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# Student Governance: A Qualitative Study of Leadership in a Student Government Association

Walter Preston May

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, *STUDENT GOVERNANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP IN A STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION*, by WALTER MAY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### STUDENT GOVERNANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP IN A STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

by  
Walter P. May

Student governance has been in existence as an integral part of higher education almost since the founding of the first college in colonial America. However, little is understood about the lived experience of students involved in student governance, and specifically those who participate in leadership positions within student government organizations such as the student government president. Therefore, the primary purposes of this study are to highlight experiences of students who served as presidents of a liberal arts college's student government association and to examine the meanings these individuals construct out of their leadership experiences.

This study employed qualitative methods, which included in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews and journaling. The sample was made up of six students who served as student government association presidents at a small, private, liberal-arts college. From the data derived through the interview and journaling processes, an overall picture of the experiences of the participants and the meanings that the participants construct of their experiences was drawn.

Based on the results, several themes regarding the participants' experiences as student government presidents emerged from the data, which include: positive and negative facets of their presidencies, stress as a substantial element during their time in

office, dissimilar experiences of women and minority students, varied experiences regarding relationships and conflicts with members of the campus community, the multiple roles required of a student government president, and personal approaches to leadership that a student government president must possess and hone.

Conclusions based on the data were included and implications for student affairs practitioners were discussed as well as recommendations for further study were made.



STUDENT GOVERNANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP IN A  
STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

by  
Walter P. May

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Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Policy Studies  
in  
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in  
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Georgia State University

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2009

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Walter P. May  
2009

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated two people: my grandfather, Walter Davis May, Jr., a person of character and an inspiration for me in all my endeavors; and my daughter, Eloise (Ella) Tenney May, whose love and boundless energy sustain me and whose inquisitive nature constantly amazes me.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables and Figures.....	vii
Abbreviations.....	viii
Chapter	
1 <b>STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</b> .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Rationale for the Study .....	9
Statement of Significance .....	12
Definitions of Terms.....	13
Overview of the Dissertation .....	15
2 <b>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b> .....	16
Introduction.....	16
Quantitative Studies .....	17
Qualitative Studies .....	21
Common Findings and Themes .....	23
Conclusion .....	65

3	FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....	67
	Emerging Adulthood.....	67
	Qualitative Interviewing .....	69
	Constructionism .....	72
	Site .....	73
	Access .....	74
	Role of the Researcher .....	76
	Participant Selection .....	79
	Context.....	80
	Ethical Issues .....	83
	Data Collection .....	85
	Data Management and Analysis .....	90
	Trustworthiness of the Data .....	94
	Limitations .....	96
	Research Management Plan and Timeline.....	97
4	DATA AND RESULTS .....	100
	Description of the Institution .....	100
	Description of the Student Government Association.....	101
	Participants and Interview Excerpts.....	101
	Defining Student Governance.....	215

	Common Themes .....	217
	Coding.....	218
	Conclusion .....	344
5	DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS.....	345
	Statement of the Problem.....	346
	Review of Method.....	347
	Summary of Results.....	347
	Discussion.....	348
	Implications.....	382
	Conclusion .....	392
	References.....	393
	Appendices.....	414

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table		Page
1	Research Management Plan and Timeline.....	99
2	Participants' Definitions of Student Governance .....	216
3	Common Themes Derived from Interview Data .....	219
4	Underlying Categories Related to the Overall Experience .....	221
5	Underlying Categories Related to Relationships .....	250
6	Underlying Categories Related to Finding Balance.....	293
7	Underlying Categories Related to Personal Characteristics .....	302
8	Underlying Categories Related to Roles.....	321
9	Underlying Categories Related to Conflict.....	337



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

SGA          Student Government Association

# **STUDENT GOVERNANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP IN A STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

#### **Introduction**

My research sought to uncover the essence of shared student experiences among student government association presidents at a small liberal arts college. In defining the term “student self-governance,” I found that I concur with the Freidson and Shuchman (1955) characterization of this entity when they state, “By student government we mean a type of organization which by virtue of its composition and constitution is entitled to represent the student community as a whole” (p. 6). Since qualitative-inquiry researchers seek to provide an overview of a particular experience or experiences under study, and an inherent understanding of the phenomenon under study was required, it was necessary to explore the origins and extent to which student governance became ingrained into the foundation of higher education in the United States. Many American researchers have written on the origins, evolution, and influence of student governance in higher education (Alexander, 1969; Bambenek & Shifton, 2003; Barr, Upcraft, Terrell & Cuyjet, 1994; Boyd, 1985; Coates & Coates, 1985; Crane, 1969; Downy, Bosco & Silver, 1984; Emmett, 2000; Falvey, 1952; Klopff, 1960; Love & Miller, 2003; McGrath, 1970;

McKown, 1944; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Miller & Nadler, 2006; Miller, Randell, & Nadler, 1999; Morison, 1970; Oxendine, 1997; Remley, 1993; Torok, 1999). Educational authors since the late 1700s, and particularly during the last 75 years, have consistently raised the topic of student governance, its history, and its impact on institutions and students. Authors unanimously supported the argument that student governance has had a significant impact on colleges and universities, and the students who participated and led student governance organizations have also greatly benefited.

The following is a summary of the origins and significance of student governance in the United States, appendix D offers a detail description of its history and evolution. Historians show that student governance has been a reality in collegiate education in the United States since the late 1700s (Cohen, 1998; Klopff, 1960; Falvey, 1952; Lunn, 1956; McKown, 1944). Several authors argue that the first American students engaged in self-governance can be found at The College of William & Mary College in the 1770s (Klopff, 1960; Lunn, 1956; McKown, 1944). McKown wrote,

Probably the first example of student participation in American colleges was at William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA., in 1779, after the college had been in existence for more than three-quarters of a century.... The students elected representatives to a central body and this handled lesser details of "general improvement," and routine discipline. The plan was very simple, but it was a beginning. (1944, p. 11)

The origins of student governance, however, are often disputed and muddled with inconsistencies. Generally, historical records are not always clear, and there are often different interpretations and conclusions drawn from them. The establishment of student governance is no exception. Klopff (1960) reveals the murkiness of the history of student

governance when he discusses the struggle to determine and give credit to the location of the first student governing body. He stated,

Some form of student government has been apparent in American colleges since the late 1700's when William and Mary College organized a student governing body. With the founding of the University of Virginia, Jefferson recommended a modified plan of student discipline, and since that time many other institutions have claimed that American student government was founded on its campus. Although early attempts were fraught with failure, the seeds were sown. (1960, p. 40)

Despite the unclear beginning, student governance has continued to survive and evolve as an integral element of higher education in the United States. Falvey wrote that

thus the movement toward student participation in college administration, apparent about 1800, became widespread. By the turn of the twentieth century there were examples of the student council, the graduate manager, the women's self government association, the men's council, and the student court on hundreds of college campuses in the United States. (1952, p. 42)

Klopf affirmed Falvey's position by stating, "student participation in college government is neither a novelty nor a modern idea.... The practice of having students responsible for and exercising control over their conduct and activities extends over a period of many centuries" (1960, p. 37). Moreover, Janc contended that "over the course of the 20th century, the role of students in higher education has significantly increased," and has shifted away from mere extracurricular activities to a role more focused on participating in the governing of institutions (2004, p. 3). As higher education in the United States has matured and expanded, so has student governance. Student governance has become, along the way, a key component to higher education in the United States.

Student governance has a presence at almost every college and university in the United States. Many student governments are members of the American Student Government Association (ASGA), which was founded in 2003 and has more than 200 member institutions (ASGA, 2006). The widespread presence of associations and organizations that are recognized by colleges and universities as being the official voice and voting body of the student body confirms the magnitude and importance of student governance in higher education in the United States.

Given the amount of meaning and worth provided it throughout the history of higher education in the United States, and the passion for its educational value shown by both educators and students, the positive effects of student governance seem definite. A number of authors, including Downy, Bosco, and Silver (1984) and Kuh and Lund (1994), discussed the impact and importance of student self-governance. Some authors argue, including Cuyjet (1994) and Klopf (1960), that student governance is a conduit for colleges and universities to train students to be future leaders, advocates, and service providers for their fellow college and university students. Terrell and Cuyjet argue,

First, when student leaders are given training and experience in collegiate governance, their education and development are enhanced greatly. Second, student leaders, as representatives of their constituents, can provide a vital resource in the formation of effective institutional policy. Third, student participation in shared governance affords greater acceptance of and support for policy decisions. (1994, p. 1)

Student governance is seen as a purposeful and important element in higher education, particularly as a conduit to reach, teach, and serve the students enrolled in higher education institutions (Bambenek & Shifton, 2003; Cuyjet, 1994; Downy, Bosco &

Silver, 1984; Freidson & Schuchman, 1955; Gold & Quatroche, 1994; Klopff, 1960; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

However, there are scholars and researchers who contend that the role of student governance in colleges and universities is insignificant and has not had a noteworthy impact on education beyond the extracurricular. McGrath declares,

Earlier, it was shown that in the past century some students in some American colleges and universities significantly influenced educational policies and practices. It would be historically inaccurate, however, to infer that these accomplishments were effected through the efforts of various organizations known as student government. (1970, p. 72)

Boyer furthers this argument regarding the insignificance of student governance by stating,

Indeed, we found that student involvement in campus governance is almost nonexistent.... The feeling is that it's a "sand-box operation" dominated by a few campus politicians.... Student government should be an important community-building institution, but on most campuses it is not taken seriously either by administration or faculty. (1987, pp. 244-245)

However, the arguments against the significance and impact of student governance in higher education are evidence that student governance did and still does exist.

As colleges and universities evolve and expand, so will student governance likely expand, especially as a means to connect with students on a level that college administrations and faculties are not able or willing to do. In addition, most researchers argue that student government engages students in the campus community by giving them their own voice.

## Purpose

I agree with Astin and Astin (2000) as well as Dugan, Garland, Jacoby, and Gasiorski (2008) and Casteem, Gibson, and Lampkin (2007) that the development of leadership and leaders is the central aim for higher education. Furthermore, I agree with Hall, Forrester, and Borsz (2008) that “given that most institutions aim to prepare future leaders, it is important to understand the impact that both in-class and out-of-class experiences have on the leadership skill development of students” (p. 125). I further concur with Austin (1984), Kuh (2001) Kuh, Kinzie, Schul, Whitt, and Associates, (2005) and Pace (1984) that significant analysis must be focused on understanding how involvement in college influences a student’s educational experience. Studies suggest that students who are involved in student leadership programs show significant gains in the areas of “skills (e.g., decision making abilities), values (e.g., sense of personal ethics), and cognitive understandings (e.g., understanding of leadership theories)” (Cress et al., 2001, p. 17). For example, Astin, in his Theory of Involvement posits that learning takes place inside and outside the classroom environment and that students learn a great deal by becoming involved in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities (1977, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1996). Astin contended that an institution’s environment plays a key role in the development of students as it offers students a wide variety of opportunities for interactions with other ideas and people (1977, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1996). If researchers or student affairs professionals, however, desire to focus on the self-perceived influence of involvement in leadership roles in student governance, then there are few studies directed in this area. There are many studies, including studies by Pacarella and Terenzini (2005),

Kuh (1995), Kuh and Lund (1994), Schuh and Laverty (1983), and Schwartz (1991), focusing on the impacts and outcomes of *general* involvement in college leadership programs and activities. However, I concur with Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005) that “participants may experience leadership differently based on the organization and its cultural context” (p. 406). In that light, there is a deficiency in the current research focused on perceptions of those who serve as student government presidents.

The present study explores the lived experiences of individual college students who held presidency in student governance at a small, private liberal arts college. Through this examination, I argue for an enhanced understanding of the experience of student government leadership. In this study, participants were interviewed about their perceptions of what they learned from their experiences and how that learning influenced their personal development. Previous studies have focused on the development of managerial and leadership skills rather than the actual, individualized meanings that specific students gain from their experiences.

This study investigated the lived experience of students involved in student governance through the lens of constructivism. Constructionist thinking enables student affairs practitioners to engage with students in diverse contexts and generates new theoretical possibilities. It brings students’ narratives into educational practices to promote student learning. Moreover, as a study focused on the qualitative experience of participation in student governance, this endeavor presents the accounts of the participants’ lived experiences, and for that reason, offers those who are charged with advising and supporting student government organizations with insights and information



that could assist them with their responsibilities. I agree with Rhoads (1997) that “student affairs professionals and faculty need phenomenon-oriented studies to better understand how students construct meaning around their experiences” (p. 509). Qualitative methodology allowed me to expose how the actual experience of participation in student governance is linked to the students’ construction of meaning of their collegiate experience. Through this study, I identified and interpreted the constructed meaning that participants applied to their involvement in student governance leadership. This interpretation of the qualitative, student-specific experiences leads to practical knowledge that student affairs professionals may implement toward student learning through participation in student governance.

#### Research Questions

For this study, I investigated how participants perceived their experiences as leaders within a student governance organization. This study sought to discern the meanings that participants placed on their involvement in student governance. Embodied in this general inquiry are the following, more specific questions that will be explored through the points of the study’s participants;

1. What do students *gain* from participation in student governance?
2. What are the *perspectives* of the participants toward their experiences, and their expected outcomes?
3. What *meanings* do the participants derive from their experience and how do those meanings affect their lives?

The aim of this study is to investigate how specific students who participate in leadership roles in student government perceive their experiences and how these actual, lived experiences have changed them.

#### Rationale for the Study

I concur with Dugan (2006) that “the development of student leaders remains a central goal for institutions of higher education as evidenced by mission statements and the increased presence of leadership development programs on college campuses” (p. 335). I am also in accord with Magolda and Ebben (2006) who argue that

colleges and universities are discovering the importance of providing purposeful, meaningful out-of-class experience for all students. Although there are many advocates on the student involvement bandwagon, there are few research studies that explore from students’ perspectives what quality out-of-class experiences look like. (p. 282)

In furtherance of the above statement, a question often asked by student affairs professionals is: What do students gain from their participation in leadership positions within student governance? Of course, responses to this question exist, but those responses lack depth. For example, Boyer (1987) stated:

Thus, the student activities picture in the American college, like the rest of the undergraduate experience, is mixed. On the one hand, the formal structures of student life—student government, convocations, and the like—do not seem to be working very well. Only a handful of students are involved, and those who are often seem driven by their own special interest. (p. 191)

Over the years, a number of studies on higher education in the United States have touched on the impact of student involvement, student leadership programs, and student governance (Astin, 1996; Boyer, 1987; Bloom, 1987, Horowitz, 1987; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005; Rudolph, 1990; Schlesinger & Baldrige, 1982; Woodward, 1994).

Also, Whitt (1994) is correct that

Research on the impact of college on students demonstrates the importance of out-of-class activities to achieving the educational purposes of higher education . . . . Involvement in leadership is associated with gains in practical and interpersonal competence . . . , development of leadership skills related to later job success . . . , intellectual development . . . , and development of altruism . . . . (p.198)

As seen above, repetitively, research on the impact and outcomes of such participation and involvement in leadership programs and student governance has for the most part centered on managerial-skills development, “such as leadership, decision making, planning, organizing, and teamwork” (Kuh & Lund, 1994, p. 8). Astin (1996) argued that involvement in student peer groups is “a powerful means of enhancing almost all aspects of the undergraduate student’s cognitive and affective development” (p. 126). Astin went on to contend that peer groups “have enormous potential for influencing virtually all aspects of the student’s educational and personal development” (1996, p. 126).

Furthermore, research has shown that college leadership experiences have “positive impacts on a student’s career, academic, and personal development; however, few studies have examined leadership issues related as personal experience” (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005, p. 394). Cross Brazzell and Reisser (1999) found that “students who participate in student government . . . are able . . . to gain greater understanding of the larger society” (p.173). Flowers (2004) also found that “a large body of research has indicated the importance of student involvement experience for college students in general” (p. 643). However, while these many studies are good evidence for “students in

general” as they involve themselves in campus governance, only rare studies closely examined the personal experiences of those who are specifically involved in student leadership positions such as the student government president. Moreover, Laosebikan-Buggs (2006) contended,

There are a variety of student development theories that can be reflected in college student participation in activities such as student government. The benefit of this participation, however, is difficult to measure and must rely on an inferential and indirect view of impacting students. (2006, p. 1)

For that reason, research needs to be conducted to determine what students perceive they gain from their participation in the presidency of a student governance organization, beyond day-to-day managerial skills. This study provides first-hand accounts by, and insight about, students who participate and lead student governance at a small, private liberal arts college. The hope is to create new theories of student development that can be applied to colleges and universities and be implemented by student affairs personnel.

Research, including works by Kuh (1995), Cooper, Healy, and Simpson (1994), Schwartz (1991), Kuh and Lund (1994), and Schuh and Laverty (1983), focuses on the outcomes of student participation in leadership development programs pertaining to the enhancement of managerial skills and personal development. The present study focused on students’ perceptions of their experiences in leadership positions within student governance at a higher education institution. Consequently, this study is important because current research is limited in a number of ways. First, previous researchers have primarily employed quantitative research methods, providing few insights into the reflective experiences of the participants. Second, the majority of previously conducted

studies have focused on *general* leadership development opportunities or positions, and those studies that did specifically focus on students who have held the presidency within the student government were narrowly tailored towards examining student government president's role in and perception of institutional decision-making at a two-year public college, the experience of student body presidents in a large public university system, and how and why women sought out the presidency (Hellwig-Olson, 2000; Sanseviro, 2006; Spencer, 2004). Third, the research on student governance is dated. Bray (2006) contended that

There are relatively few recent studies that empirically show the effects of student governance involvement on those students, or even seek to evaluate it. Most studies . . . are all relatively old at this point, having been conducted over a decade ago. More recent work has tended to remain empirical, but at a net effect of cocurricular benefits as a whole, or else the work posits the type of benefit that can be gained without actually seeking to assess that such gains do actually occur. (p. 21)

By employing qualitative methods, this study focused on what meanings the experience holds for the participants. Qualitative methods, that is, allow the researcher to highlight the specific perceptions and meanings the students construct from their experiences.

#### Statement of Significance

I agree with Miller and Nadler (2006) that students who lead, or aspire to lead, college organizations face a number of challenges. These challenges include internal strife, disorganization, student apathy, inability to establish legitimacy and trust with institutional leaders, higher levels of accountability, and lack of institutional commitment to student governance. The level of student and institutional involvement as well as student support of student governance has largely decreased over the years. Given the

current challenges and trends of involvement and influence in student governance, members of the higher education community should reevaluate the affects and outcomes within leadership positions in student government. There is a need, therefore, to examine this involvement from a qualitative perspective (DeCoster, 1996; Kuh & Lund, 1994, Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005). Merriam (1990) and Romano (1996) contended that qualitative research methods are the most suitable approach to discerning the meaning individuals place on experiences. The findings of this study provide insight into how involvement in leadership positions within student government organizations can affect, for better or worse, college and university students. In addition, the qualitative approaches of this study “avoid the artificial responses typical of controlled” quantitative studies (Fetterman, 1998, p. 31). Participants in this study were limited in neither the length nor the substance of their responses, so the study expanded as new topics and ideas arose.

#### Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined in agreement with their usage in the related general literature.

1. Leadership: Leadership involves an individual taking on a formal and recognized role in an organization or group and becoming engaged in the responsibility to guide, coordinate, and direct an organization or group in order for that group or organization be able to obtain its goals and objectives.
2. Student Government Association: A student government association is described as “a type of organization which by virtue of its composition and constitution is

entitled to represent the student community as a whole” (Freidson & Shuchman, 1955, p. 6).

3. **Student Government Executive Officers:** Student government executive officers are defined as the positions governing the student body as a whole. The officer positions include the president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. Individuals in these positions are typically elected by the student body in a recognized election process.
4. **Student Government President:** Otherwise known as the chief student officer. Eller (1949) described the president of the student government as the primary representative of the student body in all its dealings with the students of his or her respective campus and other institutions, in all dealings with the faculty and staff and administration, and in all dealings with the Board of Trustees.
5. **Student Involvement:** Student Involvement is any interaction with others within curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular related activities.
6. **Student Involvement at the Leadership Level:** Those students who are duly elected or appointed to a formal and recognized role or position within an organization or group with responsibility over others, and thereby, leading and guiding a student organization.
7. **Student Leaders:** Student leaders are those who are actively engaged at the leadership level within a student organization. Student leaders is a general term referring to students who hold elected or appointed positions in student organizations on campus including, but not limited to student government. Astin

(1984) defines the term student leader as “a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (p. 297). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Schuh and Laverty (1983) categorize student leaders as student government officers, fraternity and sorority presidents, or residence hall advisors.

8. Student Self-Governance: Student self-governance is characterized by the intentional and official recognition of involvement of students in the decision and policy making of an institution of higher education. In addition, students share the responsibility of governing themselves. For the purposes of this study, student self-governance is defined as the participation by students in college decision-making through an officially recognized and sanctioned body composed solely of students.

#### Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. In chapter I, the introduction of the study, the purpose, the research questions, the rationale, the significance, and definition of terms were presented. In chapter II there is an exploration of the related literature. Discussed in chapter III are the theoretical, methodological, epistemological frameworks and research design. The data derived from the interviews and journals is highlighted in chapter IV. Chapter V draws connections between the data and concepts provided by the literature review.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an extensive review of the student involvement and student leadership literature related to students participating in student self-governance in higher education in the United States. Through the following literature review, readers will become aware of current research that focuses not only on student governance, but also on student leadership development, and the influence and impact that involvement has on participating students. More specifically, this chapter contains reviews of applicable literature in the following areas: student leadership experiences and student governance involvement.

Leadership development through student involvement has been a long-time goal of higher education, and as such, colleges and universities have oftentimes developed both formal and informal programs and activities that support leadership development opportunities for students. Student involvement is defined by Astin (1984, 1985, 1993, 1999) as the level of engagement that students devote to college experience within curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular related activities. The student involvement theory designed by Astin (1984, 1985, 1993, 1996) argued that student learning and development is affected by involvement in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.

Posner (2004) asserted that “leadership development is now an integral part of the educational programs of college students, with courses and activities scattered throughout the co-curricular experience” (p. 443). Moreover, Thompson (2006) contended that “leadership development is a prominent theme and objective in higher education” (p. 343). Further,

many of the leadership development programs designed for college students are based upon studies and models that were developed with [or for] managers in business and public-sector organizations. Serious questions have been raised about whether such models are applicable to college students and collegiate environments, which differ considerably from the environments in which managers and corporations operate. (Posner, 2004, p. 443)

Over the years, numerous researchers have examined the impact of involvement in leadership-training programs and the affect of leadership positions on students’ college experience.

#### Quantitative Studies

There are numerous quantitative studies that examined the affects of leadership involvement on college students; however, I chose to focus on representative studies which are most relevant in some way to this study. (Cooper; Healy & Simpson, 1994; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2001; Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984; Dugan, 2006; Hallenbeck, Dickman, & Fugua, 2003; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Lavant & Terrell, 1994; Love & Miller, 2003; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Thompson, 2006; Wielkiewicz, Prom & Loos, 2005). For example, in a quantitative study, Wielkiewicz et al. (2005) sought to validate the Leadership Attitude and Belief Scale (LABS-III) against a measure with a more traditional, position-based definition of

leadership. Three hundred sixty students from two private, Catholic, single-sex, liberal arts institutions participated in this study. In doing their research, Wielkiewicz et al. found that “leadership development can occur in a wide variety of settings, such as service learning, volunteering . . . and other social activism, which would not be included in traditional leadership development programs” (p. 33). Moreover, Wielkiewicz et al. found that students’ views on leadership arise and evolve in complex and diverse ways, and as a result, student affairs practitioners need to broaden their definitions of leadership involvement and leadership development.

Dugan (2006) designed a quantitative study to examine leadership development as well as the role of involvement in leadership learning, using a social change model. The objective of his study was to link empirical research on leadership to a leadership-development model. The social change model of leadership development “suggests that leadership is a relational, transformational, process-oriented, learned, and changed-directed phenomenon” (Dugan, p. 335). There are seven core values within the social change model: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, common purpose, collaboration, controversy with civility, and citizenship. Dugan sought to test “the null hypothesis that there are no mean differences across the eight constructs of social change model based on participation in community service, positional roles, student organizations, or formal leadership programs” (p. 336). A random sample of 859 undergraduates at a single doctoral/research-intensive university were administered the Social Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS), which measures a particular value associated with the social change model. In addition, participants were asked to indicate

if they were involved in college-related experiences such as community service, positional leadership roles, student organization membership, and formal leadership programs. Dugan found that the participants had high scores across each of the scales associated with the social change model. Moreover, development on the individual level was higher than at group and society levels. Additionally, the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between leadership development and involvement in community service. Last, nonpositional involvement such as student organizational membership was related to high scores on a number of the social change model scales, but the scope of influence was limited to common purpose and citizenship.

A quantitative study by Hallenbeck, Dickman, and Fugua (2003) sought to explore the relationships between leadership, motivational factors, and residential setting of college students. The researchers contended that “little research has been conducted on the differences among leadership positions in different organizations or settings” (Hallenbeck et al., p. 25). Hallenbeck et al. argue that motivation can be divided into two types of goal-oriented behavior. These are learning goals and performance goals. Enhancing knowledge and mastery of a new skill are the purposes of learning goals, while the purpose of performance goals is to gain the favorable impressions of competence by others. The participants consisted of 172 randomly chosen students in residential life and Greek life at a large land-grant institution. Participants were administered a two-part questionnaire that measured leadership characteristics and achievement-goal motivation. In their comparison of students living in residential housing and students living in Greek housing, the authors found that there was no

difference between the two groups on the motivational dimension; both groups were motivated to seek leadership positions by both learning and performance goals. However, Hallenbeck et al. did find that by the “percentage of students in campus leadership positions, students in Greek housing participated at a much higher level than residence hall students” (2003, p. 29). Furthermore, the same authors found that differences in factors between Greek and residential students indicated that leadership is multidimensional. They contended,

The results of the current study would suggest that leadership is a more complex concept than had been previously reported. The differences in types and amount of leadership activities also suggest that the context of leadership may be but one variable that impacts the leadership experience. (Hallenbeck et al., 2003, p. 29)

A limitation of this study is that all leadership positions were treated equally. For this study, there were no distinctions made between being president of an organization and a chair of a committee. The researchers did not take in account the differences that exist between being a leader within an organization and being the leader of that organization. My experience shows that there are vast differences between a leader within an organization and a leader of an organization. For example, the president of a club or organization is likely to have a higher level of pressure and responsibility and higher levels of expectations placed upon him or her than someone who is merely a leader within an organization such as a committee chair or a highly active or motivated member.

As each of the above-mentioned studies are quantitative, they are somewhat bound by surface issues and generalities of presumed experience and do not delve into the depth of the students' leadership and student governance experiences. Therefore, one

misses the nuances of the individual students' perceptions and experiences. Bray (2006) contended that "evaluators often either settle for generalities or else provide a very constrained evaluation of particular element of development at a particular point in time" (p. 25). Moreover, Logue, Hutchens, & Hector (2005) assert that

research questions, instruments, analyses, and interpretation of data are, thus, superimposed on the topic, a contrast with students describing leadership experiences in their own words, leaving unexamined the potential of generating differing variables and unique elements of the experience. (p. 395)

Quantitative studies that utilize surveys and similar instruments have predetermined elements and answers; consequently, they do not allow respondents to personalize or contextualize their answers. Quantitative studies lack the depth offered by qualitative studies, therefore, the impact of each of these studies is limited. Moreover, quantitative studies provide, at most, limited or no insight into the reflective experiences of the participants. Qualitative studies serve to balance the use of surveys and other forms of quantitative research, and thus provide a richer set of details than is obtainable from a survey or other such instrument.

### Qualitative Studies

There are a number of qualitative studies that investigate leadership involvement experiences of college students; however I chose to focus on representative studies which are most relevant in some way to this study (Arminio, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, & Scott, 2000; Kuh, 1995; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005; Magolda & Ebben, 2006; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Schwartz, 1991). Though the results of these studies are derived from qualitative methods, they narrowly

focus on either specific leadership-related issues and ethnic groups or are overly generalized, sometimes including entire populations of college students. For example, the above-mentioned studies focused on ethical issues, faith-based student organizations, students of color, out-of-class experiences, and benefits of involvement in student governance. The study conducted by Logue et al. (2005) focused on examining student leadership issues related to personal experiences. Their study, which examined student leadership through a phenomenological lens, found three leadership-interrelated themes of people, action, and organization, through which the participants' experiences could be described. The study conducted by Magolda and Ebben (2006) was "a case study of a faith-based student organization to explore the interrelation between student involvement and mobilization in student organizations" (p. 281). Arminio et al. (2000) "used phenomenological interviewing to explore the experiences of student leaders of color" and to identify issues that need to be addressed in developing leadership resources for all campus groups (p. 496). Kuh (1995) centered on "identifying the out-of-class experiences that college seniors associated with their learning and personal development" (p. 125). He wanted to determine to what activities, events, and people students attributed their intellectual, social, and emotional development. In addition, he wanted to determine whether the types of out-of-class experiences associated with various outcomes differ by institutional type, gender, and ethnicity. Schwartz (1991) focused her study on the perceptions of six former student leaders "surrounding the ethical conduct of their college or university president" (p. 447). Kuh and Lund (1994) centered their attention on "the benefits associated with involvement in campus governance and . . . enhancing student

learning through participation in governance structures and processes” (p. 5). Their study relates to the present research, as Kuh and Lund focused on the gains associated with participation in student governance and encouraged the use of reflective thought as a means for students to assess and evaluate their student governance experiences.

The objective of this study was to further the understanding of these reflective experiences and the influences of involvement in student leadership positions within college and university student government bodies.

### Common Findings and Themes

In the previous sections, the researcher made a distinction between quantitative qualitative studies with the purpose of illuminating the need for a qualitative study that focused on examining the experience of student government presidents. In the following section, the quantitative and qualitative studies were integrated in order to fully explore the common findings and themes found in the current literature concerning student leadership involvement and student governance.

### Positive Consequences

Studies indicate that the leadership roles of students positively influence and add to the overall and unique experiences students have during their college years and contribute to their lives after they have completed their higher education (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Arminio, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, & Scott, 2000; Cooper; Healy & Simpson, 1994; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2001; Downey, Bosco & Silver, 1984; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Kuh, 1995; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005; Romano, 1994, 1996; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Thompson, 2006;



Wielkiewitz, Prom & Loos, 2005). A number of studies on student involvement in leadership activities indicated that involvement plays a key role and has positive effects on student development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Tinto & Russo, 1994). Research literature buttresses the argument that involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities has a positive influence on student development in the area of cognitive development as well as in goal-setting, interpersonal communication, networking, and educational persistence (Astin 1984, 1993; Boyer, 1987; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). The results of each of the above-referenced studies indicated that involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities has a positive influence on student development.

For example, Abrahamowicz (1988) conducted a study to examine the relationship between student-organization membership and student perception, satisfaction, and overall involvement with the college. The study included 550 undergraduate students at a large commuter university. The participant pool consisted of 240 students who were members of student organizations and 310 students who were not members of a student organization. The participants were administered the College Student Experience questionnaire (CSE). The survey results revealed differences in nearly each one of the survey items for those students who were involved in a student organization and those who were not. Abrahamowicz found that the students involved in student organizations had more positive levels of perception and satisfaction than those students who were not involved in student organizations. Moreover, Cooper, Healy, and

Simpson (1994) conducted a three-year study on student development, through the administering the Student Development Task and Life Inventory (SDTLI). In 1989, 1193 students at a doctoral-level institution were administered the SDTLI, and 256 students took part in the 1991 follow-up study. The results of their study revealed that involvement at the leadership level indicates a more positive effect on student development than development at the non-leadership member level.

In another example of where research revealed positive influences of leadership involvement, Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005) explored “the personal structure of leadership experiences from the perspectives of the student leaders themselves” (p. 395). Logue et al. focused on the individual observations and insights of student government leaders as they pertain to their roles as student leaders of higher education institutions. Data for the study were collected through open-ended, unstructured phenomenological interviews. The participants were six white, traditional-aged college students who held “an elected or appointed office in a student organization” (p. 396). Two of the participants were male and four were female. The sample consisted of one sophomore, two juniors, and three seniors. Logue et al. contended that the sample was representative of the student body of the large, southeastern university being studied. By examining student leadership through a phenomenological lens, Logue et al. identified three interrelated themes that perpetuated the positive experiences of the participants: people, action, and organization. The first theme included the participant’s interpersonal experiences within the context of student leadership such as leading and being part of a team. The second theme included the participants’ active engagement within the inner-

workings of the organization, which includes being goal-oriented, driven, and successful. The third theme involved self-image that leadership involvement in the organization provides for the student, which includes the participant “describing their leadership in relation to the respective organizations and their event or activities sponsored” (p. 403). The participants explained how their identity as a leader was directly related to their leadership role and experience within their organization.

The conclusions drawn by Logue et al. seem valid and verifiable, given what I have seen over the past six years as the advisor to the Student Government Association at the research site. However, there are two significant limitations to this study. The homogeneous nature of the participants makes this study weak. Since only six students participated in the study and “all [participants] were white, of traditional college age,” the implications of this study can not be extended to students of color, or to nontraditional-aged students (p. 396). Additionally, the self-selection of the participants is a concern. The selection bias may have skewed the results, as only persons with positive experiences with leadership involvement may have responded to the study.

The study conducted by Logue et al. relates to the present research because it is designed to describe the reflective experiences of student leaders. Similarly, this project is aimed at understanding students’ self-perceptions of their participation in student government. Through an analysis of students’ reflections, this study examined the self-perceptions regarding the skills, values, and knowledge obtained and cultivated during their involvement. The study conducted by Logue et al. is closely related to this project, because it moves beyond merely examining the impact of quantifiable outcomes of

participation in student leadership programs toward analyzing students' personal perspectives of the experiences. Similar to Logue et al., this study seeks to enhance the individual observations and insights of student government leaders as they pertain to their roles as student leaders of higher education institutions.

### *Personal Development*

Student leadership involvement has been shown by many studies to have positive affects on personal development, educational attainment, and the development of managerial skills. Personal development is enhanced through involvement in leadership roles because leadership practices reach into a student's self-awareness, self-concept, and self-esteem (Cooper et al., 1994; Kuh, 1995, Arminio et al., 2000; Logue et al., 2005; Cress et al., 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Romano, 1994, 1996). In addition, involvement in leadership roles has been shown to positively influence cognitive development and mastery of multiple subjects (Cooper et al., 1994; Kuh, 1995, Arminio et al., 2000; Logue et al., 2005; Cress et al., 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Moreover, such involvement has been shown by a number of studies to positively affect the development of a student's morals, ethics, and values (Cooper et al., 1994; Kuh, 1995, Arminio et al., 2000; Logue et al., 2005; Cress et al., 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Romano, 1994, 1996). Due to their involvement in leadership roles, students learn how to handle conflict and responsibilities and become acutely aware of how their choices influence others. Student-leadership involvement has also been shown to increase the development of multicultural and diversity awareness (Cooper et al., 1994; Kuh, 1995, Arminio et al., 2000; Logue et al., 2005; Cress et al., 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005). Students learn through their involvement how to work and cooperate with others. They also learn to listen to other opinions and ideas, and they find out that not everyone shares their life experiences or outlooks. Students learn how to work with a wide range of different people. Cooper et al. (1994) and Kuh (1995) contended that through student-leadership involvement, students learn the value of being engaged citizens in their community. Students typically learn to value themselves and others around them.

The study conducted by Schwartz (1991) examined the perceptions of six former student leaders during a period of campus controversy regarding the ethical conduct of their respective institutions' presidents. The study focused on four different colleges and universities. Similar to the present study, Schwartz conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews to investigate the former student leaders' retrospective views of their experiences. The goal was to understand the students' relationships with the presidents, as well as the short- and long-term effects of campus controversies on the student leaders (Schwartz, 1991). Schwartz's study revealed that the former student leaders' experiences as student government officers were heavily influenced by these campus controversies.

Schwartz (1991) notes that

the data indicates that the campus controversies increased the former student leaders' moral awareness and responsibility. In addition, the interviews revealed that the participants remembered feeling significant stress and disillusionment during the controversy. (p. 447)

This study will support Schwartz's findings regarding the reflective experiences of student leaders by examining the impact of student self-perceptions on their roles as student government officers. Schwartz focused on ethical and moral development and

stress, and my study broadened the research parameters to include the *meanings* that student government leaders construct from their particular experiences.

Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) instituted a study to determine the developmental outcomes of college students who participated in leadership activities as they related specifically to educational and personal development. Using longitudinal data from 875 students at 10 institutions, the researchers employed descriptive and multivariate analyses to assess whether student participation in leadership education and training programs has an impact on educational and personal development. Their research indicated that students who participated in leadership-development programs showed significantly greater levels of change in the areas of “social and personal values, leadership ability and skills, civic responsibility, multicultural awareness and community orientation, and leadership understanding and commitment” (Cress et al., p. 19). However, the study was narrowly focused on the participation in leadership training and development programs. The study did not examine the level of participation in, or content of, the programs themselves, but instead focused on the issue of whether students participated at all. In addition, the respondents were homogeneous. Thus, the outcomes of participation in leadership-development programs may differ based on such variables as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The study relates, however, to the present study because it affirmed the idea that involvement in leadership-development programs has a positive influence and effect on college students. This study aims at taking Cress et al.’s argument further, especially through examining how student government leadership has an impact on students’ perceptions.

### *Professional Development*

Another category where student leadership involvement has shown a positive impact is in the development of managerial skills (Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Romano, 1994, 1996; Schuh and Lavery, 1983). Studies have shown that through their involvement in leadership roles on college and university campuses, students develop and enhance their time-management, task-management, and planning skills. Studies also show that students enhance their communication, networking, conflict-management, and interpersonal skills. Generally, students who are involved in leadership roles on college campuses learn to develop or build-up their abilities to manage themselves and their projects. They learn to meet multiple deadlines and fulfill numerous responsibilities and obligations. They also learn how to deal with and work with multiple people and tasks at the same time.

Schuh and Lavery (1983) examined the perceived influences of significant student leadership positions on selected life activities, such as marriage and career plans, and life skills, such as budgeting and planning (Schuh & Lavery, 1983, p. 29). Seventy-six former student leaders from three colleges and universities participated in this study by completing a two-part questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that student leadership experience had a greater impact on students' skill development than on the selected activities of their lives. Schuh and Lavery concluded that "holding a student leadership position helps students sharpen selected skills, but that later life activities are influenced only in limited ways by student leadership experiences" (p. 32). That study relates to the present study in that it examined the perceived impact of student leadership

involvement. However, the conclusions of the Schuh and Lavery study are limited because it focused on what effect students' leadership experiences had on predetermined life activities, such as marriage and career plans, and predetermined selected skills, such as budgeting, organizing, and planning. The study, therefore, did not allow the respondents to make independent reflections and construct their own meaning based on their experiences as student leaders.

Kuh (1995) examined the out-of-class experiences of college students through semi-structured interviews to determine which activities influenced students' learning and personal development. The study used seniors who were enrolled at 12 different higher education institutions. Kuh reported, "One hundred and forty-nine students participated: 69 men, 80 women; 101 whites, 30 African Americans, 6 Hispanics, 6 Asian Americans, and 6 international students; 129 students of traditional age (18–23) and 20 students who were older than 23 years of age" (p. 127). This study found that students generally credit leadership responsibility with increases in learning and personal development during their time in college. The study also determined that

out-of-classroom experiences presented students with personal and social challenges, encouraged them to develop more complicated views on personal, academic, and other matters, and provided opportunities for synthesizing and integrating material presented in the formal academic program. (Kuh, p. 146)

Unfortunately, this study has substantial weaknesses. First, the study limited its scope to positive outcomes of extracurricular activities, possibly skewing the results. Second, the amount of time and quality of out-of-class experiences for each student varied, making the results of this study difficult to apply across the board to students in general.



Importantly, this variation is characteristic for all students, as their level of involvement varies based on interest and time constraints. This study relates to the present research because it moved beyond scientific and objective outcomes found in quantitative studies toward a more in-depth examination of student leadership experiences. In addition, the study sought out students' perceptions of their experiences. The present study will expand this information by examining the personal insights of students in relation to their experiences as student government leaders.

#### *Academic Attainment and Satisfaction*

Educational success and fulfillment constitutes a third category of positive influence through student-leadership involvement. The positive impact on educational success, educational persistence, and attainment, as well as overall student satisfaction, from participation in leadership on college campuses has been widely demonstrated (Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Students who are engaged in campus leadership roles are more likely to persist and have a more satisfying collegiate experience than those who are not involved (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

While these studies have indicated the positive impact and influence of student involvement on cognitive and personal development, few studies have specifically examined involvement in student government and its impact on those who lead such entities. Thus, there is a need to examine the ways that involvement in student government influences students.

## Negative Consequences

Involvement in leadership positions on college campuses has both negative consequences and positive influences. Students, due to these roles, have less free time, have to continually confront conflicts, and their grades may suffer. In their study, Logue et al. (2005) found that although students viewed involvement in student leadership as being predominantly positive, the authors noted that the literature, as well as the participants, indicated risks and negative aspects of student leadership. Participants in a number of studies indicated risks and hazards to their experiences, including increased chances of alcohol abuse, personal costs, pressure, and stressful workloads. First, studies have shown that being a student leader created a high level of stress for the student (Schwartz, 1991; Logue et al., 2005). Students involved in leadership roles are held accountable to a higher standard of behavior, causing an increase in stress (Schwartz, 1991). Second, participants indicated their workload and responsibilities, once in a leadership role, increased. Students juggled multiple roles and responsibilities as a result of these positions. Participants in the study conducted by Logue et al. referred to a very busy lifestyle and high workloads. Participants described their lives as being “exceedingly busy with meetings, activities, events, and other responsibilities of school, work, and family” (2005, p.402). Another negative effect related to student-leadership involvement is a perceived higher level of personal costs (Arminio, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, & Scott, 2000; Logue et al. 2005). Students who are involved in leadership roles often lament that their involvement limits recreational and social time. Last, studies such as the ones conducted by Spratt and Turrentine (2001) and

Logue et al. (2005) have shown an increased rate of alcohol use among those who are involved leadership roles on college campuses. Some student leaders turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism when stress increases and when they perceive an increase in personal cost related to involvement.

### Gender Differences

A number of recent studies have revealed that students do not share identical experiences while being involved in leadership roles. In studies conducted by Kezar and Moriarty (2000) and Romano (1994, 1996) it was found that men and women have distinct experiences while involved in leadership roles.

The studies conducted by Ramano (1994, 1996) examined the characteristics and experiences of fifteen female presidents of campuswide, coeducational student organizations on 3 large public university campuses. The enrollment of these institutions ranged from 22,000 to 40,000 students. The students held leadership positions in ethnic student organizations, residence halls, student newspapers, student governance organizations, etc. The results from this study indicated that the participants identified mentoring and family backgrounds as significant influences to their personal character development and their motivation for leadership. "The respondents also described their peers as role models and were influenced by them to become involved in student organizations" (Romano, 1996, p. 680). In addition, Romano found that the participants in her study described their leadership style as relational and therefore shared decision-making with others. Moreover, Romano determined, women of color had a different experience than their white counterparts. This difference was an increased sense of

accountability to and a higher level of expectation held by their peers, student affairs professionals and the institution as a whole. Last, Romano identified the importance the participants placed on the role of the advisor. She stated,

This evidence confirms the importance of the advisor to student leaders in the student organization environment. The most effective advisors to women student leaders would appear to be empathetic, considerate, and personable individuals who are able to listen to and offer advise, but equally willing to allow the students to operate in whatever way they choose without retribution. (1994, p. 281)

The studies conducted by Romano related to the current study in that they employed qualitative methods to examine the leadership experience of women in student government and student organization and the meaning that the participants place on their experience.

