not translate to a very complex resolution process. I found that student affairs professionals use a relatively simple, two-part process. One part is serious reflection. Steps such as weighing, identifying, thinking, and balancing are frequently used. Both in the actions they identify and the ways they talk about those actions, participants indicate a deep respect for the importance of what they are doing. Not one participant from either phase suggested that ethical dilemma resolution was easy or unimportant.
With this appreciation of the challenge and gravity of the situation, student affairs professionals weigh options, identify relevant principles, and balance potential outcomes.

The second part of the resolution process also demonstrates student affairs professionals’ awareness of the seriousness of ethical dilemmas. Rather than making a decision on their own, they typically talk to other people. This step is not an effort to avoid making the difficult decision. They are not seeking “the answer” from someone else or for another person to tell them what to do. Rather, professionals are humble enough to seek additional insights in hopes of getting a more complete picture of the situation and its possible resolutions. They are also willing to put in that extra effort to make the best decision by seeking others’ input rather than merely figuring it out on their own.

This finding means that student affairs professionals make the resolution of very complex situations manageable by incorporating two types of actions. This approach gives a broad guideline while at the same time allowing flexibility as to how each part is employed. It means there is no one step-by-step formula but there is a general process that professionals use to resolve ethical dilemmas.

This finding is important because it gives practitioners a way to resolve dilemmas that they can realistically implement. It does not oversimplify the resolution process by suggesting that there are specifically two parts (such as “identify ethical principles and talk to your supervisor”). Instead, it empowers student affairs professionals to have a general and easy to implement approach that they can personalize for their specific situation. The finding offers a process that recognizes the many kinds of dilemmas that professionals face.

This finding is also important for what it does not do. It does not give professionals a specific, universal resolution process that they can blindly follow. This process is “relatively
simple” but that does not mean it is “easy.” The onus is on every professional to be meaningfully engaged in their daily practice so they can properly use this process.

*Considerations of Self versus the Organization*

Another finding of the study provides insight about the considerations used by student affairs professionals in ethical dilemma resolution. Despite the complexity of the dilemmas themselves, student affairs professionals primarily consider things related to themselves (such as their role or responsibility in the dilemma) and to the wider organization (such as the political or legal implications) in their resolution process. Additionally, I did not find that considerations of self were first and considerations of the wider organization were a distant second or vice versa. These two categories were very close in how often they were identified. This suggests that student affairs professionals do not lose sight of the fact that the resolution is not always about one person, one group, one idea, or one institution. It depends on the situation as to which consideration(s) will play a role in the resolution process.

This finding is important because this umbrella of two categories (considerations that pertained to the professional and the wider organization) provides practitioners with an easy to implement template that they can then individualize for their particular situation. This finding gives professionals a starting point to organize their thoughts about what should be considered as they work to resolve their ethical dilemma. However, it is also important for practitioners to understand that they will not find “the” answer as to what they should consider. This finding requires professionals to identify the specific considerations for their situation in their ethical dilemma resolution process.
The Relative Role of Personal and Professional Values

I found that student affairs professionals have a strong sense of their personal and professional values. They talked about how they felt, what they believed, and what was important to them personally and professionally. I found that the personal values were aligned with the professional values. But if they felt that there was a conflict between the professional values in a dilemma, then student affairs professionals’ commitment to their personal values ultimately gives them the needed guidance to resolve the matter. While they want to be true to their profession, it is even more important that they be true to themselves when they decide how to resolve their dilemma. When faced with an ethical dilemma, student affairs professionals prioritized the vying ethical principles by viewing them through the lens of personal values.

This finding is important because it demonstrates the critical need for student affairs professionals to identify and nurture their personal as well as their professional values (Canon, 1996; Fried, 1997; Winston, Jr., & Dagley, 1985; Young, 1997; Young, 2001). The profession of student affairs requires practitioners to know what is important to them. With that sense of personal values, they will be better able to deal with the ethical dilemmas that they are certain to face.

The Commitment to be Ethical

It is one thing to have values. It can be another thing to stand by those values. Oftentimes there is a lot at stake in an ethical dilemma. It could be a student’s future or a colleague’s reputation. How a dilemma is resolved might bring peace of mind or never resolved feelings. Despite such daunting circumstances, I found that student affairs professionals are committed to being ethical. They accept the risk that can be associated with making and defending the ethical decision. For example, one person in the tenure process talked about what she had at stake if she
took her concerns to her supervisor and department head. There were participants in both phases that talked about the fact that they would resign their position if necessary. For some people, the outcome was positive and they did not suffer any negative consequences. Others were not that fortunate. In each of these cases, however, they decided that they had to make the ethical decision as they saw it. They were committed to being ethical, regardless of the risk.

This finding is important because it clearly demonstrates one of the most serious challenges to resolving ethical dilemmas. It is not just the challenge to understand the theoretical underpinnings of ethical practice. Professionals must recognize that ethical dilemmas take place in the real world with real people and real consequences. They must equip themselves with the theory and practical information such as the findings in this study so that they make the best decision they can. They must then be prepared to live with that decision.

This study provided important findings about ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals. The findings of the study were then examined in light of implications for future practice.

Implications for Future Practice

The findings of this study have implications for a number of constituent groups in student affairs. Student affairs graduate programs (faculty and students), new student affairs professionals, experienced student affairs professionals, and student affairs professional organizations can use the findings.

Student Affairs Graduate Programs

Both faculty and students in student affairs graduate programs can benefit from this study’s findings. Student affairs graduate programs are designed to prepare students for the real world of student affairs. The topic of ethics is found in some programs but oftentimes the
discussion is primarily theoretical. Faculty in these programs can use this study’s findings to
develop course material that would give students information about the kinds of dilemmas, the
process of how to resolve those dilemmas, and the considerations they might use in their
resolution of those dilemmas. For example, classes could include case studies based on the
dilemmas included in this study. The class could explore the steps they might take and the
considerations they might use to resolve those dilemmas. Students could learn from the
experience of the study’s participants rather than having to begin their careers with no foundation
about ethical dilemma resolution upon which to stand. Graduate programs including this study’s
findings in their curriculum would better prepare its students for their ethical participation in the
profession of student affairs.

New Student Affairs Professionals

For new student affairs professionals, the findings of this study could fill a gap they
might have in their education or experience involving ethical dilemma resolution. If their
preparation program did not include this topic, then the findings could inform them about ethical
dilemma resolution. If they had only a theoretical background about this topic, the findings could
enhance that background with practice-based insights. New professionals would have the benefit
of others’ experiences. They could be more sensitive or aware of the existence of an ethical
dilemma when they faced it, especially for the first time. The findings could also give them the
needed encouragement to make the difficult choice that an ethical dilemma typically involves by
knowing that others with more experience had followed that path. They would not feel so alone.
New professionals could be empowered to practice ethically with the real-world examples and
the process for ethical dilemma resolution that is presented in this study.
Experienced Student Affairs Professionals

Many of the benefits of these findings for new student affairs professionals apply to experienced professionals as well. Enhancing theoretical, educational background with practice-based insights by experienced professionals, increasing sensitivity and awareness of ethical dilemmas’ existence, and decreasing the feelings of isolation when dealing with ethical dilemmas can serve experienced professionals well.

