SUPERVISION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS:
A STUDY OF SYNERGISTIC SUPERVISION, NEW PROFESSIONALS, AND ATTRITION

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By
Jolene A. Petroc
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ABSTRACT

This study examines supervision in the field of student affairs and the relationship between the synergistic approach to supervision and the attrition of new professionals. In this study, literature concerning supervision in the field, synergistic supervision, the experiences, needs, and expectations of new professionals, and attrition are reviewed and analyzed. Conclusions based upon analysis indicate current supervisory practices in the field do not reflect the synergistic approach or align with the needs of entry-level professionals. Recommendations for improving supervision and propelling the field forward are provided at the conclusion of the study.
Background

A large group of new professionals joins the field of student affairs each year. Having recently earned their degrees in college student personnel, higher education, or student affairs administration, these new professionals account for 15% - 20% of the student affairs workforce and fill a substantial portion of the positions that are responsible for providing programs and services directly to undergraduate students (Barham & Winston, 2006; Cliente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Solane, 2006). Despite their passion for students, however, it is estimated that 50% - 60% of these new professionals will leave the field of student affairs within five years of entering as a full-time professional (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

Some research has indicated that large numbers of new professionals may leave the field due to professional reasons including a lack of institutional fit, low starting salaries, and the second-rate status of student affairs on campuses (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Other research has suggested that new professionals entering the field are faced with previously unprecedented amounts of stress and responsibility, which can quickly overwhelm these recent graduates and subsequently lead to job dissatisfaction and attrition (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Additionally, researchers, including Creamer and Winston (2002), have identified the quality of supervision received as a factor that may explain why some new professionals remain in the field and why others depart quickly after entering. As effective supervision seems to be a way in which the profession can address the high rate of attrition, supervision, as well as its best practices, warrant investigation.

This study examines the task of supervision in the field of student affairs and how the supervision of new professionals is related to their attrition. Specifically, this study seeks to
answer the following questions: (a) how is supervision defined, perceived, and practiced in the field of student affairs; (b) what are the supervisory expectations and experiences of new professionals; (c) what is the synergistic approach to supervision; (d) can synergistic supervision benefit new professionals in the field of student affairs; and (e) can supervision impact attrition rates of new student affairs professionals?

The purpose of this study is to understand how the task of supervision is perceived in the field of student affairs, to examine the supervision of new professionals, and to investigate how the synergistic approach to supervision impacts the decision new professionals as they decide whether to continue as practitioners in the field of student affairs. The results of this study can inform the supervisors of new professionals regarding effective supervisory practices and, furthermore, can inform student affairs leaders about areas of improvement necessary for the continuity of the field.

To address the problem of this study, literature will be reviewed in the following sections: Supervision in Student Affairs, Synergistic Supervision, New Student Affairs Professionals, and Attrition.

Supervision in Student Affairs

Supervision is “one of the most complex activities that student affairs professionals are called upon to perform” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 186). Literature relevant to the task of supervision in the field of student affairs, including literature regarding the state, the definition, the perceptions, and the practice of supervision will be reviewed below.

The quality of the student services an institution provides is greatly influenced by the professional planning and facilitating the service. Professionals who receive effective
supervision are more likely to provide high quality co-curricular programs and services to students (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This connection is of particular importance when supervising entry-level professionals. Such professionals often have the most direct contact with students and are responsible for providing many institutional services and programs (Barham & Winston, 2006; Cliente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006). It is crucial that new professionals receive the necessary support, education, and training not only to ensure that the programs offered to students are of the highest educational quality, but also for the benefit of the new professional, and the future of the field of student affairs (Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

Although supervision plays such a crucial role in sustaining the field of student affairs, little support is offered to practitioners who are challenged with the task of supervising (Barham & Winston, 2006; Cliente, et. al, 2006; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Very often student affairs practitioners are promoted to managerial roles with minimal preparation, despite the fact that supervision that is often a key component of mid-level positions in the field (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, Chernow, 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Supervision has also warranted limited attention in the literature of the profession (Barham & Winston, 2006; Creamer & Winston, 2002; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Without the necessary education, training, and resources to effectively supervise, even the most benevolent supervisors are ill-prepared to provide supervision, especially to new professionals (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, Chernow, 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, supervision is defined as a “management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and to enhance the personal and professional capabilities and performance of staff” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 42). Components of
supervision include: articulating the unit’s mission and needs, monitoring and managing unit climate, fostering individual development of staff, developing teamwork capabilities and group resources, coordinating work activities, and promoting active problem solving (Winston & Creamer, 1997). In addition to a function of management and organization, supervision is also a helping process (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Supervision is strategically designed to support staff and encourage true collaboration between the supervisor and the supervisee (Winston & Creamer, 1997). When a supervisory pair collaborates effectively, the organization’s goals are accomplished and, at the same time, the supervisee matures personally and professionally (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