In their study, Kezar and Moriarty (2000) “examined factors influencing leadership development among college students and specifically focused on potential differences for women and African American students” (p. 57). “The data used in this study are from the 1987 Freshmen Survey, the 1991 Follow-Up Survey of College Freshmen and Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System-U.S. Department of Education. The researchers state, “The sample included 9,731 students at 352 institutions” (p. 55). Through their study, Kezar and Moriarty determined that, for the most part, leadership programs on college and university campuses were based on student-development theories derived from studies on white male students and that different strategies were needed to meet the needs and leadership styles of women and African American students. Second, their study revealed differences related to gender and

race in both the rate of change of self-perception and in the factors that influenced that change. Men in their study rated themselves higher on public speaking and leadership ability before and after college than women, indicating that men take more advantage of such opportunities, that these opportunities are a better fit for them, or that these opportunities were developed with this population in mind. Third, positional leadership experiences did not appear to be important in the development of leadership-related skills for women, as they favored a more collaborative approach or a shared leadership style. In the end, Kezar and Moriarty concluded that “involvement opportunities are clearly important for the development of leadership among all groups, yet different types of involvement opportunities are helpful in developing leadership for each subgroup” (2000, p.67).

The study conducted by Kezar and Moriarty (2000) relates to the current study because it examined factors such as race and gender and how they influence leadership development of college students. These same factors have an influence on those that seek and attain the student government presidency and as such will have an impact of the results of this study.

#### Racial and Ethnic Differences

Studies have also shown that experience in leadership roles among ethnic and racial groups varies on college campuses (Miller & Kraus, 2004). Minorities, especially African Americans, have distinctly different student leadership experiences than their white counterparts. A quantitative study carried out by Lavant and Terrell (1994) focused on the involvement of minorities in student government. In this study, a questionnaire

was administered to 250 undergraduate ethnic minority students enrolled at four universities. Lavant and Terrell assessed the level of involvement and participation of minorities in student governance at predominantly white institutions. Lavant and Terrell determined that ethnic minority students do benefit from participating in leadership roles in student government. However, insensitivity and systemic racism act as perceived barriers to the involvement and participation of ethnic minority students in student government. Moreover, while participating in student government, collaboration and interactions among ethnic minority students and white students on these campuses was limited. Lavant and Terrell contended that

in order for ethnic minority students to achieve their full potential . . . [they must] be encouraged to be active participants in the day-to-day activities that affect their lives as students. They must also be encouraged to assume leadership roles and take advantage of leadership opportunities. (p. 69)

Lavant and Terrell's study is connected to the present research in that it inquires about participation in student governance by ethnic minorities. It does not, however, focus on outcome assessment or the influence of involvement on the perceptions of the involved students. Therefore, the study cannot be used to determine the impact of the involvement of minority students in student governance leadership.

Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) conducted a study to determine the impact of membership in black fraternities and sororities on black student involvement in collegiate activities and leadership development. Kimbrough and Hutcheson utilized three instruments to conduct their study: *The Student Involvement and Leadership Scale*, *The Competing Values Managerial Skills Instrument*, and the *Leadership Assessment Scale*.

The sample consisted of 387 black students from 12 institutions, seven Primary White Institutions and five Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Several themes emerged through their study. First, the researchers found that black Greek-letter organization members were more involved in campus activities and organization than were black non-Greeks; and second, “that Black Greeks were involved in other activities and organizations outside of their fraternities and sororities, and that students who joined Greek-letter organizations increased their overall involvement to a significant degree” (p. 103). Kimbrough and Hutcheson go on to state that

although most of the students sampled indicated that they were leaders to a similar extent, non-Greeks were decidedly less involved and held fewer positions in campus activities and organizations, and scored themselves lower on the leadership skills identified in the study. (p. 103)

A finding that was notable to the researchers was disparity in leadership skills and levels of involvement found between black Greeks and non-Greeks attending HBCUs.

Kimbrough and Hutcheson argue that

given that the literature indicates that students attending HBCUs do not feel the environmental presses that their peers at PWIs face . . . , one would expect equal motivation and opportunities for involvement among Greeks and non-Greeks at HBCUs.” (p. 103)

However, the results of their study indicated black Greeks attending HBCUs “scored higher on measures of student involvement, perceptions of their leadership skills, and leadership skill development than did their non-Greek counterparts” (p. 103). Overall, the results of study indicated that membership for blacks in black Greek-letter organizations has some positive aspects, including greater student involvement on campus and more confidence in their leadership skills. The study conducted by Kimbrough and Hutcheson

is pertinent to the present research because it reveals a need for further study yielding qualitative data, which in turn would provide richer understanding of the nature of black student involvement and leadership development on college campuses.

A similar study conducted by Arminio, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, and Scott (2000) indicated that the African Americans and whites have distinct experiences, both positive and negative, while they are involved in leadership roles on college campuses. Arminio et al. argue that due to differences in personal and social values and different life experiences, as well as different struggles with racial identity, African Americans and whites in leadership roles have dissimilar experiences. Arminio et al. maintain that it is these distinct life and cultural experiences that affect an African American student-leadership experience. Arminio et al. found that African Americans have a disdain for the term or title "leader"; they would rather be seen working within a group rather than leading it. Moreover, Arminio et al. found that African American students who are involved in leadership roles focus more on group and community needs rather than personal needs, while their white counterparts seek the fulfillment of personal needs. Also, minorities found their involvement in leadership roles less positive due to the lack of similar role models within the college or university administration. In the end, though, Arminio et al. contended that African Americans find their involvement in leadership roles has a positive influence on their personal development, including their self-awareness, self-concept, and self-esteem.

In addition, Arminio et al. (2000) explored the leadership experiences of students of color, specifically the question of why such a low number of students of color



participated in leadership development programs. Arminio et al. employed phenomenological methods in their study. The open-ended questions used during the interview sessions allowed the respondents to candidly talk about their lived experiences and allowed for a number of themes to arise, which challenged assumptions found in current literature on student leadership development. Current studies pertaining to student leadership development in higher education indicated that the leadership experiences of students generally have a positive influence in their lives, thus adding to the overall experience of their college years. Quite to the contrary, Arminio et al. contended that students of color have decidedly different experiences than their white counterparts, and they found that often these experiences were not positive.

Arminio et al. (2000) reviewed the current literature on leadership, the intersection of leadership and identity, and experience of students of color on predominately white campuses. The authors note that there is a vast amount of literature on the topic of leadership, and even a good bit on the intersection of gender and leadership. Arminio et al. contended that there is a significant void in the literature as it relates to the topic of race and leadership. In addition, the authors note that literature on racial and ethnic groups indicates that life experiences, racial identity, and value orientations of students of color differ from those held by white students and influence how students of color view leadership.

The 106 participants in the study conducted by Arminio et al. (2000) were traditional-aged college students from both a large, public research institution and a midsized, comprehensive public institution who self-identified as African American,

Asian, Latino/a, Chicano/a, and/or Hispanic American. “Participants included 22 African American women, 12 African American men, 18 Asian American women, 25 Asian American men, 12 Latinas, and 17 Latino men” (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 499). Both “intensity and snowball sampling methods were used to identify participants who held formal or informal leadership positions . . . on and off campus” (p. 499). The researchers first identified information-rich participants. After interviewing these students, the researchers asked them to identify other potential participants. This sampling method provided a valid group of students to interview.

The method employed by Arminio et al. (2000) in their study was phenomenological. The researchers employed interview questions that “focused on experience and behavior, opinion and values, and feelings” as a means of data collection (p. 499). The standardized, open-ended questions used by the researchers allowed participants to tell about their lived experiences with minimal variation between interviewers, as each of the participants were asked the same questions. Through this structure, the participants were not limited in their responses to the researchers’ questions, but the standardized nature of the questions did allow for consistency among the interviews. The student responses were recorded and reviewed by the researchers, and common elements and themes were identified.

Through their analysis of the data, Arminio et al. (2000) discovered a number of themes that contradicted the values and experiences traditionally extolled by leadership development programs and conventional leadership literature. The study indicated that students of color not only dislike the label “leader,” but they also associate a high

personal cost with holding leadership positions. Moreover, students of color acquire unexpected experiences when holding leadership positions in predominately white, multiracial, and same-race groups. The study found that students of color value group loyalty over individual needs and experience greater gender differences in leadership positions than white students. Additionally, the study found that students of color believe there is a lack of campus staff and faculty members to serve as role models. Each of these themes is in direct contradiction to the conventional literature and assumptions of leadership development programs found at higher education institutions in the United States.

Overall, the study conducted by Arminio et al. (2000) is consistent with my experience with students of color in leadership positions on college campuses. The conclusions reached by Arminio et al. were compelling, as well as legitimate, because student affairs professionals can reinforce them through their experience with student leaders of color. Student leaders of color have dramatically different experiences than other students. The researchers are correct; more needs to be done to make sure that students of color have constructive leadership experiences in higher education. Their study raises important issues for the student affairs professional, and as such, makes an important contribution to the study of higher education. Arminio et al. are also correct to observe that student affairs practitioners need to become more aware of the unique experiences of student leaders of color and that colleges and universities need to take intentional steps to ensure students of color acquire positive educational leadership experiences.

The study conducted by Arminio et al. (2000) relates to the present research, especially because it is aimed at describing the leadership experiences of students of color in their own voices. The study goes beyond traditional longitudinal and exploratory methods of assessing the impact of such programs. Similarly, my research sought to describe and understand students' self-perceptions based on participation in their institution's student government. Through an analysis of students' reflections, my study examines students' self-perceptions regarding the skills, values, and knowledge obtained and cultivated during their involvement in student government.

#### Studies on Student Governance

A number of studies have specifically examined student involvement in student governance on college and university campuses (Downey, Bosco, and Silver, 1984; Erin, 2005; Esterhuizen, 2007; Fortune, 1999; Golden & Schwartz, 1994; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; Immerman, 2008; Janc, 2004; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Love & Miller, 2003; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Rath, 2005; Robinson, 2004; Sanseviro, 2006; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Spencer, 2004). I have grouped these studies into the following categories: outcomes of involvement in student governance, student governance at two-year institutions, student government advisors, experience of women in student governance, experience of minority students in student governance, motivational differences between graduate and undergraduate students' involvement in student governance, and student government presidents.

### *Outcomes of Involvement*

A number of studies have examined the impact and outcomes of participation in student governance (Downey, Bosco & Silver, 1984; Janc, 2004; Kuh & Lund, 1994). It should be noted that these studies reflect differing conclusions regarding the influence and effect that involvement in student governance has on student participants.

Downey, Bosco, and Silver (1984) emulated the Schuh and Lavery study by focusing on the long-term outcomes of participation in student government. Downey et al. attempted to determine “whether or not Student Government Association (SGA) participation results in more social and personal benefits after leaving the university than does lack of participation” (p. 246). The researchers developed a questionnaire covering three areas: college experience, adult accomplishment, and employment history. The questionnaire was administered to students enrolled at one institution. Two hundred three students (144 men and 59 women) completed and returned the questionnaire. Downey et al. found that the results did “not support any unique long-term outcomes (either positive or negative) associated with participation in a student government association” (p. 250). Therefore, “SGA membership and student involvement did not contribute to life accomplishments and job satisfaction in any systemic fashion” (p. 250). They did find, however, that involvement was “associated with general satisfaction in college and contribute[d] to a student’s feeling of well-being” (p. 250). The Downey et al. study is linked to the present research in that it sought to determine specific outcomes related to involvement in student government. Nevertheless, the study does not reveal self-perceptions.

The study conducted by Kuh and Lund (1994) examined the benefits of student participation in campus governance and discussed implications for student affairs professionals. Kuh and Lund sought to examine the personal changes that students attributed to their participation in student governance. The study was also aimed at enhancing the understanding of student learning and development that occur through involvement in campus governance. Participants included 149 seniors at 12 institutions who self-reported student government experiences in comparison with other extracurricular experiences involving peers, fraternities, faculty interaction, residence halls, athletics, and academic programs. Of those who participated in the study, “26 held some form of student government position, such as student body president, elected student representative to the campus governing council, or another position in student government” (Kuh & Lund, 1994, p. 9). Kuh and Lund found that for the participants, student government experience was more meaningful to those who were involved, chiefly in the areas of practical and social competence, over other areas of involvement in campus such as clubs and athletics. In addition, the researchers found that the principal benefits associated with involvement in campus governance were the development of social and practical competence, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Participation in student governance also had a positive influence on students’ sense of humanitarian responsibilities. One of the strengths of the study is that it included a detailed review of the current literature related to involvement in student governance. In addition, the strength of this study, as noted by the researchers, is that

unlike studies that ask students to reflect on specific experiences, such as student body president or student government membership as one of many potential social leadership roles, the interviews asked students to describe how they had changed during college or university enrollment, and then to identify the experiences to which these changes could be attributed. (Kuh & Lund, 1994, p. 8)

The approach taken by Kuh and Lund allowed for a more candid and sweeping account by the respondents regarding the relationship between their experiences and the affects those experiences had on their lives. The weakness of the study is that in relation to the overall number of participants in the study, the number of students that were actually involved in student government was few, less than 20 percent, which raises the question of validity to the findings of the researchers regarding the benefits the respondents associated with involvement in campus governance. Moreover, their study focuses primarily on the development of managerial skills such as organizing, planning, managing, and decision making and does not address reflective experience of the respondents. The study relates to the present study in that it examined the personal changes, student learning, and development that students attributed to their participation in student governance.

The above studies relate to this study in that they examined the effect that involvement in student governance has on students who participate in such an organization. However, the above studies focus primarily on personal and skill development rather than asking the participants to reflect upon and to construct meanings based on that experience, which is the aim of this study. This study is aimed at taking the recommendation of Kuh and Lund to delve deeper into students' reflective experiences,

especially regarding how their involvement within student government leadership has benefited them. Kuh and Lund contended,

Here is an opportunity to help student leaders gain more from their experience by asking them to think about how their responsibilities can make a difference in the quality of campus life as well as in their own personal development. [Just] as student leaders become more reflective, they will become more intellectually competent, which will improve their ability to govern effectively. (Kuh & Lund, 1994, p. 13)

In short, this study seeks to encourage students who participate in student governance to actively reflect upon their experience.

### *Meaning Derived*

Recent studies also examined the experience of students who were either elected or appointed to serve in student government-related organizations. These studies highlighted the experience of student government leaders in general and the meaning they constructed from their experiences.

In her 2004 master's thesis Robinson explored the experience of undergraduate students who were elected to serve as student leaders in executive positions at Canadian university-wide student associations. Robinson conducted qualitative interviews with five student leaders at the end of their year-long terms. From these interviews, Robinson identified four themes. The themes were: reflections on why the students sought out the leadership position; the challenge of time constraints; conflict; a sense of responsibility and personal development. Robinson found that participants "were motivated [to seek elected leadership positions in the student association] by positive goals such as improving student life, building community, increasing diversity or further political



aims” (p. 110). Robinson determined that participants faced stress and had difficulty with time management as they were challenged to accomplish a “wide variety of goals over a one-year term” (p. 112). Robinson stated that “interpersonal relationships emerged as a critical aspect of the student leader experience” and said that all of the participants experienced some sort of conflict with their peers as well as with members of institutional administration during their time in office. Robinson stated,

The responsibilities that the students undertook in their positions were demanding. These ranged from staff management, budgeting and financial decision making, organizational planning and review, public relations, service management, membership outreach, communication with the media, liaison with provincial and national student groups . . . interacting with university administrators, as well as . . . government officials. (p. 117)

Last, Robinson indicated that the participants reported that they “acquired a great deal of valuable skills and knowledge” which included “increased ability to compromise and negotiate, empathy, mediation skills, self-awareness and self-criticism, group dynamics, and the importance of ethics and beliefs” (pp. 117–118).

In her 2004 master’s thesis, through focus groups and individual interviews over four months, Janc examined the development of relational leadership in five members of a state-wide higher education student advisory board (SAB). Janc found that the participants defined leadership in terms “of the leader-follower form of leadership and the relational, process-oriented leadership” (p. 153). Through their experience on the student advisory board, the participants redefined their definition of student leadership “from the positional group/club leaders to community servants, political activists, and policy makers” (p. 154). Janc determined,

Student leadership is the ability of a leader to be accommodating, representative of the group, fulfilling of their needs, and understanding of diverse interests, meaning that student leadership is about inclusiveness of all group members and [if applicable] of students at-large. (p. 157)

Janc found that the experience of serving on the student advisory board

serves to motivate individuals into political activism, but also allows each student to be a student advocate, and institutional steward, to practice public service through a formal organization, and to strengthen their own presence as active citizens willing to stand up for the rights and ideals of all students (p. 313).

Janc discovered that the participants collectively “saw SAB as a unique opportunity to learn about higher education, to make a difference state-wide on policy and student affairs issues, and to learn new leadership skills from each other” (p. 313). Furthermore, Janc determined through individual interviews that participants “connected this experience with confidence building, project and stress management, leadership challenge, and success” (p. 313).

The studies conducted by Robinson (2004) and Janc (2004) relate to the present study in that they seek to develop an enhanced understanding of the perceptions of student leaders, specifically, the perceptions and insights of those involved in student governance-related activities regarding their experiences. However, the participants of both studies were not limited to a specific leadership position within a student government organization. Robinson’s study focused on students who were executive board members, while Janc focused on students who participated in a university-system advisory board. The present study focused specifically on the student government presidency.

*Two-Year Institutions*

A number of recent studies reflect on student governance at two-year institutions. One such example is Esterhuizen's (2007) dissertation that explored the student government experience of students who attended community colleges and how that experience has affected personal development and subsequent life experiences.

In her study, Esterhuizen (2007) used qualitative, phenomenologically oriented research methods, specifically open-ended interviews. The site for Esterhuizen's (2007) study was a rural community college in Washington State with a 7,000-student enrollment. Esterhuizen stated, "[e]leven participants were eventually selected. Nine of the participants had been executive council officers and two of the participants were student leaders who had held nonexecutive positions" (p. 22). She went on to state that, "[o]f the 11 participants, three were female and eight were males; nine are Caucasian; and ethnicities of the remaining two are unknown" (p. 22). The participants' community college experiences spanned four decades (1960s through 1990s). Esterhuizen admitted that, "[t]heir student government service took place 11 to 45 years ago" (p. 22). Through the data derived from the open-ended interviews Esterhuizen found,

The participants believed these experiences increased their self-confidence, and that the on-the-job learning that took place prepared them for later real-world work environments. In addition, these experiences helped to develop people skills through which they asserted their newfound "voices." Participants believed the skills gained through their student government experience were of life-long value because the skills positively influenced their personal relationships, their community and civic involvement, and their professional and political effectiveness. (2007, pp. v-vi)

The study conducted by Esterhuizen (2007) mirrors the present study in that its objective was to explore the experience of students who participate in a student government organization. In addition, Esterhuizen utilizes the same qualitative, open-ended interviews. However, Esterhuizen's targeted participants were students who participated in a community college student government and her participants served in a number of leadership positions, not just the student government presidency. In addition, the participants did not serve in a series of successive terms during a specified period but rather in sporadic periods over four decades.

#### *Student Government Advisors*

In order to fully understand the experience of a student government president, one must also consider the affect the student government advisor plays in that experience. Recent studies have also examined the roles and import of the student government advisors and the influence they have on those that are involved student government on college campuses.

The study conducted by Fortune (1999)

investigate[d] the role of the student government advisor as perceived by student leaders and advisors within the California community colleges. The focus of the study [was] to seek differences and similarities in perception between the two groups of the advisors role. (p. 3)

Fortune employed survey research methodology and adapted the *Advisor Role Perception*

*Questionnaire* for this study. Fortune stated,

The participants in this study consisted of 106 California community college student affairs professionals and 106 student government presidents. The participants were either enrolled or employed in the fall of 1998. (p. 40)

The results derived from the study conducted by Fortune (1999) indicated that “both groups agree that the advisor is important to the student government organization, and that advisor-led leadership activities indeed affect the perceived role of the advisor” (p. 60). The results from the study indicated a difference between the participants regarding who should serve as the advisor. Most advisors believed a director of student activities should serve as advisor while the student government presidents were “open to have an advisor from other areas, preferably a member of the faculty” (p. 63). Fortune stated, “[b]oth groups did not agree regarding an advisor influencing students between meetings and vetoing a decision that violated college policy” (p. 67). The results indicated that

both groups felt that it was the role of the advisor to teach, plan and develop leadership activities. Both groups believed these activities created teamwork and cooperation among students and advisors and served to strengthen the ability of student leaders to be successful in college. (p. 68)

In addition, the study found, “most student leaders felt comfortable with the advisor role. In fact, the relationship proved to be extremely positive and satisfying for both the student leader and student affairs professional” (p. 69). Moreover, the study found

both advisor and student leaders also felt the advisor is important to the student government organization, should instruct and develop leadership activities, and should be knowledgeable regarding college rules and regulations. (p. 70)

However, the results of the study also indicated that, “student leaders strongly felt they should be independent of the college administration; advisors did not” (p. 70). Last, the study indicated that “student leaders and advisors . . . agreed that leadership development

skills learned through student government experiences generate responsible participation and positive contributions on and off campus” (p. 70).

The study conducted by Fortune (1999) relates to the present study in that both highlight the perception that student government presidents have regarding the relationship between the advisor and the student leaders. However, the study conducted by Fortune differs from this study in that it was quantitative and targeted community college students and advisors enrolled or employed at multiple college campuses.

Rath (2005) conducted a study, as part of his dissertation, that focused on determining to what degree the transformational leadership qualities that were demonstrated by advisors influenced the organizational outcomes of community college student governments. Rath described transformational leaders as acting “to satisfy higher needs of followers and engage the whole persona” (p. 9). He also stated that “[t]he study consists of a survey of two versions, one designed for advisors and the other designed for student leaders” (p. 13). And that,

The survey included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire for Research . . . which measured transformational leadership behaviors, types of leadership, and transformational leadership outcomes as self-perceived by community college student government advisors and as perceived by community college student government members. (pp. 13–14)

The targeted population was student government advisors and all executive board members who were members of the Florida Junior and Community College Student Government Association for the 2004/2005 academic year. Rath stated, “In all, members of 72 community college campuses or sites, including one private junior college campus, with active student governments were identified to receive the survey” (p. 47). The

student indicated that, “[a]t least one student or advisor response was received from 74% of campuses or sites. Additionally, 68% of advisors and 46% of students returned surveys” (p. 48). Forty-nine Florida community college student government advisors completed the survey, while 181 Florida community college student government executive board members completed the survey.

The results of Rath (2005) study indicated that fewer than half of the advisors were educated in the concepts of transformational leadership. However, “student government members reported generally strong ratings of advisor transformational leadership qualities, and advisors self-reported similarly strong transformational leadership qualities” (p. 94). The results indicated that “student government organizational outcomes were largely fulfilled, as measured by achievement of those outcomes by [Community College Student Government Organizations] CCSGO leaders and advisors” (p. 94). The positive results indicated a relationship between the transformational leadership qualities of advisors and the student perceived achievement of organizational outcomes. Rath (2005) contended,

Although the majority of advisors reported having little to no training or education in transformational leadership concepts and practices, advisors exhibit strong levels of transformational leadership qualities, both as self-perceived and perceived by students (p. 118).

The study conducted by Rath (2005) relates to the present study in that it focuses on the relationship between the student government advisor and student government officers. However, the quantitative nature of this study limits its ability to delve in-depth

in the student-advisor relationship. In addition, this study targeted advisors and students at multiple community and junior campuses rather than focusing on a single site.

The studies conducted by Fortune (1999) and Rath (2005) both concluded that the relationship between the student government advisor and student leaders is significant and that the advisor plays an important role in the development and overall experience of the students who participated in student governance. The present study explores this relationship in more depth.

### *Experience of Women*

A number of recent studies have revealed that women and men do not share identical experiences while being involved in leadership roles within student government organizations.

An example of divergent gender experiences can be found in the study conducted by Miller and Kraus (2004). Miller and Kraus used a one-page survey to question student government leaders about the genders of participants and leaders. Their objective was to describe the current state of student leadership among women at midwest U.S. comprehensive universities. Twenty-one students at 21 universities responded to the survey. Miller and Kraus found that while women were regularly elected as representatives, they were under-represented in presidential and vice-presidential positions within student government. The study indicated that women fill nearly half of the student government positions, but that the majority of presidents and vice-presidents were men. The explanation of why this difference existed, however, was limited. The study was descriptive in nature and, therefore, did not delve into the reasons for these



statistical differences. Miller and Kraus did not ask if and how often women had run for leadership positions, therefore, they were unable, then, to determine whether women ran and did not get elected. In addition, Miller and Kraus, based on their study questions, could not determine whether students simply did not vote for women-leader candidates.

In her dissertation, Erwin (2005) examined the leadership practices of women in student government organizations at midwest U.S. universities. Erwin sought to determine whether or not women in student governance practice leadership in different ways from men. Moreover, Erwin sought to determine if being elected or appointed played a role in how women and men practice leadership within student government organizations. Last, Erwin examined whether and how holding a student government leadership position affected men and women differently.

Erwin used survey research through administering the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) to study leadership of members of student government. A total of 308 students participated in the study. Women made up 43.8% of the sample and of that number 15.6% reported that they held leadership positions. Men made up 56.2% of the sample and of that number 21.7% reported that they held leadership positions. The sample was made up of 67.9% elected participants and 32% appointed participants. The participants in the study attended eight large, four-year, comprehensive, public institutions in the midwest U.S. with an enrollment of at least 5,000. The leadership practices measured by the SLPI include Challenging the Process, Inspired a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart. Challenging the Process refers to the individual engaging “in behaviors leading to

change, innovation and risk-taking” (p. 52). Inspired a Shared Vision refers to the individual being able to “articulate a vision for the organization and a belief that the group can make the vision happen” (p. 53). Enabling Others to Act refers to the individual “working to create trust, respect and cooperative goals” (p. 37). Modeling the Way refers to the individual “acting as a positive role model and having high standards for themselves” (p. 37). Encouraging the Heart refers to the individual “recognizing the needs for human beings to feel valued and recognized” (p. 37). Erwin determined “the results of this study indicated that there were no differences [between the leadership practices] based on whether a member of student government is male or female” (2005, p. 57). In addition, Erwin found,

There were no statistically significant differences between student government participants with regard to whether they were elected or appointed. There was strong difference between members of student government according to whether or not they held a leadership position. Leaders obtained higher scores than non-leaders on four out of the five leadership practices. (2005, Abstract)

According to Erwin, the leadership practices where difference appeared between non-leadership members and those who held higher positions were in Challenging the Process, Inspiring the Process, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart. Even with those leader/non-leader differences Erwin determined that “gender did not make a difference in the practice of leader as measured by SLPI” (p. 71). This study did reveal, as above, that females served in leadership roles less often than the males.

The studies conducted by Miller and Kraus (2004) and Erwin (2005) relate to this study in that they examined student governance and those who participate in and lead it.

Both studies shared the conclusion that women less frequently serve in leadership roles. However, as quantitative studies, they did not reach an in-depth, holistic exploration of the participants' experience in student governance, which is the aim of this study.

### *Experience of Minority Students*

Recent studies have indicated that minority students do not share common experiences while serving in leadership roles within student government organizations.

Lavant and Terrell (1994) conducted a quantitative study focused on the involvement of minorities in student government. In this study, a questionnaire was administered to 250 undergraduate ethnic minority students enrolled at four universities. Lavant and Terrell (1994) assessed "the level of involvement and participation of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian American students in student activities and governance in predominantly white institutions" (p. 65). Lavant and Terrell stated, "In regards to subjects' responses to queries about their involvement in student governance and participation in ethnic student organizations, 79 subjects indicate that they did not actively participate in student governance and were not active members of campus organizations" (p. 66). They went on to assert, "It is apparent from the responses of the subjects who participated in our study that they were involved and participated in student governance activities in a limited manner" (p. 69). Lavant and Terrell also determined that ethnic minority students do benefit from participating in leadership roles in student government. However, insensitivity and systemic racism act as perceived barriers to the involvement and participation of ethnic minority students in student government. Moreover, while participating in student government, collaboration and interactions

among ethnic minority students and white students was limited. Lavant and Terrell contended that

in order for ethnic minority students to achieve their full potential . . . [they must] be encouraged to be active participants in the day-to-day activities that affect their lives as students. They must also be encouraged to assume leadership roles and take advantage of leadership opportunities. (p. 69)

Lavant and Terrell's study is connected to the present research in that it inquires about participation in student governance by ethnic minorities. It does not, however, focus on outcome assessment or the influence of involvement on the perceptions of the involved students. Therefore, the study cannot be used to explore the holistic involvement experience of minority students in student governance leadership and the meaning minority students derive from that experience.

### *Motivational Differences*

A quantitative study conducted Love and Miller (2003) focused on identifying the similarities and differences between undergraduate and graduate students regarding their involvement in student governance. They employed a survey focusing on how undergraduate and graduate students see opportunities for building more involvement in student governance. Love and Miller surveyed both undergraduate and graduate students to determine how they perceived their role in institutional decision-making and how these students saw opportunities for building more involvement in student governance. In 2002, Love and Miller administered a survey to 31 undergraduate students and 43 graduate students in an elementary teacher-training program. The results of the study indicated that graduate and undergraduate students maintain varying views of how to

increase student participation in student governance. The results suggested that graduate students perceived that involvement in student governance could be increased if institutional “administrators respected the decisions of the student government” (p. 534). Interestingly, undergraduate students thought involvement could be increased if tangible benefits were made available to the participants. The Love and Miller study relates to the present research because both studies seek to develop an enhanced understanding of the perceptions of student leaders, specifically, the individual perceptions of those involved in student governance. Love and Miller inquired about individual reasons college students became engaged in student leadership. This study will delve further and examine the observations made by student government leaders on the effects of their involvement on their educational and personal development.

#### *Student Government President*

Three recent studies have explored the experience of the student government president. These studies are similar in methodology and aim of the present one; however, the three studies differ in their targeted participants, scope of time examined, and institutional type, size, and location.

Hellwig-Olson (2000) conducted a qualitative dissertation using phenomenological methods to explore the experience eight student body presidents in the rocky mountain region of the United States. The eight participants attended four different universities ranging in size from 3,000 to 23,000 students. The eight participants selected for the study included four college student body presidents who served during the 1999/2000 academic year and four college student body presidents who were elected to

serve during the 2000/2001 academic year. The participant selection process was designed to ensure that each of the four institutions would be represented by two participants who had served as student body presidents. Hellwig-Olson used “unstructured in-depth interviews, a demographic questionnaire and one question asked of each participant to describe the five most important job responsibilities of the student body president on his or her campus” (p. iv).

Through this study, Hellwig-Olson found that the participants agreed that the perceived responsibilities of the presidency included: empowerment, facilitator, liaison, supervisor, and communicator. Hellwig-Olson identified seven themes from the data:

factors that motivate students to serve as student body president, beliefs and values that contribute to how students serve in this role, leadership, campus issues, factors that have an impact on success, impacts on serving as a leader on personal life, and recommendations to others. (p. iv)

The motivating factors for the participants included family members, past leadership experiences, friends and other individuals, desire to improve lives of others, obstacles and adversity, résumé material, and commitment to the university. Beliefs and values that contributed to how the participants served as presidents included: ethical beliefs, beliefs of family members, as well as attitudes about gender, diversity, student activism and individuality. Regarding leadership, participants held differing definitions of leadership, identified both positive and negative role models, held varying leadership styles, and had differing methods of dealing with conflict. The participants identified a number of campus issues they had to deal with while serving as the student body president. These included enrollment-management issues, faculty evaluations, academic dishonesty,

building campus pride, managing student fees, tuition increases, alcohol and drugs, campus apathy, campus crises and violence, traffic and open space, community outreach, diversity, and political involvement. Moreover, the participants identified factors that would likely affect the success of a student body president. These were relationships with student media, administration, the university president, advisors and student government alumni and alumnae; belief in self and self-esteem; training; goal setting; transition; and willingness to debate issues. Hellwig-Olson's participants also recognized life aspects influenced by their service as student body president. These included personal relationships, loss of privacy, networking opportunities, job opportunities, skill development, academics, and maintaining a balanced life. Last, the students discussed issues that students who aspire to the president should consider, like compensation.

The study conducted by Hellwig-Olson (2000) is probably one of the closest in its intended objective to this study. Nevertheless, Hellwig-Olson's study diverges because the participants were selected from multiple campuses throughout a public university system over a two-year period. In contrast, this study targeted participants who served as student government president through seven successive years at a single, small, private, liberal-arts college.

Spencer (2004) employed qualitative research methods in her phenomenologically oriented dissertation aimed at examining female student body presidents. The objective of Spencer's research was to determine how participants were elected and why they chose to run for the office. Spencer interviewed 16 women who served as student body presidents from 1977 to 2004. The participants were also administered the Leadership Practice

Inventory. The participants attended 16 different medium-sized and large public and private institutions where enrollments ranged from 5,800 to 50,000.

Spencer (2004) determined that women who attained the student body presidency had become involved on campus at the beginning of their freshmen year and became further involved in student government during their sophomore year. Spencer also found that many of the participants were mentored and encouraged to run for the office by an older student leader. The participants also reported an unreceptive campus climate during the campaign period and during their time in office. In addition, the leadership style identified by the Leadership Practice Inventory was communal in nature.

Spencer's study relates to the present one in that it focused on the experience of student government presidents and employed qualitative methodology. However, this is where the similarities end. Spencer's study focused on female student government presidents only, used 16 different research sites (all significantly larger than the site in this study), and the time spanned in the study was much greater.

Sanseviro (2006) conducted a qualitative study that examined the roles students play in institutional decision making at a multi-campus, two-year public college and how the students perceived their roles and what their roles actually were. Sanseviro interviewed five student government presidents who served successive terms from 1999 to 2004 at one campus, located in a large metropolitan area in the southeast United States. Sanseviro also examined institutional and state-wide, system-level documents to explore the variables that affect roles students play in institutional decision making.



Through his examination of the data, Sanseviro found three common themes: role of the student government president, challenges faced by the student government president, and observations made about the decision-making process from both the design and practice perspectives. Related to the role of the student government president “five common themes emerged: advocate, liaison, overseer, trouble-shooter, and manager” (p. 60). Sanseviro identified four challenges faced by the president: “apathy, continuity, support, and prejudgement” (p. 60). Sanseviro identified three observations made by the participants about the decision-making process. These were tokenism, predetermination, and control. Based on the themes that emerged from the data, Sanseviro concluded that the participants perceived that for the institution to make informed decisions that benefit the campus, and particularly the student body, that the student government president should play an active role as a contributing partner in the institutional decision-making process. The reality that the participants acknowledged, however, was that although the student government president is not entirely divorced from the institutional decision-making process, his or her role is largely advisory.

Sanseviro’s study relates to this study in that it utilizes interviews and other qualitative methods to explore the experiences of student government presidents. However, Sanseviro’s study differs from this study as it is narrowly focused on the student government president’s role in the institutional decision-making process. Moreover, the institutional and student types differ. Sanseviro’s study covered a two-year public college.

## Conclusion

The research literature supports the need to examine the ways that students construct meaning of their experiences in leadership roles in student government. While studies have shown both the positive and negative impact of student involvement, as well as the divergent experiences of gender and racial and ethnic groups, and graduate and undergraduate students, few *qualitative* studies examined student involvement in leadership roles in student government. Moreover, studies have described the increased stress the role of leader carries beyond that of simple membership within an organization, but few studies focused on the actual, individual experiences of student government leaders. And, whereas each of the studies described above investigated the outcomes and gains derived from participation in leadership development programs and student governance for college students, only one study, Logue et al. (2005), progressed beyond the traditional longitudinal and exploratory methods of assessing the impact of such programs. Bray (2006) contended that

most theoretical frameworks and studies take a general approach to the benefits of student involvement in co-curricular activities, and it is indeed often difficult to parcel out the benefits of specific programs. (p. 25)

Therefore, the research and study that follows seek to delve into and to understand students' self-perceptions based on their first-hand participation in student governance as a student government president at a small, private, liberal arts college. The study allows, then, for a fuller exploration of the experience of actual student government leaders. Through an analysis of these students' reflections, I seek to focus on and expose their self-perceptions regarding the skills, values, and knowledge obtained and cultivated

during their involvement as leaders. Additionally, I hope to show how this study builds upon and moves beyond previous conclusions.

## CHAPTER 3

### FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the conceptual frameworks and design of this study. This chapter discusses the following contextual frameworks: emerging adulthood, qualitative interviewing, and constructionism. This chapter also includes the following areas related to the overall design of the project: site, access, role of researcher, participant selection, context, ethical issues, data collection, management and analysis, trustworthiness of the data, limitations, and a proposed plan of action (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

#### Emerging Adulthood

In order to examine the impact and influence of student government in higher education, one must become aware of the developmental stage in which the participants reside. For this study, Arnett's theory of adulthood was applied to explain some of the experiences and meanings that participants construct of their experiences as student government leaders. Arnett wrote, "The theory of emerging adulthood is a way of conceptualizing the developmental characteristics of young people between the ages of 18 and 25" (Arnett, 2005, p. 235). In Arnett's theory, this is a distinct developmental period. Arnett argued that this developmental period has five distinct features: "the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the age of self-focus, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities" (2005, p. 235). Arnett contended that this period of

development differs significantly from adolescence and adulthood. For young people in industrialized countries, the years from the late teens through the 20s are filled with change and importance. During this period, young people obtain the levels of education and training that will provide the foundation for their eventual income and occupational achievement. Young people develop and enhance personal skills, including becoming more self-aware and self-confident. They also develop occupational skills such as time management and interpersonal communication. At this developmental stage young people spend their time in self-focused exploration as they try out different possibilities in love and work, along with being the time when young people feel that that they have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives and the world around them (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2005). As such, traditional-aged college students must make profound life choices with enduring consequences. Astin (1985, 1993) argued that these years represent a critical period for students as it relates to their personal, social, and professional growth. During this distinct period of transition and exploration, young people enroll in colleges and universities while others enter the working world. Also during this period, some young people become actively involved in their college's or university's leadership development programs. During this developmental period, some students come to hold student leadership positions on campus, specifically in student government. Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood is applicable to a qualitative study exploring the experience of young people involved in student governance because it speaks directly to the developmental stage of most of the participants. During this period in their lives, young persons seek to construct meaning for themselves and their experiences and are also

exploring the world around them. Consequently, this self-exploration influences young peoples' decisions, particularly on their choices about and levels of involvement in student governance. This theoretical framework guided my research. The developmental stage of those in leadership roles within student government provided the social context for this study.

### Qualitative Interviewing

The primary goal of this study is to advance understanding of the experiences of students who hold the position of president within a student government association on a college campus. Merriam (2002) was correct, "qualitative research attempts to find out how people make meaning or interpret a phenomenon" (p. 68). This study investigated how participants perceive their shared experiences. The methodological approach for this study was qualitative in nature, as qualitative inquiry research focuses on comprehending processes or phenomena (Bamberger, 1999). Through a qualitative study of college students involved in student government, I was able to highlight aspects of the experience that may be beneficial to those who advise student government associations. Because this approach sought out the personal insights and understandings of student leaders, it was better able to contribute to a more concrete understanding of the reflective perspectives of those in government leadership positions. Little is known about what students believe they gain from participating in this experience, because few studies have focused specifically on this topic. Consequently, this study allowed me to identify and interpret the constructed meaning that participants place on their involvement. The focus of this study is not on student learning or development per se; instead, I targeted the meanings

students construct about their leadership experience as a means to identify important aspects of overall student government experience. To be clear: this study did not attempt to assess developmental changes by examining student involvement in student government. It took a qualitative direction where the essence of student government experience is the primary concern. Hence, the kind of experience students describe are important in this study, not as developmental or learning outcomes, but as indications of the nature of the experience and its context. Moreover, this study was strictly interpretive in nature, as I only sought to understand how the participants make meaning of their experiences.

The approach for this study was qualitative interviewing. Qualitative interviewing is a holistic approach to studying a shared experience such as participation in student governance. Again, Merriam is right (2002) that “this approach emphasizes the importance of providing a structure for participants to communicate their own understanding, perspectives, and attribution of meaning” (p. 166). Patton (2002) and Merriam (1998) asserted that this approach is designed to reveal the essence of a shared experience as the participants are encouraged to use their own words in describing their experience. The concept of student governance, that is, cannot be divorced from the experience of the participants. Creswell (1998) contended that to understand an experience, one must explore how participants describe the meaning of their shared lived experience. To more fully understand the role and influence of student governance, one must delve into the experiences shared by those involved within that experience. People construct meaning from their experiences and each experience shapes each person’s

reality. Qualitative interviewing allowed the researcher to describe the experience of student governance through the meaning constructed by the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Richardson, 1999). Moreover, qualitative interviewing permits the understanding of a specific experience from the emic perspective of the subject under study. A number of qualitative researchers contended that in order to understand an experience, one must pursue that understanding through the eyes of those who have shared it (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Fetterman, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; Wiggan, 2003). Therefore, I endeavored to access the experience of college student governance from the student leader's point of view through dialogue with the participants that would elicit their descriptions and perceptions. A qualitative approach is inductive in nature, as its primary goal is the understanding of the nature of a context through the eyes of the participants (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Fetterman, 1998; Rhoads, 1998). Therefore, as a researcher, I investigated the experiential meanings articulated, interpreted, and negotiated by those students in leadership positions in a student government association.

In order to enhance the understanding of the impact of involvement in student government leadership, one must first understand the participants and their perceptions. Therefore, this study focused on the reflective experiences of college students involved in student government leadership positions. I agree with Rhoads (1997) that "student affairs professionals and faculty need phenomenon-oriented studies to better understand how students construct meaning around their experiences, and they also need outcomes-oriented research to make sense of the impact of college on students" (p. 509).



Qualitative interviewing allows student affairs professionals to distinguish how participation in student governance has influenced, both positively and negatively, the perceptions of students' experiences. Consequently, qualitative interviewing was chosen as the method of inquiry because it is the most appropriate approach to study the perspectives of the informants about their experiences as student government association presidents.

### Constructionism

Because this study is based on a methodological rationale oriented in qualitative practices, it is inclined toward a constructivist paradigm. This approach is consistent with my belief that knowledge and reality are constructed by one's experiences and associations. A constructionist mind-set is appropriate for this study because it recognizes that the individuals hold their own perspective on their individual experiences. Therefore, knowledge is constructed through multicultural perspectives and multiple realities and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Moran, 2000; Neumann, 1995; Schwandt, 2001; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

Similar to the study conducted by Evans-Winters (2005) on the educational resilience of African American females, I interpreted the students' perceptions of their experiences and the meanings the participants created based on their involvement in student leadership. Each participant brought to the study distinct perceptions, viewpoints, values, and experiences. In addition, each participant had markedly different reactions, responses, and outcomes relating to their experiences while participating in student leadership. Each of these distinctions shaped the research

results. Every person possessed unique memories and interpretations of the individual experience as student government president. The themes that pervaded the interviews provided valuable insights into students' perceptions of the experience.