For experienced professionals, the role of the findings to provide credible evidence to support a decision is even more important. There can be a lot at stake when it comes to the ethical dilemmas that they face. Experienced professionals are often in positions with notable authority and responsibility, such as a dean of students or a vice president for student affairs. The short-term and long-term implications of their decisions can be very serious as they oversee many employees, students, departments, and activities of an institution. Additionally, they are often viewed as the moral compass for their institutions. The findings can be a valuable tool in giving these practitioners insights and evidence that they can use when they explain and defend their decisions. For example, they can present the process found in this study as a framework by which to base the explanation of how they resolved their dilemma. They would also not be limited to relying only on their own, individual perspective. Experienced professionals could point to the collective experience and insights of fellow practitioners to strengthen their position concerning the decision that they made.

Student Affairs Professional Organizations

Student affairs professional organizations can also benefit from the findings of this study. Eleven percent of phase one interviewees identified consideration of the mission and values of student affairs in their resolution process. One interviewee referred to a professional
organization’s professional code. Only one interviewee talked to a professional organization as part of the resolution process. Thirty-five percent of phase two respondents selected steps or considerations that involved their profession or a professional organization (such as referring to the profession’s values and mission or their responsibility to the profession). This finding suggests that student affairs professional organizations (whether directly, through their codes, or in general) were not a prevalent part of the resolution process. These organizations could use the findings to examine their role in supporting their members in ethical dilemma resolution. For example, these organizations could fund the development of course materials based on the findings to facilitate inclusion of this important information in all graduate preparation programs. The organizations could also convene a committee to study their professional codes to see if they are relevant to the current experiences of practitioners. Members could be asked for suggestions about how the organizations can facilitate their ethical practice. The organizations could also intentionally include the findings of this study in conference materials and presentations to encourage more discussion about ethical practice. Such a proactive approach would serve both the organizations and their members in making ethical dilemma resolution a more manageable challenge.

The findings of this study can inform future practice of student affairs graduate programs, new student affairs professionals, experienced student affairs professionals, and student affairs professional organizations. This study also has implications for future research.

Implications for Future Research

There is minimal research relevant to the topic of ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals. The research studies of Thomas (2002) and Janosik et al. (2004) provided
insights into the nature of ethical concerns but neither study specifically dealt with the resolution of ethical dilemmas.

Humphrey et al. (2004) presented a theoretical model of ethical decision making. The model provided a four-step process of identifying the problem, categorizing the problem in ethical terms, reflecting on the pertinent ethical principles, character traits, and professional values, and making an ethical decision. This study supports the utility of this model. One of the two steps reported in this study was reflection, including weighing options and identifying relevant ethical principles. This step coincides with two of the four steps of the model. I also found that many participants did not use the language of ethicists. For example, participants used the character trait of honesty or the professional value of being truthful to describe a situation involving fidelity. Reference to the model by Humphrey et al. (2004) and the findings of this study can give professionals useful guidance on ethical decision making in their daily practice.

The topic of ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals is a relatively unexplored subject. While this study filled a gap in what we know about ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals, it also revealed more gaps that exist. The findings of this study suggest future research that could further contribute to our knowledge about this subject and thus help our efforts to practice ethically.

One area of further study should be the role of staffing practices in ethical dilemma resolution. Many dilemmas in this study involved staffing practices such as supervision and separation. This finding suggests that further research into the resolution of ethical dilemmas involving staffing practices would help many professionals in an area where they are likely to face an ethical dilemma. Questions such as whether a supervisor’s years of experience relate to the frequency and type of staffing ethical dilemmas that occur could be studied. A goal of such a
study would be to then include that information in a course or workshop for new practitioners so that they would be better prepared when they assume a supervisory role.

This study found that ethical dilemmas varied in the degree of authority or power that a student affairs profession had in a given situation. The role of authority should be studied further to learn more about how it impacts ethical dilemma resolution. Such a study could help current supervisors and administrators reflect on their working style and relationships to ensure they are conducting their daily practice in an ethical manner.

Future research should also examine the relationship between the kind of ethical dilemma and the process and considerations involved in the dilemma’s resolution. For example, do dilemmas involving students and non-students (such as colleagues or external stakeholders) tend to be resolved by choosing the path that is in the best interests of the student? When a student affairs professional’s supervisor is one of the parties directly involved in the dilemma is the professional more likely to talk to the supervisor or to make a decision without that step? Will research find that the more complex the dilemma, the more likely it is that the resolution process includes the step of conferring with legal counsel? Questions such as these can contribute to our knowledge about ethical dilemma resolution.

This study did not look at demographic data such as gender, institution type, or ethnicity. Research that explored whether the steps or considerations used in ethical dilemma resolution differ by such characteristics could further inform the profession.

Janosik et al. (2004) found that inexperience might influence the awareness of professionals to the prevalence of ethical concerns. It would be valuable to learn how professionals develop their ethical sense or conscience. Included in such a study could be practitioners’ educational background, years of experience, and positions held. Related to the
development of ethical being, questions concerning the personal side of ethical dilemma resolution should be studied. This study found that student affairs professionals’ commitment to ethics was “rooted in their personal conviction” and that they strove to resolve their ethical dilemma in a manner that they believed was ethical. Participants talked about the need to be able to sleep at night and to feel good about their decision. Some participants said that they did what they believed was “reasonable.” Further study is needed to learn more about how personal values support or interfere with both the recognition of ethical dilemmas and their resolution.

Limitations

All research has its limitations and this study was no exception. The limitations involved the method and the focus of the study.

In phase one, I interviewed members of an organization with a focus on ethical practice in higher education. The sample was relatively homogenous in terms of their experience and positions, being predominantly mid-to high level administrators and tenured faculty. However, the reported dilemmas spanned their careers from entry-level to current situations they were facing. Therefore, the group was not as homogenous when viewed from the different positions they held at the time of their dilemmas. The sample in phase one is still a limitation in that a different group of interviewees might have led to different findings.

In phase two, I administered an online survey to NASPA members who held titles similar to the phase one participants. The initial response rate was so low that the lack of enough data required me to administer the survey again to another sample. At the end of the second administration, I had enough data to proceed but I did not get the strong response for which I had hoped. It could be that the timing affected the response rate. The first survey was sent during the first week of May. For many institutions May is the last month of the spring semester and thus is
a busy time of year. After multiple email requests, I administered the survey to a second sample at the beginning of June. The second low response rate could have been due to the fact that some people are on a nine-month contract (such as faculty) or that they were on vacation. The majority in both samples, however, were non-faculty. For these professionals, the summer months are just as busy as the academic months so timing does not completely explain the low response rate. Possible ways to increase participation in the future would be to offer incentives or to conduct the survey at a national conference. However, another researcher currently studying ethical dilemma resolution with financial advisors and compliance managers also experienced a low response rate for her online survey (J. Smith, personal communication, August 11, 2008). She had offered the incentive of professional development credit for those respondents who belonged to a professional organization. The possible explanations for the low response rate were believed to be that certain groups are oversurveyed and that the survey was administered at a busy time of year for the participants (J. Smith, personal communication, August 11, 2008). These reasons could also have played a role in the low response rate of this study’s survey.