The definition of supervision supports the assertion that the task is vital to the success of the student affairs profession (Barham & Winston, 2006; Cliente, et. al, 2006; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Winston & Creamer, 1997). However, the current state of supervision is not consistent with supervision as defined by Winston and Creamer (1997). This contradiction between the definition and the state of supervision in student affairs is problematic and indicative of a major failing in the field. The effective practice of supervision is critical to the maintenance and development of the field, and needs to be acknowledged and addressed for the betterment of the profession (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). If supervision is an essential staffing practice, the field should advocate for training, education, and literary pursuits in the area of supervision in order to elevate the overall state of the task in the field, providing it with the recognition it warrants.

In Improving Staffing Practices in Student Affairs, Winston and Creamer (1997) discuss the widely-held perception that supervision is only necessary when staff have made a mistake or error in judgment. Supervision, when viewed through this lens, is not necessary if a staff member
is well qualified, well educated, or knowledgeable. As a result, supervision perceived as only necessary when working with an incompetent staff member or when responding to an act of impropriety (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Several years later, Winston and Creamer (2002) introduced another way to view supervision, specifically that staff members should not be supervised, but rather should find their own way. Through this lens, a supervisee’s request for supervision or guidance are seen as signs of incompetence, a perception that may shame supervisees into not seeking supervision even when they need it most (Winston & Creamer, 2002). Shupp and Arminio (2012) support the assertions of Winston and Creamer (1997; 2002), but also suggest that the perception of supervision being intuitive, much like parenting, is common among student affairs professionals. The field, according to Shupp and Arminio (2012), perceives that all professionals are capable of supervising staff members, just as they are inherently capable of taking care of a child.

As part of *Improving Staffing Practices in Student Affairs*, Winston and Creamer (1997) discuss survey research conducted in order to explore beyond perceptions and gain an understanding of the staffing practices utilized in higher education. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they provided supervision at least once a month. Approximately a quarter of respondents stated that they provided supervision once or twice a year, or not at all (Winston & Creamer, 1997). In regards to the topics addressed during supervision, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that sessions were not holistic (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Almost a decade later, Barham and Winston (2006) conducted interviews in order to examine the supervisory relationships between entry-level staff members and their supervisors. When asked about how they developed their supervision style, many of the supervisors in the study reflected on previous supervisory experiences and indicated that they used such
experiences to inform and guide their supervisory practices (Barham & Winston, 2006). The results of the study overwhelmingly indicated that supervisors chose their supervisory approach based upon their own personal preference and past experiences. None of the supervisors reported receiving supervisory training or utilizing theory in their approach (Barham & Winston, 2006).

The practice of modeling supervisory methods after a former supervisor, or strategically not modeling them after a former supervisor, as reported by Barham and Winston (2006) is common (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). When asked where they learned effective supervision, even the high quality supervisors who participated in Arminio and Creamer’s (2001) study stated that they learned via trial and error or simply did not act as bad supervisors had. While modeling supervisory methods can be beneficial for practitioners who have received high quality supervision, relying on past supervision experiences, may not be an effective practice for professionals who have not had quality supervision (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Even if the supervisor recognizes that she/he has not received quality supervision in the past, it is difficult to create a method of supervision from naught (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003).

With such disparity between Winston and Creamer’s (1997) definition and the perceptions of supervision in the field, it is not surprising that the practice of supervision in student affairs does not reflect the importance of the task. Furthermore, due to the absence of training, education, and professional literature on the topic, the high frequency at which administrators determine their own methods of supervision is not only understandable, but also somewhat predictable (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Barham & Winston, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Current supervisory practices reflect the depressed state and negative perceptions of supervision in the field of student affairs and, therefore, do not align with the
elevated definition of supervision provided by Winston and Creamer (1997). Such inconsistencies must be addressed in order to improve upon the staffing practices.