Every individual constructs specific meaning of experience based upon individual reality and the reality of those nearby. Therefore, researchers must approach knowledge, reality, and the research data garnered from a multifaceted perspective. The world is a complex and interconnected place, and a person's reality is a composite of multiple realities derived from his or her environment, ethnicity, etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Moran, 2000; Neumann, 1995; Schwandt, 2001; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999) Studying a specific experience, such as student governance, calls for a constructivist approach because each individual holds his or her own perspective of individual experience, and each perspective is valid in itself. The data represent the truth of each participant's own reality and perception of the experience of student governance. A constructionist approach allows for the acceptance of individual perspectives and meanings. As a result, this study allowed me to comprehend the experience of college student governance from the participant's point of view.

#### Site

This study took place at a private, church-affiliated liberal arts college located in the southeastern United States. The pseudonym for the site is Emerging College. The demographic description of the institution is from *US News & World Report's America's Best Colleges* (2007). Approximately 95 percent of the student body hails from within the state where the college is located, and a majority of the students comes from the southeast

region of the United States. Emerging College enrolls approximately 1,000 undergraduate students. Eighty-seven percent are full-time and 13 percent are part-time, 42 percent are male and 58 percent female. The ethnic diversity of the college is 7 percent African American, 1 percent Asian American, 2 percent Hispanic, 0 percent Native American, 89 percent White, and 1 percent international. The residential status of the students is 45 percent in campus housing and 65 percent off campus. Eighty-five percent are traditional-aged students while 15 percent of the student population is 25 years or older.

#### Access

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that access involves the capability of the researcher to make contact and gain entry into the research setting. As an administrative staff person within the division of student affairs responsible for advising the institution's student government association, making contact and gaining entry to study students who participated in leadership roles in the student government association did not pose a problem for this researcher. Also, I have direct contact with many of the students involved in student government at the research site. On the one hand, this situation may bring into question biases regarding student governance and the experience of the participants. On the other hand, this familiarity provided access to the subjects of the research.

I recognize that I am personally vested in the institution and in the student government association at the research site, as I have spent the last seven years intentionally and purposefully enhancing the student government by increasing its budgets, establishing leadership workshops, and mentoring those who are involved and

participate in student government. I hold the belief that involvement in student government is a positive experience and that it helps those involved to grow personally and professionally. I am a familiar face to the students at Emerging College. I attend many on- and off-campus events and programs. I eat in the cafeteria almost every day, and I can be found walking around campus throughout each day. As a member of the college's student affairs staff, I am able to enter and blend into the natural setting in which student government leaders function. I believe that I have gained the trust of those I want to study. They often confide in me and seek my advice and insights. I have established a good rapport with each of them, and I do not need an intermediary. As the advisor to the Student Government Association, I work closely with student government leaders to provide support, services, and resources that best meet what I think are the needs of those students involved. In addition, I mentor those involved in leadership positions within the Student Government Association throughout their terms in office. Through my time with the students at the research site, I am able to identify students interested in becoming involved in student government. In order to prepare students for leadership roles in the Student Government Association, I have met individually with each student to discuss mutual expectations of the role, mutual responsibilities of the student leader, and my role as advisor. I nurture and prepare students for the challenge of leadership roles as well as advise them through the entire process. In every case, my primary role and interaction with the participants has been as an advisor and mentor and not as a researcher; the data and the rapport I have developed with the participants has been an outgrowth of my involvement as an advisor and confidant, and research was not

the central objective. My comments above are not meant to short-change the research strategy employed in this study, but instead are intended to clarify for the reader the context of my interactions and involvement with the Student Government Association and the participants in this study. In fact, my role as the advisor to the Student Government Association may actually add strength to the research strategies used in collecting data because I am able to engage in ongoing and meaningful dialogue during the interview process based on this ongoing relationship.

#### Role of the Researcher

Researchers have a number of roles within a qualitative inquiry. First, the role of the researcher is to acknowledge his or her own participation in the study as well as researcher biases and opinions on the subject under study (Merriam, 1998). I agree with Merriam (2002) that the researcher is an active participant in the study. A researcher must understand that his or her personal characteristics and status might affect interactions with the participants. I also agree with Bogdan and Biklen (2007) that to the participants, the researcher is likely to be seen not as just a researcher just as the participants will not see themselves merely subjects within the study. And I concur with Rubin and Rubin (2005) that the relationship between the researcher and the participants becomes more like a partnership with each playing an integral role within the study. The researcher is not detached or aloof from the study and participants, but through the interview process, he or she becomes engaged and immersed in the lives of the participants. Moreover, just as the personal characteristics of the participants play an important role in the study, so do the personal characteristics of the researcher. I acknowledge that as a middle-class,

white, Protestant male, my perceptions and background influence and are factors that affect the data collection and analysis process. Also, by acknowledging my own active role as researcher and how personal characteristics and status may influence my rapport with the participants and consequently the data collection and analysis process, I am able to attempt to avoid “othering” the participants. Othering is defined as collecting personal information from participants while sharing none or little about the researcher (Merriam, 2002). To avoid othering the participants, I shared with them why I am interested in the topic and some of my own background. That being said, due to my long-term relationships with the participants and my strong rapport with them, I believe the participants were familiar with my interest and background. This mutual understanding, then, added strength to the qualitative strategies used to collect and analyze data.

Although I concur with Moustakas (1994) that it is important for qualitative researchers to attempt to set aside their own beliefs, understandings, and biases so that they will be open to share the experiences of the informants, I am not sure that this was wholly possible. I agree that it is vital that the researcher endeavor to put aside pre-conceived notions and beliefs in order to see and understand the experience in its basic form. From reading the relevant literature and having seven years of experience as a student affairs professional working and advising student government leaders, I noticed three assumptions I needed to acknowledge and put aside. From my experience with student government leaders, I have concluded that 1) they appear to be highly motivated; 2) they have a desire to leave a legacy at their institution; and 3) they hope that their experience as leaders within the Student Government Association has a significant

influence on their lives, although they are unsure what that influence might be. Having acknowledged these assumptions, I continually tried to put them aside throughout my analysis of data. Nevertheless, I also realized that I was not be entirely successful in this endeavor. Since I was not able to truly set aside my biases, my goal was to identify them, address them, and attempt to see how they interact with the research and interviewing, all in an ongoing journaling process while I conducted the research and examination of the results.

The second role of the researcher is to develop a relationship with the informants. I agree with a number of qualitative researchers that in order to garner the trust of the participants to elicit genuine reflections on their experiences, I needed to establish a strong rapport (Arminio, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, Scott, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Moreover, as Mather and Winston (1998) contended, “the interviewer is an element of the research instrumentation, forming judgments throughout the process, making decisions about when and how to employ probes and when to encourage digressions from the interview guide” (p. 37). As the advisor to the Student Government Association, I am familiar with the students in the organization, and I have gained the trust and established a rapport with those who participated in the present study.

The third role of the researcher is to become immersed in the research literature on higher education, college student development, student leadership, and student governance. The researcher must also delve deeply into the data derived from the interview processes (Saddlemire, 1996). Throughout the research process, I read

literature that relates to the study. The fourth role of the researcher is to bind together the results of the inquiry with personal understanding of student governance and its impact as a means to describe and interpret this experience and the meanings the informants place on it (Fetterman, 1998, p.11). As I analyzed and interpreted the data derived from the interviews and journals in an effort to depict the reflective experience of student government presidents, I did so with the lens of my own experience and perspective as a student government advisor.

### Participant Selection

The participants were purposefully selected in order to ensure that appropriate individuals, with relevant experiences, participated in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Bonner, 2001; Fetterman, 1998; Patton, 2002). The participants were selected based upon predetermined criteria. Only two criteria were established for participation in this study: being elected as a chief student officer or chief executive officer of the Student Government Association and volunteering to describe the experience. For the purposes of this study, student governance was defined as the participation by students in college decision-making through an officially recognized and sanctioned body composed solely of students. The chief executive officer was defined as president of the Student Government Association and has the responsibility of representing and governing the whole student body. Individuals in these positions were elected by the student body of the college in a recognized election process. The participants were solicited through a networking relationship with the researcher at the respective research site. The candidates were contacted initially by telephone and/or email where I discussed the study and



invited the candidates to participate. Following that initial contact, each candidate received a follow-up telephone contact to secure each participant's involvement in the study.

### Context

The Student Government Association at the research site was established in the 1950s and has continued to evolve in influence and size over the past 50+ years. The Student Government Association represents all segments of the student body and is organized to help formulate and voice student opinion regarding college policies and to allocate funding to appropriate committees and student organizations. Participation in this organization is open to all students through voting in Student Government Association elections, attending meetings, volunteering for one of the many Student Government Association committees, and sharing questions and concerns about campus issues. The Student Government Association comprises four divisions: Executive, which is composed of the administrative and managing officers (President, Vice President for Administration, Vice President for Student Activities, Treasurer, and Secretary); Legislative, which is composed of the Student Senate; Judicial, which is composed of the Student Judicial Council; and Campus Programming, which is composed of the Student Activities Council.

The dominate figure in any student government organization is likely to be the president of the student body who is also the chief student officer. The position of the president of the student body has evolved along with the rise of student self-governance in higher education in the United States. In the early years of student self-governance

during the 18th and 19th centuries, the role of the student body president was mostly ceremonial with very little authority. Typically, the student governing council or student council was led by the president of the senior class who was the ex-officio president of the student body (Albright, 1931; Eller, 1949; Somers 2003). However, as the organization evolved, so did the role and responsibility of the chief student officer. With the increased responsibility and importance of the student government organization in the early and mid-20th century, the role of its president became more vital. Between 1920 and 1950, the position of the president of the student body evolved from that of the senior class president to a campus-wide elected position that represented the entire student body (Albright, 1931; Somers 2003). Eller (1949) described the roles and responsibilities of a president of the student government association:

The student president is an ex-officio member of virtually all boards and committees on the campus. He sits regularly on every committee . . . Specific among his powers are those to appoint the chairmen and members of all boards not otherwise provided for, to make all initial standing committee appointments, to appoint students to vacancies in the Student Legislature, to administer and enforce the laws of the Student Legislature as well as to veto its acts within proper time, to call mass meetings and preside, to require reports of committee as he deems necessary, and to represent the student body in all its dealings with the students of other schools, colleges, or universities, in all dealings with the faculty, and in all dealings with the Board of Trustees. (p. 26)

Freidson (1955) also provided an excellent portrayal of a student body president, which has not changed much over the past half-century:

First, the character of the student body president seems to be important to the prestige of the student government. Faculty, administration, and student leaders all agree that it is important to them as well as to the student body. From their comments, I gather that the successful student leader must be able to have about him an aura of extraordinary ability and

good will, and must be able to give the impression to the students that he is effective in dealing with the administration. He seems to have a delicate path to walk—on the one hand he must seem “reasonable” and pleasant to the administration (and, I suspect from my own experience, be able to cultivate an appearance of earnest ingenuousness), while on the other he must not be seen to the students to be a tool of the administration. (p. 38)

Even though the position of president and the executive branch of student government organization continued to evolve, it continued to play an active role in student self-governance on college and university campuses. Today, according to the literature, the position of student government president is considered to be demanding, difficult, and stressful by those who hold this position and those who advise and mentor them. The incumbent often has to struggle with multiple controversies and issues, as well as conflicting allegiances, during his or her time in office. In addition, the president has to frequently straddle the fence between warring factions of students, faculty members, and administrators. It is a position of tremendous responsibilities and obligations, but it also comes with prestige and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Each student government president leaves his or her own mark on their organization and institution. For more than a half century, the president of the Student Government Association at the research site has served as a liaison between the students and the college. The college has come to rely on each president as a conduit for communication and student advocacy. Based on my experience at the research site, close ties have been built and maintained by the college’s administrators, staff members, and faculty members with student government presidents as a result of the communication, interactions, and collaborations between these groups and the student government presidents. Student self-government

plays a significant role in shaping the quality of student life at the research site, and as a result so does the president of the Student Government Association.

### Ethical Issues

During the course of this study, it was expected that there would be ethical issues to be addressed by the researcher. First, I had an obligation to protect the participants from harm. To resolve this ethical issue, I submitted a project proposal to Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board as well as to the institution where the study took place. This was done to ensure that institutional policies were followed regarding research that involves human subjects. Within this submission, I included detailed research plans and noted how the participants were to be protected.

The second step was to ensure that the participants understood and consented to all aspects of this study. I met privately with each of the participants, explained the purpose of my research project, and discussed the method of conducting private, one-on-one taped interviews and possible follow-up interviews for clarification. I explained that their participation was to be kept anonymous and that all of their personal information would be confidential. I reviewed the consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board with each of the participants. Once I described the study in detail to each of the prospective informants, they were then given the option to participate in the study. I concur with Davis (2002), Moustakas (1994), and Saddlemire (1996) that the researcher is ethically bound to indicate to the intended participants that their involvement in the research is voluntary and that they are free to participate or not on their own accord. As encouraged by Saddlemire (1996), upon agreeing to participate in the study, I obtained

signed, informed-consent statements from the people who were involved in the study. The informed-consent form “describes the purpose of the research, provides background on the researcher, and points out the benefits and possible risks to those involved” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 105). The informed-consent statement also included that the findings would be shared with those involved along with the level of confidentiality that would be maintained. In accordance with admonishment by Moustakas (1994), I reminded the participants that they could withdraw from the study at anytime.

A second ethical issue that I faced was to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The participants have a right to have their identities protected, and therefore, the researcher developed appropriate profiles that protect the identity of each participant (Seidman, 1998). In accordance with the recommendations of Moustakas (1994), Seidman (1998), and Williams-Barnard, Mendoza, and Shippee-Rice (2001), pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants to ensure confidentiality. Throughout the study, in the analysis and results and all documentation, the participants were referred to by their pseudonyms.

A third ethical issue that I confronted was to caution the informants regarding their disclosure of personal and potentially damaging information. I forewarned participants of possible harm that could arise from the admission of sensitive and confidential information during the course of the interview process. Seidman (1998) wrote that “the intimate process of a participant’s placing experience in the context of his or her life . . . may lead a participant to divulge information that he or she may later regret sharing” (p. 53). Magolda and Weems (2002) contended that researchers must be

“sensitive towards the rights of respondents and the integrity of the data” (p. 505). I was aware of the psychological and sociological repercussions resulting from revelations made by the participants. Therefore, I instituted ongoing dialogues with the participants regarding their responses in the interviews and was sensitive to their need for privacy. Appropriate steps were taken to shield them from harm. I sought permission from the participants regarding use of overtly sensitive subjects and issues raised by the participants during the course of the interviews.

A fourth ethical issue that was dealt with was the issue of benefits and reciprocity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I have the opportunity to get a dissertation approved and to have an article published in a research journal, but how do participants benefit by participating in the research study? In this study, the participants were asked if they would like to assist future students who participate in leadership roles within student government by participating in a research project designed to enhance the understanding of this experience.

#### Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was qualitative interviews and journaling focusing on the six participants’ experiences as a president of a student governance association at a small liberal arts college. Each participant engaged in two interviews each lasting 45 to 90 minutes. The initial interviews and follow-up interviews were spaced 8-weeks apart. The initial interview focused on the life history of the participant. This established the context of the experience, the details of the experience that concentrated on the details of the participant’s experience within the topic of study,

and the reflection on the meaning the experience holds for the participant. The follow-up interview allowed the researcher to seek clarification and to further probe into the answers provided by the participant during the first interview. The follow-up interview was eight weeks after the initial interview to allow the researcher time to analyze and consider answers given by the participant initially.

Fontana and Frey (1994) assert that “interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 361). I concur with Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) who reason that “qualitative studies provide fuller, more detailed descriptions that are more exactly reflective of an individual’s experience” (p.190). It is through qualitative interviewing that I was able to draw from the participants a holistic understanding of their experience as student government presidents. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) state that “data derived from . . . interviews comprise the myriad things that respondents say and ‘do with words’ to establish the meaningful horizons of their experience” (p. 78). Holstein and Gubrium further contended that “data collection attends to capturing the discursive, interactional meaning-making process” (p. 78). Holstein and Gubrium also argue that the aim of the data collection process is not only to note “the substance of what was conveyed but the narrative connections, orientations, and dynamics through which substantive meaning will be assembled” (pp.78-79). Wengraf (2001) wrote that through qualitative interviews, “the interviewee is asked to tell a story, produce a narrative of some sort regarding all or part of their own life-experience” (p. 5). Through the interview process, I acquired both

detailed descriptions of the lived experience of the participants and the meaning the participants constructed from their experience.

Fetterman (1998) and Moustakas (1994) recommend for qualitative interviews that the interview protocol for a study such as this one should be semi-structured, informal, in-depth interviews with each informant. Wengraf (2001) characterizes semi-structured interviewing as “having a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way” (p. 5). My interviews were designed so that the same general questions were asked of each of the participants. Wengraf further argued that semi-structured interviewing should focus on open questions as opposed to closed questions. For the most part, open questions seek a general answer while closed questions seek a specific or precise answer. As the goal of this study is to seek in-depth descriptions and constructed meanings of the lived experience of the participants, open questions were the most appropriate inquiring strategy. I developed a series of questions (see Appendix C) that focused on some general topics I was interested in examining. As the interviewer, I was nondirective and allowed participants to lead the discussions that evolved from the general questions being asked.

The aim of in-depth interviewing is to probe the personal experiences and beliefs of participants and to get a rich understanding of the participant’s way of thinking about his or her experiences. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1990) define in-depth interviewing as “a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant’s perception of the self, life, and experience, and expressed in his or her own



words” (p.87). During this study, I probed into topics that the participants brought up during the interviews so that the essence of their experiences could be explored and an extensive description of their experience could be developed.

Seidman (1998) recommends that each individual interview should last 45 to 90 minutes. The interviews were flexible but focused on the overarching theme of the participants’ experience as a student government association president. As the interviews were informal by design, the participants were not limited in the length and substance of their responses. The aim of the study was to evoke a comprehensive account of the informant’s experience. Davis (2002), Mather and Winston (1998), Moustakas (1994), and Saddlemire (1996) contended that research designed around semi-structured, informal, in-depth interviews allows studies to evolve as new subjects or issues arise, and misconceptions can be clarified as they occur. The semi-structured, informal, in-depth interview method allows the researcher the most direct way to understand the experience as the informants did and for the informant to share the complete narrative of that experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Over the course of the interview, each participant was asked a series of questions. The initial portion of the interview focused on the participant’s life history as it pertained to his or her involvement in student governance. A typical interview began by asking how the participant came to be an officer in his or her college’s student government. The theme of the first segment of the interview was to review the participant’s life history up to the time he or she became a student government officer. The second portion of the interview focused on the participant’s contemporary experience. The question asked was:

“What was it like for you to be the president of your college’s student government association?” Alternatively, the question was, “Would you give me some of the details of your work as a student government president?” The third segment of the interview focused on reflection and meaning. Questions asked during this interview were: “What does it mean to you to be the president in your college’s student government?”; or “Given what you have said during the interview, how do you make sense of your involvement as the president of your student government?”

As mentioned above, in addition to initial and follow-up interviews, each participant was asked to keep a journal during the course of their participation in the study. The purpose of the journal was to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on their experience outside of the actual interviews. Everett (1998) contended,

Journaling is an informal and expressive form of writing primarily written with the journal author as the intended audience. Journals provide participants with the opportunity for reflection, self and matter exploration, and for making links between their experiences as student government association presidents and the meaning they construct of their experience. (p. 302)

Each participant was asked to journal for a period of eight weeks wherein they complete a single entry every other week for a total of four entries. Due to the personal nature of journaling, there were no formatting requirements. The main guideline was for the participants to take some time to consider their experiences and to write down some key thoughts. Out of the six participants, three submitted entries. Journal entries received were brief and contained insights on their respective presidencies. I integrated both the

participants' journal entries and the data derived from the interviews in the data and results found in chapter 4.

#### Data Management and Analysis

The first step in data management and analysis for this project was to develop “profiles of each of the participants and group them in categories” in order to make comparisons between the data derived from the participants (Seidman, 1998, p. 102). Each participant's profile described the person's character and cultural background, as well as educational and socioeconomic status. These descriptions provided contextual background to better analyze the data derived from the interviews.

Mather & Winston (1998), Moustakas (1994), Seidman (1998), and Williams-Barnard et al., (2001) contended that the second step in the data management and analysis for such a qualitative project should be that interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim, and they should be used as primary source documents. Each interview transcript consisted of a heading carrying the pseudonym of the person being interviewed, the time the interview occurred, and the site of the interview. Each transcript was segmented by the questions being asked by the interviewer and the responses of the interviewee. The transcripts included grammatical errors, digressions, and indications of moods such as laughter. The transcripts also included vocal pauses such as um and ah as well as silences and hesitations.

Fetterman (1998), Moustakas (1994), Patton (2002), Saddlemire (1996), Schuh (2002) and Williams-Barnard et al. (2001) argued that the third step in the data management and analysis process is the analysis of the data found in the interview

transcripts as well as the data found in the journal entries. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) contended, “analysis amounts to systematic grouping and summarizing the descriptions, and providing a coherent organizing framework that encapsulates and explains aspects of the social world that respondents portray” (p.79). At this stage, the transcript and journal entries were studied in detail, while themes, patterns, trends, idea, attitudes, words, and phrases were all identified, defined, and coded. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define coding as “the process of developing categories to sort data” derived from the interviews transcripts (p. 271).

Three levels of coding were used in this study: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In open coding, “each discrete incident, idea, or event will be given a name or code word that represents the concept underlying the observation” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 148-149). Merriam (2002) went on to describe the process of open coding as “breaking down data and beginning the process of categorization” (p. 166). Incidents, ideas, thoughts etc. were identified and coded based on their relationship and relevance to the overall goal of the study.

The second analysis coding level was axial. Merriam (2002) described axial coding as placing data together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories wherein several main categories are developed. Merriam (2002) further described axial coding as “taking initial categories and making further comparisons that describe relationships between categories” (pp. 166–167). Through axial coding, the data was categorized by grouping the coded words and phrases around particular concepts found in the interview transcripts and journal entries. Ideas were

generated by sorting the material within each category of coded data and then scrutinizing the categories of coded data and making comparisons between the interview transcripts and journal entries (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The links between the coded data and categories that emerged were then assessed to see whether the coded data and categories highlighted concepts, themes, or events in unique ways.

Selective coding was the third, and final, level. Merriam (2002) contended that selective coding is used to determine whether no new information or the need for additional categories exists and to integrate the categories to form a comprehensive picture of the experience. Fetterman (1998), Lincoln & Guba (1985), and Mather and Winston (1998) contended that by comparing and contrasting the coded information with the coded themes of the other interviews allows for the refinement and confirmation of themes emerging from the data. I studied the transcripts and journal entries to assess where coding showed two or more themes discussed and then searched elsewhere in the transcript to see whether consistency emerged with my findings. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that “weighing and combining help you synthesize different versions of the same event or separate explanations of the same concept or theme, allowing you to pull together different events into a single descriptive narrative” (p. 227). During this step in the analysis process, I integrated the different parts of my findings and checked them for accuracy and consistency. I then documented substantial individual variations to the central themes that evolved from the study and made any necessary modifications to my findings if I determined that my initial interpretations were incorrect. The comparisons

made suggested further questions for the data, which allowed me to better understand the experience of student government association presidents.

The final step in the data analysis process was to draw an overall contextual description or picture of the experiences of the participants and the meanings that the participants construct of their experiences focusing on the coded themes that arose from the interview and journaling processes. By using the three levels of coding, following Mather and Winston (1998), I was able to bring together, under the general areas in the interview guide, the coded information within each interview to create a single narrative describing the experience. Through the analysis of the data, the participant's responses "lead to collective impressions that will begin to unveil common elements or themes within the interviews" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 500). A vivid and accurate picture of the experience formed, as well as individual characteristics of the participants. And, I was able to work through my own explanatory narrative of what the experience was like for the participants. At this point, I began to look for the broader implications of what I learned by, as Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommend, "asking how my findings can modify, extend, or perhaps even create social, political, or behavioral theories" (p. 230). Rubin and Rubin defined theories as "sets of statements that bring together concepts and themes to explain how things happen or why they took place the way they did" (p. 230). Rubin and Rubin go on to state that "theory links concepts and themes into an overarching explanation that not only address the immediate research questions but also creates broader understandings about important societal issues" (p. 230). Through the analysis of the data I hoped to create a theory that, as Rubin and Rubin wrote, "builds on

what was learned from the interviewing and then speaks to issues present in the literature” (p. 231). The themes or categories that emerged from the analysis of the coded data then became the core of the theory developed for future elaboration as I described the implications that arose from my study.

In truth, the process of coding the data centered on the use of more than 2,000 note cards. I started the process of coding the data, by reviewing and evaluating each interview transcript and journal entry. When I found noteworthy information in a transcript or journal entry, I placed the relevant language on a note card, limiting the note cards to one quote per card. I then labeled each note card with a code that represented the underlying concept on the card. After compiling and labeling the note cards from each transcript and journal entry, I then analyzed the note cards for recurring statements or ideas based on the code found on each note card. At this point, I sorted the note cards by grouping them around emerging categories stemming from the relationships found between the codes assigned to each of the note cards. It was from these categories that I then formed the themes on which I based my conclusions.

#### Trustworthiness of the Data

The trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is defined as the ability of the inquiry’s findings to be seen as credible, dependable and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of the findings of this study were affirmed through a number of methods and procedures. The first method was the interview structure. The interviews were held over a period of eight weeks, which allowed me to have time to reflect upon the interviews and to develop a sense of context (Schuh, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Another method was the number of participants who were involved. By interviewing a number of participants, I was able to connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. An added method was to ask participants to write journals as a means of continuing to express their thoughts outside of the interview sessions. Another method was identifying common elements and ideas within the interview transcripts. This method allowed corroboration of shared themes and ideas (Arminio et al., 2000). Moreover, as Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005) and Rubin & Rubin (2005) recommend, I was able to check for inconsistencies or omissions in the transcripts and compare findings with current research in order to substantiate the identified themes. An additional method of member checking was also employed to assure the trustworthiness of the findings. Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Davis (2002), Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (2002), Schuh (2002) and Williams-Barnard et al. (2001) describe member checking as providing each of the participants with the opportunity to review the transcripts from their interview sessions, and to read and comment upon the conclusions reached by the researcher. Each participant was provided a complete copy of his or her interviews as well as a copy of my initial conclusions. I requested that each student review the transcripts and my conclusions for both the accuracy of the interviews and conclusions and for any additional clarifications the participants felt were necessary or useful. No substantial changes to the interview transcripts or conclusions were suggested by the participants. I incorporated the participants' reactions into the final manuscript. Throughout the study, I also used journaling to examine my preconceptions and reflect on my possible biases. While



journaling, I documented my “reflections, questions, and decisions on the problems, issues, ideas I encountered in collecting data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). I agree with Merriam (2002) that journaling “is important to capture reflections and thoughts about [myself] as a researcher, about data collection issues, and about interpretation of the data” (p. 28). A final procedure applied was an audit trail consisting of electronic files and paper copies of all communications related to the study (Davis, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Schuh, 2002; Whitt, 1994).

### Limitations

This study does have limitations. First, as Logue, Hutchens, & Hector (2005) argue, qualitative “inquiry has exploratory value . . . these topics are those upon which future research may be based or expanded” (p. 405). This study provides a glimpse into the self-reflective outcomes of involvement in student government leadership. It is the task of those who follow this study to take what is learned and to seek to not only verify it, but also to delve deeper into the subject by way of further quantitative and qualitative research.

The second limitation of this study is that the number of sites and the number of students who participated is relatively small and homogeneous. The narrowness of the scope limits the ability to transfer the conclusion to other populations or sites. One higher education institution was the site of the study, and only six students participated in it. This study does not, then, possess broad applicability, as it is context- and site-specific. Due to the restricted sample pool, the transferability of the findings may be questionable compared to other larger, more diverse institutions, even though the composition of the

sample was reflective of the total enrollment of the participating institution. However, as Logue, Hutchens, & Hector (2005) indicated, “the sample size, restricted by methodology, may be viewed as a limitation as the results are not generalizable; however, the small number of participants permitted in-depth, subjective interviewing and a depth of exploration critical to the purposes of this investigation” (pp. 406–407). Qualitative research methods did allow for a far-reaching examination into the perceptions of student governance leaders at the research site.

The third limitation of the study is that the quality of data is limited in accuracy to the researcher’s recording, reporting, and interpretation of the participant’s interviews, observations, and dialogue. Moreover, the quality of the study is limited by the honesty and openness of the participants. The findings of the study could be flawed if the data are inaccurate or the interpretation of the data is incorrect.

The fourth limitation of the study is that the researcher’s biases, which were indicated earlier in this document, may affect the findings. I attempted to set aside my own beliefs, understandings, and biases regarding the subject under study. Furthermore, I must acknowledge that my institutional bias may have affected the study, as I am an administrator in the division of student affairs who is responsible for advising the Student Government Association at the college where the study was conducted.

#### Research Management Plan and Timeline

The following plan indicates the schedule for conducting the research and presenting the conclusions. It took approximately 15 months to conduct, interpret, and analyze the results of this study. The study was divided into four phases. The first phase

took about one month to complete. I had an opportunity to review relevant literature, submitted all necessary forms and proposals for Institutional Review Board approval at each institution, and approached the institution's Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students about the inclusion of the current student and alumni/ae in this proposed study.

Once the necessary approvals were granted, this study began its second phase, which took eight months to complete. This phase consisted of the interview process. I sought the involvement of the possible candidates. Appendix C shows the initial interview structure that was designed and scheduled with each of the participants.

Once the interviews were completed, the study moved into its third and fourth phases. During these phases, I coded, analyzed, and interpreted the data that emerged from both the background research and the interview process. Both phases took five months, combined, to complete.

TABLE 1

*Research Management Plan and Timeline*

September 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit proposal to Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University</li> </ul>
October 2007–February 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select participants and schedule interviews</li> <li>• Conduct initial interviews</li> <li>• Transcribe interviews and field notes</li> <li>• Participants journal regarding their experience</li> <li>• Ongoing data management and analysis</li> </ul>
March 2008–June 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct follow-up interviews</li> <li>• Transcribe interviews and field notes</li> <li>• Participants journal regarding their experience</li> <li>• Ongoing data management and analysis</li> </ul>
July 2008–December 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final data analysis</li> <li>• Preparation of data display</li> <li>• Write up results and discussion</li> <li>• Submit research for review</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA AND RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to uncover the essence of the shared experience of students who lead a student government association at a small liberal arts college. The data and results presented here reflect the perceptions of six student government presidents concerning their experience. The primary source of data was derived from interviews conducted with the six student government association presidents. In addition, data was derived from a number of journal entries submitted by the participants focusing on their experience, and my observations of the participants during their tenure as student government president. Within this chapter, I describe the institution, the student government association, the interview participants (drawing on both what the participants shared with me along with data derived from my own relationship and interactions with the institution and all six participants), and identify common themes that emerged from the data.

#### Description of the Institution

Emerging College is located in a rural area and consists of one campus and one extension center. Emerging is a small, private, four-year liberal arts college with an approximate total enrollment of 1,000 students. Enrollment is not open to all applicants, but admissions standards are not considered competitive. The primary mission of this institution is to provide a curriculum focusing on the liberal arts, sciences, and

professional studies to educate students holistically and prepare them for a life of meaning and community engagement.

#### Description of the Student Government Association

The Student Government Association of Emerging College was established in the 1950s and represents all segments of the student body. The Student Government Association is organized to help formulate and voice student opinion regarding college issues. Participation is open to all enrolled students through voting in elections, serving as executive officers, serving as representatives within the Student Senate and its committees, serving as a member of either the Student Activities Council or Student Judicial Council and attending meetings and forums. There are four divisions within the Student Government Association: Executive, which is composed of the administrative and managing officers (President, Vice President for Administration, Vice President for Student Activities, Treasurer, Secretary and Chief of Staff); Legislative, which is composed of the Student Senate; Judicial, which is composed of the Student Judicial Council; and Programming, which is composed of the Student Activities Council. Approximately 75 students serve in some capacity within the Student Government Association: six executive officers, six judicial council members, six student activities council members, and more than 60 students serve on the Student Senate and its related committees.

#### Participants and Interview Excerpts

Each of the six students interviewed served as the Student Government Association president at Emerging College. The students served in sequence starting in

May 2000 through May 2007 with one student serving two terms as president. All six participants served under the same SGA advisor, the director of student activities, (who is also the researcher) but during this same seven-year period there was significant change in administrative leadership at the college. During this seven-year period, there were two permanent and one interim college presidents, two permanent and one interim vice presidents for student affairs and dean of students, three permanent and one interim vice presidents for academic affairs and dean of the college, three permanent vice presidents for finance and administration and two permanent and one interim vice presidents for external affairs and advancement. While the participants shared some distinct experiences with some of the specific administrators with whom they interacted during their term(s) as Student Government Association president, common themes emerged from the data. The uncommonly high administrative turnover during the time-period under study could have contributed to the perceptions of the participants.

The following are excerpts of interviews with Callie, George, Trent, Benjamin, Sandra and Joey.

Callie

*Profile*

Callie served as the president of the Student Government Association from 2000 to 2001, is an African American female, and was a traditional-aged student. She served as Emerging College's first African American female Student Government Association president. She was 19 years old and a senior during her time as president. She had a 3.0 GPA and majored in liberal studies with a concentration in history. Callie was born in

California but raised in Georgia. Callie was raised by her grandparents following her parents' divorce. Her grandfather was a college professor as well as civil servant. Her term in office was tumultuous for the college, the Student Government Association, and herself. The campus was in a state of administrative upheaval. The faculty were attempting to oust the college president and vice president for academic affairs, and fear and anxiety about this pervaded the campus. The faculty senate passed a vote of "no confidence" in both administrators, and the campus population was very much on edge. The climate in and the perceptions about the Student Government Association were tremulous, as there was little organization or structure. Callie had no previous connection to or experience in the Student Government Association; however, she did serve three years as a resident assistant and one year as an orientation leader. She also participated on the College's homecoming court and was crowned queen her senior year. One of the legacies from her presidency was the hosting of the College's only homecoming court parade, which was poorly received and attended, due to the negative campus climate. Following her term in office and graduation from Emerging College, Callie pursued a career in higher education, specializing in enrollment services. Callie first served as admissions counselor for Emerging College and then took a position in admissions at an elite liberal arts college in Alabama. Currently, she serves as an assistant director of undergraduate admissions at nationally recognized private university in Tennessee.

### *The Experience*

When asked to describe her experience as a student government president at Emerging College, Callie described her presidency as "a great experience" (Interview 1).



She went on to say that “it was difficult, but the crazy part about it is, is of my year as student government president I wouldn’t take it back. I think it taught me a whole lot”

(Interview 1). Moreover, Callie described her experience:

even though it was a year filled with lots of controversy, I still wouldn’t take it back. It was, it was still, it was the best year and I think a lot of that had to do with SGA, because it really did stretch me outside of my comfort zone in a lot of ways. (Interview 1)

In addition, Callie described her experience as “definitely a growing and coming-into-our-own type of experience” (Interview 1). She went on to say that she “just remember[s] feeling like that year after my SGA experience I felt like all of the sudden I had grown up so much” (Interview 1). “I think it truly made me a stronger person and it made me realize that, um, sometimes you have to make hard decisions” (Interview 1).

Furthermore she said,

It taught me some of those, some of those life skills that I needed to know before I went out into the real world. It taught me how to be flexible. It taught me how to be more organized, how to be a multi-tasker. It taught me all of those things that, you know, to be successful in the business world period. Those are all things that you need to know. And so, I think it prepared me pretty well. (Interview 1)

Callie described her experiences as “I just felt like the experiences that I had, they happened so fast but they changed me in a lot of ways and I felt like in a lot of good ways it made me really think about the person that I was and, and the things that I believed” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “it made me a better person. It made me realize that the world was not just about Callie” (Interview 1).

Callie described how her experience helped her boost her self-confidence. For example, she stated, “I think it was the first time I really held a leadership position, it

really provided me the opportunity to kind of step out from myself and say . . . these are some of your strengths and these are some of weaknesses” (Interview 2). She went on to say that her presidential experience made her more self-aware. She stated,

It really helped me to see that, you know, by no means was I perfect and that I, um, had strengths and I had weaknesses and how to improve on those strengths and how to, to become a little bit better about those weaknesses. It helped me a lot, you know, even just interviewing for my first job out of college. I think it, it helped a lot. (Interview 2)

Callie stated that her experience as president “prepared me also for dealing with lots of different groups of people, which I thought was really, um, really important and I think that’s vital to any successful career. You have to know how to deal with different groups of people” (Interview 1). Callie mentioned that her experience as president, “really taught me a lot about how to treat people and how to respect people” (Interview 2).

Callie asserted that her experience as the student government president reinforced her conviction that one must stand firm on their beliefs and opinions. She stated,

It taught me a lot about how to stand up for what you truly believe in . . . While at the end of the day you may not always have the result that you’re looking for, there’s something to be said about standing up for what you believe in. (Interview 2)

When asked if there were any downsides to the student government presidency, Callie discussed the challenge of seeking to find balance between being an advocate and voice of the students and serving as an advocate and voice of the college and its administration. She felt pulled by two opposing interest groups: the student body and the college administration. Callie described this difficult situation:

I really feel like the role is, of the student government president, is to really, kind of be that go-between person between the students and the administration. I think that, that, that they are the, they represent the person who listens to what the students need, needs are but they also listen to what the administration needs are. And, I think it is a fine balance and I think that for a lot of student government presidents, I think that can be their downfall is when they don't know how to balance the two. And, I think in most cases, if they can't balance the two it is because they listen so much to what the students have to say but they're not listening to what the administration has to say and there's, their not willing to compromise. (Interview 1)

Callie affirmed that her life as president was complicated, and that she found that finding a sense of balance in her life to be difficult. She testified, "there were times where people needed me to be in three places at one time and there were times where I was sick as a dog and I needed to be certain places . . . because there are certain expectations, um, for you so . . ." (Interview 1). She went on to maintain, "I mean, I think, I think a typical day was a pretty hectic day and, you know, it's one of those days where you make a list of things that you're going to do and you're lucky if you get two of them done" (Interview 1).

Callie also divulged that she felt cut off from other members of the campus community during her time as the student government president. Callie rationalized her sense of isolation and loneliness by describing her presidency:

It was a hard time and I, and I felt, I really did feel, um, quite lonely, um, during most of it, just because I felt like there wasn't really anyone that I could talk to about it. I couldn't really talk to any other students about it because some of the information that I knew was privileged information that was not information that was available to all students, and it shouldn't have been available to all students. Um, but then I also couldn't talk to administration about it because talking to them, a lot of times they couldn't talk to me because they were constantly watching their back and

making sure that no one was paying attention to what they were saying because they were in fear for their jobs. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to state, “there were, there really wasn’t anyone that I could talk to, so for me, I just had to learn how to really deal with it internally” (Interview 1). Moreover, she said that insider knowledge that she possessed as president inhibited her from talking openly with her peers and other members of the campus community and how that personally affected her. She said,

for me it wasn’t, I couldn’t talk to anyone about that information. And, there were times where I felt like that was a lot of pressure for a 19 year old to have. Um, but, at the same time, I knew that it was information that if I were to tell someone, it would have been a much more disastrous situation. (Interview 1)

She continued,

because of the, the timing and the nature of the environment when I was SGA President, it wasn’t, it didn’t really foster itself for me to necessarily talk to my peer and my friends about it, um, because there was just a lot of information that I couldn’t necessarily talk about, um, with them, you know, in regards to what was going on with the administration. (Interview 2)

Callie also described her experience of being president as being lonely because

of the climate at the time, it was lonely because there were a lot of things going on, being said behind closed doors with administration that were things that I just couldn’t discuss with my friends or other, um, SGA board members because, um, they were just private, and, and it was kind of hard to have that pressure as a senior, and, you know, also being a resident assistant and also carrying a full load of classes and trying to write my senior thesis, there were just a lot of things that I couldn’t, um, explain or talk to anyone about. (Interview 2)

Another downside that Callie related was that she felt that she was held to a different, more exacting standard than her peers. Callie felt that both her personal and

political lives were held to a higher standard than other members of the college community. Upon reflection, Callie stated

when you're SGA president in a my small, a school as small as [the College], everybody knows everybody and everyone feels like they have the right and responsibility to tell some, to tell the person, you know, how they are or they're going to be. And so, I think that's why it was so difficult. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to insist that the student government president was under more scrutiny than the average student. She said,

people watch what you do so much more than what other people do, than they do when you are a normal student. Like, people are so much more concerned. I mean, I remember there were times where, when I was just a normal student, if I wore pajama pants to class, like nobody cared. SGA president; I wore pajama pants to class, it was like a huge deal all of the sudden. Like, I felt like all of the sudden I went from a normal student to all of the sudden, I was like freaking Lindsey Lohan. (Interview 1)

Furthermore, Callie stated,

I think, in some ways, my role as SGA president was a little bit more difficult, I think just because at a smaller school, you're so much, you're under a very small microscope so everyone is watching what you're doing and you interact with pretty much everyone on campus. (Interview 1)

What's more, Callie asserted,

people seem to be more concerned about what I was doing as opposed to other people. . . . you're just really kind of under a microscope. People pay attention to what you do more, even if someone is doing the exact, another student is doing the exact same thing that you are doing, people pay attention to it more because you are SGA President. (Interview 2)

Moreover, Callie argued that the student government president faced different expectations than the average student. She declared,

I think there's a certain level or a certain expectation of always having to be "on." Like you always have to represent your school, you always have

to, um, be positive, you always have to, um, have a smile on your face and there are times where you know, you're an SGA president, you are just like everybody else. Sometimes you are having a bad day and sometimes you don't want to talk to anybody. Sometimes you just want to deal with your own stuff internally and sometimes you just want to sit in your dorm room and study and do your work and not have to interact with people. You can't do that when you are SGA president. (Interview 1)

In regard to the perception of being held to a higher level of accountability, Callie stated, "I think you do feel like you're accountable to everyone. You are accountable to students, you're accountable to administration" (Interview 1). She went on to say,

I think accountability plays a huge role in the difference between successful and unsuccessful SGA presidents. I think when you realize how accountable you're going to be held, then it's up to you to, to understand if you can handle that responsibility. And I think sometimes we can handle it really great and other times we can't. You know, looking back on my . . . I think that there were sometimes that I did it OK and there were sometimes that I didn't do it so great. Um, but accountability definitely plays a huge, huge role, um, in whether you're going to be successful or not. (Interview 1)

Callie went on say,

I think, you know, SGA presidents who aren't willing to take accountability for what goes on can often times be unsuccessful. Um, I mean, I think, you know, as SGA President, because you are the leader of the group, you have to be able to step up to the plate and, and take heat and um, for decisions that have been made, um, even if they weren't necessarily your personal decisions or your personal, um, beliefs, you have to be willing to go to bat and be able to support the decisions that your, um, entire board has made. (Interview 2)

Callie described another downside in that she expressed a sense of loss of regarding her free time. Callie mentioned that while she was president, that she "lived in the student center. I mean, that was, I spent more time in the student center than I did in my own dorm room" (Interview 1).