Keeping in mind that all researchers have those two challenges, another possible explanation for so few people choosing to participate is the topic of ethical dilemma resolution. Research suggests that there is a gap in the knowledge of student affairs professionals in this area (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Janosik et al., 2004). Rather than providing an ethical dilemma for them to discuss in terms of what steps and considerations they would use, I asked each participant to describe an ethical dilemma that they had faced. It is possible that this question prevented some people from participating. They might have been unable to think of an ethical dilemma or been uncomfortable with sharing that information with me (although the survey was anonymous). If I had provided an ethical dilemma, I might have had more responses.
The other limitation of my study also involved the phase two survey. The online survey did not allow me to conduct a member check as I was able to do with the phase one phone interviews. As a result, any surveys with incomplete answers or answers that I did not understand could not be included in my analysis. I was also challenged to keep my analysis to what the survey contained and not “read between the lines.” If I had asked permission from respondents to contact them if I had any questions, I could have addressed this limitation. But with the sensitive nature of my topic, such a request might have kept some people from participating. Despite these limitations, the study contributed to the body of knowledge concerning ethical dilemma resolution by student affairs professionals.

Conclusion

Ethical dilemma resolution is an ongoing challenge of today’s student affairs professionals. Kezar (2000) called for research that informs practice and this study has answered that call. While there is still a significant gap that needs to be filled, this study contributes new insights and information that did not previously exist about this topic.

One important contribution of this study is that it has taken ethical dilemma resolution out of the theoretical realm and put it in the real world of student affairs. It has given ethical dilemmas a face and context that practitioners can recognize in their daily lives. The study has also made the challenge of ethical dilemma resolution less overwhelming by offering a way to make sense of the possible steps and considerations involved in this process. The template gives professionals a means to approach this task with more confidence and understanding than they possibly had before. For practitioners who were satisfied with their process, this study gives them other ways to think about that process. While not the final answer to ethical dilemma resolution, this study does offer a guide that is based on experience.
Another important contribution of this study is that it puts ethical dilemmas and their resolution on the radar screen. There is minimal literature on this topic. Considering the likelihood of encountering ethical dilemmas, student affairs professionals need to proactively prepare for and address them. Such an approach requires education, discussion, and reflection. This study supports these three activities.

In conclusion, practitioners should not be intimidated by such words as “ethics” and “ethical dilemma resolution.” For professionals to practice ethically and be true to the student affairs profession, they must make the oftentimes difficult decision that will resolve the ethical dilemma they face. They cannot hand off that responsibility to someone else and hope they agree with the ultimate decision. To make a sound decision, they need to be engaged. They can use this study as a guide to help them navigate through these typically complex situations. But at the end of the day, both personally and professionally, it is essential that they do their best to make ethical decisions.
References


Appendix A
Standards of Professional Practice

NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education is an organization of colleges, universities, agencies, and professional educators whose members are committed to providing services and education that enhance student growth and development. The association seeks to promote student personnel work as a profession which requires personal integrity, belief in the dignity and worth of individuals, respect for individual differences and diversity, a commitment to service, and dedication to the development of individuals and the college community through education. NASPA supports student personnel work by providing opportunities for its members to expand knowledge and skills through professional education and experience. The following standards were endorsed by NASPA at the December 1990 board of directors meeting in Washington, D.C.

1. Professional Services

Members of NASPA fulfill the responsibilities of their position by supporting the educational interests, rights, and welfare of students in accordance with the mission of the employing institution.

2. Agreement with Institutional Mission and Goals

Members who accept employment with an educational institution subscribe to the general mission and goals of the institution.

3. Management of Institutional Resources

Members seek to advance the welfare of the employing institution through accountability for the proper use of institutional funds, personnel, equipment, and other resources. Members inform appropriate officials of conditions which may be potentially disruptive or damaging to the institution's mission, personnel, and property.

4. Employment Relationship

Members honor employment relationships. Members do not commence new duties or obligations at another institution under a new contractual agreement until termination of an existing contract, unless otherwise agreed to by the member and the member's current and new supervisors. Members adhere to professional practices in securing positions and employment relationships.

5. Conflict of Interest

Members recognize their obligation to the employing institution and seek to avoid private interests, obligations, and transactions which are in conflict of interest or give the appearance of impropriety. Members clearly distinguish between statements and actions
which represent their own personal views and those which represent their employing
institution when important to do so.

6. Legal Authority

Members respect and acknowledge all lawful authority. Members refrain from conduct
involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, and misrepresentation or unlawful discrimination.
NASPA recognizes that legal issues are often ambiguous, and members should seek the
advice of counsel as appropriate. Members demonstrate concern for the legal, social
codes and moral expectations of the communities in which they live and work even when
the dictates of one's conscience may require behavior as a private citizen which is not in
keeping with these codes/expectations.

7. Equal Consideration and Treatment of Others

Members execute professional responsibilities with fairness and impartiality and show
equal consideration to individuals regardless of status or position. Members respect
individuality and promote an appreciation of human diversity in higher education. In
keeping with the mission of their respective institution and remaining cognizant of
federal, state, and local laws, they do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion,
creed, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation, or physical disability. Members do
not engage in or tolerate harassment in any form and should exercise professional
judgment in entering into intimate relationships with those for whom they have any
supervisory, evaluative, or instructional responsibility.

8. Student Behavior

Members demonstrate and promote responsible behavior and support actions that
enhance personal growth and development of students. Members foster conditions
designed to ensure a student's acceptance of responsibility for his/her own behavior.
Members inform and educate students as to sanctions or constraints on student behavior
which may result from violations of law or institutional policies.

9. Integrity of Information and Research

Members ensure that all information conveyed to others is accurate and in appropriate
context. In their research and publications, members conduct and report research studies
to assure accurate interpretation of findings, and they adhere to accepted professional
standards of academic integrity.

10. Confidentiality

Members ensure that confidentiality is maintained with respect to all privileged
communications and to educational and professional records considered confidential.
They inform all parties of the nature and/or limits of confidentiality. Members share
information only in accordance with institutional policies and relevant statutes when
given the informed consent or when required to prevent personal harm to themselves or others.

11. Research Involving Human Subjects

Members are aware of and take responsibility for all pertinent ethical principles and institutional requirements when planning any research activity dealing with human subjects. (See Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants, Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1982.)

12. Representation of Professional Competence

Members at all times represent accurately their professional credentials, competencies, and limitations and act to correct any misrepresentations of these qualifications by others. Members make proper referrals to appropriate professionals when the member's professional competence does not meet the task or issue in question.

13. Selection and Promotion Practices

Members support nondiscriminatory, fair employment practices by appropriately publicizing staff vacancies, selection criteria, deadlines, and promotion criteria in accordance with the spirit and intent of equal opportunity policies and established legal guidelines and institutional policies.

14. References

Members, when serving as a reference, provide accurate and complete information about candidates, including both relevant strengths and limitations of a professional and personal nature.

15. Job Definitions and Performance Evaluation

Members clearly define with subordinates and supervisors job responsibilities and decision making procedures, mutual expectations, accountability procedures, and evaluation criteria.

16. Campus Community

Members promote a sense of community among all areas of the campus by working cooperatively with students, faculty, staff, and others outside the institution to address the common goals of student learning and development. Members foster a climate of collegiality and mutual respect in their work relationships.