Synergistic Supervision

Synergistic supervision is regarded as having the “greatest utility for working with the student affairs practitioners” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 196). The synergistic approach to supervision demonstrates a “cooperative effort between the supervisor and staff members that allows the effect of their joint efforts to be greater than the sum of their individual contributions” (Winston & Creamer, 1997, p. 196). Mathematically expressed by Winston and Creamer (1997) as “1+1= 3,” it is the sum of supervisor-supervisee collaboration that results in the accomplishment of both the institution’s and staff member’s goals (p. 196). The nine components of synergistic supervision are: dual focus, joint effort, two-way communication, focus on competence, growth orientation, proactivity, goal-based, systematic and ongoing process, and holism (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

When the definition of synergistic supervision is compared to how supervision is perceived and practiced in the field, several inconsistencies become apparent (Winston & Creamer, 1997). First and foremost, the perceptions of supervision commonly held by student affairs administrators do not align with the synergistic approach (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Second, common supervisory practices, as described by Winston and Creamer (1997), indicate that the synergistic approach to supervision is not customary, a finding to which the perceptions of supervision allude. The incongruence between the definition of synergistic supervision, an approach regarded as being very beneficial for student affairs practitioners, and the current perceptions and practices of supervision help to explain the state of supervision in the field.
Although synergistic supervision closely aligns with the idea that effective supervision is linked to the success of both the institution and the professionals employed by the institution, the depressed state of supervision does not reflect a synergistic approach. The overall lack of training, education, and professional literature suggests that the task of supervision is not regarded as a valuable component of staffing practice or development (Barham & Winston, 2006; Creamer & Winston, 2002; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Winston & Creamer, 1997). As utilizing the synergistic approach to supervision does not appear to be instinctive for many supervisors in the field of student affairs, synergistic supervisory skills may require cultivation encouraged by a heightened state of supervision in the field (Winston & Creamer, 1997).

In order to examine the validity of synergistic supervision in the field of student affairs, Saunders, Cooper, Winston, and Chernow (2000) conducted a study in which participants were asked to describe the aspects of their current supervisory relationship and identify which of these aspects they found to be effective supervisory practices. Participants who reported experiencing the following activities also reported higher perceptions of synergistic supervision: discussion of job performance, discussion of long-term career goals and aspirations, discussion of personal attitudes and opinions, and frequent performance appraisal (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). An analysis of the data indicated that synergistic supervision is a legitimate approach to supervision, especially in regards to the field of student affairs (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000).

Arminio and Creamer (2001) sought to expand upon the initial research of Winston and Creamer (1997) and conducted a study to determine the behaviors, values, and attitudes that constitute quality supervision in student affairs. The findings of the study indicated that quality supervisors integrated the staff member’s skills with the needs of the institution (Arminio &
Specifically, quality supervisors demonstrated two main focuses: the needs of the organization and the needs of the individual staff member (Arminio & Creamer, 2001). Furthermore, quality supervisors in the study focused more on the personal needs of their supervisees than the needs of the organization, and spent much time building the supervisor-supervisee relationship necessary for the accomplishment of the institution’s goals (Arminio & Creamer, 2001). The overall study findings revealed that quality supervisors viewed supervision as a deliberate, on-going process, and that quality supervision results from “common sense, ordinary supervisory activities” conducted in a persistent and direct manner (Arminio & Creamer, 2001, p. 35). The data also indicated a direct link to synergistic supervision as the characteristics of high quality supervisors encompassed the cooperative efforts described by Winston and Creamer (1997) (Arminio & Creamer, 2001).

Over a decade later, Shupp and Arminio (2012) were interested in identifying the supervision practices found to be most valuable by new student affairs professionals, and if such practices were consistent with synergistic supervision. Study participants were asked to describe the best aspects of the supervisory experience, the role supervision played in their professional development, and the structure of their current supervision (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). The data indicated that the supervisees desired five main experiences, all of which are consistent with synergistic supervision: guidance, meaningful interaction, unique supervision, formal evaluations, and professional development opportunities (Shupp & Arminio, 2012).