Callie also associated a sense of loss in regards her presidency. She described a loss of time that often estranged them from their families and friends. Callie, for example, expressed that time and energy she committed to her SGA duties hurt her relationships with friends and family members. She stated,

I think it alienated a lot of my friends. A lot of my friends felt like they couldn't really talk to me about stuff as much because I had so much, so many other things on my plate. . . . SGA took up a lot of my time doing other things. Um, I don't know, I mean, I don't think it really affected my relationship at the time because my boyfriend didn't go to [the College]; he went to another school. So, um, I think it mostly affected my friends on campus because I, I wasn't always like readily available or, you know, like if they came into my dorm room, I couldn't always talk, like I needed to do my homework. (Interview 1)

Callie also articulated that a downside to her presidency was that she found it to be very difficult to juggle her commitment to her presidency and her commitment to serving as a resident assistant. She contended,

I kind of felt like I wasn't quite as good of an RA. So, I think it affected some of the girls on my hall because I couldn't spend as much time with them because SGA took up a lot of my time doing other things . . . I wasn't always, like, readily available or, you know, like, if they came into my dorm room, I couldn't always talk, like, I needed to do my homework because I had to do an SGA thing or I had to go do something with the RAs. So, I think that my time wasn't as, as readily available to them as it had been before, so. (Interview 1)

A final downside that Callie associated with her time as student government president at Emerging College was a high level of stress. Callie stated, "it was definitely, it's stress, when you're in an SGA type position, yeah, there's always going to be stress" (Interview 1). She went on to describe how she felt the stress was a negative aspect of her experience as president. She commented, "I remember that being the hardest semester of

my four years. I remember, like, waking up every morning and just being nervous about what was going to be on that other side of my dorm room. It was, like, it was honestly hell” (Interview 1). She went on to describe how the stress of serving as president affected her health and emotional wellbeing. She said, “it was so stressful that it, I mean, there were physical impacts of the stress that it was having on me” (Interview 1).

Furthermore, she said,

I was just extremely stressed out to the point of, you know, getting ulcers and, um, and I think a lot of that really had to do with that fact that I took a lot of what was going on, on campus, um, personally and I was very invested in trying to do what was right for the campus overall. (Interview 1)

Callie attributes her being stressed during her presidency to her possession of insider knowledge of campus politics. She explained,

the crazy part about it is, for me, when the times got really tough, with the pressure of knowing some of that information, um, there’s um, an area, kind of behind campus where . . . I would just go there because no one ever went back there and I would just kind of go to kind of get away from it all and to kind of sort of de-stress. (Interview 1)

Callie also attributes the stress she experienced to the high level of accountability and scrutiny she faced. She stated,

You are accountable to students, you’re accountable to administration. Um, and I think that’s where some of the stress comes in because I think, you’re not, as a student, as a normal student, you’re not, not used to being held accountable to all of those things and having all those expectations. (Interview 1)

She continued, “I think that’s where the majority of the stress comes in, and I think accountability plays a huge role in the difference between successful and unsuccessful SGA presidents” (Interview 1). Callie contended,



it was rough, I mean, like I said, I was still, I was a kid. I really was and as much as I wanted to be an adult and as much as I thought I was an adult, I was a kid and I wasn't really prepared or equipped to deal with a lot of the stuff that happened that particular year. And I just, you know, I remember being sad a lot but I, I think a lot of people thought that my sadness was because, um, I was SGA president or it was sadness because of, you know, maybe things that were going on in my personal life. (Interview 1)

She went on to state,

All those tears, all those blow ups were because [the College] was truly a place that I love and I was 150 percent passionate about the place and I felt like I had no control over all of the crap that was going on at the current time. And I just felt like my school was being torn apart and I just didn't know what to do about it. And I was miserable, and that's where I think a lot of the tears and a lot of the blow ups came from. (Interview 1)

Callie described how she coped with stress in a number of different ways. She stated,

there were times when I just needed to get off campus to just deal. Like, I just needed to be away where I, like, I just needed to have silent time to really just kind of, reflect on the things that happened. I wrote a lot in my journal just because I needed to get it out and I needed to be able to just have it out there but I didn't really need to talk to anyone, um, about it. Um, I think for me those were the two biggest ways that I, um, coped. (Interview 1)

### *Race*

It is to be noted that Callie was Emerging College's second African American and first African American female to serve as student government president. Callie disclosed that while attending a predominately white higher education institution, as an African American, she struggled with fitting in to some degree, but that she strived to not let her race and her minority status interfere with her experience. Callie stated,

I went to a predominately white school in the north Georgia mountains so, you know, obviously, you know, being at Emerging College I definitely ran into some adversity and, you know, for some people I was the first black person they had ever met and interacted with. Um, and so, that's

fine, you know, I didn't, I really tried my hardest not to think about that so much. (Interview 1)

She went on to testify, "I've always lived my life and like, I'm Callie, I am who I am. African, being African American is a part of who I am but it does not define who I am" (Interview 1).

Callie also felt that there were different expectations for her as an African American. She admitted, "I do think there was a little bit of a different set of expectations" (Interview 1). However it is interesting to note that she perceived that those higher expectations were from the most part from other African American students. Callie stated, "Definitely there was a different expectations by the African American students because I think the African American students felt like I needed to put African American student's interest above all other student's interest" (Interview 1).

In regards to how her race influenced her relationship with the college's administration she asserts, "there was definitely an expectation um, there. I think that, for the most part, I think that, that, I would like to think that the administration didn't care so much about that fact that I was African American" (Interview 1). However she does acknowledge that "There were a few um, people that really felt like I was not going to good job strictly because of the fact that I was African American" (Interview 1).

### *Relationships*

During the course of the interviews Callie characterized a number of the relationships she had with members of the college community while serving as president of the Student Government Association. Callie considered serving as president as a

means to build relationships with members of the campus community and to take action to better it. She stated that she was “able to interact with the community, um, and doing some of the things that we did in the community, I thought, um, were kind of cool” (Interview 1). She went on to explain that her experience “allowed me to, um, not only get involved with students on campus but it also got, helped me to get involved with faculty and administration on campus” (Interview 1).

Callie described her relationship with the college’s staff as “pretty good just because I was involved in so many different things” (Interview 1). She went on to declare, “I had a great relationship with, um, with [the Vice President for Enrollment Services and Student Affairs] and his entire staff” (Interview 1). Moreover, she contended, “I felt like enrollment management, student affairs in general, I had a pretty good relationship with them. Like, I felt like those were the people that understood my pain, that understood what I was going through” (Interview 1). Concerning members of the college’s staff beyond those in student affairs Callie described her relationship with them as positive, but said,

alumni relations, development, they were, to me, they were just like a whole different bag of chips. Like, they were just, they were kind of their own entity. And it wasn’t because they didn’t understand, it was just that they operated more so on a college being a business whereas student affairs really dealt with a college as a college and interacting with the students. (Interview 1)

In a similar fashion, Callie felt she did not connect to and have understanding with the members of the board of trustees. She declared,

It’s hard to even describe that because it was really kind of a surreal moment because I would sit in those meetings and I would listen. And I

would listen to what the president had to say and I would listen to the board of trustees' response and I just remember sitting there thinking, like, wow, they really just don't get it. Like, they really just don't get what we go through as students and they don't really understand where our true needs are. (Interview 1)

Regarding the board of trustees, Callie went on to state,

Um, I just remember thinking, like, they were just all so disconnected. Um, and I just, I particularly remember the chairman of the board, who, um, I just really felt like he just really relied on everything that the president said and he really had no clue what the students were going through. (Interview 1)

Callie then asserted,

And, and I really felt like the board of trustees really got very much a one-sided account of what was going on every day on campus. They didn't really see the true picture. And I just remember sitting there, just kind of being frustrated and kind of, um, just wanting to stand up and be, like, "You know what, I'm a student and the majority of stuff that has been said is completely untrue. This is how things really are on campus and this is why they, things are currently in the state that they are." And so, um, for me that was, that was difficult. (Interview 1)

Callie concluded her remarks about the board of trustees,

I only remember about two board of trustees members who were really interested in what the students thought and who would actually ask me questions because there were plenty of times in those meetings where I was not asked a single question. No one would even acknowledge the fact that I was in the room because they didn't really care about the student opinion. There, I can count on my hand how many of the board of trustees members were actually concerned, um, about it. (Interview 1)

In regards to her relationship with the student government advisor, Callie was quick to admit that she considered it necessary for the Student Government Association to have an advisor to guide them. She stated, "I think at first it was a little chaotic because we were like, "What the hell are we supposed to do? Like, we need an advisor"

(Interview 1). Callie went on to discuss the importance of the advisor understanding his or her role and being able to balance their casual and working relationships with the SGA president. She contended,

I think that sometimes, for some advisors, they don't know how to balance that. They are more concerned with whether students like them than rather, over whether students have respect and are actually listening to what they are saying. . . . Like, [the advisor] listen[ed] to what we had to say but [the advisor was] also like, "You know what, at the end of the day, this is how it has to be and this is what we're working with and we have to have, to find a way to make it work." . . . [The advisor] might have been concerned about it, like that wasn't [the advisor's] main concern. [The advisor's] main concern was getting the job done at the end of the day. (Interview 1)

Callie takes this thought further,

I think it's a really fine balance. I think a good advisor has to understand how to be flexible but also has to understand that you have to have the respect of students, and it's cool to have students like you, but at the end of the day, like, you don't have to be best friends with the students because sometimes when that happens, they'll try to walk over you. (Interview 1)

Beside the value of an advisor being able to balance his or her relationship with their advisees, Callie also stressed the significance of an advisor's longevity and willingness to serve in that role for the long-haul. She stated,

And I think that, um, there were a lot of people who maybe would have held their own but would have been long gone and, and [the advisor was] still there and [the advisor was] still constantly trying to make SGA better and student affairs better. And, I think that, that that definitely, definitely stood out to me. (Interview 1)

Callie described her relationship as president with her peers serving on her executive board as being challenging and at times strained. Callie, she declared that the primary difficulty she faced while serving as president was the burden of trying to lead

other students who were her closest friends. She asserted, “I think the two biggest challenges were the two people on the board that I was the closest friends” (Interview 1).

She further clarified by candidly saying,

Even though they are your friends, like, they have to understand that, you know, they have to respect the decisions you are making. And with both of them, you know, I talked to them in like, in you know, would say, “Listen, I’m not trying to be a dictator, I’m not trying to say that every opinion that I have is correct. But when we are in meetings together just respect the fact that I’m the person who’s running the meeting and that I’m the person that ultimately is going to have the response. Follow me because they are going to ask me when I go to a board of trustees meetings or they are going to ask me, you know, if it’s something from the administration. So, you just have to trust that I kind of know what I’m doing.” (Interview 1)

Callie went on to describe how she struggled and learned to balance her role as a friend and the burden on being the leader of SGA. She stated,

It was oftentimes hard, too, to conduct meetings because, you know, people thought of me as more of a friend and as so nice that they could say whatever they wanted or do whatever, um, they wanted. And so, you know, I think there were definitely a few, um, difficulties, but I think that was really in the beginning. I think it, I think toward the end, that really didn’t happen as much. (Interview 2)

Callie, for one, could only say positive things about her relationship with the faculty at Emerging College. She declared, “the faculty: that’s the reason I came to Emerging College, and the faculty remained amazing. I mean, they were some of the strongest people that I had ever met and some of the greatest people” (Interview 1).

However, because of her close relationship with the faculty and the hostile political clash between the college president and the faculty at the time of her presidency, this positive relationship turned into a negative experience for her. As president of the student body, in “no-man’s land,” between these two warring factions, Callie explained,

I found myself more as a student government president worrying about the faculty and how the faculty were treated than actually worrying about student issues. Um, and so, um, which I mean, to me, you know, faculty issues, if faculty aren't happy, that does indirectly affect students. (Interview 1)

She went on to describe how, because she was placed in an awkward, difficult, and unnerving situation, she was burdened with a significant amount of stress, which she was ill-equipped to handle. She stated,

And, you know, I, like I can't, like when I think, when I think back on my [the College] experience and I think about the faculty, like, sometimes it makes me just want to cry because there were plenty of times where I just wanted to quit and I just wanted to leave [the College] and the only reason that I stayed was because of the faculty. (Interview 1)

Callie described her relationship with the College president, while president of SGA, as being awkward and complicated. She depicted their relationship as being unpleasant and horrible. Callie went so far as to represent her relationship with the college president as adversarial. To provide context: During Callie's presidency, Emerging College was in a significant state of upheaval and controversy, and a systemic level of discontent surrounded the College president. During the middle of her presidency, the college's faculty senate took a no-confidence vote on both the College president and the College's vice president for academic affairs. The internal campus politics and turmoil created an environment of tension and hostility with the students and, in particular, the student body president was caught between warring factions on campus. The resolution to the growing discontent over the College president's management style was that the student body, working through Callie, and in collaboration with the faculty leadership, orchestrated his termination by the Board of Trustees. Callie admitted that the

intense environment on campus resulted in both emotional and physical strain for her.

That being said, even though Callie described her experience with the College president as overwhelmingly negative, she did state that her initial response was positive, for a short time. She said,

I think it started off being good. Um, but I think that when I was SGA president that kind of was when it started off being good, that was before he really started rocking the boat a whole lot. Um, I think eventually, it was pretty bad, and, and I don't know that it was pretty bad with the administration. I know that it was pretty bad with the president. (Interview 1)

Callie described her relationship with the College president as being discouraging and maddening. She asserted,

I felt really frustrated by what had gone on that year, and I was mostly frustrated with [the College president] because I felt like, because of the environment that he created, we focused so much so trying to correct that, that there were other issues that we probably should have been participating in a taking care of, that we didn't get to because our time and energy was spent on trying to diffuse that situation. (Interview 2)

She went on to explain her dissatisfaction by contending,

I was frustrated by that because I felt like, you know, our legacy as, in SGA was that we got rid of the president when our legacy should have been more that we actually did some things to really empower the student body. (Interview 2)

In an effort to describe how unhealthy the relationship between Callie and the College president had become during her presidency, she stated,

I distinctively remember, um, towards the end of my senior year, he called me in his office to talk to him and I remember him recording our conversation because he felt that students and faculty were attacking him and so he wanted to, to have everything on the record. And I just kind of remember thinking to myself, like, I'm a 19 year old kid, like, you feel



that threatened by me that you have to record what we're saying? I just remember really kind of taking offense to that. (Interview 1)

She went on to describe the substance of her remarks during that conversation. She asserted,

I told him that I really felt like he was tearing the school apart, um, and that he wasn't listening to what the faculty had to say and he wasn't listening to what the students had to say, and that it wasn't a one-man-show, that all of us played a, a huge role in how [the College] went, and, and that he didn't understand that. I told him, you know, I was very frustrated by that. (Interview 1)

Callie concluded her comments about her relationship as the student government president with the College president by stating, "I mean, there were definitely times towards the end of my year that, to walk into the president's office made me nauseous" (Interview 1).

### *Personal Characteristics*

During the course of her interviews, Callie identified a number of personal characteristics that she felt were essential for a student government president to possess. Callie articulated that a person seeking the presidency must be passionate about the institution and the members of its community. Callie focused on her zeal for the College as she stated the College "was truly a place that I love and I was one 150 percent passionate about the place" (Interview 1).

Callie also conveyed the need for SGA presidents to have an inquisitive nature. She explained how she intentionally sought to break down barriers between students and the college's administration by continually questioning the policies, programs, and actions of the administration. She stated,

I think I really wanted to break down that line between administration and students because I think that, when I was SGA president, there was a very clear line of, “You’re a student, you fit into this box and you don’t question so much what the administration does.” Um, and from the administration’s standpoint, “You’re an administrator and you don’t really have to care so much about what the students opinion is.” And so, I really wanted to kind of break down that line and I think in some ways, I did that. (Interview 1)

Another character trait that Callie identified was being a risk-taker. Callie referred to risk taking as stepping outside one’s comfort zone. She described this trait: “I think of leadership as someone who is really willing to kind of step out of their comfort zone. Um, someone who’s, who understands that they may have to go against the grain of what everyone else thinks” (Interview 1). Callie went on to state,

I think anybody who is going to be a leader has to understand that they have to step out of their comfort zone, um, and you have to step out and you have to take risks. Um, I think some of the greatest leaders have taken some of the greatest risks ever. I mean, Gandhi wasn’t a great leader because he wasn’t willing to take risks. You know, same thing as Martin Luther King—they, they were people who were willing to take risks and they were willing to go against the tide, and because they were willing to do that, they were able to bring about great change, um, in the world. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to describe how being a risk taker is an important element in one’s ability to be a successful student government president. She stated, “I also see the student government president’s role as the person who is open, who is willing to step out of the comfort zone . . .” (Interview 1). Callie clarified:

As SGA President, because you are the leader of the group, you have to be able to step up to the plate and, and take heat and, um, for decisions that have been made, um, even if they weren’t necessarily your personal decisions or your personal, um, beliefs, you have to be willing to go to bat and be able to support the decisions that your, um, entire board has made. (Interview 2)

Callie claimed that she came into the presidency with the trait of being a risk taker. She said, “I was just kind of always the type of person that was just like, well, if no one else is going to do anything about it, like, why don’t I do something about it”

(Interview 1)? However, Callie also acknowledged that her presidency helped to strengthen this character trait. She contended,

It was, it was still, it was the best year and I think a lot of that had to do with SGA because it really did stretch me outside of my comfort zone in a lot of ways. It really did. (Interview 1)

In simplest terms, Callie, said “I just remember thinking that this would be a way for me to give back” (Interview 2). In the end, Callie described her sense of civic responsibility in the following way. She stated,

All of the things that I got involved in really were connected to helping people and getting to understand, you know, the dynamics of [the College] and what [the College] meant not only to students, but also what [the College] meant to the community and the impact that they had on the community and so, I think that was my motivation for getting involved in all those things . . . . (Interview 1)

During her interview, Callie linked the importance of being a listener to the presidency. She described the student government president as kind of a “go-between person between the students and the administration” (Interview 1). Callie went on to clarify, “I think that, that, that they are the, they represent the person who listens to what the students need, needs are but they also listen to what the administration’s needs are” (Interview 1). She also admitted, through her presidency, she “learned that I also had to listen to other people’s thoughts and the other ideas that they were bringing, um, to the table” (Interview 1). Callie even went so far as to attribute this trait to being a great

leader. She stated, “a great leader knows how to take the input from everyone else” (Interview 1).

Callie regarded being outspoken as not only a character trait, but a responsibility of an engaged and active citizen and leader and especially a student government president. She stated, “I’ve always, um, kind of been taught that if you complain about something, you need to have some type of a solution to it” (Interview 2). Callie further said, “I just felt like, if I’m going to complain about stuff, um, I might as well go ahead and try to make an effort to change it” (Interview 2). She concluded her thoughts on being outspoken by reasoning,

It’s kind of like the theory of, if you don’t vote, you can’t complain. Um, so I figured, I wasn’t necessarily pleased with a lot of things that were going on, so what a great opportunity for me to try to change some of those things. (Interview 2)

### *Roles*

Through the course of the two interviews, Callie described a number of essential roles that the student government president must fulfill. One such role was as an engager of others. Callie declared that a president must be able to engage others. She stated, “I’m the type of leader that I want everyone to be involved. I want everyone to play some type of role in it” (Interview 1). She went on explain how she disliked idle individuals in the student government. She wanted to not only delegate but empower others to act. She contended, “I don’t want there to be like two or three work horses and then everyone else is just kind of laying back and hanging out . . .” (Interview 1). She went on to assert, “I

think really trying to be a motivator and being enthusiastic and trying to get them to see like this is . . . important, let's all get on board" (Interview 1).

Callie also described how she believes the role of the president should operate as a mediator between campus groups. She explained,

I really feel like the role of the student government president is to really, kind of be that go-between person between the students and the administration. I think that they are the . . . the person who listens to what the students needs . . . but they also listen to what the administration needs are. (Interview 1)

She expounded, "I think I really wanted to break down that line between administration and student" (Interview 1). Callie went on to state,

As SGA president I saw the divide between administration and student. I wanted to be that person who I felt could understand where students were coming from but also could implement the needs of the administration and really try to be able to some way accommodate both. (Interview 1)

Moreover, she said,

I think that balance is important because I think whoever the SGA president is, has to understand that while you do represent the students, and you want to do what's in the best interest of the students, you also have to take into consideration what the administration is looking for, what their goals are. And you have to somehow find a way to make the administration see where the students are coming from and the students see where the administration is coming from. (Interview 2)

Callie explained that another role of the student government president was an advocate and champion when she stated,

I also see the student government president's role as the person who is open, who is willing to step out of the comfort zone, to listen to what students really have to say, and not only listen, but be able to go back and say that to the administration with the same intensity and passion that the students who are telling this to the student government president have. I think that's really, that's really important. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to stress the importance of the role of advocate for the presidency. She asserted, “You get to voice your opinion to [the] administration that other students wouldn’t have the opportunity to do” (Interview 2). She also explained her reasons for seeking the presidency, which relate to the role of the president as an advocate. She stated, “my two big reasons for wanting to be involved in student government were because I felt like, not only would it give a chance for people to hear my voice, but more importantly, it would give the administration a chance to really hear the voice of the general student body” (Interview 1). Callie also mentioned the import of seeking out and exploring the ideas of others and advocating those ideas to the College’s administration. She contended, “I made it a point to talk to different groups of people and to see what their opinions are and to really try to get to the administration and tell them these are some of their concerns” (Interview 1).

Furthermore, Callie portrayed the role of an SGA president as a cheerleader: She stated “I think really trying to be a motivator and being enthusiastic and trying to get them [students, faculty, and staff] . . . on board” (Interview 1). Callie also referred to the role of the president as a cheerleader in that she argued that they must also serve as a public relations person for the college. She contended,

When you are SGA president, even though there may be things going on, on campus that you maybe don’t always understand or that you don’t agree with, I think you still have to try as best as you can to put a positive spin on things. And to give students a sense of knowing that even though things may not be perfect, that they’re going to be ok, and make them feel comfortable and making them feel good about the decision they made to attend [the College]. (Interview 2)

Last, Callie described the president's responsibility of being a mentor by stating, "I think it plays a huge role because I think if you mentor the people that come after you, then you're setting them up for success" (Interview 1). She went on to assert,

I think it is important to help mentor those students because when you mentor them, they get to really see what you did and what your vision was and how to implement that into their vision and to kind of continue the vision on as a long-term goal. (Interview 1)

In regard to her cultivating a successor, she maintained, "I think that was a huge part of [George] being so successful . . . that he was well prepared to deal with anything that would come his way" (Interview 1).

George

### *Profile*

George served as the president of the Student Government Association from 2001 to 2002, is a white male, and was traditional-aged student. He was strong student with over a 3.85 GPA, and he majored in liberal studies with a concentration in English. He was born and raised in a middle-class, Protestant Georgia family. He was in his early 20s and a senior during his time as president. George comes from an academic family—his father is a professor at a regional public university. George was active on campus as a student leader, serving for three years as the student coordinator of the orientation program and one year as a residence hall representative on the senate. One of his many accomplishments was the establishment of a fall festival, which brought the campus community together. George was highly organized, and worked well with others, but he tended to procrastinate. Following his term as president, he pursued a master's in divinity

and became an Episcopal priest. He currently serves a dual role as an assistant rector for a small Episcopal church and as a college chaplain for a regional public institution.

### *The Experience*

George describes his experience as a student government president as “fun, it was surprisingly fun” (Interview 1). He continued by saying that “I don’t know if I can pinpoint a worst part because it ended up being a pretty wonderful experience” (Interview 1). George explained that he doesn’t “want, I don’t want to make it sound like, you know, student government was, was the beginning of the rest of my life and everything has been tied to those experiences and everything, but you can, you can see where the threads have carried through” (Interview 1).

Also, George associated personal growth with his experience as student government president, particularly in the areas of enhanced self-confidence and self-efficacy. George stated that he had “gone from being kind of apprehensive and, and cautious and hesitant and unsure of my own abilities . . .” (Interview 1). He went on to state that “I was very, very timid when I came to [the College]. My self esteem was not the highest” (Interview 2). And, that during his presidency that he became “assertive more than I had ever been in my life” (Interview 1). He said that during his presidency he determined that he “finally had to decide to stop being such a sissy and just kind of get in there and, and, and put to work the gifts that I had been given” (Interview 1).

George stated that what challenged him most about being president was “working with people I didn’t trust” (Interview 1). He went on to say that being president allowed him to think about dealing with others and how he desired to be perceived as a leader.



George stated, “we sort of learn how we don’t want to be by seeing other people do what we know that we don’t want to do” (Interview 1). “And, and having to work with people who are difficult to work with” enhanced his interpersonal skills, which have benefited him as an Episcopal priest (Interview 1).

George described his experience as president of the Student Government Association as being isolated from others and led him to have an acute sense of loneliness. He stated,

with leadership, I mean, there are times when you have to be cautious and you can’t just always wear your heart on your sleeve and expose yourself completely to everyone and be vulnerable all the time and this is one of the great struggles of being a priest now is that, you know, I mean, I have few people um, to whom I can take my burdens and be completely transparent. (Interview 1)

He went on to say that “it was little bit of a lonely year” and that “I think that leadership is lonely” (Interview 1). Moreover, George refers to his “experience of leadership . . . is that it, it involves a certain loneliness and um, it involves a certain broken heartedness . . . ” (Interview 2).

He also mentioned being held accountable as a leader of others as an issue he faced as president. He said,

It was also, at the same time, um, very, uh, frustrating at times because um, um, because there was, you know, there was no blank check, you know. Like it was the first time that, that I had to be really, truly accountable for, for leading a group of people. (Interview 1)

On a similar note, George associated an emotional toll with his time as president. He declared, “the whole experience from top to bottom was just absolutely exhausting” (Interview 2).

George also reported feeling stressed during his presidency. He felt that it was a positive kind of stress. He asserted, “I do remember there being a lot of stress, but it was positive stress, you know. I mean, it was, we knew that we were doing something good and I had, I had really good people to work with” (Interview 1). George went on to state that fulfilling the role of president,

did produce a lot of stress and again, because of my difficulties with procrastination, I mean, there’s a lot of stress . . . that I come by, honestly. Um, and I acknowledge that more readily now than I did then. Um, so yeah, there was a lot of stress and, and there were, there were stress factors that, that did, you know, that came out of the time that I was spending on student government that affected my academic life. Um, and you know, my senior thesis and stuff like that but, but again, it was a positive stress. Um, we, we knew that it was for a reason, that it was; it was going to go well. (Interview 1)

Moreover, he contended,

I just think that, you know, um, stress . . . growth comes out of stress, um, at least, you know, when you are talking about self development and, and group development. Um, I, I think that, that if everything remains a constant, than there’s very little room for growth. (Interview 2)

George went on to insist,

things can be very stressful but, um, but it, you know, I, I think that if you, if you look, if you look at stress and the things that are causing that stress in the life of a person or in the life of a group, as opportunities for growth, um, then, or, or, or as a result of growth, I mean, you know, it um, then I think that, that really, you do well to consider it a positive. Um, and so, perhaps it has to do with, with one’s perception. (Interview 2)

In a roundabout fashion, George also acknowledged that as president of SGA he felt there was a struggle to find a balance between the needs and concerns of the student body and those of the college faculty and administration. However, in the end, he admitted that, the scales leaned more toward the student body. He stated,

I felt like, um, whatever we had been through, the two years before, um, that we could emerge stronger and that students had a role to play in that, that no matter how the faculty were feeling, and the administration, all that was up in the air. (Interview 1)

George felt that he had difficulty in balancing his role as president with other aspects of his life. He stated, “you know, that came out of the time that I was spending on student government that affected my academic life. Um, and you know, my senior thesis and stuff like that . . .” (Interview 1). He went on to describe the presidency,

It’s not the kind of position where there are clear-set hours, and so, you know, um, I could pour myself into stuff probably more than was required and not take very good care of myself both, you know, on a, on a health level but also on an academic level and, and just, and in the sense of keeping my life in order, keeping things balanced. (Interview 1)

George also revealed that, “endless hours were consumed through that. Um, as, as a student government president, as a senior, actually most of my memories are located in, in the, uh, the student activities building. Very few memories are from class” (Interview 1). Moreover, George stated,

all I can say, um, is that my academic work, my academic work was affected, um, but there was a whole lot of room given to me by my teachers, um, in a way that, probably was not completely legitimate on their part but I think they were supportive. (Interview 2)

### *Relationships*

Through the course of his interviews, George described a number of his relationship with members of the college community including staff, faculty, trustees, his peers, and the college president. From George’s perspective the relationship between the student government association and particularly the student government presidency and the college’s staff as positive. He stated,

we had a, a good working relationship, um, with lots of mutual respect and again, you know, as I said before, there were plenty of frustrations that came out of, you know, um, the kind of cultivating that you guys were doing um, with, with us and with me in particular and, and some of the disagreements that were bound to occur, but to me they all were positive. (Interview 1)

In regard to the members of the marketing department, he contended his reaching out was intentional in his efforts to develop a positive relationship with them. He stated,

those folks, um, they were fun to be around. And, plus I figured out, pretty quickly that, um, they were good to be around as the student government president because they were the ones writing the stories about the college. And so, I thought, well, I might be able to, you know, put some of our positive spin in on that but also they were seeking me out because they needed a quick little quote from the student government president. (Interview 1)

In regards to his relationship with the College's Board of Trustees as positive.

George stated "I loved being on the board" (Interview 1). However, George did admit that he was initially overawed by being among them. He asserted,

that was actually kind of nerve-racking, you know, because I didn't want to, I didn't want to be an idiot in front of them, or whatever. And I thought, you know, I mean, I am just this, this 20 year old kid and these are executives and, and these are the CEOs. (Interview 1)

Though he acknowledged he was initially awed by the trustees, George quickly overcame his hesitance and developed a positive rapport with them. He stated, "I think that I cultivated, I can say this now, I wouldn't have been able to see it or say it then, but I think that I cultivated a certain amount of respect among the board . . ." (Interview 1). He went on to say, "I thought that it was a good relationship . . ." (Interview 1).

Furthermore, George described his relationship with the members of the board of trustees as

collegial and it was just, you know, and I was, I've, there was this kind of really cool feeling that, like, you know, here I am, I'm just this little kid at a, at a small college, um, and, and these people who are, you know, who carry some influence in the world, um, in their various, uh, vocations, um, sort of seem to, to respect what was coming out of my mouth. You know, that on a, on a very personal level, um, that was, that was really, that was neat . . . . (Interview 1)

On the topic of the student government advisor, George illustrated how he felt the role of the advisor was to hold the president responsible for his or her actions and words.

He contended,

Like, it was the first time that, that I had to be really, truly accountable for, for leading a group of people, but also, you know, being led by someone, um, or someone's and, um, you know, looking back on it, [the advisor] did such a good job with that. (Interview 1)

George went on to explain the import he placed on the advisors holding the presidents accountable but at the same time using those times as teachable moments. He said,

he cared about me but he was also someone who would hold me to account if, um, if I did something that, that he was unhappy with, or whatever, which, you know, I don't think happened a whole lot but when I did, he would say, ok, we got to talk about this. And, and he would hold me to account. Um, but use that moment to teach me. (Interview 1)

Regarding his relationship as student government president with peers on his executive board, George acknowledged that he found those relationships to be at times challenging. He admits that he enjoyed working with the members of SGA, especially those serving on the executive board. He simply stated, "I had really good people to work with" (Interview 1). And, "there were some really outstanding senators" (Interview 1). However, he also admitted that he struggled with the different personalities of those on

the executive board and with establishing his authority and standing with his peers regarding his role and responsibilities as president. George contended,

I was very clear that year. Even though, I mean, once I stepped into the role, and once I was student government president, although I had not wanted it, I said, “All right, then I will be the student government president,” and was, you know, had to sort of make it clear [who was president and who was] not the president. (Interview 1)

George described how he struggled while working with and leading a diverse group of people. He asserted, “the year of my student government presidency, um, was the first time that I ever had to really work closely with, with people with whom I disagreed or whom I just didn’t like. I mean, that just annoyed me” (Interview 1). He went on to say,

I think every, every student government president probably has to deal with that, but that was a first for me because I couldn’t hand pick everybody, you know. Um, and, and if, you know, I mean, dictatorship is a wonderful, if you are the dictator. (Interview 1)

When asked what challenged him the most as student body president, George responded that he attempted to pursue his goals and objectives while he struggled to retain order and authority within his own executive board. George admitted that he struggled with “working with people I didn’t trust” (Interview 1). One such person that he struggled with was Trent, who was on his executive board. Trent, who the following year would be elected as president, served as George’s vice president. George described the power struggle that existed between the two. George stated that Trent “was my constant thorn in the side. Um, and I, I liked the boy, um, but didn’t trust him too much” (Interview 1). George went on to say, “not that I thought that he going to completely sabotage anything, but as I said before, I, I knew that he was, um, saying disparaging things about me and

about my leadership and about, you know, all of that kind of stuff, um, behind my back” (Interview 1). This notion of struggling for authority is similar with the experience that Callie had as president the previous year.

Although George at times struggled with working with individuals serving on in the executive board and on the senate who had different views and opinions, and at times vied for power, he readily stated that he developed a number of positive working relationships and friendships. George talked a length about his constructive relationships with the treasurer and secretary. He stated, “I could not have asked for, um, a better person to be on my executive board than Jill. Um, she was my right-hand person, even though she was the secretary. Um, there was a lot of trust and rapport there” (Interview 1). George went on to assert that Jill “was the, the perfect complement for who I was and where I was and, um, the skills that I lacked, she more than made up for . . .” (Interview 1). He took it a step further by stating, “to this day, um, you know, I really sort of think that she would have and could have been, um, the right student government president that year” (Interview 1). In regard to the treasurer, George described Pam as being a lot of fun and someone who liked to push barriers. He said that Pam “just kind of came and voiced her opinion, and she was funny about it and, um, and I liked the fact that, you know, I mean, Lindy and I were like such little goody-goodies and Sophie was real different” (Interview 1). George went on to declare, that Pam was “somebody I would never have gotten to know quite so well if she hadn’t been on there. So, I mean, really, my relationship to her was that she just kind of made things fun” (Interview 1).

Even though George said that he was challenged by the internal political power struggle of one of his executive board members, he felt that his group collaborated and worked effectively together. He stated,

On the whole, though, we worked pretty well together. We were a fairly cohesive group, um, even with that under current of, um, distrust between me and Trent, I know Jill also felt that way, um, but still I mean, we've, we were pretty cohesive. We made it work. (Interview 1)

George claimed to have a positive relationship with the faculty of Emerging College. He contended that his productive relationship with faculty members existed “long before I became student government president, I had developed a good rapport with them” (Interview 1). He went on to state, “there were . . . some faculty with whom I was extremely close, um, particularly as the student government president” (Interview 1). George figures that his positive relationship with the faculty members was due to SGA not pushing an aggressive agenda during his time as president. He stated,

And as far as, you know, my work with, as the student government president, um, because of the nature of our goals and what we were trying to accomplish, we weren't having to push through anything really difficult with them, so there wasn't that kind of working relationship that I'm sure other student government presidents had to cultivate or should have cultivated. (Interview 1)

The agenda that George did advocate with the faculty was one of reconciliation of the campus community. He asserted, “I just had conversations like we had always had but they had, had more to do with the college itself and restoring competence” (Interview 1). He maintained, “Um, for us, we were trying to do the exact same thing with and for them that we were doing for everybody else, and that was to create a positive culture” (Interview 1).



Although George contended that he had a positive relationship with many faculty members, he also felt that faculty members could also be difficult and fractious when they felt the students were encroaching on their territory. He stated, “I thought the faculty could be pretty bitchy about stuff . . .” (Interview 1). This negative perception at times soured George’s relationship with many faculty members.

On the subject of his relationship with the College president during his tenure as student government president, George describes it as complex. George experienced three different College presidents during his time as a student at Emerging College, each of who had distinctly different leadership styles. George explains, “I came when Dr. Franklin was president and I really, you know, I mean, he seemed like a wonderful and genuine man. I also thought, wow, this, this country bumpkin is something else” (Interview 1). He went on to describe Dr. Franklin’s management style by arguing, “from Dr. Franklin, um, I learned that . . . charm can get you far in certain places. Um, and I think it’s got to be genuine, and I think for him it was genuine” (Interview 2).

George went on to describe his experience with his second College President, Dr. Newton. He asserted,

Then we got, um, Dr. Newton in and I was actually very excited initially about him because I thought, “This guy’s really different.” Um, he’s not a country bumpkin. Um, he’s something, he’s something different and he seems very decisive and, um, and seems to, to carry his authority well. Um, but as time went on, things seemed out of place and didn’t seem to add up to, to me and to lots of others. (Interview 1)

In short, George stated, “well, there’s plenty that I learned not to do from Dr. Newton” (Interview 2).

George then put into words his relationship with his third College President, Dr. Luther who served as the interim president while George was student government president. He asserted, “Luther . . . he was a competent, you know, um, interim president. He was just good at that and being, being the interim anywhere is not an easy role and I thought he did it well” (Interview 1). George went on to contend,

[From] Luther, I learned that one of the most valuable things in leadership is, um, um, a something that, that I have since learned to call um, non-anxious presence, um, that calm centeredness and self awareness that comes from many people after years and years and years and years of leadership. Um, and that, you know, he, and, and its what I, I know part of your question was, you know, what was I looking for in a president. Um, what I was looking for in an interim president . . . is . . . someone who can be a calm, centered anchor for people in the midst of transition; and he was that. (Interview 2)

Although George respected and held Dr. Luther in high regard as an interim president, George also felt in some measure slighted by Dr. Luther. He explained,

I found his, um, his approach to me as the student government president, somewhat patronizing. Um, and I, you know, its, um, I, I think that he just had different priorities and he wasn't there to, to sort of, um, increase the, the capacity or the role of the, the student government president, um, by having a voice on the board or by, you know, meeting with me on a regular basis or whatever. Um, and not that I rarely ever sought that out or expected it, um, I didn't think that I would be having weekly meetings with the president, or whatever. Um, though, now, as I look back, I sort of think, well, you know, maybe college presidents would do well to do that with their presidents; um, their student body presidents. (Interview 1)

George went on to clarify that even though he felt at times that Dr. Luther was condescending or denigrating toward the student government president that he had a positive relationship with Dr. Luther in relation to his role as an interim College President. He asserted,

so it was a little patronizing but I trusted in his leadership, as a college president, um, and was not dissatisfied with what was going on. Whereas I had been so extremely dissatisfied the year before, but I let that go. Um, and so, you know, overall, it was a positive experience. . . . I couldn't have asked for anything more. (Interview 1)

Through his interviews, George put in plain words what he believed an ideal college president should be like. He stated,

In a broader sense, what I was looking for in a president was someone who um, seemed honest, um, and, and I think with that comes the, um, the, the role of, um, consensus builder and someone who, at least makes people think that, that he or she is interested in what they're thinking and worrying about. (Interview 2)

George further described the characteristics of an ideal college president by asserting, "I also wanted someone who could play [the College] game, um, someone who valued the mission of the place. And it's funny, you know, again, I think that is tied up with listening to, to people with building consensus . . ." (Interview 2)

#### *Personal Characteristics*

Through discussing his experience as a student government president, George highlighted a number of personal characteristics that he felt were essential for a student government president. George stressed a strong sense of integrity was needed by presidents. He stated that he attempted to maintain a moral code as president. He claimed, "I still tried to keep . . . a code of integrity and honesty that had sort of been built into me through life in the church and through my parents, especially my dad" (Interview 1). George described the importance that sense of integrity played in a presidency. He contended,

honesty and integrity . . . I mean obviously we would, you know, we would always say that we wanted those from any elected leader and anybody or in any government, but I think that within the context of student government at [the College] specifically you know . . . So, I feel like the president has to be able to make every good attempt to embody that. We will all fail from time to tome, but I think that those are crucial. (Interview 1)

George went on to maintain,

I think that if you have the honesty and the integrity first, that people will sort of say, “OK, here’s somebody who, who’s vision I like, or if I don’t like it, I at least trust this person enough to, to give my own two cents and let’s see where we can go from here.” Um, I sort of put all of those on equal footing. (Interview 1)

In a similar fashion, George contended that his presidency was effective because he was able to develop relationships across campus that built on “mutual respect”

(Interview 1).

Another character trait that George revealed that he too felt that it was important that the president possess an inquisitive nature. He explained that as president, he had a “proclivity . . . toward kind of trying to be creative, put things together in interesting ways, and see what kind of meaning was created out of all that” (Interview 1).

George also argued that being a risk taker and, more important, possessing the confidence to expose oneself to ambiguity are important personal characteristics of someone who desires to be a leader and, more specifically, a president of a student government association. He asserted,

I think that . . . part of leadership as much as I talk about servant leadership and everything, is that you, you’ve got to acknowledge the fact that you can do it. Um, and go on out there, and, and put yourself, um, on the line and, and see what happens, and give it your best shot. (Interview 1)

Moreover, George contended,

I think the people who don't take that risk, um, you know, end up, um, feeling a little bit unfulfilled um, because I think, I think, I think it's not just that everybody wants to make a difference in the world. (Interview 1)

George admitted that he felt that he did not possess the confidence to be a risk taker when he began his presidency but that it developed over his presidency. George divulged,

Someone there who said, you know, um, "You aren't very sure about your leadership abilities but we are, so stop being such a sissy and holding back and just let yourself go." Um, and some of that happened at [the College]. (Interview 1)

He went on to explain, "You know, I finally had to decide to stop being such a sissy and just kind of get in there and, and, and put to work the gifts that I had been given . . ."

(Interview 1). George furthermore explained that he "learned through student government and through being kind of thrust into it, is that you, you have to step up to the plate and make yourself available" (Interview 1).

George considered possessing a significant level of civic responsibility, in particularly the desire to work to improve the lives of others, as an important character trait for student body presidents. He stated, "I define leadership . . . in terms of, of benefiting the greater good of, of the larger group . . ." (Interview 1). He clarified that with student governance,

the concept of leadership was tied to service; that if you're going to be a leader in this organization, you have to be willing to show up early and to stay late and to, to help people be the best that they can be to achieve their best self. (Interview 1)

Through his interviews, George explains that his enlightened sense of civic responsibility originates from his passion for Emerging College. He stated, “it had to do with this love that I had for the institution and the idea that the institution, um, could be, could be more and deserved to be more” (Interview 1). George asserted that the presidency is, “about serving the common good of that particular body . . . that body being the students” (Interview 1). He contended that his aim as president was to “create a positive environment” for the members of the campus community (Interview 1). He went on to declare “we did lots of things I guess, the year that I was president, but that’s the thing that I wanted the most because I wanted people to say, ‘I like being here because I liked being there’” (Interview 1).

George also addressed being outspoken as an essential character for a student government president. He argued a president needs to be assertive regarding his or her own opinions. He readily admitted that, “I know that I was opinionated” (Interview 1) He reasoned that it was an important trait for him as president.