17. Professional Development
Members have an obligation to continue personal professional growth and to contribute to the development of the profession by enhancing personal knowledge and skills, sharing ideas and information, improving professional practices, conducting and reporting research, and participating in association activities. Members promote and facilitate the professional growth of staff and they emphasize ethical standards in professional preparation and development programs.

18. Assessment

Members regularly and systematically assess organizational structures, programs, and services to determine whether the developmental goals and needs of students are being met and to assure conformity to published standards and guidelines such as those of the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (CAS). Members collect data which include responses from students and other significant constituencies and make assessment results available to appropriate institutional officials for the purpose of revising and improving program goals and implementation.

Source: [http://www.naspa.org/about/standards.cfm](http://www.naspa.org/about/standards.cfm)
Appendix B

Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards

Preamble
ACPA – College Student Educators International is an association whose members are dedicated to enhancing the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual within post-secondary educational institutions and, thus, to the service of society. ACPA members are committed to contributing to the comprehensive education of students, protecting human rights, advancing knowledge of student growth and development, and promoting the effectiveness of institutional programs, services, and organizational units. As a means of supporting these commitments, members of ACPA subscribe to the following principles and standards of ethical conduct. Acceptance of membership in ACPA signifies that the member understands the provisions of this statement.

This statement is designed to address issues particularly relevant to college student affairs practice. Persons charged with duties in various functional areas of higher education are also encouraged to consult ethical standards specific to their professional responsibilities.

Use of this Statement
The principal purpose of this statement is to assist student affairs professionals (individuals who are administrators, staff, faculty, and adjunct faculty in the field of student affairs) in regulating their own behavior by sensitizing them to potential ethical problems and by providing standards useful in daily practice. Observance of ethical behavior also benefits fellow professionals and students due to the effect of modeling. Self-regulation is the most effective and preferred means of assuring ethical behavior. If, however, a professional observes conduct by a fellow professional that seems contrary to the provisions of this document, several courses of action are available. Suggestions to assist with addressing ethical concerns are included in the Appendix at the end of this document.

Ethical Foundations
No statement of ethical standards can anticipate all situations that have ethical implications. When student affairs professionals are presented with dilemmas that are not explicitly addressed herein, a number of perspectives may be used in conjunction with the four standards identified in this document to assist in making decisions and determining appropriate courses of action. These standards are: 1) Professional Responsibility and Competence; 2) Student Learning and Development; 3) Responsibility to the Institution; and 4) Responsibility to Society.

Ethical principles should guide the behaviors of professionals in everyday practice. Principles are assumed to be constant and, therefore, provide consistent guidelines for decision making. In addition, student affairs professionals should strive to develop the virtues, or habits of behavior, that are characteristic of people in helping professions. Contextual issues must also be taken into account. Such issues include, but are not limited to, culture, temporality (issues bound by time), and phenomenology (individual perspective) and community norms. Because
of the complexity of ethical conversation and dialogue, the skill of simultaneously confronting differences in perspective and respecting the rights of persons to hold different perspectives becomes essential. For an extended discussion of these aspects of ethical thinking, see Appendix B.

Ethical standards
Four ethical standards related to primary constituencies with whom student affairs professionals work, colleagues, students, educational institutions, and society are specified.

1 Professional Responsibility and Competence.
Student affairs professionals are responsible for promoting and facilitating student learning about students and their world, enhancing the quality and understanding of student life, advocating for student welfare and concerns, and advancing the profession and its ideals. They possess the knowledge, skills, emotional stability, and maturity to discharge responsibilities as administrators, advisors, consultants, counselors, programmers, researchers, and teachers. High levels of professional competence are expected in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. Student affairs professionals are responsible for the consequences of their actions or inaction.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

1.1 Conduct their professional activities in accordance with sound theoretical principles and adopt a personal value system congruent with the basic tenets of the profession.
1.2 Contribute to the development of the profession (e.g., recruiting students to the profession, serving professional organizations, advocating the use of ethical thinking through educational and professional development activities, improving professional practices, and conducting and reporting research).
1.3 Maintain and enhance professional effectiveness by continually improving skills and acquiring new knowledge.
1.4 Monitor their personal and professional functioning and effectiveness and seek assistance from appropriate professionals as needed.
1.5 Maintain current, accurate knowledge of all regulations related to privacy of student records and electronic transmission of records and update knowledge of privacy legislation on a regular basis.
1.6 Represent their professional credentials, competencies, and limitations accurately and correct any misrepresentations of these qualifications by others.
1.7 Establish fees for professional services after consideration of the ability of the recipient to pay. They will provide some services, including professional development activities for colleagues, for little or no remuneration.
1.8 Adhere to ethical practices in securing positions: [a] represent education and experiences accurately; [b] respond to offers promptly; [c] interview for positions only when serious about accepting an offer; [d] accept only those positions they intend to assume; [e] advise current employer and all institutions at which applications are pending immediately when they sign a contract; [f] inform their employers before leaving a position within a reasonable amount of time as outlined by the institution and/or supervisor; and
1.9 Provide an honest, accurate, and respectful reference. If it is not deemed possible to provide a positive reference, contact the ‘searching employee’ to inform them of such. It is not appropriate to provide a positive reference to move an individual beyond a department or institution.

2 Learning and Development.

Student development is an essential purpose of higher education. Support of this process is a major responsibility of the student affairs profession. Development is complex and includes cognitive, physical, moral, social, emotional, career, spiritual, personal, and intellectual dimensions. Professionals must be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the variety of backgrounds, cultures, experiences, abilities, personal characteristics and viewpoints evident in the student population and be able to incorporate appropriate theoretical perspectives to identify learning opportunities and to reduce barriers to development. Multicultural competence is a fundamental element of ethical practice.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

2.1 Treat students with respect as persons who possess dignity, worth, and the ability to be self-directed.

2.2 Avoid dual relationships with students where one individual serves in multiple roles that create conflicting responsibilities, role confusion, and unclear expectations (e.g., counselor/employer, supervisor/best friend, or faculty/sexual partner) that may involve incompatible roles and conflicting responsibilities.

2.3 Abstain from all forms of harassment, including but not limited to verbal and written communication, physical actions and electronic transmissions.

2.4 Abstain from sexual intimacy with clients or with students for whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or instructional responsibility.

2.5 Inform students of the conditions under which they may receive assistance.

2.6 Inform students of the nature and/or limits of confidentiality. They will share information about the students only in accordance with institutional policies and applicable laws, when given their permission, or when required to prevent personal harm to themselves or others.

2.7 Refer students to appropriate specialists before entering or continuing a helping relationship when the professional’s expertise or level of comfort is exceeded. If the referral is declined, professional staff is not obliged to continue the relationship nor should they do so if there is not direct benefit to the student.

2.8 Inform students about the purpose of assessment and research; make explicit the planned use of results prior to assessment requesting participation in either.