While the findings of Saunders, Cooper, Winston, Chernow (2000), Arminio and Creamer (2001), and Shupp and Arminio (2012) all demonstrate the value of synergistic supervision in the field of student affairs, the studies do present a few limitations. First, it is difficult to generalize the results of each study due to low response rates and small sample sizes.
(Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Additionally, Saunders, Cooper, Winston and Chernow’s (2000) study is limited by the method of data collection. The survey instrument was designed to measure perceptions of supervisory behaviors, not realities (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). Furthermore, the results of Arminio and Creamer’s (2001) and Shupp and Arminio’s (2012) studies are limited by the purposeful selection of their participants.

Despite the limitations described above, the findings of each study are indicative of the impact synergistic supervision can have in the field of student affairs (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). While more research on the utilization of the synergistic approach to supervision is needed, the work of Saunders, Cooper, Winston and Chernow (2000), Arminio and Creamer (2001), and Shupp and Arminio (2012) can help to guide the practices of supervisors in the field, and can suggest the path for future studies and literature.

New Student Affairs Professionals

In the field of student affairs, entry-level practitioners are among the least satisfied with their professional roles (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998). Such dissatisfaction is certainly alarming, as it can lead to attrition (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000; Tull, 2006). However, the relationship between a new professional and his/her first direct supervisor can play a large role in creating commitment to the field of student affairs. In fact, “no relationship holds greater natural potential to influence self-image, career satisfaction, and professional development than the relationship with a supervisor” (Harned & Murphy, 1998, p. 43). In order to better understand the influential supervisee-supervisor relationship, this section
examines the needs and concerns of new professionals, the expectations of new professionals, as well as how new professionals are commonly supervised in the field.

According to a national study conducted through the American College Personnel Association, new professionals have six main professional development needs: receiving adequate support, understanding job expectations, fostering student learning, moving up in the field of student affairs, enhancing supervision skills, and developing multicultural competencies (Cilente, et al., 2006). Survey respondents also indicated four main concerns during their first years of student affairs work: understanding organizational culture, making the transition from graduate school to work, establishing a relationship with a mentor, and clarifying job expectations (Cilente, et al., 2006).

In order to examine how entry-level professionals experience their first full-time position, Renn and Hodges (2007) interviewed a small group of entry-level professionals. The study revealed that new professionals are faced with a variety of challenges, all of which centered around three themes: relationships, fit, and competence (Renn & Hodges, 2007). For participants, concerns about relationships focused on whether they would be liked by students, supervisors, supervisees, and co-workers and colleagues (Renn & Hodges, 2007). In regards to fit, new professionals expressed concerns about connecting with others, understanding the student culture, and developing an appropriate social life (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Finally, the new professional’s concerns about competence were related to basic job training, skills, knowledge about the institution, and understanding their personal strengths and weaknesses (Renn & Hodges, 2007).

Though certainly valuable, the research conducted by Cliente, et al. (2006) and Renn and Hodges (2007) is limited. For example, the low response rate in Cliente, et al.’s (2006) research
severely decreases the ease at which the study results can be generalized. Similarly, the results of Renn and Hodges’ (2007) study are also difficult to generalize to the greater population as all ten participants graduated from the same master’s preparatory program (Renn & Hodges, 2007). An additional limitation of Renn and Hodges’ (2007) study is due to the method of data collection; because an online system was used, the researchers did not have the opportunity to ask for additional or clarifying information if a participant provided an incomplete or vague response. Regardless, the findings of Cliente, et al. (2006) and Renn and Hodges (2007) provide an insider’s view into the experiences of new professionals in the field, and such information can inform administrators about tailoring their supervision of new professionals.

Individuals who are drawn to fields of human development, like student affairs, expect to have a supervisor who is both nurturing and caring (Harned & Murphy, 1998). Professionals in student affairs, especially those who hold entry-level positions, anticipate being an apprentice to their supervisors (Harned & Murphy, 1998). Due to the expectation of apprenticeship, many entry-level professionals plan to solely rely on their immediate supervisors for guidance, support in making decisions, and assistance in solving problems (Harned & Murphy, 1998). As such, the supervisory relationship has great potential “to influence [the] self-image, [the] career satisfaction, and [the] professional development” of a professional beginning his or her career in student affairs (Harned & Murphy, 1998, p. 43).