Last, George argued that being passionate about the institution was an essential characteristic for a student government president. He reasoned that his passion for the college was the reason that he sought out and accepted the presidency. He contended, “it had to do with this love that I had for the institution and the idea that the institution, um, could be, could be more and deserved to be more” (Interview 1).

### *Roles*

Through his interviews, George drew attention to a number of roles that he felt that the student government president must fulfill in order to be successful. First, he

believed that a student government president must be an engager. He felt that his chief aim as president was to design a vision for the future in collaboration with the entire student body. He stated,

it was my task to get my four immediate officers to kind of shape up a vision and then bring some other people on board the senate and have them sort of cultivate a vision so that ultimately . . . there's a vision being cultivated by the entire student body and maybe beyond that. (Interview 1)

George also discussed the advocacy role of the student government president. He felt being an advocate for the student body and the college in general was a significant role and responsibility. George also believed that because of his affable and outgoing nature, he was able to effortlessly step into this role during his presidency. He stated,

I think what came easiest to me was, um, being genuinely in love with the college and trying to share that through whatever means, you know, through whatever activity we sponsored or whatever little message we put out or, you know, all that kind of stuff. (Interview 1)

George also identified the role of the student government president as a cheerleader. He asserted,

there's the visionary piece and the other piece was, honestly, to try to be a cheerleader and to cheer on people who were doing good work, whether they were senators or executive board, or whatever, and also to sort of cheer on the institution as a whole. (Interview 1)

George went on to describe how part of the cheerleading role of the president is to nurture the belief of others in the college. He contended, "I think that that year, that year in my mind, at least was, was somewhat unique in that our, our vision had to do with cultivated a confidence in, in the institution and in one another" (Interview 1).

George also discussed the importance of recruiting new members and mentoring future leaders as a role of the student government president. He argued,

the student government really, really ought to be about, um, cultivating leadership from, you know, among the students, grass roots level, bringing students up, um, to, to recognize their own particular gifts and to put them to work for the good of the student body and the institution. (Interview 1)

He went on to contend, “if a community is being a good and diligent community, then it, you know, it ought to be able to recognize leadership and it ought to be able to call that person forward” (Interview 2). George went on to describe his vision for mentoring others, he stated, “the best way to cultivate leadership and to have good programs is to put them in their hands, give them lots of guidance, but to put it in their hands” (Interview 1).

Trent

### *Profile*

Trent served as the president of the Student Government Association from 2002 to 2003, is a white male, and a traditional-aged student. He was 19 years old and a senior when he served as president. He was strong student with a 3.86 GPA, and he majored in religion. He was born and raised in a middle-class, Protestant Georgia family. His parents divorced and a grandparent raised him. He was academically driven and was able to graduate from Emerging College in three years. Trent was ambitious and sought out leadership roles in all organizations in which he was a member. As a new freshman, Trent approached George and the Callie about getting involved. Trent was appointed by Callie to the judicial council as a freshman, and then was elected vice president



underneath George and then was elected president. He has a strong personality, and Trent's leadership style was autocratic and at times dictatorial. He strictly enforced Robert's Rules of Order, and he was hierarchical in his approach to his relationship with other members of the executive board and the senate. During his time in office, the Student Government Association updated its constitution and bylaws and expanded the Senate to include student organization representatives. In addition, Trent assisted in the modernization of the College's Code of Conduct. He also forwarded ideas toward the establishment of a student activities fee, which came to pass three years later. Following his term as president, and his subsequent graduation from Emerging College, Trent initially sought a career in the ministries. He attended one year of seminary, but stopped short of getting a degree. He changed paths and acquired a position with the YMCA. He had been an active member of the YMCA as a high school student. Since his employment, he has moved up through promotions to become associate director, and he now serves as an executive director of a regional territory.

### *The Experience*

Trent portrayed his student government president experience as being positive. Trent declared, "I served as student body president, and that was a very rewarding opportunity. It allowed me to really step up as a leader on campus and to be a representative" (Interview 1). He went on to say, "You make the best or worse out of every experience and, uh, for me it was a good experience" (Interview 1).

Trent described his presidency as a developmental experience. Trent stated, “student government leadership, particularly the president . . . is a crucible of learning” (Interview 1). Moreover, he said that his experience as an SGA president is

responsible for building me as a leader and I think that the, being student body president put the icing on the cake. It helped polish me, it helped put me in situations, um, that I could, um, expand my leadership . . . experience and . . . that experience was essential for me, being as successful as quickly as I have been in my professional career. (Interview 1)

In short, Trent stated that he believed that his experience as student government president “helped polish me” (Interview 1).

In addition, he reflected that his experience as student government association president enhanced his self-confidence and self-efficacy. Trent succinctly said that during his presidency that he settled on the notion that he had “to be my biggest fan because I’m the only fan I’m guaranteed” (Interview 2).

Moreover, Trent attributed the development of his leadership and management styles as well as his interpersonal skills. He contended, “I started out very micro-managerial, um, and almost dictatorial . . . I’ve gone from that . . . micro-managerial, uh, dictatorial, uh, leadership style to a more, uh, coach-based leadership style” (Interview 1). He went on to state, “I’ve been able to, to tweak and to enhance my leadership style. Um, I was able to get a greater ease at dealing with folks” (Interview 1).

When asked about any downsides to the student government presidency, Trent described his experience of being president as being at times lonely as well as feeling

isolated from others, both of which he attributed to the burden as well as the pressure of possessing insider knowledge and being a primary decision-maker. Trent stated

A leader is someone who, uh, who very often will find themselves, um, in lonely positions, um, because, um, being a leader many times means that you're out front and that's, uh, a position that not many people want to join you in. Um, so it's a rewarding thing, um, but it at times can be very lonely, um, position to be in. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to reason that,

there's a lot of pressure and you get a lot . . . of the heat for things, if people don't like it, I mean, the faculty senate gets all hip in a tizzy or this or that, you know, you're the one they look to, not the 52 people behind you or the student body. You are, because you're the one whose name is at the bottom of the paper or on the business card that says SGA President. (Interview 2)

In addition, he stated that he felt that although serving as president "was an honor and it was a learning experience and it really taught me that leadership is lonely" (Interview 1).

Moreover, Trent stressed,

When you're in a position of leadership you have to make some tough decisions and a lot of times those aren't popular, ah, and a, a true leader realizes that and is okay with it, ah, or maybe not okay with it but accepts that role and, ah, doesn't shy away from it. (Interview 2)

Trent also stated, "it felt like there was a tremendous weight on me, and that all the responsibility lied on me and there was a lot of people expecting a lot out of me" (Interview 2). Last, he stated that the obligations of the presidency isolated him from his friend and other peers. He stated the presidency, "requires a lot of time so you don't necessarily have the ability or the time to maintain anything but peripheral relationships, ah, with other students" (Interview 2).

Trent also brought up the notion of being under intense scrutiny as president. He stated,

the balance between, uh, uh being that student leader, um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge because, uh, I, I couldn't be just a regular, I mean, when I had an opinion or when I was unhappy about the food in the dining hall, I couldn't be unhappy as Trent the student, I was unhappy as president of the student body. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to say, "The worst part was that you're always on. You're always being watched. And, uh, you lose your identity as an individual and you become the student body . . . .that was tough, um, always being on . . ." (Interview 1). He succinctly said, "I thought I lived in a glass house as student body president" (Interview 1).

Trent also discussed how he felt that he was held to a higher standard as president. He claimed,

there was higher expectations of you academically because you were the, the face of the student body. Um, the professors expected more out of you. And I don't, uh, because you are in that representative position, they expected you to lead the way, in every way. And, um, I don't know that that was fair or realistic but that was reality. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to state,

you were seen as a, as a, a definite leadership entity on campus and, as such, the ah administration expected a lot out of you, the faculty expected a lot out of you and really what I, would like the faculty to know one day and understand, and maybe I'll tell them one day, is that just because a student is student body president doesn't mean they are a straight A student. (Interview 2)

Furthermore, he said, "there is just that expectation that when you are in position of leadership they you are, ah, above board with everything. Well, not necessarily above

board, but that you set the standard, and that's not always the case" (Interview 2). Trent summarized,

I felt like everything that I did was not only scrutinized by the faculty, staff, and administration but also by my peers and there is a great level of accountability, ah, and so, ah, and probably the courtroom of your peers is, is the most harsh courtroom to find yourself in. (Interview 2)

Trent claimed that he also lost a bit of his individual self while serving as president. He stated, "you lose your identity as an individual and you become the student body" (Interview 1). He went on to assert,

I had to sacrifice, during my term as student body president, I had to sacrifice Trent um, for, for the student body. In other words, I, I had to constantly be aware that I wasn't acting as Trent but I was acting as the student body president. And so that, uh, that affected what actions I chose to take or chose not to take. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Trent stated, "there was a little bit of personal sacrifice of, of individuality" (Interview 1). Trent said that he was not acting as himself but a corporate entity. To him, this was negative because he could not always take action without thinking of its larger implications on the community.

On a similar note, Trent also described feeling torn trying to find balance between being perceived as a student and at the same time a member of the college's administration. He stated, "the balance between, uh, uh, being that student leader, um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge" (Interview 1). He went on to explain,

You're a student but you are no longer treated as a student. You're not an administrator but you're treated as an administrator. You had the authority to do everything and the authority to do nothing. I mean, it's just a very awkward position. Ah, you have the right to walk into the president's

office and have an audience with him, any student has that right, but you have the, ah, ah, you're more quickly recognized, I guess, ah, as a, as a, ah player, ah, it's just kind of awkward because ah, you're feeling that, that ah, difference between, "Well am I a student? Am I a leader? Am I . . .?" I mean, you really are almost, ah, an ex-officio member of the administration and there is no other way to put that, and that's awkward. That's an awkward responsibility for a student to carry, ah, I think it's appropriate and I think it's needed, but it's awkward. (Interview 2)

Another downside that Trent attributed to the presidency was that he felt that he had to forfeit his relationships with his friends and family members. He stated, "I was a little bit of personal sacrifice of, of individuality in that, if that makes sense" (Interview 1). Trent went on to assert, "you have to make yourself available to everyone and, ah, so, in doing so you kind of struggle to maintain your close-knit circle of friends . . ." (Interview 2). Moreover, Trent said that he felt that his role as president affected his relationship with his closest friends due to the fact that many also served in leadership roles within SGA and at times he and his friends had conflicting interests. He stated,

within my nucleus of friends, um, it affected them as well, I mean, Eric was, uh, an executive board officer and we were best friends and sometimes that strained our relationship as a friend, um, because we were, uh, seeing things differently within the professional realm and that affected our personal relationship as well. (Interview 1)

Trent also associated stress as part of his experience as student government president. Trent felt that the stress associated with the presidency was negative in the sense that he felt beleaguered. He stated, "I was overwhelmed. Um, because at one point in time, I was taking 23 credit hours in an attempt to get out in three years and, um, I felt like I was always owned and always investing in others and didn't have enough time to invest in myself" (Interview 1). Trent went on to say,

I remember several times thinking I was going crazy. Um, because I was simply, uh, kept drawing on a, uh, an account of energy to invest in others and, uh, without replenishing it or, or reinvesting in myself and several times I found myself, you know, um, with insufficient, uh, amounts of energy and so, um, I found myself, you know, overwhelmed sometimes. (Interview 1)

He felt that the stress also derived from juggling the roles of a student leader and just being a student. Trent declared, “the balance between, uh, uh, being that student leader um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge” (Interview 1). He also tied the stress that he felt with the high level of scrutiny and accountability that he had to deal with. Trent argued, “there was stress and there was, there was higher levels of, of accountability” (Interview 1). He went on to say,

that it felt like there was a tremendous weight on me, and that all the responsibility lied on me and there was a lot of people expecting a lot out of me, ah, to me it felt, sort of as that person you played a dual role, you were a student, and then you were a part of the administrative structure of the college . . . . (Interview 2)

Although Trent contended that he felt stressed in a negative sense during his presidency, he also felt, that his experience taught him a lot. In the end, though, he did describe himself as being overwhelmed. He also described the experience in a positive light in that he saw himself develop as a person. He stated, “overwhelmed was a good word, but a better word is stretched, um, it was a growing process for me as a leader” (Interview 2).

Trent also discussed how he coped with the stress he experienced. Trent admitted that he would talk out his frustrations and stress with others. He stated, “a couple of points in time, I would either sit with [the SGA Advisor] or [the Director of Counseling

Center] or [the Vice President for Student Affairs] and discuss” his feelings of anxiety and tension (Interview 1).

Trent felt challenged while trying to find balance in his life as the president of SGA. He contended,

I think one of my issues, as a student body president is that I was student body president first and a student second. Ah, with the proper perspective you always should be a student first and then student body president. Ah, but I’m sure that every student body president faces that issue. (Interview 2)

A last downside that Trent associated with the Student Government Association was that it “really took up every bit of my time” (Interview 1). Trent went on to say “I was just constantly giving, giving, giving, ah, and didn’t take the, I mean I worked on student issues at all hours of the day, ah, just about seven days a week . . .” (Interview 2). He also asserted, “I felt like I was always owned and always investing in others and didn’t have enough time to invest in myself. And, uh, I remember several times thinking I was going crazy” (Interview 1).

### *Relationships*

During his interviews, Trent examined a number of the relationships he had with members of the campus community. In regards to his relationship with the college’s staff a he states that it was positive. He asserted,

the college staff is great. Um, the staff is who make your college run. The administration comes and goes. Your staff is, is the face of the college and, um, they were great. Any time we needed something, they were always available, amenable, um, they were great. The college administration was very supportive. Um, from yourself as, as my direct contact to the, the vice-president of student affairs, um, it was a very pleasant experience working with the college administration. (Interview 1)



Trent went on to state that he believed the college staff,

cared about me as a person, they cared about my opinions, they cared about the student body. It was a very pleasant experience and I enjoyed working with them and I felt like when I raised a concern, for the most part, it was addressed. Um, or at least, if it wasn't addressed, they said, well this is the big picture and this is why we can't do that and they took time to explain to me, uh, you know, why we can't do this or do that because, um, as a student I could only see a limited scope of the picture. (Interview 1)

Trent described his relationship with the members of the board of trustees as positive. He stated, "It was a very, uh, amenable relationship. Um, a very good relationship. Um, and I enjoyed that. Um, and I still enjoy it to this day, um, I'm still, uh, in regular contact with a good number of, of the board members" (Interview 1). Trent went on to assert, "it was a good relationship and when they asked for my opinion, they were sincere; they wanted to know what I thought" (Interview 1). Moreover, he stated that the members of the board of trustees "were concerned and they were, they were interested, I guess is a better way of putting it, in what I, what it was that I thought and in my experience" (Interview 1). Trent went on to explain that he felt,

it's important that you have that marriage between the student body president and the board of trustees because it's so easy for it, on the board's side of things, to become nickels and noses and forget that those are people and students and that you're selling an experience as well as an education. (Interview 1)

When asked about his relationship with the student government advisors, Trent described his experience with the SGA advisor as being supportive and positive. He asserted,

[The advisor], because [the advisor was] always there as a support, um, good, bad, and ugly. Um, and even when we did fight like cats and dogs, um, it was always, for the most part, private between us, and we settled it and we moved on, and it didn't hinder our working relationship. Um, and we were able to, to, to build a pretty dog-goned strong friendship out of it. You know, one that we still keep in touch with each other to, to this very day. (Interview 1)

Trent also explained what he feels is the function of a student government advisor. He stated, "The role of the advisor is simply that to advise, um, and not to micro-manage. And you are very good at that . . . your job is to ensure that the train don't get off the tracks" (Interview 1). However, he is quick to point out the advisor must leave room for students to act independently and to empower them to do so. He contended,

As much as you can allow the students to lead within reason the way they want to lead. Um, and it, it was important part of the experience for me, that I was given the liberty and the ability to, uh, make my own mistakes and, uh, sometimes against [the advisor's] words of caution and advice. Um, but at the same time, I was allowed to make my own mistakes and learn from those. Um, I'm a big believer that you learn from your successes and you learn from you failures, and if you're never allowed to fail, then you never truly learn. (Interview 1)

Trent also reveals his belief that the role of the advisor is also to hold the president and the other members or the student government accountable. He declared,

The role of the advisor is simply that to, to be someone to make sure that the, uh, integrity of the Student Government Association is, is in tact, um, to make sure that the, the rules of the college are followed and, and that, uh, you know, everything is done in a legal and safe way. (Interview 1)

When the relationship with his peers on his executive board was brought up, Trent stated that felt that he struggled in his interpersonal relationships with the members of his executive board. Trent openly admitted that he held the reins of leadership very tightly and that he did not empower the members of their executive boards. Trent acknowledged

that his unwillingness to delegate responsibility to others was where many of his conflicts arose. Trent asserted, “My executive board challenged me most” (Interview 1). Trent went on to explain,

Relationships in general were easy. The relationships with the executive board, um, was not easy because I wasn’t willing to give up pieces of the pie. Um, even though I had the right to govern the way I governed and I was within my full constitutional authority to do so, um, that does not mean that I had to elect to do so. Um, and uh, that doesn’t mean that I should have done so. (Interview 1)

Trent continued to articulate his experience as he asserted,

I mean, certainly, as the chief executive officer of the student body, I could have elected to distribute the, uh, uh, you know, the labor and the leadership and the responsibility to whomever I pleased, and I chose not to do that. Um, so that, that created, at times, a tense relationship with those who I should have, um, had the strongest support . . . . (Interview 1)

He insisted that his most significant failure was that he

did not engage my executive board, um, and it’s fully in the big picture as I could have, and, um, in painting the picture where we needed to go and allowing them to help carve out the map of, of how we would get to that destination. Um, and it’s, in doing so or in not doing so, rather, um, I created, uh, uh, uh, a monster for myself. (Interview 1)

Trent also acknowledged that the members of his executive board “were capable and they were willing, um, I just didn’t allow them to be a part of that” (Interview 1). He went on to state,

my leadership style at that time, was that I’m, since I was in that position, that I needed to be the one representing, when I simply could have delegated some of that to my executive board members or even to, uh, various members of the student body, or the Student Government Association. I chose not to do that so that was my problem. I see that now. (Interview 1)

He admitted that his leadership style was that of a “lone ranger” and that caused a lot of conflict within his executive board (Interview 1). He went on to say,

when you’re a lone ranger leader you cannot and should not expect others to buy in because, ah, buy-in is created by a sense of coming together and coming up with a plan together, ah, so, it should have not, it should not have been any surprise to me that they didn’t buy in. (Interview 2)

Because of his inability to delegate and empower others, the internal power struggle hindered his administration from achieving its goals and serving the student body, Trent reflected,

within the executive board, you had other folks jockeying for power, and jockeying for, ah, position and this and that and, you know. And, at the end of the day, again, the, the losers were the students. While we were arguing over this or that, we really could have been taking that energy and, and better serving the needs of the student body. (Interview 2)

During the course of the interviews, Trent related that he viewed his relationship with the faculty at Emerging College to be both positive and negative. Trent asserted that he “enjoyed working with the faculty leadership” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “the, uh, faculty chairs that I worked with. Uh, it was a pleasure. Um, they were always concerned and always looking to partner” (Interview 1). However, Trent also admitted that he found working with faculty and especially the faculty senate to be frustrating and a hindrance. First, he felt that the faculty senate was so large that it was unwieldy and cumbersome. He contended, “I think it’s ridiculous that every member of the faculty is on the senate. I think it should be representation” (Interview 1). He also felt that faculty senate was slow to act and interloped into territory that he believed belonged to students. Trent declared, “Now I will say that sometimes it was frustrating because they would

drag their feet and have to be a part of issues that I didn't think was any of their damn business" (Interview 1). That being said, he reaffirmed overall his relationship with the faculty was a positive aspect of his experience. Trent claimed, "sometimes that, uh, process, um, with the faculty, took longer to get things accomplished. But it was good experience" (Interview 1).

Trent also had the opportunity to observe and work with multiple College presidents during his time at Emerging College. Trent stated,

It was an interesting time for the College itself because it was a time of transition. Um, I had, in my three years I, I did my four year's studies in three. Um, I had three different college presidents, um, and so there was a time of transition and upheaval for the College itself. (Interview 1)

He went on to explain why he described his time at Emerging College as a time of transition and upheaval. He asserted,

My whole time here at [the College] was a fire storm. I mean, we went . . . I had three different presidents in three different years. Ah, there was a lot of upheaval and unrest in the student body because of the administrative topsy-turvyness. Students, whether they will admit it or not, need and desire and long for, ah, stability in structure, and when that is not in place, then you really have ah, you're really set up for some issues of, of , of different fires across campus. Ah, there was, ah, ah maybe a "fire storm" is not the, the best terms, ah, but it was definitely a period of change, ah for the college. As well, we had just not too long gone from a two-year college to a four-year college. We were still experiencing the growing pains of that, ah, and we, ah, it was just a time of transition, not only because of the leadership but the student body was ah, ah, ah, within the office of student activities we were growing and taking on a more collegiate view because of the four-year program. Ah, so really, maybe less "fire storm" and more just growing pains. Ah, ah, you know, changing. Change is not fun and it's not easy, ah, and so that may be why I said "fire storm." (Interview 2)

Like George, Trent witnessed and worked with Dr. Newton, Dr. Luther, and Dr. Ingle during their time as presidents of Emerging College. Trent was elected to SGA presidency after Dr. Newton was terminated as the president of Emerging College. He did, though, participate actively in the actions taken on behalf of the student body in an intentional effort to oust Dr. Newton from the College presidency. Trent described how the students helped to cause the ouster of Dr. Newton. He asserted,

I don't know what the official title of the committee was but students concerned about the college or something and it was really, uh, uh a panel of students that had called the administration together and had some very straight and poignant questions that they wanted answers to. Um, and that with other things, you know, led to, uh, the resignation of, of a college president, um, who was ill-equipped to lead the college. (Interview 1)

The year prior to his election to the student government presidency, Trent served as vice-president of the student government while George was president. During that time, Dr. Luther served as an interim College president at Emerging College. About Dr. Luther Trent stated, "The beginning of my term I had Dr. Luther as the college president. He was interim. Um, very sweet fellow, very . . . endearing and just a charming grandpa-like fellow" (Interview 1). However, by the time Trent was serving as the student government president, Dr. Ingle had taken over as president of Emerging College. Trent reflected that he had a positive relationship with Dr. Ingle at the outset. Nonetheless, Trent admitted that the positive nature of their relationship quickly faded. He explained,

[I was initially] very supportive of Dr. Ingle . . . I was very open to new leadership and very embracing of him and, uh, and his wife. Um, but that quickly went sour, um, probably sometime around October or November when, uh, I found him not to be a person of his word. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to clarify,

I was jaded pretty, um, pretty quickly with the president, um, not being a man of integrity, um, or not being a man of his word. Um, that jaded me pretty quick and I was hurt by that, um, and lost a lot of faith in, in his ability to lead and, uh, in his genuineness and his sincerity. (Interview 1)

Trent makes clear his idea of integrity when he asserted, “I’m the type person, you see what you get, and what I say you’ll get is what you get, and I expect that of other people” (Interview 1). He went on to pinpoint his troubles with Dr. Ingle: the idea of establishing a student activities fee. The concept of a fee was being discussed and debated by a strategic planning committee. In his interview, Trent said that prior the committee meeting he felt that Dr. Ingle had pledged support for implementing the fee, and during actual meetings Dr. Ingle spoke out against it. Trent vented,

It was a very frustrating process, ah, but, only frustrating because, ah, I had been lied to by the president who said he supported it, ah, and then later did not. And, I guess it would have been different if he said, “Well, you know, after having a look closer at this, I’ve changed my mind.” Ah, I probably could have accepted that, ah, and then I would’ve at least to go, to said, “Well, you know, let’s look at this and see if there is any room for modification, if we can work on this, ah, to make it something better, ah, for the college.” But he simply acted as if he had never heard it, and, of course, I know that he had ’cause we had, you know, took it through the actual planning process and then through the, ah, personal meetings with him as well, and so, but the process did not have to be frustrating. Ah, but that’s the way it ended up. (Interview 2)

This disagreement or lack of communication and agreement between Dr. Ingle and Trent created a schism, which has yet to be reconciled. Trent described their relationship: “It was cordial, um, but we didn’t care for each other. I didn’t care for him, he didn’t care for me, and we didn’t make any bones about that. Um, and the relationship is still the same today” (Interview 1). He went on to explain that even though he had a falling out with the

College president that his negative experience and relationship with Dr. Ingle did not hinder his desire to serve the college even as an alumnus. He contended,

As the college president, I am loyal to the position, um, and if were to call on me in that role as college president, to do something as an alumnus, I would do it and I would do everything within my energy to support the institution. As a person, I do not support him nor do I care for his leadership. But I do see a distinction between the position and the person. Um, I am loyal to my alumnus, uh, to my alma mater and um, will do anything to advance it. (Interview 1)

### *Personal Characteristics*

Throughout the interviews Trent discussed a number of personal characteristics that he associated with successful student government presidents. First, Trent emphasized that a sense of integrity is an important characteristic for someone serving as president of SGA. He said, “A leader is someone who will stand up for what is right regardless if they find themselves standing alone or not” (Interview 1). He went on to state, “[I] was always taught to speak my mind and do it as politely as possible without giving an inch, still stand firm. And, who it is that I am and what it is that I believe and just treat all, treat everyone with respect and the courtesy that they deserve” (Interview 1).

Trent also emphasized that respect for others was an important trait for presidents. He stated that he learned as president he needed to “treat everyone with respect and the courtesy that they deserve” (Interview 1).

In addition, Trent indicated that he also felt that an inquisitive nature was an important character trait. He described himself: “I was inquisitive. I never was mischievous, um, or just mean. Uh, my problem was I wanted to know why everything worked. I wanted to know how everything worked” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “if



I don't know the answer to something, I'm going to ask and I'm going to keep asking until I get the answer. Um, and if don't like the answer that I get, I'm going to ask why that's the answer" (Interview 2). Last, Trent contended,

Good leaders ask good questions, um, because you, uh, you cannot be a renegade lone-ranger leader. You have to have input from others, and, um, really, you know you're turning into a good leader, um, when you find yourself, uh, realizing that you don't have all the answers and that you need to get the answers from someone else. So, good leaders ask good questions. (Interview 2)

Moreover, Trent identified risk taking as an essential character trait for a student government association president. He succinctly stated, "the student body president is to simply be a lightning rod" (Interview 1). Trent admitted that he came into the presidency with the confidence to take chances and to gamble on the successes of his ventures. He claimed, "I am the type of person that if no one else will step up, I will step up, and I will take the lead" (Interview 2).

Trent acknowledged that he believes that civic responsibility was an important character trait. He stated, "I believe in leadership that . . . [is an] engaged citizenship. Whether it be at a college level or in a community, I believe it is necessary" (Interview 1). Trent asserted, "I was very involved . . . I think a good citizen of [the College]" (Interview 1). When asked to define the phrase "good campus citizen" he contended,

Well, a good campus citizen, number one: shows, I guess, you could break it down to four character traits. Ah, first of all honesty, ah, ah, next I would say respect, respect for the rules, ah, respect for you know the traditions that come along, ah, respect for the faculty, the staff, the administration, ah, I'd say responsibility, ah, we all come together, ah, with each with a different role to play and ah students must take responsibility for their actions, and part of that responsibility is academic

but part of is social and being involved in giving back and then, ah, lastly to kind of tie it all together is caring . . . . (Interview 2)

He further defined the term as,

A responsible campus citizen, ah, or a good campus citizen, ah, you need to be involved. I mean, you need to, ah, to be a person who supports the you know, the events on campus and all. I mean, you don't have to go to everything but you should, ah, give back and contribute and be a, a contributing member of the community. (Interview 2)

Being outspoken was also a character trait that Trent identified as been important for a student government president. Trent admitted that he was an outspoken president who was a fervent activist on behalf of the student body. Trent explained, "if something happened in the administration I didn't like, huh, I was the first one to tell 'em . . . I was an ardent, ah, I feel like an ardent defender of the students" (Interview 2). He contended that he was raised to be frank and open about his opinions. He stated, as before, that he, "was always taught to speak my mind and do it as politely as possible without giving an inch . . ." (Interview 1). He went on to contend, "I mean I'm one that's going to speak my mind, and, uh, and let it be like it is" (Interview 1). He followed this comment up with,

I didn't go looking for fights but I wasn't afraid if one showed up at the door. Ah, and so, ah, there was just issues that we needed to address, ah, and so, I felt like, as the student body president, ah, I should be the one at the helm, ah, or the forum of those issues. (Interview 2)

Another essential character trait that Trent associated with the presidency was being passionate about the college. Trent maintained that he too was passionate about Emerging College and that this passion was an important character trait during his presidency. He insisted, "I love this place and I want to see it advance, and I want to do anything that I can" (Interview 1). Trent went on to contend he was not only passionate

about the College but that he was also passionate about serving as the president of the student body. He asserted,

I definitely was passionate about, ah, the students, ah, ah, advocacy, ah, and, ah, ah, passionately, ah, I mean, if something happened in the administration I didn't like, uh, I was the first one to tell 'em, ah, and, ah, I was, I was an ardent, ah, I feel like an ardent defender of the students, ah, representative maybe, ah, but sometimes defenders that sometimes needed to be, compassionate . . . . (Interview 2)

### *Roles*

During the course of his interviews, Trent pointed out that the student government president had a number of roles to fulfill. One such role that Trent focused on was that of an engager, however he disclosed that he was not so much of an engager as SGA president. He freely admitted that he acted as “a lone ranger” (Interview 2). Upon reflection, he learned that his poor relationships within his executive board, senate, faculty, staff, and administration could have been minimized, or avoided all together, if he had been more of an engager. Trent stated that if he was to do it over again that he would “entrust my executive board with more power and I would . . . put more students in the process because it is an important process to be involved in . . . and other students would benefit from that” (Interview 1). He went on to state that he would “lead differently. I would be less lone ranger and would share the division of labor. And I would trust those who were in my cabinet to make decisions and empower them to make decisions . . .” (Interview 1).

Another role of the student government president that Trent felt was important was as a mediator. He described the importance of the president being able to build

connections across the campus, take those connections and develop a shared vision, and then act upon them. Trent stated, “the ability to pull everyone together and get them on the same page and get things going” is a tremendous part of a presidency (Interview 1). In short, he asserted, “A leader is someone who will seek to make sure that everyone’s opinions is heard” (Interview 1).

Trent also recognized the student government president’s role as an advocate. He explained,

I felt like I was the mouthpiece for the student body. Um, not only to the administration but to the, the board of trustees. Um, and, uh, I think it’s important that the student body president have voice on the board because, um, not always is the picture painted by those who are in the, uh, seat of painting the pictures, such as the college president, not always is that an accurate picture. Um, and I think that the student body president needs to be able to um, bring folks to reality and let them know that this is an issue. (Interview 1)

Trent described the advocacy role of the president as “a voice of the students and a, a facilitator of change for the good for the students” (Interview 1). Trent claimed the “role of the student body president is to simply be a lightning rod and to, um, allow everyone to, to just know how their decisions, no matter how minute effect the student body and the day-to-day, um, lives” (Interview 1). He went on to assert, “there was just issues that we needed to address, ah, and so, I felt, like, as the student body president, ah, I should be the one at the helm, ah, or the forum of those issues” (Interview 2). However, Trent also admitted that being an advocate also had its downside. He explained, “because the student body president is, is the voice of the students, you’re roped into every stinking committee meeting possible” (Interview 1). Even though Trent believed that being an

advocate had negative aspects, he emphatically stressed its positive aspects. He contended, “I just remember being proud of that and, and being able to represent the student body at the board of trustees meeting. That was a good feeling and it was, it was, uh, it was important. . .” (Interview 1).

Trent also saw the SGA president as a cheerleader. He stated that the, “easiest thing was the ability to pull everyone together and get them on the same page and get things going . . . keeping everybody feeling good about themselves and feeling good about the direction was easy” (Interview 1). He went on to describe the student government president as peddler of faith and optimism in the institution and the directions it was taking. He claimed, “Well, more and more, I see myself as a dealer of hope” (Interview 2).

Last, Trent identified mentoring as a key role and responsibility of the student government president. Trent reflected on his outlook regarding mentorship. He stated, “I think leaders are born but must be cultivated” (Interview 1). He went on to testify, “My job . . . as a leader. . . is to build leadership skills in those who are below me to work myself out of a job” (Interview 1). Moreover, he maintained, “my job as a leader . . . is to reproduce myself in others” (Interview 1). Furthermore, “It was very important to sort of mentor the next person” (Interview 1). He went on to say,

There must be a mentoring process. You have to have someone to invest in that leader because to me the best way of learning is experiential learning, and I guess absolutely the best way to learn leadership skills is to be thrown into the fire and have to deal with it, you know, issues and problems and all that stuff. But, the most ideal situation is to have a mentor come alongside of you. (Interview 2)

Trent further asserted,

I think that leadership is something that has to be developed or transferred, and so, if your executive board is not, or your student leadership is not developing that to come up, ah, leadership is not a vacuum, it is not going to happen on it's own. You've got to develop that, and so, ah, that's part of the major, I would say criterion of executive work, maybe not criterion but responsibility is, ah, training and identifying those who, who are to follow. (Interview 2)

Trent also discussed being mentored by his predecessors, Callie and George, and spoke to his role in mentoring his successor, Benjamin. In regard to being recruited and cultivated as a future SGA leader, Trent described how, as a freshman, he was approached by both Callie and George and encouraged to serve as part of student government. He stated, "Callie came up to me, um, and said, hey, hey I need one more person on the judicial council, will you do it? Um, it definitely has something to do with Callie saying, 'I want you on it'" (Interview 2). Trent went on to describe how George, who was sophomore and a member of the student senate, encouraged him to become further involved in the student government beyond serving on the judicial council. Trent asserted, "George, I think, was the one who called me aside and said 'You seem to really be involved and seem to really speak your mind. We have this committee that we want you to on'" (Interview 1). Trent further explained how George approached him at the end of his freshman year about running as his vice president for the following year. He said,

[George] turned to me and he said "Why don't you run for vice president?" And I said, "OK, why?" He said "Well I'm running for President," and so ah, George is really the one that ah, ah, ah kind of directed that. (Interview 2)

Following his year as vice president under George, Trent was elected SGA president.

Upon being elected, George gave Trent some words of advice. Trent:

I remember the conversation with [George] telling me, and this was shortly after I had been elected, he said, “Trent you need to find someone to be your, to take up the torch from you and you should begin mentoring them immediately.” (Interview 1)

Trent described how he identified and cultivated students who would one day lead student government. He explained, “what I try to do is find those people and then help them develop that potential into something that can be used” (Interview 2). He further stated,

I saw [Benjamin] and, and a number of other students that I knew would be rising student leaders and, ah, I wanted to help in that process and that’s the reason I, I picked them and sort of took them under my wings. (Interview 2)

Trent went on to clarify why he selected Benjamin to be his successor. He said,

[Benjamin] was a very easy-going no-nonsense-type fellow. Very polite, very kind, and I felt was a true representation of his representatives. He was very active and very involved, and I just thought he would do a good job. He was the, in my opinion, of those who I served with on the senate, he was the best person to continue what had already been put in place by the [George] administration by my administration and to continue it to the next level. In fact, I included [Benjamin] in on a lot of things that regular senator were not involved with. Anything that I thought was very important I made sure he was on the committee. (Interview 1)

Trent concluded by discussing why he believed mentoring was such a vital role of the student government president. He stated,

I wanted to definitely mentor them to come on to lead, and why is that important? That’s important because, ah, that allows for a seamless transition, ah, the last thing that you ah need to have is, ah, is just a person in willy-nilly or, or cold, ah, turkey into a leadership position. I mean, there needs to be a, ah, understanding of who you are or, or where you are

coming from and all that sort of stuff. I think it's important to, to have that process, and number two, you got to make sure there's leadership coming up behind you . . . . (Interview 2)

He finally stated his philosophy on mentoring, "since, ah, my post as student body president, ah, this, my theory on leadership is this: is that you should always be recreating yourself in someone else so as to replace yourself" (Interview 2).

Benjamin

*Profile*

Benjamin served as the president of the Student Government Association from 2003 to 2004 and again from 2004 to 2005, is a white male, and was a traditional-aged student. He was first a 20-year-old junior then 21-year-old senior when he was president. He graduated with a 3.20 GPA, majoring in history. He was born and raised in middle-class Georgia family, and is the son of a Protestant minister. Due to his father's ministerial calling, Benjamin moved quite often throughout the state as a child and young adult. He is the only president to serve two terms. Benjamin had a strong interest and involvement in the Student Government Association. He was elected to the Senate as a freshman representative during his freshmen year and then served as a residence hall representative his sophomore year. He was elected president his junior year and he ran unopposed for his second term his senior year. Benjamin had a relaxed and diplomatic leadership style. He sought to incorporate and include under-represented groups. In order to create the perception of equality within the senate, Benjamin had the meetings moved from a tiered-lecture hall to a multipurpose room where the members could sit on the same level and face each other. He came to college with a significant level of



involvement in the governing of his church as a voting member of its regional conference. Through his leadership within his church conference, Benjamin learned how to run the Student Government Association, work within and manage a diverse team, and provide clear oversight and accountability to an organization. Benjamin was very active in the Student Government Association for his entire time at Emerging College, and he had worked his way up through the organization. His leadership style was diplomatic and he focused on consensus building. Some of the accomplishments made during his two terms include expanding the number of seats in the senate, reorganizing the committee system, collaborating with the faculty senate to add French courses to the curriculum, and establishing the chief of staff position within the executive board. His most controversial, and probably the most effective, accomplishment was the merger between the Student Government Association and the Student Activities Council. The potential of the merger had been discussed during Trent's presidency, and Benjamin forwarded those discussions then worked to make it happen. Prior to the merger, the Student Activities Council was an independent and directly competing entity. Following the completion of his second term and his graduation from Emerging College, Benjamin pursued a career in higher education, focusing on development and fundraising. He was employed at a similar small private liberal arts college as a major gifts officer for a couple of years and now serves as a major gifts officer for a nationally recognized private university. He plans on pursuing a graduate degree in religious studies.

### *The Experience*

Benjamin described his experience as a student government president as “very fulfilling for me . . . I’d wake up in the morning excited about our work and I’d go to bed at night excited about our work. Yeah, that’s the shortest answer I’ve given, but it was fulfilling, it was very fulfilling” (Interview 1). He went on to say that it was “fulfilling, in the accomplishment of our goals and in the confidence the people had to let me do it” (Interview 2).

Benjamin characterized his experiences as one of personal growth in regards to the enhancement of his self-confidence and self-efficacy. Benjamin stated that his experience as president “allowed me to have a little more confidence in myself as a leader” (Interview 1). He went on to state that

I’ve become less skittish . . . early on, I was very reluctant to move quickly and to make quick decisions and I was easily made nervous by people in authority because I was concerned about being, not in being a “yes” man, but I was concerned about doing things that would please them as a leader themselves and as someone I looked up to. What I have learned is, is that, that there are things that I can bring to the table. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Benjamin said that due to his experience as president that he is

not afraid to make a decision alone anymore. I used to be. I used to be very hesitant to make a decision by myself. I’d have to call a meeting and I’d have to discuss it. If I know it’s right, I’m not as afraid to pull the trigger anymore and to chart ahead with that decision. (Interview 1)

Similarly, Benjamin explains how his experience enhanced his interpersonal and leadership skills. He contends that he became more open to the ideas of others and how he learned how to be a better leader by being first a team player. Benjamin wrote in his journal: “I learned very early that every organization must have a clearly established

leader; however, that leader cannot act alone – the leader must act in consultation with others” (Journal 1). He also stated in the interview that he learned during his presidency that he should not

ever be afraid of someone else’s really strong original idea, um, in your department or anyone else’s because it, if it’s as successful as they think it’s going to be, and if it’s theirs, they’ll be passionate about it more so than the adoption of someone else’s idea. It’s only a strong reflection upon you and other people around you. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to say how he felt, “The best parts were watching us work and learning how to work as a team and watching us learn how to make a difference in an organization that needed a difference, that needed a change” (Interview 1). Moreover, Benjamin stated that his presidency

taught me how to respect the ideas of others. It taught me how to work as a part of a team and it taught me how to be, not only the number one at the table to how to be the number two, the number three, the number four, the number ten at the table. (Interview 1)

Benjamin also described his experience as president as being lonely and isolated because others could not truly appreciate or understand the burdens that he felt he had to carry as president. He stated,

I was concerned about what my campus was experiencing, and I didn’t know how to respond to it and nobody but me saw it, I felt. Nobody had my pain. Um, that was selfish, but I felt that way. So anyway, that’s kind of where I was. (Interview 2)

Benjamin also brought up issues of scrutiny and accountability during the course of his interviews. In regard to the intense scrutiny Benjamin said, “when you leave campus or when you walk around campus or when you talk on campus, your actions are reflective of all . . . ” (Interview 1). Benjamin implied that he felt comfortable living and

working in the spotlight during his presidency due to his upbringing as a son of a minister. He stated, “I just knew that all eyes were on me and even now, when I leave my house, I’m very aware that, there are people watching me, um, and I don’t care. It doesn’t bother me, I grew up with it” (Interview 2). Benjamin went on to claim, “it was something that came naturally to me because I had always been on stage—my whole life I’ve been on stage” (Interview 2).

In regard to the notion of being held accountable to others for one’s words and actions as president, Benjamin said,

they should be, and they should be [held to a higher standard]. If you’re, if you’re, if you’re set apart as a leader, and you’re dubbed with a title and an office and you’re elected to serve, you should be. I can honestly tell you on tape, I never once had a drink of alcohol on [the College’s] campus, never once, never once on that campus. (Interview 1)

He went on to assert, “We were responsible at what we did as students because we knew what we represented” (Interview 1). Benjamin also lamented that he “spent a lot of time in the office at night” (Interview 1).

Upon reflection, Benjamin attributed a sense of emotional loss to his presidency. He stated, “I lost some sleep over some issues with the College President, um, but those were personal. Um, uh, I, I let them be personal, they weren’t really, but I let them be personal” (Interview 2).

Throughout his interviews, Benjamin insisted that he was not truly stressed by his experience. He did report, however, being stressed about interpersonal conflicts with his peers as it regarded the merger between the Student Government Association and the Student Activities Council. He stated, “I was stressed then, there, but everything else was

not a stressful thing to me” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “I was stressed only once and that was when we actually were coming down to the brass tacks and the nuts and bolts of what that merger would look like between those two organizations” (Interview 1).

Benjamin conceded that the president has to seek a balance between the needs of the student body and the needs and agenda of the college administration. He responded, “my role was to bring some equality to the work and I saw my role as SGA president in, in that way” (Interview 1). He went on to concede that he felt that the primary role of the president was “being important as an ambassador for the students” (Interview 1).

However, Benjamin stressed that future presidents “have got to be able to understand that their role is not simply related to the students. Their role is beyond that. Their role is much bigger than that” (Interview 1). As one can see, Benjamin sustained the notion that the president of SGA must seek to find a balance between serving both students and administration.