2.9 Comply with the institutional guidelines on electronic transmission of information.

2.10 Provide appropriate contextual information to students prior to and following the use of any evaluation procedures to place results in proper perspective with other factors relevant to the assessment process (e.g., socioeconomic, gender, identity, ethnic, cultural, and gender related).
2.11 Discuss with students issues, attitudes, and behaviors that have ethical implications. 2.12 Develop multicultural knowledge, skills, competence, and use appropriate elements of these capacities in their work with students.
2.13 Faculty should inform prospective graduate students of program expectations, predominant theoretical orientations, and skills needed for successful program completion, as well as positions received by recent graduates.
2.14 Assure that required experiences involving self-disclosure are communicated to prospective graduate students. When the preparation program offers experiences that emphasize self-disclosure or other relatively intimate or personal involvement (e.g., group or individual counseling or growth groups), professionals must not have current or anticipated administrative, supervisory, or evaluative authority over participants.
2.15 Provide graduate students with a broad knowledge base consisting of theory, research, and practice.
2.16 Educate graduate students about ethical standards, responsibilities and codes of the profession. Uphold these standards within all preparation programs.
2.17 Assess all relevant competencies and interpersonal functioning of students throughout the preparation program, communicate these assessments to students, and take appropriate corrective actions including dismissal when warranted.
2.18 Assure that field supervisors are qualified to provide supervision to graduate students and are informed of their ethical responsibilities in this role.
2.19 Support professional preparation program efforts by providing assistantships, practical field placements, and consultation to students and faculty.
2.20 Gain approval of research plans involving human subjects from the institutional committee with oversight responsibility prior to the initiation of the study. In the absence of such a committee, they will seek to create procedures to protect the rights and ensure the safety of research participants.
2.21 Conduct and report research studies accurately. Researchers will not engage in fraudulent research nor will they distort or misrepresent their data or deliberately bias their results.
2.22 Cite previous works on a topic when writing or when speaking to professional audiences.
2.23 Comply with laws and standards common in the helping professions related to citation and attribution of information accessed electronically where public domain status may be ambiguous.
2.24 Acknowledge major contributions to research projects and professional writings through joint authorships with the principal contributor listed first. They will acknowledge minor technical or professional contributions in notes or introductory statements.
2.25 Co-authorship should reflect a joint collaboration. When involvement was ancillary it is inappropriate to pressure others for joint authorship listing on publications.
2.26 Share original research data with qualified others upon request.
2.27 Communicate the results of any research judged to be of value to other professionals and not withhold results reflecting unfavorably on specific institutions, programs, services, or prevailing opinion.
2.28 Submit manuscripts for consideration to only one journal at a time. They will not seek to publish previously published or accepted-for-publication materials in other media or publications without first informing all editors and/or publishers concerned. They will make appropriate
3 Responsibility to the Institution.

Institutions of higher education provide the context for student affairs practice. Institutional mission, goals, policies, organizational structure, and culture, combined with individual judgment and professional standards, define and delimit the nature and extent of practice. Student affairs professionals share responsibility with other members of the academic community for fulfilling the institutional mission. Responsibility to promote the development of students and to support the institution’s policies and interests require that professionals balance competing demands.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

3.1 Contribute to their institution by supporting its mission, goals, policies, and abiding by its procedures.
3.2 Seek resolution when they and their institution encounter substantial disagreements concerning professional or personal values. Resolution may require sustained efforts to modify institutional policies and practices or result in voluntary termination of employment.
3.3 Recognize that conflicts among students, colleagues, or the institution should be resolved without diminishing respect for or appropriate obligations to any party involved.
3.4 Assure that information provided about the institution is factual and accurate.
3.5 Inform appropriate officials of conditions that may be disruptive or damaging to their institution.
3.6 Inform supervisors of conditions or practices that may restrict institutional or professional effectiveness.
3.7 Refrain from attitudes or actions that impinge on colleagues’ dignity, moral code, privacy, worth, professional functioning, and/or personal growth.
3.8 Abstain from sexual intimacies with colleagues or with staff for whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or instructional responsibility.
3.9 Assure that participation by staff in planned activities that emphasize self-disclosure or other relatively intimate or personal involvement is voluntary and that the leader(s) of such activities do not have administrative, supervisory, or evaluative authority over participants.
3.10 Evaluate job performance of subordinates regularly and recommend appropriate actions to enhance professional development and improve performance.
3.11 Define job responsibilities, decision making procedures, mutual expectations, accountability procedures, and evaluation criteria with subordinates and supervisors.
3.12 Provide fair and honest assessments and feedback for colleagues’ job performance and provide opportunities for professional growth as appropriate.
3.13 Seek evaluations of their job performance and/or services they provide.
3.14 Disseminate information that accurately describes the responsibilities of position vacancies, required qualifications, and the institution.
3.15 Adhere to ethical practices when facilitating or participating in a selection process by [a] representing the department and institution honestly and accurately [b] periodically notify applicants of their status; [c] adhere to established guidelines, protocol, and standards for the selection process; and [d] provide accurate information about the resources available to
applicants once employed.
3.16 Provide training to student affairs search and screening committee members.
3.17 Refrain from using their positions to seek unjustified personal gains, sexual favors, unfair advantages, or unearned goods and services not normally accorded in such positions.
3.18 Recognize their fiduciary responsibility to the institution. They will ensure that funds for which they have oversight are expended following established procedures and in ways that optimize value, are accounted for properly, and contribute to the accomplishment of the institution’s mission. They also will assure equipment, facilities, personnel, and other resources are used to promote the welfare of the institution and students.
3.19 Restrict their private interests, obligations, and transactions in ways to minimize conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest. They will identify their personal views and actions as private citizens from those expressed or undertaken as institutional representatives.
3.20 Evaluate programs, services, and organizational structure regularly and systematically to assure conformity to published standards and guidelines. Evaluations should be conducted using rigorous evaluation methods and principles, and the results should be made available to appropriate institutional personnel.
3.21 Acknowledge contributions by others to program development, program implementation, evaluations, and reports.
3.22 Maintain current knowledge about changes in technology and legislation that are significant for the range of institutional responsibilities in their professional domain (e.g., knowledge of privacy and security issues, use of the internet, and free speech/hate speech).

4 Responsibility to Society.

Student affairs professionals, both as citizens and practitioners, have a responsibility to contribute to the improvement of the communities in which they live and work and to act as advocates for social justice for members of those communities. They respect individuality and individual differences. They recognize that our communities are enhanced by social and individual diversity manifested by characteristics such as age, culture, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, gender identity, race, religion, and sexual orientation. Student affairs professionals work to protect human rights and promote respect for human diversity in higher education.

As ACPA members, student affairs professionals will:

4.1 Assist students in becoming productive, ethical, and responsible citizens.
4.2 Demonstrate concern for the welfare of all students and work for constructive change on behalf of students.
4.3 Not discriminate on the basis of age, culture, ethnicity, gender, ability, gender identity, race, class, religion, or sexual orientation. They will actively work to change discriminatory practices.
4.4 Demonstrate regard for social codes and moral expectations of the communities in which they live and work. At the same time, they will be aware of situations in which concepts of social justice may conflict with local moral standards and norms and may choose to point out these conflicts in ways that respect the rights and values of all who are involved. They will recognize that violations of accepted moral and legal standards may involve their clients, students, or colleagues in damaging personal conflicts and may impugn the integrity of the profession, their own reputations, and that of the employing institution.
4.5 Report to the appropriate authority any condition that is likely to harm their clients and/or others.