Research regarding the expectations of new student affairs professionals is needed. When paired with current research about the needs and concerns of new professionals, research on expectations will allow supervisors to better mold their practices for new professionals from the start of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Furthermore, if the particular expectations of new
student affairs professionals are revealed through research, supervisors will, if necessary, be able to assist their supervisees in adjusting their expectations to better match those of the institution.

Unfortunately, research has indicated that many new student affairs professionals do not receive the supervision that they need or expect in order to achieve their personal and professionals goals (Barham & Winston, 2006; Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006; Winston & Hirt, 2003). For example, in an informal survey conducted by Winston and Hirt (2003), entry-level professionals discussed both the supervision they were currently receiving and the supervision that they wanted to receive. The supervisees reported an overall lack of structure and autonomy in their positions, infrequent feedback on their performance, and insufficient support and resources for professional development opportunities in their current supervisory relationships (Winston & Hirt, 2003). Supervisees indicated that they desired supervisors who were intentional in their approach, who demonstrated trust in their professional abilities, and who routinely evaluated their skills and abilities (Winston & Hirt, 2003). Furthermore, the supervisee respondents described their supervision as lacking emotional support and consistency, and as utilizing ineffective communication techniques (Winston & Hirt, 2003). The respondents also indicated that their supervisors routinely failed to recognize their limitations in both time and skill. The supervisees reported wanting a supervisor who recognized that they were still learning, who would actively engage in teaching them, and who would model appropriate behavior (Winston & Hirt, 2003). This informal study clearly reveals the discrepancy between the supervision that a new professional actually receives and the supervision that a new professional needs and desires to receive (Winston & Hirt, 2003).
Barham and Winston (2006) further explored this incongruence through interviews of supervisee and mid-level supervisor pairs. All supervisee participants directly stated a desire for two crucial experiences: a personal relationship with their supervisor and a safe space in which to freely express their frustrations (Barham & Winston, 2006). According to the supervisees, having a balanced relationship with a non-judgmental individual with whom they could “process, talk [and] brainstorm” resulted in feeling supported and understood (Barham & Winston, 2006, p. 85). Other reported supervisee needs included: guidance in supervising paraprofessional staff, autonomy, and increased administrative support (Barham & Winston, 2006).

Supervisors in Barham and Winston’s (2006) study had much difficulty stating what their supervisee specifically needed. The perceived needs directly stated by at least one supervisor included: involvement in professional conferences, involvement in campus committees, confrontation skills, administrative skills, and supervisory skills (Barham & Wilson 2006). An analysis of the data further revealed four implied needs, common to all of the supervisor participants: balance, communication, support, and maturity (Barham & Wilson, 2006). All four supervisors also indicated that they provided for their supervisee when he or she openly made his or her needs known (Barham & Winston, 2006).

When Barham and Winston (2006) compared the interview data from the supervisees and the supervisors, the incongruence between the perceptions of the new professionals and the perceptions of the supervisors became apparent. Only two needs were common among the perceptions of the new professionals and their supervisors: time to talk/process and building skills to supervise paraprofessional staff members (Barham & Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, the data revealed that both the supervisees and the supervisors were unable to identify and articulate the new professional’s needs (Barham & Wilson, 2006). According to Barham and Winston
(2006), “if neither the supervisor or the new professional is able to clearly articulate needs, supervision becomes a process of the blind leading the blind,” a process that not only severely limits growth and development for the new professional, but also may result in attrition (p. 82).

The research described by Winston and Hirt (2003) and conducted Barham and Winston (2006) revealed that new professionals often do not receive the supervision they need or expect upon entering the field of student affairs. Further research is warranted, however, as both studies have limitations related to generalizability and/or biases that may be present in the data (Barham & Winston, 2006; Winston & Hirt, 2003). Barham and Winston (2006), for example, have an additional difficulty establishing generalizability as their study participants are from one geographical area. Furthermore, the informal research described by Winston and Hirt (2003) may contain a bias due to the method of data collection. By posting questions on listservs, only professionals with access to the specific site or interest in an online professional community could participate in the informal poll.