Benjamin recognized that he needed to seek a balance in his life while serving as president. However, unlike his peers, Benjamin contended that he was able to balance his presidential duties, his personal life, and his academics responsibilities without having a sense of being overwhelmed. Benjamin admitted that he “always tried to give a lot of time to the office” (Interview 1). Nonetheless, he also said he “was very dedicated to my academic skills” (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to say that “as SGA president I made my best grades in college because I was working so hard at those classes; A’s and B’s solid, just right through there. My grade point average actually improved my last two

years of college” (Interview 1). Moreover, he asserted, “as SGA president I very rarely missed a class” (Interview 1). Throughout his interviews, Benjamin maintained that he “was very committed to making sure I gave a lot of time to the academics, which was my primary focus” (Interview 1).

### *Relationships*

Throughout his interviews, Benjamin discussed relationships he had with faculty, fellow students, trustees, advisor, staff and the college president. Benjamin also described his relationship with the staff of the college as positive. He testified his relationship was,

very strong as well. I learned a lot from the cleaning staff, our maintenance crew. I learned a lot from our library staff. I learned a lot by watching our development staff and working with them. We’ve talked about student affairs staff already. I had a good relationship with them. Um, I never had any cause to ever have a fight with any of those people, never once. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to say, “I had a strong relationship with our student services staff and executive leadership in student services. I had a strong relationship with our development and external relations staff and executives” (Interview 1).

Benjamin felt that he had a strong and positive relationship with the members or the board of trustees. He described his relationship with the trustees as

Very strong. I had a good relationship with them. I liked them and they liked me, I think. They did, but they liked me. I think they liked, I know they did, because I still get notes from them from time to time, a few of them. Two of them have rotated off now, but I keep up, they keep up with me, yeah, a strong relationship with the board, strong, very strong. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to describe the importance of a strong relationship between the president of SGA and the members of the board of trustees, by asserting,

With the trustees, it is very important because trustees have to hear from the students and the students have to see the trustees function so they know how their college is organized. Um, the president is your executive leader but the trustees own the school. Um, it's important for students to know that. It's important for the students to really interact with the executive comparable, to know the chair of the trustees and for the trustee chair to know them. (Interview 1)

Benjamin characterized his relationship with the student government advisors as positive. Benjamin felt the role of the advisor is to serve as a guide and as a conduit to reach or acquire resources, including people, funds, equipment, and services. Most important to Benjamin was that the advisor be a relationship-builder and be able to network the student government president with others. He stated,

I think the advisors have to do a few things, like connect them up with people, make sure that there's a good relationship with the vice president for enrollment, or for student affairs, with a good relation, have a good relationship with the president, have a good relationship with the board chair, an opportunity to meet them, to be, to converse with them, to set up opportunities for them to be engaged in conversation. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to argue that the advisor to the Student Government Association must empower and encourage students to take responsibility and to take action. He contended, "That they be empowering, that the advisors be empowering, that they would, um, allow us to take on these challenges and, and do them, um, responsibly, which we did . . ."

(Interview 2) He also asserted that the advisor must hold students accountable for their words and actions or at time their silence and inaction. He also felt that the advisor must

also serve as a safety net to ensure that the Student Government Association and its student officers did not fail entirely. These roles can be seen as Benjamin stated,

The advisors would allow us to, um, to make little mistakes as we were going along the way, but also head us off before we fell flat on our faces, Um, but also would push us to say, “Why don’t you, have you ever thought about this?” Um, you know, to, to offer an angle, uh, administratively that we could not see as students because we had never been exposed to it before . . . . (Interview 2)

Benjamin also found the role the Student Government Association advisor to be that of guide and pathfinder in order to show the students the way through the college’s policies and procedures. He stated that one role of the advisor is found in

helping wade through the college administration, helping make the bureaucracy, uh, not as cluttered with red tape. Yeah, that was, that was an expectation um, that, that, the advisors would help cut through some of the red tape . . . . (Interview 2)

Benjamin acknowledged that working with his peers on the executive board was one of the most taxing aspects of being president of SGA. He stated,

As SGA president, I would have, in my first term, been more careful about who I would have asked to run for secretary and treasurer. I realized later that I had two people that were terribly angry and divisive and did not understand how to participate the way that I knew how to participate and the way that our vice president knew how to participate. (Interview 1)

Benjamin admitted that he struggled to overcome the interpersonal conflicts and rivalries that existed within his executive board. Benjamin declared that he believes in allegiance to others. He stated, “Um, I expect loyalty from people. I expect that I will be able to, to make decisions on their behalf and their trust” (Interview 1). However, he divulged that members of his executive board did not always live up to his standards.



In addition to working with challenging interpersonal relationships and internal conflicts within his executive board, Benjamin also stated, “working with a variety of people was very challenging for me. I had to learn to work with people that did not see things the way I saw things” (Interview 1). He went on to explain, “We were all different people. All five of your executive officers were different people” (Interview 1). Moreover, he said that beyond the fact that they were all different people that they also “brought completely different perspectives to the table” (Interview 1). Although he disclosed that working with a diverse group at times challenged him, that he learned to value that same diversity. He stated, “if everybody looks alike and thinks alike, um, the product will reflect that and it will be . . . it will be a weak cup of coffee” (Interview 1). He went on to clarify, “I think that, as a leader . . . I learned this at [the College] . . . I learned that you have to sit back and look and assess what is good for everybody. And you don’t do that by yourself, you do that with a group of people” (Interview 1). He further stated,

As a leader, personally, you have to bring to the table, with me, you get, you get people that are different, you get perspectives that are unique. Um, and as a group, you chart a course for what you feel is the correct path to follow. And you follow the path together. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Benjamin acknowledged that he learned through his experience that as a leader,

I expect that before I make that decision, that I’ll make it in concert with them and having given complete consideration to their work and to their passions and to their thoughts on something. Um, I think that all of those things together make for a strong team. (Interview 1)

Last, he explained,

. . . [what] I have learned is, is that, that there are things that I can bring to the table and I've learned to listen and to not be as intimidated by other people, even my own peers. Um, I learned to, to listen more carefully and to know that their ideas are just as good as my ideas and deserve just as much, um, time and discussion as anybody else's. I've learned that.  
(Interview 1)

Benjamin felt that his relationship with the faculty at Emerging College was both positive and negative. Benjamin attested that he perceived that he had a solid relationship with members of Emerging College's faculty. He maintained that his relationship with the faculty was "very strong, very strong" (Interview 1). He believed that his relationship was positive because he felt that he was "always adopted as a student and as a colleague" (Interview 1). On the other hand, Benjamin felt that his relationship with the faculty was a negative aspect of his presidency because of the internal conflicts within the faculty. He stated, "I did not appreciate the disagreement and squabbles that occurred among the faculty that were very open" (Interview 1). He also stated that it was a negative aspect of his presidency, because he felt the faculty were incapable of taking decisive action. He alleged, "I noticed about my faculty at [the College] that they were paralyzed by their insecurities and incapable of, of dreaming" (Interview 2).

Benjamin also described his relationship with the College's president as a mixture of both negative and positive. Benjamin explained that the negative aspects arose where he felt that Dr. Ingle was too distant and cut off from the student population and experience. Benjamin stated,

I did not have a strong relationship with our president because I saw the president's work as being, um, void of an understanding that students were primary, and I saw the work of the college president as disengaged from the [long-standing Protestant] community, disengaged from the

community of the [long-standing Protestant] colleges, disengaged from the Atlanta community . . . disengaged from the community that [the College] was founded upon and must exist within. (Interview 1)

Benjamin further contended, “his leadership style did not permit him to be open-minded enough to permit other people’s voices at the table to be heard and to be, and their ideas to be implemented. . .” (Interview 1).

He argued,

You have to be willing to not be afraid of people and their ability to think and come up with original ideas. Because the idea wasn’t your own, doesn’t mean it’s not a good one and doesn’t mean it’s not worth exploring and implementing. . . . Because it wasn’t your ideas, the executive, doesn’t mean that it’s any less a reflection of you. I learned that and you can apply that writ large. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to explain,

I think as, as college president, you have to be willing to do that, you have to be willing to hire the best and understand that what their going to produce is going to be the best and it’s reflecting upon your work as well. Because it wasn’t your ideas, the executive, doesn’t mean that it’s any less a reflection of you. I learned that and you can apply that writ large. Um, don’t ever be afraid of someone else’s really strong original idea, um, in your department or anyone else’s ,because it, if it’s as successful as they think it’s going to be, and if it’s theirs, they’ll be passionate about it more so than the adoption of someone else’s idea. It’s only a strong reflection upon you and other people around you and the school, so . . . (Interview 1)

Beyond feeling that the College president was disconnected from the student population, Benjamin also found Dr. Ingle’s personality “did not allow or permit him to be engaging or charismatic” (Interview 1). Moreover, Benjamin reflected that he struggled with the actions taken by Dr. Ingle while he was serving as SGA president. Benjamin explained,

The worst part for me was having to face the foolish behavior of our president and, and, and justify his actions at times to the students’ related to enrollment. I mean, tuition increases, related to, uh, budget cuts, related

to foolish decrees that he would hand out, um, related to his disengagement . . . . Um, yeah, that was the hardest thing for me. That was the part that stunk. I hated it when he started messing with student affairs stuff because every time, I had to go translate that, painfully, to the students. I hated it. (Interview 1)

### *Personal Characteristics*

Throughout his two interviews, Benjamin alludes to a number of personal characteristics that he felt were important for a student government president to have. Benjamin placed a lot of weight on the student government president being a person of integrity. He portrays his view of the importance he placed on integrity while president by explaining that while he served he sought to be open and up-front with others about his opinions and views as well as not acting in secret or working behind closed doors. He stated,

I never once had a private meeting with someone where I said we could make this go away. I never had once those kind of meetings. I had meetings where I would go and ask for people for support and state my case so they could decide intelligibly for themselves. (Interview 1)

Benjamin also brought up passion, especially for the college, as an essential character trait. He stated,

I also was fascinated by the structure of higher education, how the small college was designed, and how it was laid out in terms of structure, how it was administrated . . . that was for me most fascinating. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to contend, “I would say a majority of SGA presidents have a fascination with institutions of higher education at all levels including administrative and academic student services. All of us have a respect for and an appreciation of it . . .” (Interview 1).

Benjamin believed that respect for others is an important character trait. He asserted, “I learned a lot . . . about the rules of life that really do apply universally. Treat people well, and always do what’s right and just and fair” (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to state, “You have to be fair and you have to show people that you’re fair and you have to show people that everybody has a voice” (Interview 2).

Benjamin felt that inquisitive nature was also a vital trait for a student government president. He contended it was his inquisitive nature that was the root of his desire to be president. He stated, “I was inquisitive about making a difference for people. Um, and even now my interest in politics isn’t motivated by a desire to run for election, um . . . I think my inquisitive nature . . . pushed me to a point to run for the student government presidency” (Interview 2).

Benjamin also recognized that leadership entails risk and being willing to expose oneself, therefore he felt that being a risk-taker is a key character trait for a student government president. He asserted, “you can’t lead anybody anywhere unless you are willing to step up and take a little bit of a risk and move ahead to the next place” (Interview 2). However, Benjamin admitted that early in his presidency he was at times timid or tentative in regard to making decisions or taking action on his own. He explained, “I used to be very hesitant to make a decision by myself. I’d have to call a meeting and I’d have to discuss it” (Interview 1). That being said, Benjamin asserted that by the end of his presidency he had grown in confidence and was more willing to make decisions and to take possibly risky action. He declared, “if I know it’s right, I’m not as afraid to pull the trigger anymore and to chart ahead with that decision” (Interview 1). He

further stated, “There are certain things that warrant quick decisions, and I’m readily open to making decisions on my own and quickly” (Interview 1).

Benjamin also recognized the need for the president of student government association to be civically-minded and to display civic responsibility. He argued, “I think a leader . . . would be best described as a person that creatively, energetically, and passionately fulfills the needs of an organization that they’re asked to serve as leader” (Interview 1). Benjamin contended that while president he sought to answer the question, “Could we, you know, could we improve the student’s position here?” (Interview 2). This highlights his desire to be an engaged campus citizen and to take action to better the experiences of others.

Benjamin also addressed being a listener as an important character trait. He explained that while serving as president, he intentionally sought out the ideas of others as he crafted the vision, direction, and actions of SGA. He asserted, “I expect that before I make that decision that I’ll make it in concert with them and having given complete consideration to their work and their passion and to their thoughts on something” (Interview 1). Benjamin also acknowledged that he became a better listener due to his time as president. He stated, “I learned to . . . listen more carefully and to know that their ideas are just as good as my ideas and deserve just as much time and discussion as anybody else” (Interview 1). In the end, he simply stated, that when you “make decisions with people . . . with good counsel that you know will make a difference” (Interview 1).

Another character trait that Benjamin identified was that of being outspoken. Benjamin described himself as outspoken and frank and that he used this trait during his

presidency. He stated, “I was outspoken about my opinions on a few things, um, and that might have had some influence [on my success]” (Interview 2).

### *Roles*

During his interviews, Benjamin identified a number of roles that must be fulfilled by a student government president. Benjamin said that one of the most important roles as president was to engage and bring in others together to make decisions. He stated, “I tried to do as much as I could to bring people alongside me so they could be part of our work together and be a part of our connection as a unit” (Interview 1). Benjamin also said that as president he wanted “to bring everyone to the table and make sure every voice was heard” (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to assert, that one of his other responsibilities as an engager “was to find and groom people to follow us” (Interview 1).

Benjamin also felt that being a mediator was a significant role of the presidency. He argued,

So, my role as SGA president, I thought was to bring the student body together. I saw us as very disconnected. So, the first thing I did was I insisted that we meet around a round table. That was very important to me . . . I think it is important for everyone to be seated equally around table with no clearly defined head. (Interview 1)

Beyond pulling students together for a common purpose, Benjamin also described the role of a mediator as a bridge between the students and the college’s administration and board of trustees. He contended,

I tried to see my role as allowing students an opportunity to have their voice heard at the executive level of the college with the vice presidents . .

. and with the president . . . I tried to represent the student's voice at board [of trustees] meetings. (Interview 1)

He went on to state, "I also saw my role as being important as an ambassador for the students to the board and as a representative of the college" (Interview 1). In addition, Benjamin clarified that he also felt that as a mediator the student government president must also build connections with the college faculty and its leadership. He asserted, "I tried to do all that I could to connect us up with the faculty senate" (Interview 1).

Benjamin also recognized president as advocate as a significant role and responsibility of his time in student government. He explained,

I tried to see my role as allowing students and opportunity to have their voice heard at the executive level of the college with the vice president for various things and with the president, were it appropriate. I tried to represent the student's voice at board [of trustees] meetings. (Interview 1)

In addition to being the voice of the student body to the college administration and trustees, Benjamin also saw the role of the student government president as serving as a voice of the students to the faculty. Beyond serving as a voice, Benjamin also argued that the student government president is also a person of action. He felt that the president not only advocates for the student body but also makes decisions and takes actions on their behalf. He argued that, as president, "I expect that I will be able to, to make decisions on their behalf and with their trust" (Interview 1).

Benjamin briefly described the president of the student body as a cheerleader and public persona of the College by stating, "Um, you, you got to put on a blue and gold tie and a blue blazer every now and then because you are, um, that's who you are; you're that to the campus" (Interview 2).



Benjamin also acknowledged the significance of mentoring as a duty. He said that he saw this role as “primary. As part of your role as a leader is to, is to help other people hone their leadership skills. It’s essential for the sustainability of an organization” (Interview 1). He succinctly argued, “One of them [roles of the president] was to find and groom people . . .” (Interview 1). Benjamin even admitted that he, too, was recruited and cultivated. He said, “I was approached to run for president my sophomore year” (Interview 2).

Benjamin also described how he recruited and cultivated the leaders that would come after him. He asserted,

I tried to do as much as I could to bring people alongside me so they could be a part of our work together, um, and be a part of our connection as a unit. Um, I would invite people to sit, to executive board meetings so they could see the inside, what happens on the inside. (Interview 1)

He went on to state, “I looked for representatives of the student body, people that I wouldn’t always agree with but people that represented voices of the student body” (Interview 1).

Sandra

### *Profile*

Sandra served as the president of the Student Government Association from 2005 to 2006, is a white female, and was a traditional-aged student. She was born and raised in a middle-class Protestant Georgia family. She was 19 and a junior during her presidency. She was strong student with a 3.51 GPA, and she majored in communications with a concentration in public relations. Sandra was a recruited and cultivated by Benjamin

while he was president. She was an engaged member of the campus community. She served on the College's concert choir all four years and spent one school year as an orientation leader. She also participated on the College's homecoming court for three consecutive years and was crowned queen her senior year. Sandra was an active member of the senate where she served as a freshmen and as a sophomore representative. At the behest and encouragement of Benjamin, she ran for the presidency her junior year and won with little opposition. Even though at the outset she had to overcome the shadow of Benjamin's two-term presidency, she did find her niche by focusing on the need for construction of a new student center and the establishment of a student activities fee, which had been initially proposed by Trent three years before. Unlike her immediate predecessor, Sandra did not run for a second term, but after her presidential term remained involved in campus life by serving in paraprofessional position focusing on coordinating special events for the office of student activities. Immediately following her term as president, she spent the summer as an intern in the Georgia Governor's Office. Upon her graduation, she took a position as a membership coordinator for a local chamber of commerce and then after two years took a position as corporate relations officer at a regional bank.

### *The Experience*

Sandra described her experience as student government president at Emerging College as "a lot of fun. You make a lot of lifetime friends, life-long friends. And I think just the experience in itself, with the leadership roles that I took on, just helped mold you and make you into the, the woman I am today and into the positions that I've taken on in

my work, um, in the work world, I guess, or whatever. So, it was all very positive” (Interview 1). Sandra went on to declare, “I think just the experience in itself with the leadership roles that I took on just helped mold you and make you into the, the woman I am today and into the positions that I’ve taken on in my work” (Interview 1).

Sandra expressed that her presidency was a growing experience for her through which she saw improvements in her self-confidence and self-efficacy. Sandra stated that due to her experience her “personality changed, it has changed a lot. Um, I used to let people walk all over me and I don’t do that any more. And so that’s a positive thing” (Interview 1). She went on to state,

I had always had confidence, but I felt like that gave me even more confidence . . . I’m an outgoing person but I don’t just walk up to you on the street and say, hi, I’m Sandra. Who are you? You know, that’s not my personality. But I had to be, a lot, my, as president and I think that helped me a lot. (Interview 1)

Likewise, Sandra articulated how she felt her experience as president improved her interpersonal skills. She said, “I don’t think I listened very well. Um, I, I don’t think I did at the beginning . . .” (Interview 1). However, due to her experience, she learned “to rely on other people, delegating. You still get burned and I still get let down and disappointed by, when I do delegate, and it’s not done but I think that helped me have to do that more, learn how to do it more” (Interview 1).

Sandra acknowledged a number of downsides to being the student government president. Sandra described feeling isolated from others, especially her peers due to the insider knowledge she possessed. She asserted that as president,

You learn a lot, or you get to hear a lot of secrets and stuff, almost so much so that you don't want to know them. Not that you're sworn to secrecy but there are things that you can't tell other students because they won't understand. Ah, and it was, that was hard. (Interview 2)

Sandra also felt that she had to deal with a higher level of scrutiny and accountability while president. She was comfortable in the glare of the spotlight. She seemed to seek out the attention. She said of her presidency: "It was kind of like I was famous on campus" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to say,

I loved the attention. And that sounds awful but I did. I loved having, um, it's not even a power, I don't want to say, a power, but I loved knowing that, um, I had my name tag that said "SGA President," or when I could introduce myself, or when I had to do freshman orientations and I had to get up and speak in front of all the freshmen or all the parents, or whatever. It's a respected position and that's very important to me. (Interview 1)

However, Sandra also acknowledged that being the center of attention and in the spotlight had its shortcomings. For example, she described how the aspect of being on stage challenged her as president. She said,

Well, you are in the spotlight all the time. Whether I wanted to know that I think that or not, I'm, just people are watching. So, personally it challenges you because, or it challenged me because, ah, even when I didn't want to be happy. If I was walking down the sidewalk and I wasn't smiling, somebody would literally ask me "Are you okay, what's wrong, why aren't you smiling?" And that would make me so ill, I'd be like "Do I have to have a smile on my face 24/7? Do I sleep with a smile on my face?" NO. And it's just funny because when people saw me in the spotlight normally I was in a good mood, I was smiling, but I'm not in a good mood 24/7. (Interview 2)

Sandra went on to describe the negative aspects of the high level of scrutiny and accountability,

I think that personal challenge was the fact that you can't really mess up and then there are some that really want you to mess up, you know, like banking on you messing up so they can like point it out to people or get kicked out, or whatever, and so, you had to be on your toes all the time. (Interview 2)

Additionally, Sandra talked about how her duties as president took up her free time which she associated with being a downside to being president. She said, "I honestly can't think of, other than it taking up a lot of your personal time, but that was never really a problem to me. Um, I guess there were some nights I didn't want to have our exec meetings, you know, late at night, or whatever" (Interview 1). Sandra also affirmed this loss of time with family and friends. She declared that her presidency "took up time . . . away from my family, I wasn't able to go home as much" (Interview 1).

Sandra also ascribed a sense of emotional loss to her time as president of the Student Government Association. For example, she contended that her presidency was at times frustrating and the need for juggling multiple tasks and responsibilities led to burn out. She stated,

there's a lot of little things like that, that I guess frustrated me, and, and that was, I guess just, it only frustrated me because I was a perfectionist, and I couldn't make it the way I wanted it to be, which would have been perfect. I had to sit back and watch it be, you know, half-assed (laughs), so it was kind of frustrating sometimes with that. (Interview 2)

Sandra went on to state, "I feel like I could have still done a little bit more, you know, but I almost started, we have the end of every school year getting burnt out and I was already starting to get burnt out" (Interview 2).

Sandra did not find her experience as president to be stressful in negative fashion. She admitted to being stressed, but not overwhelmed. She said, "I got stressed out over a

few things, but I just didn't feel like it was worth crying over. You know, it wasn't, it was a big deal and I always made it a big deal, I didn't clown around at it too much"

(Interview 1). She went on to contend, "I think, at times it was, but I work well under stress. I think I work better under stress or when I have deadlines" (Interview 1). Sandra followed that statement with "I was expecting it to be a lot more stressful than it was. And I'm kind of glad that I had really high expectations, so that way, I'm glad. I'm glad I didn't expect less and then was overwhelmed. You know, like, I expected the worst and I was very pleased with what turned out" (Interview 1).

As a mechanism to cope with the stress she encountered as president, Sandra sought refuge in her art. She described how she "was able to find release in my minor which was art. And so, I would, at least every semester, take one to two art classes to try and just balance out the crazy hecticness . . ." (Interview 1).

Sandra admitted that she found it difficult to balance being serving the student body and serving the college administration. She declared, "it was, that was hard. It was hard when administration that I would support would do something against the students and yet, I was still supporting them. That made it difficult" (Interview 2).

Sandra also divulged that she felt challenged while trying to find a sense of balance. However, although she felt that her personal life was out of kilter because of the responsibilities and duties of the presidency, she admitted she understood that that to be part of the burden of leadership. She stated that the presidency took "up a lot of your personal time, but that was never really a problem to me" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to assert, "it took up time, as far as, away from my family. I wasn't able to go home as

much, um, and I, not necessarily, didn't like that but, um, it, it's just, it's a commitment that you make" (Interview 1).

In regards to being a female student body president, Sandra stated, "because the female before me [which was Callie], was a good five years before, I think, um, and it didn't go very well with her as president, from what I understood. .... I think I had a lot to prove as a female" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to say "I think...I had to fight for respect and I think, I think I set the bar at a different level than it had been and maybe that's just me thinking that" (Interview 1). Furthermore, she contended,

I think that, because I followed so many males before me, um, I do think I had to raise the bar to a different level. Its not that I raised it above them, it's that it was just a transition, it was just different, it, the way I handled things were just different. And um, I think it was a good change, you know. (Interview 1)

Sandra concluded,

because there hadn't been a whole lot of positive with a girl being president before me, I felt like I had a lot of things to prove and I think I did a good job with it. .... I think I did a good job when I was there um, but I do think its, and there have been since me, a few females that have run, they haven't won, but have run and, and I think that's good. I think they should keep running. (Interview 1)

### *Relationships*

Sandra discussed a number of relationships she had as student government president with individuals and groups on campus. In regards to her relationship with the college staff, Sandra felt that she had a positive relationship with the staff of the college. She declared "I loved them all. They were probably my favorite out of everybody. And,

as far as, um, because they all worked for the same goal, they are all trying to meet the same goal, and its all for the students” (Interview 1). Furthermore, she contended,

as far as student affairs, and, I’ve really, I just, I always connected with all of those people, and I still talk to a good many of them, and I’m sure I always will continue just because, *yawn*, excuse me, they helped me out, a lot and they helped me with personal things. I mean, they were all just great. (Interview 1)

She went on to say,

most of them worked with me as much as they could, and most of them want to see the students accomplish and achieve things. I think some of them, in the past, maybe tried to suppress the students, or whatever. But, I never really felt like I butted heads with too many of them, or any of them, really. Um, so I didn’t ever really have a problem with them. (Interview 1)

Sandra also felt that she had a constructive relationship with the members of the board. During the course of her interviews, Sandra described the importance of the relationship between student government president and the trustees. She contended, “if the board of trustees does not like the president, or does not feel a connection with the president, or thinks that they’re fake, or whatever, they’re not going to, they won’t do for the president or for the students, I don’t think” (Interview 1). Sandra went on to state that the members of the board of trustees

make decisions based on the facts that they have. If they’re not told exactly the right story or, you know, from every point of view, then they’re not able to make a correct or a, I don’t know, impartial judgment. And so, for me, like I just, that was very important to me. (Interview 1)

She went on to state, “I do think that they respected me enough to listen to what I had to say and if it was important to me, that they would make it important to them” (Interview 1). Moreover, Sandra contended,



I think it is very important that, and I think that's something that needs to be stressed to each president that, this is not something to be taken lightly, you know. Like, you can make or break your year with, you know, the board of trustees. (Interview 1)

Through her interviews, Sandra acknowledged the positive nature of her relationship she had with the student government advisor. Sandra granted that the advisor plays an important role within SGA. She stated, "it's a very important position. There always needs to be an advisor, I think, for everything" (Interview 1). Sandra described the roles of the advisor as a listener, advocate, coach, and guide. She admitted, "I didn't have a clue what to do when I came into the position . . . [The advisor] would kind of guide me and tell me that . . . give me ideas to get my brain start to thinking, and then I would explode from there" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to further describe the advisor as a guide. She stated,

I look at it more of just guidance and more of advice, I could take it or not, you know, and, and more than none I would take the advice and I would do it, especially because if it was someone in your position or someone older that had been through it. Why would I not take their advice if they're going to say you're going to fall flat on your face if you do this?  
(Interview 2)

In addition, Sandra said the advisor also helped to keep her on the path to reach her goals and objectives and from getting distracted or derailed. In short, she said, "Like the advisors, you know, y'all just are there to listen and make sure we don't tell kids to go jump off buildings, you know. I mean, [the advisors are] there to keep us sane . . . and [from] going off on 10 different tangents" (Interview 1). She affirmed, "you definitely need the advisor's guidance" (Interview 1).

Sandra also stated that even though she wanted more hand-holding, she was glad that the advisor acted as a hands-off guide and coach rather than someone who gave them all of the answers. She went on to describe how the advisor encouraged and empowered her to seek answers and to take risks and, in turn, to lead her organization in her own way. Sandra stated, “there were times I wanted [the advisor] to give me the, ‘Just tell me yes or no.’ . . . and [the advisor] wouldn’t do it. And [the advisor] would say, you’ll, you’ll figure it out . . .” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “what I wanted, was to be told: ‘Do this and this will happen.’ Which I’m glad [the advisor] didn’t do. [The advisor] didn’t do that. [The advisor] said, ‘[the advisor] should really think about doing this’” (Interview 1). Sandra said that at times when she asked a “specific question, and [the advisor] would say, ‘I don’t know, why don’t you look at it yourself or why don’t you do some research on that or figure that out yourself’” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “I think [the advisor] did a good job balancing, you know, being able to tell us . . . I think, to figure it out for ourselves” (Interview 1).

Sandra went on to contend, “the role of the advisor, [the advisor] taught me a lot of lessons as to, um, [the advisor] let me fall on my face, which was good because it needs to happen” (Interview 1). She clarified this statement by saying that part of being an advisor is to enlighten the members of SGA and especially the president-leader that failure and mistakes are going to happen and that they should not be feared. The advisor should not shield the president from them, but should use them as teachable moments. Sandra asserted, “I mean, you learn things from your mistakes and so the advisor’s role, to me, is to guide and direct them in the right direction, but not to do the job for them”

(Interview 1). She maintained, “if we fall on our face, [the advisor] kind of pick, pick us back up and [the advisor] help us see what we did and we’re able to learn from it”

(Interview 1).

Last, Sandra said that it was important that advisor be supportive of the actions taken by the Student Government Association. She admitted,

[The advisor] pretty much supported any ideas that I had, and that I had but I had to just get the backing of the executive committee. So, I don’t feel like [the advisor] ever put [his] thumb on me or said that, you know, suppressed any kind of, I mean, cause [the advisor] wanted the students, [the advisor] wanted us to succeed and for us to do things . . . (Interview 2)

In regards to her relationship with her peers, Sandra reflected that her experience was both positive and negative with the executive board and the student senate. She described her experience as both a constructive and frustrating at the same time. Regarding interactions and work with her executive board she stated, “we worked together as a group” (Interview 1). Although she felt that they worked as a team, Sandra also admitted that she had to learn to delegate to the members of the executive board and she struggled with doing so because of personality conflicts. She said, “I couldn’t have a hand on everything, ah, my huh, my executive staff, there are some very good ones and then there were a few that were not so good, and that was frustrating” (Interview 1). She went onto clarify that, like previous presidents, the differing and conflicting personalities of the executive board members did not always mesh, but in the end she felt that they all contributed and played part of accomplishing their goals and objectives. She explained,

I liked them all . . . I tried not to butt heads with anybody, and I don’t think I really did, a whole lot. Some of them really annoyed me. Um, the

student activities guy at the time didn't really do his job very well, and that frustrated me a lot. But, um, but, I think we all did our part. We all complimented each other . . . I think that was a good mix. (Interview 1)

Sandra also found her relationship with the student senate to be frustrating and a hindrance to the achievement of her goals. She acknowledged that she had difficulty overcoming personality conflicts with a number of its members. She asserted, "Some people gave me heck about certain things . . . whatever, you're going to have that with everybody" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to state,

There were some students that I did not want to listen to, more personal reasons than not. Because I knew things that they were doing was for personal reasons and not for the bettering of the students and so, I wouldn't listen. We didn't really get along very well. A lot people, or, I don't say WE . . . just as a whole we didn't work very well together, ah, and there were a few of us that did and there were a few that did not. (Interview 2)

She continued by describing why she found student senate meetings aggravating. She contended,

I thing a lot of times these meetings were very frustrating. Because we would have ideas and there would be half of us that really wanted to do it, and the other half wouldn't, and unless we could come up with a consensus, we couldn't do them, and that was very frustrating 'cause it was like, "You just don't see the big picture." (Interview 2)

At times she felt that because of the conflicts with the members of the student senate that, as president, she "had no power to change things, within the senate" (Interview 2). She continued,

you just kind of have those unruly people that, I mean, there's a percentage of voting that had to take place, and we were split a lot of times. Lots of times people were just voting for popularity reasons. They didn't really care about being there, so they didn't show up. Ah, there was a lot of people that wanted to be to make the changes and not in a good

way. So, I think we had a lot of apathetic people my junior year on the senate. I don't think we had a whole lot of, like, driven people and so, that caused, I think, a lot of inabilities to change. (Interview 2)

She declared that working with the student senate, "was very difficult, ah, the senate members were not doing their jobs" (Interview 2). In the end, though, she professed, "I expected it to be a lot worse than it was and I had, I think, more fun with it than I had anger and strife and ill-will towards others" (Interview 2).

Sandra considered her relationship with faculty as positive and negative. She believed that she had a constructive relationship with faculty members based on mutual respect. She claimed, "I did have a, I think, a good relationship with, pretty much, all faculty" (Interview 1). She went on to describe how her relationship with faculty was built on deference and that the relationship went beyond the classroom environment. She stated, "I think it's getting to know the faculty and the staff and the trustees and earning their respect. And, I think I did and it helped in my classroom relationships. It helped in, um, relationships as far as out of school" (Interview 1). However, even though she felt her relationship with many of the faculty at Emerging College was positive, she was also frustrated by what she believed to be some disingenuous faculty members. She asserted, "I respected every professor at that school, on some level. Some I did not like, and some said they were student advocates and were not—they wanted things to happen the way they wanted them to happen" (Interview 1).

Sandra did describe her relationship with the College's administration and in turn the College president for the most part as positive. She stated,

Most of them worked with me as much as they could and most of them wanted to see the students accomplish and achieve things. I think some of them, in the past, maybe tried to suppress the students, or whatever. But, I never really felt like I butted heads with too many of them, or any of them, really. Um, so I didn't ever really have a problem with them. (Interview 1)

### *Personal Characteristics*

Sandra highlighted a number of personal characteristics that she felt were essential for student government presidents. Sandra discussed how she believed that integrity was a key ingredient for a successful SGA president. She described integrity as holding on to her beliefs and opinions and sticking to her guns when she felt that she was in the right. Sandra stated, "I needed to stick with what my thoughts and my beliefs were, and I needed to stand strong to what I wanted to accomplish. And by that I had to be myself" (Interview 2).

During her interviews and journaling, Sandra also discussed her passion for being the president of SGA. She stated, "Something I had to learn as SGA President was that...my job as SGA President [was] first and foremost" (Journal 1). She went on to contend that the presidency "was a big deal and I always made it a big deal" (Interview 1).

Sandra contended that respect for others is an important character trait for student government presidents. She insisted, "I think people need to feel that they're very appreciated" (Interview 1). Sandra moreover felt that curiosity and an inquisitive nature are important traits for student government presidents. She asserted, "I think I do go and seek out the answers" (Interview 2).

Sandra also identified risk taking as defining of a leader. She contended,

A leader is someone who can listen and who, um, can handle the details and, um, someone that is not afraid to, um, to screw up, to mess up, but who, after they do mess up, learns from the mistakes and is able to improve upon them . . . . (Interview 1)

Sandra described herself prior to her presidency as being fairly self-confident and willing to go her own way. She simply stated, “I’ve never been one to just kind of blend into the crowd” (Interview 1). Sandra described a significant gamble that she took as president. She pushed for the establishment of a student activities fee. She asserted, “I think asking for the student activity fee was a huge risk, ah, but students did it. They agreed to it, so, ah, I think just because that was such a *huge* deal to the students” (Interview 2).

In regard to being an engaged citizen, Sandra emphasized the importance of a leader placing others and the community above him or herself. She stated that, “[a leader] doesn’t put themselves above others because [a] leader is not any more important than the follower” (Interview 1). She went on to contend, “A leader is a servant and is someone who can give themselves first and foremost, to . . . others” (Interview 1).

### *Roles*

Through her interviews, Sandra depicted a number of roles that she felt were critical to the student government presidency. One such role that Sandra felt was important was that of an engager. That said, Sandra confessed that she came late to the idea that the president should seek out and engage others. She readily admitted that she attempted to serve as president as a solo act, but she acknowledged that she soon learned that she could not balance all of the responsibilities on her shoulders alone. Sandra stated,

I also had to learn how to trust the rest of my staff when it came to getting the job done. I am use to doing everything myself but this experience

taught me that you can delegate and that it doesn't always blow up in your face. :-) I learned how to trust others more when it came to work and how to stop working when it came to "my time". (Journal 1)

She confessed,

You can't do it all as president. You have to delegate. And that's hard for me. And that was really hard for me as president, and I would try and do a lot of it by myself and until probably midway through the year, I realized I couldn't do it. (Interview 1)

Sandra went on to say, "having people say they would do something ,and it would be done and it would be done well, that stood out to me and that made me realize that I could rely on people more and trust them more" (Interview 1).

Sandra also believed that the student government president must serve as a bridge builder. She stated, "I think the president's a very important position, they're a mediator" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to describe the role of a president as mediator, "To be that one voice that . . . takes . . . the common census of what is needed and wanted by the students . . . and make that decision happen" (Interview 1).

Sandra also identified advocacy as one of the primary roles of a student government president. She described the advocacy and spokesperson role of the student government president as "speaking on behalf of the students . . . to be that one voice that, you know, 50 to 60 can not be" (Interview 1). She went on to say the role of the student government president is,

to take from those meetings, the common census of what is needed and wanted by the students, who then are supposed to be the voices of those other people, of all the other organizations and classes, and whatever. So, hopefully if they get the ideas from their people, bring it to the senate and it all becomes one decision, then the president can take it from there and make that decision happen. (Interview 1)



Sandra maintained that she did not seek the presidency as a power position, but as a means of advocacy. She stated,

I'm not a power type of person, I really could care less who holds the power, but I like to know that I have a say. I like to know that my voice is being heard and I like other people to be able to feel like their voices are being heard. So, if I'm the go-to, the person that embodies that for them, then and can speak for them, then I want to do that. (Interview 2)

Through our discussions, Sandra felt that she was a successful advocate for the student body. She contended that, "as far as being the voice for the students, I felt I did my job right. I mean, I got it, got the ball rolling, which is what we needed and what we wanted" (Interview 1). She went on to express how much personal satisfaction she received for her role as an advocate for the student body. She asserted, "my best memories were my speaking engagements, whether it was speaking in front of the parents, um, or speaking in front of the board of trustees or the faculty or students" (Interview 1).

Another presidential role that Sandra felt was important was that of mentor. Sandra freely acknowledged that she was recruited to be the student government president. She stated, "I was approached by the current president at the time, to run for president for the next year, for my junior year" (Interview 1). Sandra explained the significance of being approached,

So, I guess I did it just because, well, when a little bug puts, you know, you know, that in your ear and tells you, you should really do this, it makes you start thinking and you're like, "I could so do that." (Interview 1)

She further stated,

I mean, when he just, when he talked to me about it, I was just, it just, it, it literally was just that little bug that got put in my ear and it just wouldn't go away, and I was just like, "I'm doing it," you know. And so, I guess having somebody tell you that you would be good at something, if they see that in you, um, really gives you confidence also . . . It did for me. (Interview 1)

Sandra described how she was recruited and mentored by Benjamin to be his successor. She stated, "Benjamin came and talked to me at dinner one night and threw the idea out at me. And, it was like a week or two before I had to finalize my decision and then go through the election process" (Interview 1). She further described how she felt about being approached by Benjamin:

It was, ah, I was very honored 'cause, I mean, he was the president at the time so, you know, I was kind of nervous when he said I need to have dinner with you, or something. I was like "All right." And, they kind of approached me with the idea and they were like, "Just think about it, you know, sit on it . . ." (Interview 2)

Sandra further avowed, "when y'all approached me in my Sophomore year and asked me if I would to run, I started thinking about it and I was thinking, 'Oh, what else would I do?'" (Interview 2). She concluded,

I felt honored. I was excited. Scared to death, ah, so it was kind of just a big ball of emotions, you know, that I went through thinking about it, trying to figure out and then it was almost like there was no question. I was like well 'Duh! Yeah, I'm going to do it!' You know, so, ah, I think it was good that you're approached. (Interview 2)

Joey

### *Profile*

Joey served as the president of the Student Government Association from 2006 to 2007, is a white male, and was a traditional-aged student. He was 20 years old and a

senior when he served as president. He was strong student with over a 3.52 GPA, and he majored in communications with a concentration in public relations. He was born and raised in a middle-class, Protestant Georgia family with close ties to the community that surrounded the college. Joey's leadership experience revolved around athletics, in particularly the college's cross-country team where he served as captain for two-years. Joey was recruited and cultivated by Sandra while she was president, and he was appointed to serve as her chief of staff. Sandra selected Joey as her chief of staff because they were close friends and she trusted him. Prior to his role as chief of staff, he had no connection with nor involvement in the Student Government Association. Some of the accomplishments of his year in office include improving communication with the faculty senate, successfully administering the allocations and oversight of the student activities fee, reconnecting with student government alumni, and establishing a student government presidential debate, which is held in conjunction with the executive board elections each spring. He was able to increase the communication and interaction with the faculty senate. He forged an agreement to have the student government president address the faculty senate at their meetings during the school year. He was able to reconnect with alumni and alumnae by hosting a celebration to honor the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Student Government Association and by honoring the first president and vice president through renaming two service awards. Following his term in office and his graduation from Emerging College he pursued a career in business marketing and the public relations industry.

*The Experience*

Joey described his experience as student government president at Emerging College as overly positive. Joey said, “it was a lot of fun” (Interview 1). He went on to say that, “it was great just to kind of step out of where I was in high school and just, kind of evolve into the person that I became” (Interview 1).

Joey described his experience as “a definite learning experience and part of, you know, why I am like I am today, just kind of reshape me” (Interview 1). Joey also stated, “I think that . . . it was a growing experience for me.” He went on to declare, “I really enjoyed the way I kind of, I transformed throughout the year . . .” (Interview 1). In addition, he said “it’s really kind of, you know, this is kind of cliché but it’s made me a better person. It really has . . .” (Interview 1). Joey explained that due to his experiences as student government president that he has gained more self-assurance. He said,

I think definitely, you know, even kind of the quiet mouse I talked about earlier, you know, someone that would say, all right, somebody else take the reigns. Where now, you know, I enjoy going out and, you know, taking the reigns . . . I’m a lot more outspoken now. (Interview 1)

Joey stated, “I think that . . . it was a growing experience for me. Like I said before, kind of the, the whole aspect of working with people, um, you know, advancing my, um, interpersonal relationship skills, all of that” (Interview 2).

Joey acknowledged that the student government presidency did have a negative side. Joey felt during his presidency a sense of isolation from other members of the campus community and his fellow student leaders due to his role the final decision-maker and from the burden that role placed on him. He stated,

as far as the isolation and being alone, sometimes as . . . the decision maker . . . [it] comes down to, you . . . here's, everybody's voted . . . typically, it was the SGA President and executive board that had the last vote and so . . . maybe one way or the other, it was, it was kind of like an isolation . . . thing where . . . it's just me now . . . . I call it an isolation because, you know, it was, at one time, oh, here's the decision on his shoulders. (Interview 2)

Joey also reflected on the high level of scrutiny and accountability he faced while serving as president. He affirmed what the other participants felt about being at the center of decision-making with all eyes upon you. He stated,

I think that's what SGA taught me, you know, you're sitting up there and you've got, you know, 40 people looking at you for answers saying, "OK. Well, here's our problem. What are you gonna do?" I mean, you've got to provide them an answer. (Interview 1)

In addition, Joey described his experience as president as being stressful. He attributed his stress to being overwhelmed by the commitments of the office. He stated,

there was just a lot of things on my plate and so, at times, you know, there were, there were long days. It was like I was working a job, you know, with everything that I had going on. You know, I kind of think back now and I'm like, wow, I kind of want, you know, SGA again. You know, being, being doing all that because it was just a lot on my plate and there were times I didn't think I was going to get everything I needed to get done. (Interview 2)

Moreover, Joey found it difficult to balance the needs and desires of the students and those of the administration. Joey believed the primary "role of the student body president is to lead, kind of voice the concerns of the students to other students, administration, trustees" (Interview 1). Throughout his interviews, Joey did acknowledge a struggle to find a balance between these two groups.