Appendix A

Suggestions for Resolving Ethical Misconduct

USE OF THIS STATEMENT (from page 1)

Initiate a private conversation. Because unethical conduct often is due to a lack of awareness or understanding of ethical standards as described in the preceding document, a private conversation between the target of inappropriate action(s) and the individual being inappropriate is an important initial line of action. This conference, if pursued in a spirit of collegiality and sincerity, often may resolve the ethical concern and promote future ethical conduct. Pursue institutional resources. If a private conference does not resolve the problem institutional resources may be pursued. It is recommended individuals work with mentors, supervisors, faculty, colleagues, or peers to research campus based resources. Request consultation from ACPA Ethics Committee. If an individual is unsure whether a particular behavior, activity, or practice falls under the provisions of this statement, the Ethics Committee may be contacted in writing. A detailed written description (omitting data identifying the person(s) involved), describing the potentially unethical behavior, activity, or practice and the circumstances surrounding the situation should be submitted to a member of the ACPA Ethics Committee. Members of the Committee will provide the individual with a summary of opinions regarding the ethical appropriateness of the conduct or practice in question, as well as some suggestions as to what action(s) could be taken. Because these opinions are based on limited information, no specific situation or action will be judged “unethical.” Responses rendered by the Committee are advisory only and are not an official statement on behalf of ACPA. Please contact the ACPA Executive Director for more information.

A. Ethical Foundations of this Document

The principles that provide the foundation for this document are:

Act to benefit others. Service to humanity is the basic tenet underlying student affairs practice. Hence, the student affairs profession exists to: [a] promote cognitive, social, physical, intellectual, and spiritual development of students; [b] bring an institution-wide awareness of the interconnectedness of learning and development throughout the institution in academic, service, and management functions; [c] contribute to the effective functioning of the institution; and [d] provide programs and services consistent with this principle.

Promote justice. Student affairs professionals are committed to assuring fundamental fairness for all persons within the academic community. The values of impartiality, equity, and reciprocity are basic. When there are greater needs than resources available or when the interests of constituencies conflict, justice requires honest consideration of all claims and requests and equitable (not necessarily equal) distribution of goods and services. A crucial aspect of promoting justice is demonstrating respect for human differences and opposing intolerance of
these differences. Important human differences include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as ability, age, class, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Respect autonomy. Student affairs professionals respect and promote autonomy and privacy. This includes the rights of persons whose cultural traditions elevate the importance of the family over the importance of the individual to make choices based on the desires of their families if they wish. Students’ freedom of choice and action are not restricted unless their actions significantly interfere with the welfare of others or the accomplishment of the institution’s mission.

Be faithful. Student affairs professionals make all efforts to be accurate in their presentation of facts, honor agreements, and trustworthy in the performance of their duties.

Do no harm. Student affairs professionals do not engage in activities that cause either physical or psychological damage to others. In addition to their personal actions, student affairs professionals are especially vigilant to assure that the institutional policies do not: [a] hinder students’ opportunities to benefit from the learning experiences available in the environment; [b] threaten individuals’ self-worth, dignity, or safety; or [c] discriminate unjustly or illegally. Student affairs professionals are expected to understand that students from non-dominant cultures and groups that differ from the majority may feel harmed by attitudes and processes that are considered harmless by members of the dominant (i.e. majority) group.

VIRTUES: HABITUAL BEHAVIOR

The virtues that student affairs educators should work to develop are based on widely accepted ideas about the characteristics of people in helping professions who are consistently ethical in their choices and behavior. Virtues differ from principles in that they are related to specific contexts and demonstrate personal characteristics that people in that context, in this case the student affairs profession, value. Virtues balance principles in that they are somewhat flexible and reflect the means by which a person acts on values. The four virtues associated with this profession are prudence, integrity, respectfulness, and benevolence.

Self-regarding virtues. Prudence and integrity are virtues related to the behavior of a person in a particular situation. Prudence signifies thoughtfulness and unwillingness to jump to conclusions. Integrity signifies consistency and wholeness; a lack of dramatic behavioral differences from one situation to another.

Other-regarding virtues. Respectfulness and benevolence are virtues that describe a person’s treatment of others. Respectful persons are prudent - they take time to think about appropriate responses to others in unfamiliar situations. Respectfulness is also connected to benevolence, the consistent habit of taking other people’s well-being into consideration.

CONTEXT: FINDING PATTERNS OF MEANING AND DEVELOPING ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES
Because our campuses are comprised of people from all over the world, have official connections with institutions in many countries, and also serve people who are Americans with significant allegiance to non-dominant cultures, it is important to take context into account when addressing ethical concerns. There are three frames of reference that should be considered: culture, temporality, and phenomenology.

Culture. Every culture has its own ideas about values, virtues, social and family roles, and acceptable behavior. Cultures may be grounded in ethnicity, faith, gender, generation, sexual orientation, physical ability, or geographic area to name a few. Every campus also has a range of cultures based on work status or location as well as a dominant culture of its own. Ethical dilemmas often arise among or between people from different cultures. Ethical decision making suggests that the values of relevant cultures be examined when dilemmas arise and overt conversations about conflicting values take place, if necessary.

Temporality. This term suggests that an awareness of time-related issues be present. These include the duration of the problem, the urgency of its resolution, the time of the academic year, the duration of the relationships among the people involved, and the “spirit of the times” or Zeitgeist.

Phenomenology. All persons have both cultural roots and individual attributes that shape their perspectives. Phenomenology refers to the personal and individual points of view of the persons involved in the situation. Both justice and prudence require that decision-makers do not assume anything about a person’s perspective based on cultural background until that perspective is understood in both its individual and its cultural contexts.

References for additional information


www.myacpa.org
Acknowledgement: American College Personnel Association (ACPA), National Center for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, DC USA 20036.
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
DATE: May 25, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Steven M. Janosik
    Elaine Humphrey

FROM: David M. Moore

SUBJECT: IRB Expedited Approval: "An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma Resolution by Student Affairs Administrators", IRB # 07-293

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective May 25, 2007.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.

4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:
If you are conducting federally funded non-exempt research, this approval letter must state that the IRB has compared the OSP grant application and IRB application and found the documents to be consistent. Otherwise, this approval letter is invalid for OSP to release funds. Visit our website at http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/newstudy.html#OSP for further information.

cc: File
Dear [Insert Participant Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. I am conducting research to study how student affairs professionals resolve professional ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma is defined as a situation in which two ethical principles are at odds rather than a simple matter of right versus wrong (Kitchener, 1985). A professional ethical dilemma is an ethical dilemma in the context of a person’s professional experience. I am interested in real-life work-related dilemmas that are memorable because they were particularly difficult or challenging to resolve.

I will be conducting an interview that should take about 45 minutes of your time. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed. I will need your signature on an IRB form and will need to obtain permission to record the interview. All information provided by you in this interview will be kept confidential. I also request that during the interview you refer to yourself and any other person by a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Please think of a pseudonym for yourself before the interview.