Despite their limitations, the informal research described by Winston and Hirt (2003) and the study conducted by Barham and Winston (2006) can inform the practices of both entry-level supervisees and their supervisors. By acknowledging and addressing the discrepancies that exist between the supervision a new professional receives and the supervision a new professional needs, supervisor-supervisee pairs can begin to build a supervisory relationship that encourages the success of the new professional.

Attrition
In order to understand the high percentage of attrition in the field, this final section examines the link between stress and job satisfaction, the various factors that influence commitment and retention, and the relationship between synergistic supervision and attrition.

Too much work and too little time are the main stressors for student affairs practitioners (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000). Unfortunately, as many professionals have demanding schedules that require them to work over the traditional forty-hour workload, these stressors are extremely common in the field (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000; Bolton, 2005). Stress levels are directly related to job dissatisfaction; the more satisfied a practitioner is with his/her job, the less stress he/she experiences (Berwick, 1992). Likewise, the lower the level of satisfaction, the more stress that is reported (Volkwein, Malik, & Napierski-Prancl, 1998).

As such, particular attention should be given to new professionals in student affairs, as they are the least satisfied with their positions in the field (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998). By reducing the amount of stress experienced by new professionals, the likelihood that they are satisfied with their entry-level positions could increase (Berwick, 1992). Such an increase in satisfaction may result in a decreased rate of attrition, securing the future of the student affairs profession (Boehman, 2007; Williams & Hazer, 1986).

Job satisfaction has been directly linked to organizational commitment; personal and organizational characteristics directly impact job satisfaction, and only impact commitment through their influence on job satisfaction (Boehman, 2007; Williams & Hazer, 1986). Such an impact clearly defines a casual connection between job satisfaction and commitment (Boehman, 2007; Williams & Hazer, 1986). Furthermore, a study designed to examine the relationship between job satisfaction, organizational politics, organizational support, balance, and
organizational attachment revealed the influence that a supportive work environment can have on an individual’s decision to commit to an organization (Boehman, 2007). In fact, when compared to overall job satisfaction and organizational politics, organizational support is likely the best predictive value for affective commitment, especially in student affairs (Boehman, 2007).

A supportive work environment is also highly influential in regards to retention (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009). A study of entry-level, live-in professionals revealed that the following organizational supports impacted retention rates: a clear mission statement, a culture of engagement, a culture of professionalism, and a culture of opportunity (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009). Specifically, institutions that are clear in their organization’s purpose, have a collegial environment in which communication is valued, encourage autonomy throughout organizational levels, and provide opportunities in which new professionals can learn and grow, display higher levels of retention of entry-level, live-in staff (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009). Such factors create the supportive work environment necessary to create affective commitment among staff, leading to increased levels of retention (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009).

While the research conducted by Boehman (2007) and Belch, Wilson and Dunkel (2009) certainly illustrate the importance of understanding the various factors that influence an individual’s decision to commit to an employment position and profession, their respective studies do have limitations. Boehman’s (2007) study, for example, is limited in its generalizability, as participants were selected due to their involvement in a national organization. Such an organization likely attracts individuals who are committed to student affairs. In Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel’s (2009) research, the identification of institutions relied solely on the knowledge of the Delphi panel. Additionally, the study is also limited due to the researchers’
high level of involvement in both the collection and analysis of the data. The researchers may have unknowingly influenced data generation and or analysis (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009).

Overall, Boehman (2007) and Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel’s (2009) research suggests that commitment and retention are influenced upon a variety of factors, including institutional environment and organizational support. While the influence of these factors may differ for each entry-level professional, student affairs practitioners may be able to address the environment and offer supports through their supervisory practices, increasing the likelihood that a new professional actively commits to the field.

A new practitioner’s experiences in his/her first full-time position have a significant impact on his or her success in the field (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Creamer & Winston, 2002). In particular, the relationship between an entry-level professional and his or her supervisor can be a key component in a new professional’s decision to commit to the field of student affairs (Harned & Murphy, 1998). It has been stated that the attrition of new professionals is directly related to the quality of supervisory experiences they receive during their first few years in the field (Creamer & Winston, 2002). As the retention of professionals is critical to the future of the profession, the impact of supervision on attrition has attracted attention of researchers (Barham & Winston, 2006; Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Tull, 2006).