Joey was also challenged while seeking to find balance in his life as president. He stressed,

it was really tough because, you know, I like fast-paced things but, but when it's every day, you know, for a whole semester . . . it was, it was starting to wear but, you know. There were times I remember having to really balance my day, you know, as far as, you know, writing it down on pieces of paper, you know, "Here's what I've got to do." (Interview 2)

He went on maintain,

I had a really full plate, um, my senior year from. I had internships during the fall. I was running cross country, um, to being, you know, serving on the SGA to . . . I'll give Lindsey some credit: Being, you know, having a girlfriend on campus, you know, having to balance that . . . (Interview 2)

### *Relationships*

Joey viewed his relationship with the college's staff in a positive light. He contended,

I think it was, you know, very important for the students to see, the administration, sometimes in our meetings. You know, we didn't want them there the whole time, believe me, but just when, you know, we would invite them, they never refused to come in, and I thought that was important, um, that they were there and, you know, they were willing to talk, willing to explain, you know, maybe what was going on and kind of calm some concerns that students may have. (Interview 1)

Joey also felt that he had a positive relationship with the members of the college's board of trustees. He expressed how much he took pleasure in his interactions with the members of the board of trustees. Joey stated, "I know personally, um, I really enjoyed the action planning committee and things like the student development committee, um, because they were there just, you know, talking about student needs" (Interview 1).

In regards to his relationship with the student government advisor, Joey described how the advisor encouraged him to take ownership of his presidency. He stated it best by saying, “What challenged me the most? I think, uh, I think [our advisor] did a great job of challenging me” (Interview 1). Joey went on to describe how the advisor empowered him to seek out the answers and solutions to the issues confronting him and the student body without coddling him. He stated,

something [the advisor was] saying to us, well, “Hey, y’all are adults. Go about this like you would in these executive meetings. I trust you, so here it is.” And so, that was the biggest encouragement to me. At some point, I would look around and say, “Well, you know, I’m in charge here.” (Interview 2).

Joey’s experience with his peers on his executive board and in the student senate was a mixture of positive and negative. He admitted that he, like his predecessors, struggled with his relationships with his peers in the SGA, but through his struggles he enhanced his interpersonal and conflict-management skills. He attributed the challenges he faced with this peers to his desire to appease others, to interpersonal conflicts, and to communication issues. Joey stated, “I think it was just a combination of attitudes, um . . . strong-willed people, at some point, and just, some just blatant communication issues” (Interview 2). Even though he was challenged by interpersonal relationships with the members of his executive board, he expressed that he had an overall positive relationship with them. Unlike Trent, he was open to their ideas and would, like Sandra, delegate responsibilities to them and empower them to act. Joey contended, “I think just mainly with the executive board we had a lot of, we would meet, you know, before the SGA

meetings and it was on a real personal level . . . I was no higher than them, is the way I would like to, to run it. And so, they got their fair share to say things” (Interview 2).

Although Joey felt that he had a positive relationship with the members of his executive board, he admitted that he did not share such a relationship with many of the members of the student senate. Joey struggled to overcome the personal attacks and the personal agendas held by some in the student senate. Joey declared,

Dealing with, you know, certain people who may tend to get out of control sometimes, maybe tend to, you know, rub your face in the mud, try to make you look bad, you know. I’ve always disliked people who try to do that to other people. (Interview 1)

He went on to assert,

I want[ed] to represent the school and try to make it good, and here they are, you know, trying to, you know, bad talk you or, you know, trying to make you look like the person you’re not supposed to be. So, I always, I felt, you know, that, I really didn’t like that part of it. (Interview 1)

On further reflection, Joey contended,

I think it was just a part of people maybe having their own agendas, too. You know, here’s things that they want to get done and so it was really hard to, you know, be that decision maker at the top and have to, you know, sometimes say, “Hey, you know, I really don’t feel like fighting for that because, you know, I don’t see that being, I see that being as you and your friends as, you know, you have a problem with that.” So, luckily, you know, I don’t, I don’t think it ever came to that it was just minor. You know, petty issues . . . usually about distribution of funds and stuff, and so . . . But, uh, I mean, there were times where it was, you know, I wouldn’t say difficult, just, you know, a little interesting to work with people, so . . . (Interview 2)

The relational issue that challenged Joey the most, in regard to his peers in SGA, was his desire to appease everyone. He stated, “the worst parts for me, um, would probably just be the . . . you couldn’t please everybody” (Interview 1). He went on to



admit, “you know, I was really stupid. I tried to appease way too many people and I got myself in trouble” (Interview 1). He continued, “when you try to appease a, a big student body like that, someone is going to get their feelings hurt, and then, you know, you never know who that, who that could be, you know, what kind of impact that would leave on them, so . . .” (Interview 2). However, Joey later reflected that as a leader it is not possible to appease all parties. He stated, “you can never do that, but I always was kind of someone that tried to do that, and, um, just the, the lesson I learned from that” (Interview 1).

Joey believed his relationship with the faculty was both a negative and positive aspect of his presidency. In short, he stated that he “felt like it was a love/hate relationship” (Interview 1). He contended that he found his relationship with the faculty to be both encouraging and frustrating. Joey admitted that he was initially confident that his relationship would be constructive.

I had the opportunity to, uh, speak in front of the faculty senate . . . And so, I would bring kind of what SGA was doing, and usually, you know, it was, I was mindful of their time and they, so I would keep it very short, you know, and just highlight a couple ideas that we had worked on and discussed. (Interview 1)

At the outset, Joey was heartened by the response he received from his time in front of the faculty senate and believed that he was making inroads in establishing a strong rapport between the two governing groups. He said that a faculty member “pulled me aside and said, ‘You know, how’s SGA going? You know, you know, I’ve heard a lot of good things out of there.’ And, so, it was very encouraging that the, the faculty were on the side of the students” (Interview 1). Joey went on to describe his experience. He stated,

I think it really helped going before them in the faculty senate, and just, if it's just explaining what we're doing. I think that was the first time anyone had ever gone before the faculty senate from SGA and just kind of given a report. You know, I'm sure they could talk to somebody and, oh yeah, we had SGA meetings and here's what we did. But, just the visual of me up there, telling them what we'd done. I think that kind of increased their knowledge . . . . (Interview 1)

However, Joey's optimism regarding his relationship with the faculty was short lived. He was soon to feel that his presence at the faculty senate meetings was simply being ignored, which made him cynical about his relationship with the faculty at Emerging College. Joey described his growing pessimism,

Sometimes I felt as I stood up there, you know, they were just kind of looking away or, you know, maybe weren't paying attention. Maybe they didn't feel like these ideas were, you know, good enough. And then, you know, question times, "Anybody have any questions?" and nothing would happen, you know. And so, at times I felt slighted, but there were definitely faculty members who were very willing to work with the SGA. (Interview 1)

He continued to illustrate his frustration by stating,

It's like they didn't, they were trying to, you know, hurry me along. And so, I think I had mentioned before that in our question/answer time, I always asked for questions and never got a single question. And so it was, it was something that I didn't feel like they wanted me there almost. But you know, maybe they just said, "Hey, you know, we agreed to give him this 10 minutes. You know, let him say his spiel, be on with it, you know, if he really starts screwing up, you know, then we'll start asking questions." So, it was, you know, it was, that was the hardest part for me to understand because, you know, here if I, if I was a faculty member and I had the student coming in saying, "Hey yeah, we're going to have . . ." I think one of the first meetings I had talked about a student that raised a concern about their lack of awareness on sexually transmitted diseases. I mean, if I were to have said that, you know, if a student would have said that to me, and said, "Is that really an issue, do you think that is an issue?" Never once. So, I thought it was, you know, very interesting and it was kind of the, the vibe I got all year was that, you know, they really didn't care if we got there. (Interview 2)

Joey indicated that he had a fairly positive relationship with the college president, Dr. Ingle, while he served as the student government president. Joey suggested that he felt he had a personal relationship with Dr. Ingle. Joey stated,

As far as our college president, you know, I got to know him on a pretty good basis, you know. He would always be one to come up and talk to me, and I was always the one to go up to him and tell him how things were going, you know, whether personally or with student government.  
(Interview 1)

He went on to assert,

I think he was one of the first people to congratulate me on being elected. I think it was one of the next days, I passed him on the sidewalk again and he had stopped and said something to me. You know, actually stopped, not just in passing, and said, you know, “Congratulations on being elected, I look forward to working with you.” And so, that was a big, you know, a big thing in my eyes. It’s like, aw, you know, he really did notice, you know, whether he heard it through the grape vine or he actually read an email, or he actually maybe seeked [sic] someone out and asked them, you know, to um . . . And throughout the year, you know, he was um, more than willing to, you know, talk with me. (Interview 2)

That being said, Joey also hints that he felt that the College president was disengaged and disconnected from the student body at large. He pointed out, “So, he was very, you know, personal in that aspect, but at times I felt it was kind of detrimental because it kind of stopped with me, as most people thought” (Interview 1). Joey went on to explain,

I guess the biggest knock or thing that people say about him is that he is not very personable to the students and I guess I could see that my first years because, you know, um, I had never really spoken to him . . .  
(Interview 2)

*Personal Characteristics*

During his interviews Joey identified a number of personal characteristics that he believed were critical for a student government president. Joey expressed that he felt that a vital character trait of a person serving as the president of SGA is a passion for the college. He testified, “you’ve got to love this college to be . . . a student body president. If you don’t, it’s almost like, what are you doing it for” (Interview 1)?

In addition, Joey discussed the importance of respecting others. He described how his leadership style as president, which centered on engaging others in dialogue and respecting their ideas and opinions, helped make his presidency successful. Joey stated, “I’m kind of the one to sit back and say, ‘Hey, what does everybody else think? Let’s kind of get a group consensus and then if someone’s got to push it forward, we can push it forward’” (Interview 1). He went on to clarify,

I know I’m not the most vocal leader and, you know, that’s . . . but I think it’s something where sometimes people may respect you more or may kind of understand or not feel as intimidated at points, you know, in my leadership role. (Interview 1)

Joey emphasized that his curious nature played a powerful role during his presidency. He stated,

I was always very curious, as in . . . So I was always, you know, kind of somebody that always wanted to get my hands in things and, kind of, pick things up and say, “What is this?” or if something was there and I would just take it apart just to take it apart. So, I was always very into things and kind of wanted to see how things worked . . . (Interview 1)

Joey went on to describe the import of being inquisitive while serving as president. He claimed,

The former presidents I know, and I think you have to have that. If you don't, you're never going to question yourself. Question, I mean, what you believe and question things on behalf of the students. You know, going into it, you know, you wanted, I just wanted to soak up all the information I could . . . . So that was, you know, I was very, very intent on doing so, and if you don't have that, I don't think you are going to succeed. You've got to know every aspect of what SGA, you know, is going to do for the students. (Interview 2)

Joey also stated,

If I wouldn't have had that inquisitive mind, I could not have remembered all those details. You know, something like that because, I, you know, I kind of went into researching that, you know, um, looking at it, you know, finding out . . . just finding out all the information that I could. And so, when you do that, you yourself go in to whether it is the SGA meeting, whether it's a meeting of the Student Development Committee with knowledge and credibility . . . . (Interview 2)

Furthermore, Joey asserted, "I was glad I had that inquisitive nature about me to go out and find out information and kind of research all that was, you know, to be asked of me . . . ." (Interview 2)

Joey also acknowledged that he felt that a willingness to take risks was an important trait for a student government president. He described how the decision merely to seek the position of president entails taking a risk and that that is just the beginning. He stated, "I mean, its kind of . . . a risk to run for, you know, a position on campus because, you know, here you are in a position of authority" (Interview 2).

Regarding civic responsibility, Joey focused on the importance of leaders, specifically the president of student government, to serve others and better the community. He stated, "we really did give something back to this campus" (Interview 1). He went on to contend, "we really did change something that needed to be changed"

(Interview 1). He concluded by saying, “I think that’s kind of the aspects of leadership that, you know, you need to strive for” (Interview 1).

Joey also discussed the value of being a good listener. Joey described how, as president, he would sit in on student senate and other committee meetings and allow those in attendance to voice their ideas and opinions, and he would help steer the direction of the discussions in effective directions. He stated, “I like to sit back and kind of take in what’s happening, and then at the same time, I like to interject and push people towards what should be done” (Interview 1). Joey believed that an effective president was a quiet listener more often than an outspoken advocate.

### *Roles*

Throughout the interviews, Joey acknowledged that the student president had to play multiple roles. First, Joey felt that a student government president must be an engager and as such, he asserts that he proactively sought to engage others. He felt that the president’s role of being an engager was a primary function. He contended, “I think that was kind of the one thing that I wanted to see. I wanted to see more involvement” (Interview 1).

Joey, in his own fashion, succinctly described the role of the student government president as a mediator. He stressed that he hoped that he “would kind of be the moderator. I guess you would say that I would keep people from fighting” (Interview 1).

Joey also saw his role as student government president as one of advocacy. He contended, “the role of the student body president is to lead, kind of voice the concerns of the students to other students, administration, trustees” (Interview 1). In Joey’s

discussions regarding advocacy, he fixated on the advocacy role of the president as more of an intermediary or moderator between the students and the college administration. He explained,

things can come from administrators or advisors, but when they come from students and students understand the idea that, hey, we can actually, you know, sit here and make decisions and kind of govern ourselves and kind of say, here's what we want. The administration looks more favorably on that because, you know, we're the life blood of this college. (Interview 1)

He went on to insist,

I think, uh, I came to know them a lot better, you know, it was something that was always an open-door policy with them. They always, any time that I had a question, a concern, maybe an idea I wanted to bounce around with them, I could go to them at any time and that was anyone from, you know, counseling and career services all the way down to the dean of students. (Interview 1)

Last, he stated that most of the college staff,

went to bat for the students, you knew they would back you up. They wouldn't, you know, cower behind the president in fear of their job, you know, they knew that, you know, this is what the students wanted and we're going to push for it. (Interview 1)

One can see from these excerpts the participants shared some distinct experiences during their term(s) as Student Government Association president. However, one can also see from these excerpts that, notwithstanding the distinct experiences of each participant, the participants often discussed similar notions regarding relationships with the members of the campus community, personal characteristics they felt that a student government president should possess and the multiple roles that a student government president had

to assume. It was from these similar notions that the codes, categories and themes emerged.

#### Demographic Summary of the Participants

Demographically, the six students who participated in this study had the following profiles:

- Race: five whites, one African American
- Gender: two women and four men
- State of Residency: six Georgians
- Age: ranged from 19 to 21
- Socioeconomic Status: six middle-class
- Religious Affiliation: six Protestants

#### Defining Student Governance

Before delving into the common themes that emerged from the data, it is important to first acknowledge and understand how the participants viewed student governance in general. These definitions provide clear insights into how the participants viewed not only student governance, but their roles and responsibilities as president. The participants' understanding of student governance and how they defined it provide a contextual framework throughout these findings. Through the interview and journaling, each participant used somewhat different terms to define student governance.



TABLE 2

*Participants' Definitions of Student Governance*

PARTICIPANT	PARTICIPANT'S DEFINITION OF STUDENT GOVERNANCE
Callie	Student governance means the ability for students to really have a voice for the student body to speak, and I think, for me, that's why student government was so important (Interview 1).
George	It's about serving the common good of that particular body . . . that body being the students. The student government really is . . . ought to be about cultivating leadership from among the students, grassroots level, bring students up to recognize their own particular gifts and to put them to work for the good of the student body and the institution (Interview 1).
Trent	To me student governance is less about . . . enforcing the rules, it's less about the legalistic side . . . It's more about representation and more about resources . . . It's more about representing the students and to provide the students with resources to really be able to, number one, have the college experience and number two, to develop themselves as . . . responsible collegiate citizens and . . . as developing adults. . . . It's a conduit for change and it's a conduit for people being involved and responsible (Interview 1).
Benjamin	To bring everybody to the table and make sure every voice is heard (Interview 1).
Sandra	It means that students have a lot more say in what goes on, on their campus than they really realize (Interview 1).

Joey	I would define it as just students taking the reign of responsibility and leading other students. . . . So, I think, just as defining it . . . [as] students kind of collectively coming together for the greater good of the college (Interview 1).
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The above definitions of student governance present an essential insight into how the participants understood student governance and its role at Emerging College. As seen above, the definitions of student governance fall into two categories: advocacy and leadership cultivation. Student governance is about representing and serving the student body. It also carries the role of connecting to the community at large and should develop engaged students to be community leaders.

#### Common Themes

I began this research seeking to understand the experience of those who held the presidency of a student government association and the meaning they make of their experience. The experience of the six participants has been explored in great depth through both individual interviews and journaling. The results of both have been incorporated into the findings of this study in order to offer varied perspectives and to deepen the understanding of the experience of those who serve as student government presidents at a small liberal arts college. The interviews and journaling initially focused on three broad categories:

1. What the students gained from their participation in student governance.
2. The perspectives of the participants toward their experiences.

3. The meanings the participants derived from their experience and how those meanings affected their lives.

However, consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, the data derived from interviews redirected the research. The data shifted the research from focusing on what the participants' gained from their experience to that of a holistic or macro-view of the experience. Some themes may correspond with themes in other categories, while other themes may be more category-specific.

### Coding

During the analysis of the transcript and journal entries, three levels of coding were used: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These three levels of coding enabled me to sort the data derived from the interviews and journals and develop categories and themes. Through open coding, I identified, defined and coded ideas, attitudes, words, phrases, incidents, and events found in the interview transcripts and journals. I provided each idea, word, phrase, etc with a name or code word that represented the underlying concept. Through this initial step, I began to break down and categorize the data based on their contextual relationship. Through axial coding, I made connections between the incidents, ideas, and events that I had identified through open coding. The data was then categorized by grouping the coded words and phrases within categories representing shared characteristics. Through selective coding, the categories were integrated into themes to provide a comprehensive contextual description or picture of the experiences of the participants and the meanings that the participants constructed of their experiences.

The themes as a collective whole described the experience of serving as Student Government Association president at a small private liberal arts college. The participants consistently portrayed their experience as separately positive and negative as well as blend of both. The participants also described the relationships that they had with various members of the college community while they served student government president. In addition, the participants depicted the various personal characteristics they felt were needed by the president as well as the varying of roles that they believed the president must fulfill. Last, participants explained the interpersonal conflicts that they had while they served the student government president. From these common areas of commentary and concern surfaced a number of underlying themes that further describe the overall experience of being a student government association president and the meaning that the participants make of that experience.

TABLE 3

*Common Themes Derived from Interview Data*

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
THE EXPERIENCE	
	Positive Consequences
	Negative Consequences
	Mixture of Positive and Negative Consequences
RELATIONSHIPS	
	Positive

	Mixture of Positive and Negative
BALANCE	
	The Students Versus the College
	Life in General
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
	Integrity
	Passion
	Respect
	Inquisitive Nature
	Risk-Taker
	Citizenship
	Listener
	Being Outspoken
ROLES	
	Engager
	Mediator
	Voice/Advocate
	Cheerleader
	Mentor

CONFLICT	
	Conflict with Peers
	Conflict with College President

As each theme is depicted, examples from the data derived from the interviews will be used to further elaborate. Some themes may correspond with themes in other categories, while other themes may be more category-specific. Nonetheless, the themes as a collective whole describe the experience of serving as Student Government Association president.

The Experience

TABLE 4

*Underlying Categories Related to the Overall Experience*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODE</b>
POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES	
	Fulfilling and Fun
	Growth and Development
	Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy
	Interpersonal Skills
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES	
	Isolation and Loneliness
	Scrutiny and Accountability

	Sense of Loss
MIXTURE OF POSITIVE & NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES	
	Stress
	Coping with Stress

### *Positive Consequences*

Each participant, in their own way, described their experience as president of the Student Government Association in upbeat and affirmative terms. Some described the experience as fulfilling, and others even went so far as to describe the experience as fun. All participants described growth and development that they experienced while serving as president. Callie described her presidency as “a great experience” (Interview 1). She went on to say that “it was difficult, but the crazy part about it is, is of my year as student government president I wouldn’t take it back. I think it taught me a whole lot” (Interview 1). Moreover, Callie described her experience:

even though it was a year filled with lots of controversy, I still wouldn’t take it back. It was, it was still, it was the best year and I think a lot of that had to do with SGA, because it really did stretch me outside of my comfort zone in a lot of ways. (Interview 1)

On a similar note, George stated that “It was fun, it was surprisingly fun” (Interview 1). He continued by saying that “I don’t know if I can pinpoint a worst part because it ended up being a pretty wonderful experience” (Interview 1). Trent declared, “I served as student body president, and that was a very rewarding opportunity. It allowed me to

really step up as a leader on campus and to be a representative” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “You make the best or worse out of every experience and, uh, for me it was a good experience” (Interview 1). Benjamin described his experience as “very fulfilling for me . . . I’d wake up in the morning excited about our work and I’d go to bed at night excited about our work. Yeah, that’s the shortest answer I’ve given, but it was fulfilling, it was very fulfilling” (Interview 1). He went on to say that it was “fulfilling, in the accomplishment of our goals and in the confidence the people had to let me do it” (Interview 2). Sandra described her presidency as “a lot of fun. You make a lot of lifetime friends, life-long friends. And I think just the experience in itself, with the leadership roles that I took on, just helped mold you and make you into the, the woman I am today and into the positions that I’ve taken on in my work, um, in the work world, I guess, or whatever. So, it was all very positive” (Interview 1). Finally, Joey said, “it was a lot of fun” (Interview 1). He went on to say that, “it was great just to kind of step out of where I was in high school and just, kind of evolve into the person that I became” (Interview 1).

#### *Growth and Development*

The participants without fail indicated that their experience as president of a Student Government Association as a growing and developmental experience. Callie described her experience “definitely a growing and coming-into-our-own type of experience” (Interview 1). She went on to say that she “just remember[s] feeling like that year after my SGA experience I felt like all of the sudden I had grown up so much” (Interview 1). “I think it truly made me a stronger person and it made me realize that, um, sometimes you have to make hard decisions” (Interview 1). Moreover she said,



It taught me some of those, some of those life skills that I needed to know before I went out into the real world. It taught me how to be flexible. It taught me how to be more organized, how to be a multi-tasker. It taught me all of those things that, you know, to be successful in the business world period. Those are all things that you need to know. And so, I think it prepared me pretty well. (Interview 1)

George explained that he doesn't "want, I don't want to make it sound like, you know, student government was, was the beginning of the rest of my life and everything has been tied to those experiences and everything, but you can, you can see where the threads have carried through" (Interview 1). Trent similarly stated, "student government leadership, particularly the president . . . is a crucible of learning" (Interview 1). Moreover, he said that his experience as an SGA president is

responsible for building me as a leader and I think that the, being student body president put the icing on the cake. It helped polish me, it helped put me in situations, um, that I could, um, expand my leadership . . . experience and . . . that experience was essential for me, being as successful as quickly as I have been in my professional career. (Interview 1)

On a similar line, Benjamin stated that his experience as president "allowed me to have a little more confidence in myself as a leader" (Interview 1). Sandra declared, "I think just the experience in itself with the leadership roles that I took on just helped mold you and make you into the, the woman I am today and into the positions that I've taken on in my work" (Interview 1). Last, Joey described his experience as "a definite learning experience and part of, you know, why I am like I am today, just kind of reshape me" (Interview 1).

Some participants provided details about how their tenure as SGA president changed and matured them. Callie described her experiences as "I just felt like the

experiences that I had, they happened so fast but they changed me in a lot of ways and I felt like in a lot of good ways it made me really think about the person that I was and, and the things that I believed” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “it made me a better person. It made me realize that the world was not just about Callie” (Interview 1). Trent stated that his experience “helped polish me” (Interview 1) and Sandra offered a similar comment, “I think my personality changed, it changed a lot” (Interview 1). Joey also stated, “I think that . . . it was a growing experience for me” (Interview 1). He went on to declare, “I really enjoyed the way I kind of, I transformed throughout the year . . .” (Interview 1). In addition, he said “it’s really kind of, you know, this is kind of cliché but it’s made me a better person. It really has . . .” (Interview 1).

From the common theme of growth and development, the participants described how their experience as president of a student government association improved their self-confidence and self-efficacy as well as enhanced their ability to work in teams and their interpersonal relationships, and finally how it honed their organizational and time-management skills.

#### *Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy*

Through her interviews, Callie described how her experience helped her boost her self-confidence and self-efficacy. For example, she stated, “I think it was the first time I really held a leadership position, it really provided me the opportunity to kind of step out from myself and say . . . these are some of your strengths and these are some of weaknesses” (Interview 2). She went on to say,

It really helped me to see that, you know, by no means was I perfect and that I, um, had strengths and I had weaknesses and how to improve on those strengths and how to, to become a little bit better about those weaknesses. It helped me a lot, you know, even just interviewing for my first job out of college. I think it, it helped a lot. (Interview 2)

On a similar note, George stated that he had “gone from being kind of apprehensive and, and cautious and hesitant and unsure of my own abilities . . .” (Interview 1). He went on to state that “I was very, very timid when I came to [the College]. My self esteem was not the highest” (Interview 2). And, that during his presidency that he became “assertive more than I had ever been in my life” (Interview 1). He said that during his presidency he determined that he “finally had to decide to stop being such a sissy and just kind of get in there and, and, and put to work the gifts that I had been given” (Interview 1). Trent succinctly said that during his presidency that he settled on the notion that he had “to be my biggest fan because I’m the only fan I’m guaranteed” (Interview 2). As mentioned above, Benjamin stated this experience as president “allowed me to have a little more confidence in myself as a leader” (Interview 1). He went on to state that

I’ve become less skittish . . . early on, I was very reluctant to move quickly and to make quick decisions and I was easily made nervous by people in authority because I was concerned about being, not in being a “yes” man, but I was concerned about doing things that would please them as a leader themselves and as someone I looked up to. What I have learned is, is that, that there are things that I can bring to the table. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Benjamin said that due to his experience as president that he is

not afraid to make a decision alone anymore. I used to be. I used to be very hesitant to make a decision by myself. I’d have to call a meeting and I’d have to discuss it. If I know it’s right, I’m not as afraid to pull the trigger anymore and to chart ahead with that decision. (Interview 1)

Similarly, Sandra stated that due to her experience her “personality changed, it has changed a lot. Um, I used to let people walk all over me and I don’t do that any more.

And so that’s a positive thing” (Interview 1). She went on to state,

I had always had confidence, but I felt like that gave me even more confidence . . . I’m an outgoing person but I don’t just walk up to you on the street and say, hi, I’m Sandra. Who are you? You know, that’s not my personality. But I had to be, a lot, my, as president and I think that helped me a lot. (Interview 1)

Likewise, Joey explained that due to his experiences as student government president that he has gained more self-assurance. He said,

I think definitely, you know, even kind of the quiet mouse I talked about earlier, you know, someone that would say, all right, somebody else take the reigns. Where now, you know, I enjoy going out and, you know, taking the reigns . . . I’m a lot more outspoken now. (Interview 1)

### *Interpersonal Skills*

Comparable to the improvements in self-confidence experienced by each of the participants as president of the Student Government Association, the participants also associate an enhancement in their ability to work in teams and an improvement in their interpersonal relationships skills. Callie stated that her experience as president “prepared me also for dealing with lots of different groups of people, which I thought was really, um, really important and I think that’s vital to any successful career. You have to know how to deal with different groups of people” (Interview 1). Similarly, George stated that what challenged him most about being president was “working with people I didn’t trust” (Interview 1). He went on to say that being president allowed him to think about dealing with others and how he desired to be perceived as a leader. George stated, “we sort of

learn how we don't want to be by seeing other people do what we know that we don't want to do" (Interview 1). "And, and having to work with people who are difficult to work with" enhanced his interpersonal skills, which have benefited him as an Episcopal priest (Interview 1). Trent described how his interpersonal style and skills evolved during his presidency. He contended, "I started out very micro-managerial, um, and almost dictatorial . . . I've gone from that . . . micro-managerial, uh, dictatorial, uh, leadership style to a more, uh, coach-based leadership style." He went on to state, "I've been able to, to tweak and to enhance my leadership style. Um, I was able to get a greater ease at dealing with folks" (Interview 1). Similarly, Benjamin explains how he became more open to the ideas of others and how he learned how to be a better leader by being first a team player. Benjamin wrote in his journal: "I learned very early that every organization must have a clearly established leader; however, that leader cannot act alone – the leader must act in consultation with others" (Journal 1). He stated during his interview that he learned during his presidency that he should not

ever be afraid of someone else's really strong original idea, um, in your department or anyone else's because it, if it's as successful as they think it's going to be, and if it's theirs, they'll be passionate about it more so than the adoption of someone else's idea. It's only a strong reflection upon you and other people around you. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to say how he felt, "The best parts were watching us work and learning how to work as a team and watching us learn how to make a difference in an organization that needed a difference, that needed a change" (Interview 1). Moreover, Benjamin stated that his presidency

taught me how to respect the ideas of others. It taught me how to work as a part of a team and it taught me how to be, not only the number one at the table to how to be the number two, the number three, the number four, the number ten at the table. (Interview 1)

In the same way, Sandra articulated how she felt her experience as president improved her interpersonal skills. She said, “I don’t think I listened very well. Um, I, I don’t think I did at the beginning . . .” (Interview 1). However, due to her experience, she learned “to rely on other people, delegating. You still get burned and I still get let down and disappointed by, when I do delegate, and it’s not done but I think that helped me have to do that more, learn how to do it more” (Interview 1). Correspondingly, Joey stated, “I think that . . . it was a growing experience for me. Like I said before, kind of the, the whole aspect of working with people, um, you know, advancing my, um, interpersonal relationship skills, all of that” (Interview 1).

### *Negative Consequences*

Although each of the participants extolled the positive aspects of being president of Emerging College’s Student Government Association, in their own individual way, they also revealed that there are a number of negative aspects of being president.

#### *Isolation and Loneliness*

Through the interviews, each one participants indicated that serving as president of the Student Government Association isolated them from other members of the campus community, including their fellow students, faculty, staff, and administration as well as members of their own families. The participants attributed the sense of isolation to a number of factors that included the burden of possessing insider knowledge and being

yoked with being a decision-maker on the behalf of a large community. Callie rationalized her sense of isolation and loneliness by describing her presidency:

It was a hard time and I, and I felt, I really did feel, um, quite lonely, um, during most of it, just because I felt like there wasn't really anyone that I could talk to about it. I couldn't really talk to any other students about it because some of the information that I knew was privileged information that was not information that was available to all students, and it shouldn't have been available to all students. Um, but then I also couldn't talk to administration about it because talking to them, a lot of times they couldn't talk to me because they were constantly watching their back and making sure that no one was paying attention to what they were saying because they were in fear for their jobs. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to state, "There were, there really wasn't anyone that I could talk to, so for me, I just had to learn how to really deal with it internally" (Interview 1). Moreover, she said that insider knowledge that she possessed as president inhibited her from talking openly with her peers and other members of the campus community and how that personally affected her. She said,

for me it wasn't, I couldn't talk to anyone about that information. And, there were times where I felt like that was a lot of pressure for a 19 year old to have. Um, but, at the same time, I knew that it was information that if I were to tell someone, it would have been a much more disastrous situation. (Interview 1)

She continued,

because of the, the timing and the nature of the environment when I was SGA President, it wasn't, it didn't really foster itself for me to necessarily talk to my peers and my friends about it, um, because there was just a lot of information that I couldn't necessarily talk about, um, with them, you know, in regards to what was going on with the administration. (Interview 2)

Last, Callie described her experience of being president as being lonely because

of the climate at the time, it was lonely because there were a lot of things going on, being said behind closed doors with administration that were things that I just couldn't discuss with my friends or other, um, SGA board

members because, um, they were just private, and, and it was kind of hard to have that pressure as a senior, and, you know, also being a resident assistant and also carrying a full load of classes and trying to write my senior thesis, there were just a lot of things that I couldn't, um, explain or talk to anyone about. (Interview 2)

Similar to that of Callie's experience, George described his experience as president of the Student Government Association as feeling isolated from others and have an acute sense of loneliness. He stated that,

with leadership, I mean, there are times when you have to be cautious and you can't just always wear your heart on your sleeve and expose yourself completely to everyone and be vulnerable all the time and this is one of the great struggles of being a priest now is that, you know, I mean, I have few people um, to whom I can take my burdens and be completely transparent. (Interview 1)

He went on to say that "it was little bit of a lonely year" and that "I think that leadership is lonely" (Interview 1). George refers to his "experience of leadership . . . is that it, it involves a certain loneliness and um, it involves a certain broken heartedness . . . ." (Interview 2).

Akin to the experiences of Callie and George, Trent also described his experience of being president as being at times lonely as well as feeling isolated from others, both of which he attributed to the burden as well as the pressure of possessing insider knowledge and being a primary decision-maker. Trent stated:

A leader is someone who, uh, who very often will find themselves, um, in lonely positions, um, because, um, being a leader many times means that you're out front and that's, uh, a position that not many people want to join you in. Um, so it's a rewarding thing, um, but it at times can be very lonely, um, position to be in. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to reason that,



there's a lot of pressure and you get a lot . . . of the heat for things, if people don't like it, I mean, the faculty senate gets all hip in a tizzy or this or that, you know, you're the one they look to, not the 52 people behind you or the student body. You are, because you're the one whose name is at the bottom of the paper or on the business card that says SGA President. (Interview 2)

In addition, he stated that he felt that although serving as president “was an honor and it was a learning experience and it really taught me that leadership is lonely” (Interview 1).

Moreover, Trent stressed,

When you're in a position of leadership you have to make some tough decisions and a lot of times those aren't popular, ah, and a, a true leader realizes that and is okay with it, ah, or maybe not okay with it but accepts that role and, ah, doesn't shy away from it. (Interview 2)

Trent also stated, “it felt like there was a tremendous weight on me, and that all the responsibility lied on me and there was a lot of people expecting a lot out of me” (Interview 2). Last, he stated that the obligations of the presidency isolated him from his friend and other peers. He stated that the presidency, “requires a lot of time so you don't necessarily have the ability or the time to maintain anything but peripheral relationships, ah, with other students” (Interview 2).

Benjamin also described his experience as president as being lonely and isolated because others could not truly appreciate or understand the burdens that he felt he had to carry as president. He stated,

I was concerned about what my campus was experiencing, and I didn't know how to respond to it and nobody but me saw it, I felt. Nobody had my pain. Um, that was selfish, but I felt that way. So anyway, that's kind of where I was. (Interview 2)

In a comparable fashion, Sandra described feeling isolated from others, especially her peers due to the insider knowledge she possessed. She asserted that as president,

You learn a lot, or you get to hear a lot of secrets and stuff, almost so much so that you don't want to know them. Not that you're sworn to secrecy but there are things that you can't tell other students because they won't understand. Ah, and it was, that was hard. (Interview 2)

Likewise, Joey felt that a sense of isolation from other members of the campus community and his fellow student leaders due to his role the final decision-maker and from the burden that role placed on him. He stated,

as far as the isolation and being alone, sometimes as . . . the decision maker . . . [it] comes down to, you . . . here's, everybody's voted . . . typically, it was the SGA President and executive board that had the last vote and so . . . maybe one way or the other, it was, it was kind of like an isolation . . . thing where . . . it's just me now . . . I call it an isolation because, you know, it was, at one time, oh, here's the decision on his shoulders. (Interview 2)

#### *Scrutiny and Accountability*

In addition to referring to their experience of being president of a student government association as being lonely and feeling isolated, the six participants, in their own way, also described the high level of scrutiny and accountability they faced as a negative aspect of being president. Each of the participants indicated that they felt that they lived their presidency on a stage under a hot spotlight. The participants also considered themselves to be judged by and held answerable to all members of the college community including their peers, faculty members, staff members, administrators, and trustees. More important, however, was that the participants felt that both their personal

and political lives were held to a higher standard than other members of the college community. Upon reflection, Callie stated

when you're SGA president in a my small, a school as small as [the College], everybody knows everybody and everyone feels like they have the right and responsibility to tell some, to tell the person, you know, how they are or they're going to be. And so, I think that's why it was so difficult. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to insist that,

people watch what you do so much more than what other people do, than they do when you are a normal student. Like, people are so much more concerned. I mean, I remember there were times where, when I was just a normal student, if I wore pajama pants to class, like nobody cared. SGA president; I wore pajama pants to class, it was like a huge deal all of the sudden. Like, I felt like all of the sudden I went from a normal student to all of the sudden, I was like freaking Lindsey Lohan. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Callie declared,

I think there's a certain level or a certain expectation of always having to be "on." Like you always have to represent your school, you always have to, um, be positive, you always have to, um, have a smile on your face and there are times where you know, you're an SGA president, you are just like everybody else. Sometimes you are having a bad day and sometimes you don't want to talk to anybody. Sometimes you just want to deal with your own stuff internally and sometimes you just want to sit in your dorm room and study and do your work and not have to interact with people. You can't do that when you are SGA president. (Interview 1)

Furthermore, Callie stated,

I think, in some ways, my role as SGA president was a little bit more difficult, I think just because at a smaller school, you're so much, you're under a very small microscope so everyone is watching what you're doing and you interact with pretty much everyone on campus. (Interview 1)

What's more, Callie asserted,

people seem to be more concerned about what I was doing as opposed to other people. . . . you're just really kind of under a microscope. People

pay attention to what you do more, even if someone is doing the exact, another student is doing the exact same thing that you are doing, people pay attention to it more because you are SGA President. (Interview 2)

In regard to the perception of being held to a higher level of accountability, Callie stated, “I think you do feel like you’re accountable to everyone. You are accountable to students, you’re accountable to administration” (Interview 1). She went on to say,

I think accountability plays a huge role in the difference between successful and unsuccessful SGA presidents. I think when you realize how accountable you’re going to be held, then it’s up to you to, to understand if you can handle that responsibility. And I think sometimes we can handle it really great and other times we can’t. You know, looking back on my . . . I think that there were sometimes that I did it OK and there were sometimes that I didn’t do it so great. Um, but accountability definitely plays a huge, huge role, um, in whether you’re going to be successful or not. (Interview 1)

Callie went on say,

I think, you know, SGA presidents who aren’t willing to take accountability for what goes on can often times be unsuccessful. Um, I mean, I think, you know, as SGA President, because you are the leader of the group, you have to be able to step up to the plate and, and take heat and um, for decisions that have been made, um, even if they weren’t necessarily your personal decisions or your personal, um, beliefs, you have to be willing to go to bat and be able to support the decisions that your, um, entire board has made. (Interview 2)

Likewise, George also discussed the high level of scrutiny that he faced as president. He stated, “With leadership, I mean, there are times when you have to be cautious and you can’t just always wear your heart on your sleeve and expose yourself completely to everyone” (Interview 1). He also mentioned being held accountable as a leader of others as an issue he faced as president. He said,

It was also, at the same time, um, very, uh, frustrating at times because um, um, because there was, you know, there was no blank check, you

know. Like it was the first time that, that I had to be really, truly accountable for, for leading a group of people. (Interview 1)

Trent also brought up the notion of being under intense scrutiny as president. He stated,

The balance between, uh, uh being that student leader, um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge because, uh, I, I couldn't be just a regular, I mean, when I had an opinion or when I was unhappy about the food in the dining hall, I couldn't be unhappy as Trent the student, I was unhappy as president of the student body. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to say, "The worst part was that you're always on. You're always being watched. And, uh, you lose your identity as an individual and you become the student body . . . . that was tough, um, always being on . . ." (Interview 1). He succinctly said, "I thought I lived in a glass house as student body president" (Interview 1).

Trent also discussed how he felt that he was held to a higher standard as president.

He claimed,

There was higher expectations of you academically because you were the, the face of the student body. Um, the professors expected more out of you. And I don't, uh, because you are in that representative position, they expected you to lead the way, in every way. And, um, I don't know that that was fair or realistic but that was reality. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to state,

You were seen as a, as a, a definite leadership entity on campus and, as such, the ah administration expected a lot out of you, the faculty expected a lot out of you and really what I, would like the faculty to know one day and understand, and maybe I'll tell them one day, is that just because a student is student body president doesn't mean they are a straight A student. (Interview 2)

Furthermore, he said, “There is just that expectation that when you are in position of leadership they you are, ah, above board with everything. Well, not necessarily above board, but that you set the standard, and that’s not always the case” (Interview 2). Trent summarized,

I felt like everything that I did was not only scrutinized by the faculty, staff, and administration but also by my peers and there is a great level of accountability, ah, and so, ah, and probably the courtroom of your peers is, is the most harsh courtroom to find yourself in. (Interview 2)

In the same way as Callie, George, and Trent, Benjamin also brought up issues of scrutiny and accountability during the course of his interviews. In regard to the intense scrutiny Benjamin said, “When you leave campus or when you walk around campus or when you talk on campus, your actions are reflective of all . . .” (Interview 1). However, unlike Callie, George, and Trent, Benjamin implied that he felt comfortable living and working in the spotlight during his presidency due to his upbringing as a son of a minister. He stated, “I just knew that all eyes were on me and even now, when I leave my house, I’m very aware that, there are people watching me, um, and I don’t care. It doesn’t bother me, I grew up with it” (Interview 2). Benjamin went on to claim, “it was something that came naturally to me because I had always been on stage—my whole life I’ve been on stage” (Interview 2).

In regard to the notion of being held accountable to others for one’s words and actions as president, Benjamin said,

they should be, and they should be [held to a higher standard]. If you’re, if you’re, if you’re set apart as a leader, and you’re dubbed with a title and an office and you’re elected to serve, you should be. I can honestly tell

you on tape, I never once had a drink of alcohol on [the College's] campus, never once, never once on that campus. (Interview 1)

He went on to assert, "We were responsible at what we did as students because we knew what we represented" (Interview 1).

Sandra also felt that she had to deal with a higher level of scrutiny and accountability while president, though similar to Benjamin, she was comfortable in the glare of the spotlight. She seemed to seek out the attention. She said of her presidency: "It was kind of like I was famous on campus" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to say,

I loved the attention. And that sounds awful but I did. I loved having, um, it's not even a power, I don't want to say, a power, but I loved knowing that, um, I had my name tag that said "SGA President," or when I could introduce myself, or when I had to do freshman orientations and I had to get up and speak in front of all the freshmen or all the parents, or whatever. It's a respected position and that's very important to me. (Interview 1)

However, Sandra also acknowledged that being the center of attention and in the spotlight had its shortcomings. For example, she described how the aspect of being on stage challenged her as president. She said,

Well, you are in the spotlight all the time. Whether I wanted to know that I think that or not, I'm, just people are watching. So, personally it challenges you because, or it challenged me because, ah, even when I didn't want to be happy. If I was walking down the sidewalk and I wasn't smiling, somebody would literally ask me "Are you okay, what's wrong, why aren't you smiling?" And that would make me so ill, I'd be like "Do I have to have a smile on my face 24/7? Do I sleep with a smile on my face?" NO. And it's just funny because when people saw me in the spotlight normally I was in a good mood, I was smiling, but I'm not in a good mood 24/7. (Interview 2)

Sandra went on to describe the negative aspects of the high level of scrutiny and accountability,

I think that personal challenge was the fact that you can't really mess up and then there are some that really want you to mess up, you know, like banking on you messing up so they can like point it out to people or get kicked out, or whatever, and so, you had to be on your toes all the time. (Interview 2)

Last, like the other participants, Joey also reflected on the high level of scrutiny and accountability he faced while serving as president. He affirmed what the other participants felt about being at the center of decision-making with all eyes upon him. He stated,

I think that's what SGA taught me, you know, you're sitting up there and you've got, you know, 40 people looking at you for answers saying, "OK. Well, here's our problem. What are you gonna do?" I mean, you've got to provide them an answer. (Interview 1)

#### *Sense of Loss*

In addition to these negative aspects of serving as president— isolation, loneliness, scrutiny, accountability—the participants also described a sense of loss as a prevalent aspect of their presidencies. This sense of loss could be found in a number of areas including loss of identity or self, loss of free time, loss of academic preparation and success, loss of time with family and friends, loss of time to commit to other employment, and loss of emotional control.