I am mailing you two copies of the IRB form and a self-addressed, stamped envelope by traditional mail service. Please review the IRB form and return one signed copy in the self-addressed, stamped envelope as soon as you can so that I will have the signed IRB form before our interview day. Our interview is scheduled for [Insert date and time]. I appreciate your participation in this project and please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Elaine Humphrey
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Phase One

Title of Project: An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma Resolution by Student Affairs Administrators

Investigators: Dr. Steven Janosik, Elaine Humphrey

I. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study is to explore how student affairs administrators resolve professional ethical dilemmas. A student affairs administrator is defined as an individual administering a student affairs unit at an institution of higher education. An ethical dilemma is defined as a situation in which two ethical principles are at odds rather than a simple matter of right versus wrong. A professional ethical dilemma is defined as an ethical dilemma in the context of a person’s work-related experience.

For phase one, there will be 22 participants who are members of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. These participants were selected because they have knowledge about and experience with the topic of ethical dilemma resolution.

II. Procedures

As a participant, you will be interviewed one time by Elaine Humphrey for approximately 45 minutes by phone. Your interview has been scheduled for (date and time). I will call you at (phone number). You can withdraw from the study at any time during the interview, if you so desire, without any penalty. The interview questions are attached to this document for your review.

You will need to sign one copy of this Informed Consent form and return it to Elaine Humphrey in the envelope provided prior to the interview date of (insert date).

III. Risks

There are no more than minimal risks involved in participation in this study.

IV. Benefits

Participation in this study may provide participants, the profession of student affairs, and society with insights concerning ethical dilemma resolution.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.
V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The interview will be tape recorded to ensure accurate data collection. The tapes will be stored in a locked storage box and only Elaine Humphrey will have access to these tapes. Elaine Humphrey will be the transcriber for this study. The tapes will be erased no later than December 2010.

The use of pseudonyms for participants and anyone to which they refer will protect individual identification. A list of the pseudonyms and identities will be stored at a different physical location than where the data are stored. Only Elaine Humphrey will have access to this list and all data. The list and data will be destroyed no later than December 2010.

VI. Compensation

You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You are also free not to answer any question.

VIII. Subject’s Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

1. Review interview questions prior to interview date.

2. Participate for approximately 45 minutes in interview conducted by Elaine Humphrey on (insert date and time).

IX. Subject’s Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I agree to the tape recording of my interview with Elaine Humphrey. I agree to use pseudonyms for me and anyone I might discuss during my interview. I have had all of my questions answers. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Signature: ________________________________________

Contact Information of Investigators:
Dr. Steven Janosik (sjanosik@vt.edu)
540/231-9702
Elaine Humphrey (elaineh@vt.edu)
540/231-5499

If I should have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, I may contact Dr. David Moore, Chair Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, telephone: (540) 231-4991; email: moored@vt.edu; address: Research Compliance Office, 1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497), Blacksburg, VA 24061
Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

I want to speak with you today for about 45 minutes about how you resolve professional ethical dilemmas. I am interested in two real-life work-related dilemmas that were memorable because they were particularly difficult or challenging to resolve. I will be recording the interview and ask you to use pseudonyms when referring to yourself or any other person. I would like you to respond to all of the questions for the first dilemma you are going to discuss. When you are done talking about the first dilemma, then I would like you to respond to all of the questions with the second dilemma in mind. Since you have had time to look over the questions ahead of time, please feel free to begin when you are ready.

1. Please identify a professional ethical dilemma that you faced during your role as a student affairs administrator. I am particularly interested in ethical dilemmas that are memorable because you really had to give some thought about how to resolve it.

2. Please describe the steps you took to resolve this professional ethical dilemma.

3. In this situation, what considerations did you use to resolve this professional ethical dilemma?

4. Please tell me the relative importance of these considerations in your resolution of the dilemma.

5. Is there anything else about this dilemma or how it was resolved that we haven’t discussed that you think is important for me to know?
## Appendix G

### Interview Check Sheet

**Interview Date:** _______________________________

**Interview Subject ID/Pseudonym:** _______________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time started:</th>
<th>Time Completed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before Interview Begins</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent Form is signed and copy provided to subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym provided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is your tape recorder functioning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is memoing device ready?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask probing questions (included in parenthesis in interview questions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that relevant questions are addressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo pertinent thoughts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo pertinent thoughts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribe interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Check List

__ Process

__ Criteria

__ Principles

___ beneficence (benefiting others)

___ nonmaleficence (doing no harm)

___ justice (fairness)

___ autonomy (individual rights and freedom of thought or choice)

___ fidelity (issues of loyalty, truthfulness, promise keeping)

__ Influential factors

___ Gender

___ Ethnicity

___ Years in profession

___ Nature of decision

___ Who was involved

___ Timing

___ External pressures

___ Other
## Appendix H

### Ethical Dilemma Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Description of Ethical Dilemma</th>
<th>Beneficence</th>
<th>Nonmaleficence</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Fidelity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill 1</td>
<td>Termination of insubordinate employee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 2</td>
<td>Serving as reference for insubordinate former employee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob 1</td>
<td>Advisor - fee board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob 2</td>
<td>Advisor - student leader not currently a student</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob 3</td>
<td>Advisor - dealing with difficult chairman of lecture committee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don 1</td>
<td>VP and DoS - Faculty vote of no confidence in Pres</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don 2</td>
<td>Fraternity asking to be reinstated - Pres opposed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry 1</td>
<td>Dean - his boss smoking - illegal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry 2</td>
<td>Dean - his boss hurting staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane 1</td>
<td>Dir of Res Life - antidiscrimination clause</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane 2</td>
<td>Dir of Res Life - RA selection</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean 1</td>
<td>Hiring situation - involving diversity office</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jean 2</td>
<td>Dir of Career Ctr - student overhears faculty and recruiter</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>John 1</td>
<td>Supervise people with undocumented illness</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 2</td>
<td>On comm to approve student final project - plagiarism</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 3</td>
<td>On comm to approve student final project - unacceptable work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie 1</td>
<td>Oversees contract - sexual harassment of company employee</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie 2</td>
<td>Oversees contract - offered use of vacation home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy 1</td>
<td>Two advisees lose same person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Katy 2</td>
<td>Career Ctr - student complains about recruiter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Keylee 1</td>
<td>Oversees peer health education program</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keylee 2</td>
<td>Supervisor plagiarizes her work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary 1</td>
<td>Union strike</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary 2</td>
<td>Dept head - admissions committee decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick 1</td>
<td>Two employees fight</td>
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<td>Nick 2</td>
<td>Oversaw student conduct issues - VP for SA interferes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ralph 1</td>
<td>Colleague misinforming Pres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sally 1</td>
<td>VP and Dean for Student Devel - odd behaving student</td>
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An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma150
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally 2</td>
<td>VP - gets raise during salary freeze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen 1</td>
<td>Student says sister looking at academic record</td>
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<td>Stephen 2</td>
<td>Student reports difficulties with family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen 3</td>
<td>Student/employee problems with partner and immigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan 1</td>
<td>Employee asks for retroactive pay raise</td>
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<td>Susan 2</td>
<td>Wants to stop payments to town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tess 1</td>
<td>Kept confidence of friend's job search</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tess 2</td>
<td>Chaired search committee - supervisor's friend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeke 1</td>
<td>Terminated employee asks for reference letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeke 2</td>
<td>Banned frat wants to hold reunion on campus</td>
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### Appendix I