One study examined the relationship between the perceived amount of synergistic supervision received, level of job satisfaction, and intention to turnover (Tull, 2006). Two main effect findings emerged from the data (Tull, 2006). First, a significant positive correlation was found between the perceived level of synergistic supervision received and job satisfaction. New professionals who reported high levels of perceived synergistic supervision also reported high
levels of job satisfaction (Tull, 2006). The positive supervisory relationship provided through the synergistic approach contributes to the personal and professional development of the new professionals involved in the study, greatly reducing their experiences of job burnout and overload (Tull, 2006). Second, a significant negative correlation was found between perceived level of synergistic supervision received and intention to turnover, or leave the profession. New professionals who reported lower levels of perceived synergistic supervision reported higher levels of intention to leave the field (Tull, 2006). Overall, this main effect indicated that the absence of synergistic supervision could result in an increased intention to turnover amid new professionals (Tull, 2006). Based upon this research, the quality of supervision received could be the reason some new professionals thrive in the field, and the reason other entry-level professionals abandon their careers in the field of student affairs (Tull, 2006).

While the study results linked synergistic supervision and attrition from the field, Tull’s (2006) participants limit the generalizability of the research in two ways. First, the ACPA associated participants do not represent the entire population of all new professionals in the field of student affairs (Tull, 2006). Second, ACPA is a national professional association in the field of student affairs. Participants may have joined ACPA due to the encouragement or influence of a synergistic supervisor, therefore skewing the study findings (Tull, 2006). Despite these limitations, however, Tull’s (2006) research revealed a strong link between synergistic supervision and intention to turnover in the field of student affairs. Such research contributes much needed literature concerning supervision to the profession of student affairs, and also informs supervisory practices, and guides future studies of new professionals and supervision.

Conclusions
Based upon the literature reviewed and analyzed in this study, five conclusions can be made. First, the way in which supervision is defined in the literature does not align with the negative perceptions of the task or the minimal practice of effective supervision that occurs in the field (Winston & Creamer, 1997). As the perception of supervision undoubtedly impacts how the task is practiced, and vice versa, the field of student affairs must address both inconsistencies to enact change. Second, the supervisory expectations of new professionals do not often match the supervision that they receive (Winston & Hirt, 2003; Barham & Winston, 2006). Third, synergistic supervision is an approach to supervision that encourages much supervisor-supervisee collaboration in order to achieve both the goals of the institution and the goals of the supervisee (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Fourth, the utilization of the synergistic approach has many implications for student affairs professionals, including those who hold entry-level positions. Effective, high quality supervisory practices, as reported by practitioners, reflect the synergistic approach (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Finally, fifth, a relationship exists between the perceived amount of synergistic supervision received, level of job satisfaction, and intention to turnover (Tull, 2006). Synergistic supervision can help to alleviate job-related stress, burnout, and overload, reducing the intentions of new professionals to leave the field (Tull, 2006). Therefore, providing quality supervision should be recognized as a way in which the field of student affairs can address the high attrition rates of new professionals.

Recommendations

Three following recommendations for further research can be made based upon the review and analysis of the literature. First, further research should focus on the expectations, needs, and experiences of new professionals in the field of student affairs. Second, additional research should continue to examine the utilization of synergistic supervision in student affairs.
Third, research should be aimed at exploring the potential relationship between developmental theories and supervision in student affairs. As practitioners utilize student development theories to inform their practices with undergraduate students, adult developmental theories may be a resource supervisors can use to guide their approach to supervisory relationships.

Three recommendations for practice can also be made based upon the literary review and analysis. First, graduate preparatory programs should address supervision in the required curriculum. As future new professionals who will likely act in both supervisee and supervisor roles, graduate students should learn basic supervisory skills and practices, and how to create and maintain effective supervisory relationships. Second, student affairs leadership should encourage practitioners at their institutions to examine their current supervisory practices and perceptions, and to actively seek educational opportunities relevant to the task so their practices can be improved. Finally, student affairs professional organizations should take on a larger role in providing information, education, and training in supervision. Through such practices, the negative perceptions of supervision can be confronted, and the state of supervision in student affairs can be improved and the field can continue to develop. Such supervisory evolution would better prepare student affairs professionals to address the development needs and concerns of students, further validating student affairs and its role in higher education.
REFERENCES