#### Coding Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: Kinds of Dilemmas</th>
<th>RQ2: Process of Resolution</th>
<th>RQ3: Considerations in Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Nature of Dilemma)</td>
<td>Think, Reflect, Weigh, Balance</td>
<td>A true ethical dilemma or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Identify ethical principles</td>
<td>Your responsibility or role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Identify options</td>
<td>Legal implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Confer with others (informally)</td>
<td>Impact of Resolution on Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>Confer officially</td>
<td>Others' Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Confer with Human Resources</td>
<td>Responsibility to Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Stakeholders</td>
<td>Refer to education</td>
<td>Teachable Moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Staff</td>
<td>Refer to profession</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Students</td>
<td>Talk to those involved</td>
<td>Political implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Role in Dilemma)</td>
<td>Do nothing</td>
<td>Bigger picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Refer to upper administration or university</td>
<td>Personal values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisee</td>
<td>Confer with legal</td>
<td>Appearance of Unethical Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Confer with professional association</td>
<td>Uncertainty of situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/student</td>
<td>Do what feels right</td>
<td>Personal situation of other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Pray</td>
<td>Set Precedent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague</td>
<td>Try to negate negative effects</td>
<td>Timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Member/Chair</td>
<td>Refer to professional standards</td>
<td>In a subordinate position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Employee</td>
<td>Resign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>(Ethical Principles)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Supervisor</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonmaleficence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix J

**Category Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>Nature of dilemma involved professional relationships such as interaction between supervisor and employee or administrator and colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Nature of dilemma involved interaction between professionals and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>Interviewee’s role in dilemma was that of decision maker, such as supervisor or administrator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/Student Support</td>
<td>Interviewee’s role in dilemma was that of advisor or provider of student support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>Interviewee’s role in dilemma was that of supervisee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>The ethical principle that includes issues of loyalty, truthfulness, and promise keeping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmaleficence</td>
<td>The ethical principle of doing no harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>The ethical principle of fairness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficence</td>
<td>The ethical principle of benefiting others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>The ethical principle of individual rights and freedom of thought or choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introspection</td>
<td>Steps taken to resolve dilemma that involved interviewee’s internal process such as identify options, thinking, reflecting, weighing, and balancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to Others</td>
<td>Steps taken to resolve dilemma that involved interviewee talking to or conferring with others, both formally (e.g. supervisor, upper administrator, human resources, legal advisor) and informally (e.g. colleagues, spouse).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Nothing</td>
<td>Steps taken to resolve dilemma that involved interviewee not taking action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Considerations included in resolution of dilemma that related to self such as their role/responsibility in the dilemma, impact of resolution on them, and their personal values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigger Picture</td>
<td>Considerations included in resolution of dilemma that related to issues such as political implications, legal implications, responsibilities to profession, and precedent setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Situation</td>
<td>Considerations included in resolution of dilemma that related to issues specific to the situation such as impact of resolution on individual, others’ responsibility/role in dilemma, and uncertainty of situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uphold Ethical Principle</td>
<td>Dilemma in which interviewee viewed upholding a particular ethical principle as the most important consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Value</td>
<td>Dilemma in which interviewee’s personal values were the most important consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances</td>
<td>Dilemma in which interviewee viewed certain circumstances of that situation as important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
particular situation as the most important consideration.
## Appendix K

### Category Matrix

| Category                        | Bill 1 | Bill 2 | Bob 1 | Bob 2 | Bob 3 | Don 1 | Don 2 | Harry 1 | Harry 2 | Jane 1 | Jane 2 | Jean 1 | Jean 2 | John 1 | John 2 | John 3 | Julie 1 | Julie 2 | Katy 1 | Katy 2 | Kaylee 1 | Kaylee 2 | Mary 1 | Mary 2 | Nick 1 | Nick 2 | Ralph 1 | Ralph 2 | Sally 1 | Sally 2 | Stephen 1 | Stephen 2 | Stephen 3 | Susan 1 | Susan 2 | Tess 1 | Tess 2 | Zeke 1 | Zeke 2 | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1A. Professionals              | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 30     |
| 1A. Students                   |        |        | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 20     |
| 1B. Decision Maker             | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 11     |
| 1B. Advisor/Student Spt        |        |        | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 11     |
| 1B. Subordinate                |        |        | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 11     |
| 1C. Fidelity                   | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       |
| 1C. Nonmaleficence             | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       |
| 1C. Justice                    | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 23     |
| 1C. Beneficence                |        |        | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       |
| 1C. Autonomy                   | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 13     |
| 2. Introspection               | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 32     |
| 2. Talk to Others              | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 32     |
| 3A. Self                       | 1      | 1      | 1     | 2      | 3      | 3      | 2      | 2       | 2       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 54     |
| 3A. Bigger Picture             | 1      | 2      | 1     | 2      | 1      | 1      | 2      | 1       | 5       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 3       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 2       | 1      | 2      | 1      | 2      | 3      | 1      | 2      | 3      | 52     |
| 3A. Specific Situation         | 4      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 2      | 2      | 1       | 1      | 2      | 1      | 2      | 1      | 2      | 1      | 2       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 2       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       |
| 3B. Uphold Ethical Principle   | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 27     |
| 3B. Personal Value             |        |        | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 4      |
| 3B. Circumstances              |        |        | 1     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1       | 1       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 6      |
Appendix L

Online Survey

Student affairs professionals face ethical dilemmas every day. The purpose of this study is to examine how student affairs professionals resolve these dilemmas. An ethical dilemma is a situation where two ethical principles are at odds rather than a simple matter of right versus wrong. Sometimes these dilemmas involve staffing issues. Student affairs professionals can also face ethical dilemmas involving students.

For this survey, please respond to the following:

1. Provide an example of a work-related experience you had that involved an ethical dilemma. Please describe that experience and explain why you consider it an ethical dilemma.

2. Please place a check mark by THREE items in the following list that reflects the three most important steps that you took to resolve this dilemma. If you choose “Other” please identify the other step(s).

3. Please place a check mark by THREE items in the following list that reflects the three most important considerations that you included in your resolution process. If you choose “Other,” please identify the other consideration(s).
An Exploration of Ethical Dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Other Consideration(s):</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>more ethical principles or if it was just a matter of right versus wrong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered my responsibility or role in the dilemma.</td>
<td>I considered my personal values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered the legal implications of the dilemma and/or my decision about how to resolve the dilemma.</td>
<td>I considered the possibility that one of my choices might give the appearance of unethical behavior on my part even when I wasn’t doing anything wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered the impact of the resolution on others.</td>
<td>I considered whether or not I had a clear and complete understanding of the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered others’ responsibility in the dilemma.</td>
<td>I considered the personal situation of someone directly involved in the dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered my responsibility to the profession of student affairs to uphold its values, such as caring and promoting student development.</td>
<td>I considered the possibility of setting a precedent either within my office or at my institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered whether this was a teachable moment, depending on how I resolve the dilemma.</td>
<td>I considered the individual specifics of the dilemma, such as the timing of the person’s actions (versus the bigger picture of the situation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered how the different resolution choices might affect me either personally or professionally.</td>
<td>I considered the degree of power or authority I had in the dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I considered the political implications of the dilemma and/or my decision</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

4. Reviewing your answers to #2 and #3, is this the approach you generally use to resolve an ethical dilemma? Please explain your answer.