#### *Loss of Identity and Self*

While only one of the participants brought up the issue of losing one's identity, this seems to follow the theme of scrutiny and accountability as a number of the participant indicated that they felt that as the student government president that they were perceived to be the embodiment of the student body and no longer an individual. During



the course of the interview with Trent, he claimed that he lost a bit of his individual self while serving as president. He stated, “you lose your identity as an individual and you become the student body” (Interview 1). He went on to assert,

I had to sacrifice, during my term as student body president, I had to sacrifice Trent um, for, for the student body. In other words, I, I had to constantly be aware that I wasn't acting as Trent but I was acting as the student body president. And so that, uh, that affected what actions I chose to take or chose not to take. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Trent stated, “there was a little bit of personal sacrifice of, of individuality” (Interview 1). Trent said that he was not acting as himself but a corporate entity. To him, this was negative because he could not always take action without thinking of its larger implications on the community.

#### *Loss of Free Time*

In addition to a sense of loss of individual identity, the participants also discussed a sense of loss of their free time. Callie mentioned that while she was president, that she “lived in the student center. I mean, that was, I spent more time in the student center than I did in my own dorm room” (Interview 1). In a similar fashion, George also revealed that, “endless hours were consumed through that. Um, as, as a student government president, as a senior, actually most of my memories are located in, in the, uh, the student activities building. Very few memories are from class” (Interview 1). Trent also declared that the “Student Government Association really took up every bit of my time” (Interview 1). Benjamin also lamented that he “spent a lot of time in the office at night” (Interview 1). Additionally, Sandra talked about how her duties as president took up her free time. She said, “I honestly can't think of, other than it taking up a lot of your

personal time, but that was never really a problem to me. Um, I guess there were some nights I didn't want to have our exec meetings, you know, late at night, or whatever" (Interview 1).

### *Loss of Academics*

Beside a sense of loss of identity and a loss of free time, a number of the participants bemoaned the fact that their academic studies suffered as a result of their SGA responsibilities. For example, George stated,

all I can say, um, is that my academic work, my academic work was affected, um, but there was a whole lot of room given to me by my teachers, um, in a way that, probably was not completely legitimate on their part but I think they were supportive. (Interview 2)

On a similar note, Trent asserted,

if I had time to do the homework, I did it, and if I didn't have time to do the homework, um, then I didn't. Um, and so, I seem to survive like that um, I probably, well I did not get maybe as much as I did, or I would have, had I applied myself 100 percent academically. (Interview 1)

### *Loss of Time with Family and Friends*

Beyond the loss of identity, loss of free time, and loss of academic success, a number of the participants also described a loss of time that often estranged them from their families and friends. Callie, for example, expressed that time and energy she committed to her SGA duties hurt her relationships with friends and family members. She stated,

I think it alienated a lot of my friends. A lot of my friends felt like they couldn't really talk to me about stuff as much because I had so much, so many other things on my plate. . . . SGA took up a lot of my time doing other things. Um, I don't know, I mean, I don't think it really affected my relationship at the time because my boyfriend didn't go to [the College];

he went to another school. So, um, I think it mostly affected my friends on campus because I, I wasn't always like readily available or, you know, like if they came into my dorm room, I couldn't always talk, like I needed to do my homework. (Interview 1)

Similarly, Trent felt that he had to forfeit his relationships with his friends and family members. He stated, "I was a little bit of personal sacrifice of, of individuality in that, if that makes sense" (Interview 1). Trent went on to assert, "you have to make yourself available to everyone and, ah, so, in doing so you kind of struggle to maintain your close-knit circle of friends . . ." (Interview 2). Moreover, Trent said that he felt that his role as president affected his relationship with his closest friends due to the fact that many also served in leadership roles within SGA and at times he and his friends had conflicting interests. He stated,

within my nucleus of friends, um, it affected them as well, I mean, Eric was, uh, an executive board officer and we were best friends and sometimes that strained our relationship as a friend, um, because we were, uh, seeing things differently within the professional realm and that affected our personal relationship as well. (Interview 1)

Sandra also affirmed this loss of time with family and friends. She declared that her presidency "took up time . . . away from my family, I wasn't able to go home as much" (Interview 1).

#### *Loss of Other Employment*

Another negative aspect as it relates to loss was loss of time to commit to other employment obligations. For example, Callie expressed that she found it to be very difficult to juggle her commitment to her presidency and her commitment to serving as a resident assistant. She contended,

I kind of felt like I wasn't quite as good of an RA. So, I think it affected some of the girls on my hall because I couldn't spend as much time with them because SGA took up a lot of my time doing other things . . . I wasn't always, like, readily available or, you know, like, if they came into my dorm room, I couldn't always talk, like, I needed to do my homework because I had to do an SGA thing or I had to go do something with the RAs. So, I think that my time wasn't as, as readily available to them as it had been before, so. (Interview 1)

*Loss of Emotions (Emotional Toll)*

In addition to the losses listed above came a loss of emotions or an emotional toll to their presidencies. Callie contended,

it was rough, I mean, like I said, I was still, I was a kid. I really was and as much as I wanted to be an adult and as much as I thought I was an adult, I was a kid and I wasn't really prepared or equipped to deal with a lot of the stuff that happened that particular year. And I just, you know, I remember being sad a lot but I, I think a lot of people thought that my sadness was because, um, I was SGA president or it was sadness because of, you know, maybe things that were going on in my personal life. (Interview 1)

She went on to state,

All those tears, all those blow ups were because [the College] was truly a place that I love and I was 150 percent passionate about the place and I felt like I had no control over all of the crap that was going on at the current time. And I just felt like my school was being torn apart and I just didn't know what to do about it. And I was miserable, and that's where I think a lot of the tears and a lot of the blow ups came from. (Interview 1)

Similarly, upon reflection, Benjamin attributed a sense of emotional loss to his presidency. He stated, "I lost some sleep over some issues with the College president, um, but those were personal. Um, uh, I, I let them be personal, they weren't really, but I let them be personal" (Interview 2). In addition, Sandra ascribed a sense of emotional loss to her time as president of the Student Government Association. For example, she

contended that her presidency was at times frustrating and the need for juggling multiple tasks and responsibilities led to burn out. She stated,

there's a lot of little things like that, that I guess frustrated me, and, and that was, I guess just, it only frustrated me because I was a perfectionist, and I couldn't make it the way I wanted it to be, which would have been perfect. I had to sit back and watch it be, you know, half-assed (laughs), so it was kind of frustrating sometimes with that. (Interview 2)

Sandra went on to state, "I feel like I could have still done a little bit more, you know, but I almost started, we have the end of every school year getting burnt out and I was already starting to get burnt out" (Interview 2).

### *Mixture of Consequences*

#### *Stress*

The participants indicated that stress was a common aspect of their presidencies. However, unlike the entirely positive aspects such as developing self-efficacy and negative aspects such as isolation and scrutiny, they had mixed perspectives toward stress. Some participants indicated that the stress had a positive influence on their experience while others noted a negative influence. The participants reported feeling stressed about time-commitment pressure; interpersonal problems with peers, faculty, and administrators; and earning good grades. Each of the participants described themselves as being stressed to some degree during their presidency. Callie stated, "it was definitely, it's stress, when you're in an SGA type position, yeah, there's always going to be stress" (Interview 1). She went on to describe how she felt the stress was a negative aspect of her experience as president. She commented, "I remember that being the hardest semester of my four years. I remember, like, waking up every morning and just being nervous about

what was going to be on that other side of my dorm room. It was, like, it was honestly hell” (Interview 1). She went on to describe how the stress of serving as president affected her health and emotional wellbeing. She said, “it was so stressful that it, I mean, there were physical impacts of the stress that it was having on me” (Interview 1).

Furthermore, she said,

I was just extremely stressed out to the point of, you know, getting ulcers and, um, and I think a lot of that really had to do with that fact that I took a lot of what was going on, on campus, um, personally and I was very invested in trying to do what was right for the campus overall. (Interview 1)

Callie attributes her being stressed during her presidency to her possession of insider knowledge of campus politics. She explained,

the crazy part about it is, for me, when the times got really tough, with the pressure of knowing some of that information, um, there’s um, an area, kind of behind campus where . . . I would just go there because no one ever went back there and I would just kind of go to kind of get away from it all and to kind of sort of de-stress. (Interview 1)

Callie also attributes the stress she experienced to the high level of accountability and scrutiny she faced. She stated,

You are accountable to students, you’re accountable to administration. Um, and I think that’s where some of the stress comes in because I think, you’re not, as a student, as a normal student, you’re not, not used to being held accountable to all of those things and having all those expectations. (Interview 1)

She continued, “I think that’s where the majority of the stress comes in, and I think accountability plays a huge role in the difference between successful and unsuccessful SGA presidents” (Interview 1).

George also reported feeling stressed during his presidency. However, unlike Callie, he felt that it was a positive kind of stress. He asserted, “I do remember there being a lot of stress, but it was positive stress, you know. I mean, it was, we knew that we were doing something good and I had, I had really good people to work with” (Interview 1). George went on to state that fulfilling the role of president,

did produce a lot of stress and again, because of my difficulties with procrastination, I mean, there’s a lot of stress . . . that I come by, honestly. Um, and I acknowledge that more readily now than I did then. Um, so yeah, there was a lot of stress and, and there were, there were stress factors that, that did, you know, that came out of the time that I was spending on student government that affected my academic life. Um, and you know, my senior thesis and stuff like that but, but again, it was a positive stress. Um, we, we knew that it was for a reason, that it was; it was going to go well. (Interview 1)

Moreover, he contended,

I just think that, you know, um, stress . . . growth comes out of stress, um, at least, you know, when you are talking about self development and, and group development. Um, I, I think that, that if everything remains a constant, than there’s very little room for growth. (Interview 2)

George went on to insist,

things can be very stressful but, um, but it, you know, I, I think that if you, if you look, if you look at stress and the things that are causing that stress in the life of a person or in the life of a group, as opportunities for growth, um, then, or, or, or as a result of growth, I mean, you know, it um, then I think that, that really, you do well to consider it a positive. Um, and so, perhaps it has to do with, with one’s perception. (Interview 2)

However, like Callie, Trent felt that the stress associated with the presidency was negative in the sense that he felt beleaguered. He stated, “I was overwhelmed. Um, because at one point in time, I was taking 23 credit hours in an attempt to get out in three

years and, um, I felt like I was always owned and always investing in others and didn't have enough time to invest in myself" (Interview 1). Trent went on to say,

I remember several times thinking I was going crazy. Um, because I was simply, uh, kept drawing on a, uh, an account of energy to invest in others and, uh, without replenishing it or, or reinvesting in myself and several times I found myself, you know, um, with insufficient, uh, amounts of energy and so, um, I found myself, you know, overwhelmed sometimes. (Interview 1)

He felt that the stress also derived from juggling the roles of a student leader and just being a student. Trent declared, "the balance between, uh, uh, being that student leader um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge" (Interview 1). He also tied the stress that he felt with the high level of scrutiny and accountability that he had to deal with. Trent argued, "there was stress and there was, there was higher levels of, of accountability" (Interview 1). He went on to say,

that it felt like there was a tremendous weight on me, and that all the responsibility lied on me and there was a lot of people expecting a lot out of me, ah, to me it felt, sort of as that person you played a dual role, you were a student, and then you were a part of the administrative structure of the college . . . . (Interview 2)

Although Trent contended that he felt stressed in a negative sense during his presidency, he also felt, like George, that his experience taught him a lot. In the end, though, he did describe himself as being overwhelmed. He also described the experience in a positive light in that he saw himself develop as a person. He stated, "overwhelmed was a good word, but a better word is stretched, um, it was a growing process for me as a leader" (Interview 2).

Throughout his interviews, Benjamin insisted that he was not truly stressed by his experience. He did report, however, being stressed about interpersonal conflicts with this



peers as it regarded the merger between the Student Government Association and the Student Activities Council. He stated, “I was stressed then, there, but everything else was not a stressful thing to me” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “I was stressed only once and that was when we actually were coming down to the brass tacks and the nuts and bolts of what that merger would look like between those two organizations” (Interview 1).

Unlike Callie and Trent, but similar to George and Benjamin, Sandra did not find her experience as president to be stressful in negative fashion. She admitted to being stressed, but not overwhelmed. She said, “I got stressed out over a few things, but I just didn’t feel like it was worth crying over. You know, it wasn’t, it was a big deal and I always made it a big deal, I didn’t clown around at it too much” (Interview 1). She went on to contend, “I think, at times it was, but I work well under stress. I think I work better under stress or when I have deadlines” (Interview 1). Callie followed that statement with “I was expecting it to be a lot more stressful than it was. And I’m kind of glad that I had really high expectations, so that way, I’m glad. I’m glad I didn’t expect less and then was overwhelmed. You know, like, I expected the worst and I was very pleased with what turned out” (Interview 1).

In a similar fashion to that of Trent, Joey described his experience as president as being stressful. He attributed his stress to being overwhelmed by the commitments of the office. He stated,

there was just a lot of things on my plate and so, at times, you know, there were, there were long days. It was like I was working a job, you know, with everything that I had going on. You know, I kind of think back now

and I'm like, wow, I kind of want, you know, SGA again. You know, being, being doing all that because it was just a lot on my plate and there were times I didn't think I was going to get everything I needed to get done. (Interview 2)

### *Coping with Stress*

Each of the six participants indicated that their experience as SGA president was stressful in some way, however only three mentioned how they coped with the stress they encountered. Callie described how she coped with stress in a number of different ways.

She stated,

there were times when I just needed to get off campus to just deal. Like, I just needed to be away where I, like, I just needed to have silent time to really just kind of, reflect on the things that happened. I wrote a lot in my journal just because I needed to get it out and I needed to be able to just have it out there but I didn't really need to talk to anyone, um, about it. Um, I think for me those were the two biggest ways that I, um, coped. (Interview 1)

Unlike Callie who would spend time away from campus and would write in her journal, Trent would talk out his frustrations and stress with others. He stated, "a couple of points in time, I would either sit with [the SGA Advisor] or [the Director of Counseling Center] or [the Vice President for Student Affairs] and discuss" his feelings of anxiety and tension (Interview 1). Sandra sought a refuge in art. She described how she "was able to find release in my minor which was art. And so, I would, at least every semester, take one to two art classes to try and just balance out the crazy hecticness . . ." (Interview 1).

### *Relationships*

A recurring aspect mentioned by each of the participants regarding their time as president of the Student Government Association was their relationships with other

members of the college community. The participants characterized some of these relationships as being positive while others were portrayed as negative, while still other relationships were described as a mixture.

TABLE 5

*Underlying Categories Related to Relationships*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODE</b>
POSITIVE	
	College Staff
	Board of Trustees
	SGA Advisor
MIXTURE OF THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE	
	Peers: SGA Executive Board and Student Senate
	College Faculty
	College President

*Positive*

*College Staff*

Each of the participants in their own way described their relationships with the members of the college staff, the members of the college's board of trustees, and the advisor of the Student Government Association as positive. For the purpose of this study, the category of college staff includes, but is not limited to, the members of the college's

student affairs, enrollment, alumni affairs, advancement, marketing, housekeeping, and maintenance staff. Callie described her relationship with the college's staff as "pretty good just because I was involved in so many different things" (Interview 1). She went on to declare, "I had a great relationship with, um, with [the Vice President for Enrollment Services and Student Affairs] and his entire staff" (Interview 1). Moreover, she contended, "I felt like enrollment management, student affairs in general, I had a pretty good relationship with them. Like, I felt like those were the people that understood my pain, that understood what I was going through" (Interview 1). Concerning members of the college's staff beyond those in student affairs Callie described her relationship with them as positive, but said,

alumni relations, development, they were, to me, they were just like a whole different bag of chips. Like, they were just, they were kind of their own entity. And it wasn't because they didn't understand, it was just that they operated more so on a college being a business whereas student affairs really dealt with a college as a college and interacting with the students. (Interview 1)

In a similar fashion, George described his relationship with the college's staff as positive. He stated,

we had a, a good working relationship, um, with lots of mutual respect and again, you know, as I said before, there were plenty of frustrations that came out of, you know, um, the kind of cultivating that you guys were doing um, with, with us and with me in particular and, and some of the disagreements that were bound to occur, but to me they all were positive. (Interview 1)

In regard to the members of the marketing department, he contended his reaching out was intentional in his efforts to develop a positive relationship with them. He stated,

those folks, um, they were fun to be around. And, plus I figured out, pretty quickly that, um, they were good to be around as the student government president because they were the ones writing the stories about the college. And so, I thought, well, I might be able to, you know, put some of our positive spin in on that but also they were seeking me out because they needed a quick little quote from the student government president. (Interview 1)

In the same way, Trent portrayed his relationship with the college's staff a positive. He affirmed,

the college staff is great. Um, the staff is who make your college run. The administration comes and goes. Your staff is, is the face of the college and, um, they were great. Any time we needed something, they were always available, amenable, um, they were great. The college administration was very supportive. Um, from yourself as, as my direct contact to the, the vice-president of student affairs, um, it was a very pleasant experience working with the college administration. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to state,

They cared about me as a person, they cared about my opinions, they cared about the student body. It was a very pleasant experience and I enjoyed working with them and I felt like when I raised a concern, for the most part, it was addressed. Um, or at least, if it wasn't addressed, they said, well this is the big picture and this is why we can't do that and they took time to explain to me, uh, you know, why we can't do this or do that because, um, as a student I could only see a limited scope of the picture. (Interview 1)

Correspondingly, Benjamin also described his relationship with the staff of the college as positive. He testified his relationship was,

very strong as well. I learned a lot from the cleaning staff, our maintenance crew. I learned a lot from our library staff. I learned a lot by watching our development staff and working with them. We've talked about student affairs staff already. I had a good relationship with them. Um, I never had any cause to ever have a fight with any of those people, never once. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to say, “I had a strong relationship with our student services staff and executive leadership in student services. I had a strong relationship with our development and external relations staff and executives” (Interview 1).

Like her presidential predecessors, Sandra also had a positive relationship with the staff of the college. She declared “I loved them all. They were probably my favorite out of everybody. And, as far as, um, because they all worked for the same goal, they are all trying to meet the same goal, and its all for the students” (Interview 1). Furthermore, she contended,

as far as student affairs, and, I’ve really, I just, I always connected with all of those people, and I still talk to a good many of them, and I’m sure I always will continue just because, *yawn*, excuse me, they helped me out, a lot and they helped me with personal things. I mean, they were all just great. (Interview 1)

She went on to say,

most of them worked with me as much as they could, and most of them want to see the students accomplish and achieve things. I think some of them, in the past, maybe tried to suppress the students, or whatever. But, I never really felt like I butted heads with too many of them, or any of them, really. Um, so I didn’t ever really have a problem with them. (Interview 1)

Joey also viewed his relationship with the college’s staff in a positive light. He contended,

I think it was, you know, very important for the students to see, the administration, sometimes in our meetings. You know, we didn’t want them there the whole time, believe me, but just when, you know, we would invite them, they never refused to come in, and I thought that was important, um, that they were there and, you know, they were willing to talk, willing to explain, you know, maybe what was going on and kind of calm some concerns that students may have. (Interview 1)

He went on to insist,

I think, uh, I came to know them a lot better, you know, it was something that was always an open-door policy with them. They always, any time that I had a question, a concern, maybe an idea I wanted to bounce around with them, I could go to them at any time and that was anyone from, you know, counseling and career services all the way down to the dean of students. (Interview 1)

Last, he stated that most of the college staff,

went to bat for the students, you knew they would back you up. They wouldn't, you know, cower behind the president in fear of their job, you know, they knew that, you know, this is what the students wanted and we're going to push for it. (Interview 1)

### *Board of Trustees*

The college's board of trustees provided additional positives to the participants, and all but one of the participants perceived this as solely positive. The participants described feeling a connection to the trustees and having a sense of mutual respect and deference. Each of the participants recognized and acknowledged the importance the relationship with the trustees played in their individual presidencies and in turn how that relationship influenced their ability to effectively serve as the voice of the student body. That being said, Callie was the one participant who felt she did not connect to and have understanding with the members of the board of trustees. She declared,

It's hard to even describe that because it was really kind of a surreal moment because I would sit in those meetings and I would listen. And I would listen to what the president had to say and I would listen to the board of trustees' response and I just remember sitting there thinking, like, wow, they really just don't get it. Like, they really just don't get what we go through as students and they don't really understand where our true needs are. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to state,

Um, I just remember thinking, like, they were just all so disconnected. Um, and I just, I particularly remember the chairman of the board, who, um, I just really felt like he just really relied on everything that the president said and he really had no clue what the students were going through. (Interview 1)

Furthermore, Callie asserted,

And, and I really felt like the board of trustees really got very much a one-sided account of what was going on every day on campus. They didn't really see the true picture. And I just remember sitting there, just kind of being frustrated and kind of, um, just wanting to stand up and be, like, "You know what, I'm a student and the majority of stuff that has been said is completely untrue. This is how things really are on campus and this is why they, things are currently in the state that they are." And so, um, for me that was, that was difficult. (Interview 1)

Callie last said,

I only remember about two board of trustees members who were really interested in what the students thought and who would actually ask me questions because there were plenty of times in those meetings where I was not asked a single question. No one would even acknowledge the fact that I was in the room because they didn't really care about the student opinion. There, I can count on my hand how many of the board of trustees members were actually concerned, um, about it. (Interview 1)

Contrasting the experience of Callie, each of the other participants portrayed their experiences and relationships with the members of the board of trustees as nothing but positive. For example, George stated "I loved being on the board" (Interview 1). However, George did admit that he was initially overawed by being among them. He asserted,

that was actually kind of nerve-racking, you know, because I didn't want to, I didn't want to be an idiot in front of them, or whatever. And I thought, you know, I mean, I am just this, this 20 year old kid and these are executives and, and these are the CEOs. (Interview 1)



Though he acknowledged he was initially awed by the trustees, George quickly overcame his hesitance and developed a positive rapport with them. He stated, “I think that I cultivated, I can say this now, I wouldn’t have been able to see it or say it then, but I think that I cultivated a certain amount of respect among the board . . .” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “I thought that it was a good relationship . . .” (Interview 1).

Furthermore, George described his relationship with the members of the board of trustees as

collegial and it was just, you know, and I was, I’ve, there was this kind of really cool feeling that, like, you know, here I am, I’m just this little kid at a, at a small college, um, and, and these people who are, you know, who carry some influence in the world, um, in their various, uh, vocations, um, sort of seem to, to respect what was coming out of my mouth. You know, that on a, on a very personal level, um, that was, that was really, that was neat . . . (Interview 1)

In a similar fashion, Trent also described his relationship with the members of the board of trustees as positive. He stated, “It was a very, uh, amenable relationship. Um, a very good relationship. Um, and I enjoyed that. Um, and I still enjoy it to this day, um, I’m still, uh, in regular contact with a good number of, of the board members” (Interview 1). Trent went on to assert, “it was a good relationship and when they asked for my opinion, they were sincere; they wanted to know what I thought” (Interview 1).

Moreover, he stated that the members of the board of trustees “were concerned and they were, they were interested, I guess is a better way of putting it, in what I, what it was that I thought and in my experience” (Interview 1). Trent went on to explain that he felt,

it’s important that you have that marriage between the student body president and the board of trustees because it’s so easy for it, on the board’s side of things, to become nickels and noses and forget that those

are people and students and that you're selling an experience as well as an education. (Interview 1)

Like George and Trent, Benjamin felt that he had a strong and positive relationship with the members or the board of trustees. He described his relationship with the trustees as

Very strong. I had a good relationship with them. I liked them and they liked me, I think. They did, but they liked me. I think they liked, I know they did, because I still get notes from them from time to time, a few of them. Two of them have rotated off now, but I keep up, they keep up with me, yeah, a strong relationship with the board, strong, very strong. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to describe the importance of a strong relationship between the president of SGA and the members of the board of trustees, by asserting,

With the trustees, it is very important because trustees have to hear from the students and the students have to see the trustees function so they know how their college is organized. Um, the president is your executive leader but the trustees own the school. Um, it's important for students to know that. It's important for the students to really interact with the executive comparable, to know the chair of the trustees and for the trustee chair to know them. (Interview 1)

Comparable to the positive experiences of George, Trent, and Benjamin, Sandra also felt that she had a constructive relationship with the members of the board. During the course of her interviews, Sandra described the importance of the relationship between student government president and the trustees. She contended, "if the board of trustees does not like the president, or does not feel a connection with the president, or thinks that they're fake, or whatever, they're not going to, they won't do for the president or for the students, I don't think" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to state that the members of the board of trustees

make decisions based on the facts that they have. If they're not told exactly the right story or, you know, from every point of view, then they're not able to make a correct or a, I don't know, impartial judgment. And so, for me, like I just, that was very important to me. (Interview 1)

She added, "I do think that they respected me enough to listen to what I had to say and if it was important to me, that they would make it important to them" (Interview 1).

Moreover, Sandra contended,

I think it is very important that, and I think that's something that needs to be stressed to each president that, this is not something to be taken lightly, you know. Like, you can make or break your year with, you know, the board of trustees. (Interview 1)

In the vein of his predecessors, Joey also felt that he had a positive relationship with the members of the college's board of trustees. He expressed how much he took pleasure in his interactions with the members of the board of trustees. Joey stated, "I know personally, um, I really enjoyed the action planning committee and things like the student development committee [of the board of trustees], um, because they were there just, you know, talking about student needs" (Interview 1).

#### *SGA Advisor*

Each of the participants described having a positive relationship with the student affairs staff member appointed by the dean of students as the advisor to the Student Government Association. The participants all shared the same advisor during their presidencies, and the advisor is the researcher of this project. The participants noted that the advisor served a number of functions, which included being a supporter and guide; a source of empowerment; a provider of perspective; and someone who held them accountable. Many of the participants admitted that their initial relationship with the

advisor was at times rocky, as both the participants and advisor worked to establish a rapport. The participants also acknowledged that they grew to understand and appreciate the role of the advisor. Callie was quick to admit that she considered it necessary for the Student Government Association to have an advisor to guide them. She stated, “I think at first it was a little chaotic because we were like, ‘What the hell are we supposed to do? Like, we need an advisor’” (Interview 1). Callie went on to discuss the importance of the advisor understanding his or her role and being able to balance their casual and working relationships with the SGA president. She contended,

I think that sometimes, for some advisors, they don’t know how to balance that. They are more concerned with whether students like them than rather, over whether students have respect and are actually listening to what they are saying. . . . Like, [the advisor] listen[ed] to what we had to say but [the advisor was] also like, “You know what, at the end of the day, this is how it has to be and this is what we’re working with and we have to have, to find a way to make it work.” . . . [The advisor] might have been concerned about it, like that wasn’t [his] main concern. [His] main concern was getting the job done at the end of the day. (Interview 1)

Callie takes this thought further,

I think it’s a really fine balance. I think a good advisor has to understand how to be flexible but also has to understand that you have to have the respect of students, and it’s cool to have students like you, but at the end of the day, like, you don’t have to be best friends with the students because sometimes when that happens, they’ll try to walk over you. (Interview 1)

Beside the value of an advisor being able to balance his or her relationship with their advisees, Callie also stressed the significance of an advisor’s longevity and willingness to serve in that role for the long-haul. She stated,

And I think that, um, there were a lot of people who maybe would have held their own but would have been long gone and, and [the advisor was]

still there and [the advisor was] still constantly trying to make SGA better and student affairs better. And, I think that, that that definitely, definitely stood out to me. (Interview 1)

George described his relationship with the advisor of the Student Government Association to be both edifying and vexing. He stated,

It was at once both, very, very fun and educational and enlightening to work with adults like you . . . It was also, at the same time, um, very, uh, frustrating at times because, um, um, because there was, you know, there was no blank check, you know. (Interview 1)

George went on to illustrate how the role of the advisor was to hold the president responsible for his or her actions and words. He contended,

Like, it was the first time that, that I had to be really, truly accountable for, for leading a group of people, but also, you know, being led by someone, um, or someone's and, um, you know, looking back on it, [the advisor] did such a good job with that. (Interview 1)

George illustrated the import of the advisors holding the presidents accountable but at the same time using those times as teachable moments. He said,

he cared about me but he was also someone who would hold me to account if, um, if I did something that, that he was unhappy with, or whatever, which, you know, I don't think happened a whole lot but when I did, he would say, ok, we got to talk about this. And, and he would hold me to account. Um, but use that moment to teach me. (Interview 1)

In a similar fashion, Trent described his experience with the SGA advisor as being supportive and positive. He asserted,

[The advisor], because [the advisor was] always there as a support, um, good, bad, and ugly. Um, and even when we did fight like cats and dogs, um, it was always, for the most part, private between us, and we settled it and we moved on, and it didn't hinder our working relationship. Um, and we were able to, to, to build a pretty dog-goned strong friendship out of it. You know, one that we still keep in touch with each other to, to this very day. (Interview 1)

Trent also explained what he feels is the function of a student government advisor. He stated, “The role of the advisor is simply that to advise, um, and not to micro-manage. And you are very good at that . . . your job is to ensure that the train don’t get off the tracks” (Interview 1). However, he is quick to point out the advisor must leave room for students to act independently and to empower them to do so. He contended,

As much as you can allow the students to lead within reason the way they want to lead. Um, and it, it was important part of the experience for me, that I was given the liberty and the ability to, uh, make my own mistakes and, uh, sometimes against your, your words of caution and advice. Um, but at the same time, I was allowed to make my own mistakes and learn from those. Um, I’m a big believer that you learn from your successes and you learn from you failures, and if you’re never allowed to fail, then you never truly learn. (Interview 1)

Trent also revealed his belief that the role of the advisor is also to hold the president and the other members or the student government accountable. He declared,

The role of the advisor is simply that to, to be someone to make sure that the, uh, integrity of the Student Government Association is, is in tact, um, to make sure that the, the rules of the college are followed and, and that, uh, you know, everything is done in a legal and safe way. (Interview 1)

Correspondingly, Benjamin felt the role of the advisor is to serve as a guide and as a conduit to reach or acquire resources, including people, funds, equipment, and services. Most important to Benjamin was that the advisor be a relationship-builder and be able to network the student government president with others. He stated,

I think the advisors have to do a few things, like connect them up with people, make sure that there’s a good relationship with the vice president for enrollment, or for student affairs, with a good relation, have a good relationship with the president, have a good relationship with the board chair, an opportunity to meet them, to be, to converse with them, to set up opportunities for them to be engaged in conversation. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to argue that the advisor to the Student Government Association must empower and encourage students to take responsibility and to take action. He contended, “That they be empowering, that the advisors be empowering, that they would, um, allow us to take on these challenges and, and do them, um, responsibly, which we did . . .”

(Interview 2). He also asserted that the advisor must hold students accountable for their words and actions or at times their silence and inaction. He also felt that the advisor must also serve as a safety net to ensure that the Student Government Association and its student officers did not fail entirely. These roles can be seen as Benjamin stated,

The advisors would allow us to, um, to make little mistakes as we were going along the way, but also head us off before we fell flat on our faces, Um, but also would push us to say, “Why don’t you, have you ever thought about this?” Um, you know, to, to offer an angle, uh, administratively that we could not see as students because we had never been exposed to it before . . . . (Interview 2)

Benjamin also found the role the Student Government Association advisor to be that of guide and pathfinder in order to show the students the way through the college’s policies and procedures. He stated that one role of the advisor is found in

helping wade through the college administration, helping make the bureaucracy, uh, not as cluttered with red tape. Yeah, that was, that was an expectation um, that, that, the advisors would help cut through some of the red tape . . . . (Interview 2)

Like her predecessors, Sandra granted that the advisor plays an important role within SGA. She stated, “it’s a very important position. There always needs to be an advisor, I think, for everything” (Interview 1). Sandra described the roles of the advisor as a listener, advocate, coach, and guide. She admitted, “I didn’t have a clue what to do

when I came into the position . . . . You would kind of guide me and tell me that . . . give me ideas to get my brain start to thinking, and then I would explode from there”

(Interview 1). Sandra went on to further describe the advisor as a guide. She stated,

I look at it more of just guidance and more of advice, I could take it or not, you know, and, and more than none I would take the advice and I would do it, especially because if it was someone in your position or someone older that had been through it. Why would I not take their advice if they're going to say you're going to fall flat on your face if you do this?

(Interview 2)

In addition, Sandra said the advisor also helped to keep her on the path to reach her goals and objectives and from getting distracted or derailed. In short, she said, “Like the advisors, you know, y'all just are there to listen and make sure we don't tell kids to go jump off buildings, you know. I mean, you're there to keep us sane . . . and [from] going off on 10 different tangents” (Interview 1). She affirmed, “You definitely need the advisor's guidance” (Interview 1).

Sandra also stated that even though she wanted more hand-holding, she was glad that the advisor acted as a hands-off guide and coach rather than someone who gave them all of the answers. She went on to describe how the advisor encouraged and empowered her to seek answers and to take risks and, in turn, to lead her organization in her own way. Sandra stated, “there were times I wanted [the advisor] to give me the, ‘Just tell me yes or no.’ . . . and [the advisor] wouldn't do it. And [the advisor] would say, you'll, you'll figure it out . . .” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “what I wanted, was to be told: ‘Do this and this will happen.’ Which I'm glad [the advisor] didn't do. [The advisor] didn't do that. [The advisor] said, ‘You should really think about doing this’” (Interview



1). Sandra said that at times when she asked a “specific question, and [the advisor] would say, ‘I don’t know, why don’t you look at it yourself or why don’t you do some research on that or figure that out yourself’” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “I think [the advisor] did a good job balancing, you know, being able to tell us . . . I think, to figure it out for ourselves” (Interview 1).

Sandra went on to contend, “the role of the advisor, [the advisor] taught me a lot of lessons as to, um, [the advisor] let me fall on my face, which was good because it needs to happen” (Interview 1). She clarified this statement by saying that part of being an advisor is to enlighten the members of SGA and especially the president-leader that failure and mistakes are going to happen and that they should not be feared. The advisor should not shield the president from them, but should use them as teachable moments. Sandra asserted, “I mean, you learn things from your mistakes and so the advisor’s role, to me, is to guide and direct them in the right direction, but not to do the job for them” (Interview 1). She maintained, “if we fall on our face, [the advisor] kind of pick, pick us back up and [the advisor] help us see what we did and we’re able to learn from it” (Interview 1).

Last, Sandra said that it was important that advisor be supportive of the actions taken by the Student Government Association. She admitted,

[The advisor] pretty much supported any ideas that I had, and that I had but I had to just get the backing of the executive committee. So, I don’t feel like [the advisor] ever put your thumb on me or said that, you know, suppressed any kind of, I mean, cause [the advisor] wanted the students, [the advisor] wanted us to succeed and for us to do things . . . (Interview 2)

Akin to the experiences of Trent and Sandra, Joey described how the advisor encouraged him to take ownership of his presidency. He stated it best by saying, “What challenged me the most? I think, uh, I think [our advisor] did a great job of challenging me” (Interview 2) Joey went on to describe how the advisor empowered him to seek out the answers and solutions to the issues confronting him and the student body without coddling him. He stated,

something [the advisor was] saying to us, well, “Hey, y’all are adults. Go about this like you would in these executive meetings. I trust you, so here it is.” And so, that was the biggest encouragement to me. At some point, I would look around and say, “Well, you know, I’m in charge here.” (Interview 2)

#### *Mixture of the Positive and Negative*

##### *Peers: SGA Executive Board and Student Senate*

Though each of the participants readily stated that their experience provided them with the opportunity to develop rich and life-long friendships, they also stated that they struggled working with and leading peers on the executive board and student senate. For Callie, she declared that the primary difficulty she faced while serving as president was the burden of trying to lead other students who were her closest friends. She asserted, “I think the two biggest challenges were the two people on the board that I was the closest friends” (Interview 1). She further clarified by candidly saying,

Even though they are your friends, like, they have to understand that, you know, they have to respect the decisions you are making. And with both of them, you know, I talked to them in like, in you know, would say, “Listen, I’m not trying to be a dictator, I’m not trying to say that every opinion that I have is correct. But when we are in meetings together just respect the fact that I’m the person who’s running the meeting and that I’m the person that ultimately is going to have the response. Follow me because they are

going to ask me when I go to a board of trustees meetings or they are going to ask me, you know, if it's something from the administration. So, you just have to trust that I kind of know what I'm doing." (Interview 1)

Callie went on to describe how she struggled and learned to balance her role as a friend and the burden on being the leader of SGA. She stated,

It was oftentimes hard, too, to conduct meetings because, you know, people thought of me as more of a friend and as so nice that they could say whatever they wanted or do whatever, um, they wanted. And so, you know, I think there were definitely a few, um, difficulties, but I think that was really in the beginning. I think it, I think toward the end, that really didn't happen as much. (Interview 2)

George also acknowledged that he enjoyed working with the members of SGA, especially those serving on the executive board. He simply stated, "I had really good people to work with" (Interview 1) And, "there were some really outstanding senators" (Interview 1). However, he also admitted that he struggled with the different personalities of those on the executive board and with establishing his authority and standing with his peers regarding his role and responsibilities as president which was an experience shared with Callie. George contended,

I was very clear that year. Even though, I mean, once I stepped into the role, and once I was student government president, although I had not wanted it, I said, "All right, then I will be the student government president," and was, you know, had to sort of make it clear [who was president and who was] not the president. (Interview 1)

George described how he struggled working with and leading a diverse group of people. He asserted, "the year of my student government presidency, um, was the first time that I ever had to really work closely with, with people with whom I disagreed or whom I just didn't like. I mean, that just annoyed me" (Interview 1). He went on to say,

I think every, every student government president probably has to deal with that, but that was a first for me because I couldn't hand pick everybody, you know. Um, and, and if, you know, I mean, dictatorship is a wonderful, if you are the dictator. (Interview 1)

When asked what challenged him the most as student body president, George responded that he attempted to pursue his goals and objectives while he struggled to retain order and authority within his own executive board. George admitted that he struggled with “working with people I didn't trust” (Interview 1). One such person that he struggle with was Trent, who was on his executive board. Trent, who the following year would be elected as president, served as George's vice president. George described the power struggle that existed between the two. George stated that Trent “was my constant thorn in the side. Um, and I, I liked the boy, um, but didn't trust him too much” (Interview 1). George went on to say, “not that I thought that he going to completely sabotage anything, but as I said before, I, I knew that he was, um, saying disparaging things about me and about my leadership and about, you know, all of that kind of stuff, um, behind my back” (Interview 1). This notion of struggling for authority is similar with the experience that Callie had as president the previous year.

Although George at times struggled with working with individuals serving on in the executive board and on the senate who had different views and opinions, and at times vied for power, he readily stated that he developed a number of positive working relationships and friendships. George talked a length about his constructive relationships with the treasurer and secretary. He stated, “I could not have asked for, um, a better person to be on my executive board than Jill. Um, she was my right-hand person, even

though she was the secretary. Um, there was a lot of trust and rapport there” (Interview 1). George went on to assert that Jill “was the, the perfect complement for who I was and where I was and, um, the skills that I lacked, she more than made up for . . .” (Interview 1). He took it a step further by stating, “to this day, um, you know, I really sort of think that she would have and could have been, um, the right student government president that year” (Interview 1). In regard to the treasurer, George described Pam as being a lot of fun and someone who liked to push barriers. He said that Pam “just kind of came and voiced her opinion, and she was funny about it and, um, and I liked the fact that, you know, I mean, Lindy and I were like such little goody-goodies and Sophie was real different” (Interview 1). George went on to declare, that Pam was “somebody I would never have gotten to know quite so well if she hadn’t been on there. So, I mean, really, my relationship to her was that she just kind of made things fun” (Interview 1).

Even though George said that he was challenged by the internal political power struggle of one of his executive board members, he felt that his group collaborated and worked effectively together. He stated,

On the whole, though, we worked pretty well together. We were a fairly cohesive group, um, even with that under current of, um, distrust between me and Trent, I know Jill also felt that way, um, but still I mean, we’ve, we were pretty cohesive. We made it work. (Interview 1)

Similar to the experiences of Callie and George, Trent felt that relationships came easy in regard to his peers within the student body at large. However, where he struggled, just like Callie and George, were in his interpersonal relationships with the members of his executive board. Unlike his predecessors, Trent held the reins of leadership very

tightly. Where George and Callie sought to empower the members of their executive boards, Trent chose not to delegate responsibility to others, which was where his conflicts arose. Trent asserted, “My executive board challenged me most” (Interview 1). Trent went on to explain,

Relationships in general were easy. The relationships with the executive board, um, was not easy because I wasn’t willing to give up pieces of the pie. Um, even though I had the right to govern the way I governed and I was within my full constitutional authority to do so, um, that does not mean that I had to elect to do so. Um, and uh, that doesn’t mean that I should have done so. (Interview 1).

Trent continued to articulate his experience as he asserted,

I mean, certainly, as the chief executive officer of the student body, I could have elected to distribute the, uh, uh, you know, the labor and the leadership and the responsibility to whomever I pleased, and I chose not to do that. Um, so that, that created, at times, a tense relationship with those who I should have, um, had the strongest support . . . (Interview 1)

He insisted that his most significant failure was that he

did not engage my executive board, um, and it’s fully in the big picture as I could have, and, um, in painting the picture where we needed to go and allowing them to help carve out the map of, of how we would get to that destination. Um, and it’s, in doing so or in not doing so, rather, um, I created, uh, uh, uh, a monster for myself. (Interview 1)

Trent acknowledged that the members of his executive board “were capable and they were willing, um, I just didn’t allow them to be a part of that” (Interview 1). He went on to state,

my leadership style at that time, was that I’m, since I was in that position, that I needed to be the one representing, when I simply could have delegated some of that to my executive board members or even to, uh, various members of the student body, or the Student Government Association. I chose not to do that so that was my problem. I see that now. (Interview 1)

He admitted that his leadership style was that of a “lone ranger” and that caused a lot of conflict within his executive board. He went on to say,

when you’re a lone ranger leader you cannot and should not expect others to buy in because, ah, buy-in is created by a sense of coming together and coming up with a plan together, ah, so, it should have not, it should not have been any surprise to me that they didn’t buy in. (Interview 2)

Because of his inability to delegate and empower others, the internal power struggle hindered his administration from achieving its goals and serving the student body, Trent reflected,

within the executive board, you had other folks jockeying for power, and jockeying for, ah, position and this and that and, you know. And, at the end of the day, again, the, the losers were the students. While we were arguing over this or that, we really could have been taking that energy and, and better serving the needs of the student body. (Interview 2)

Comparable to statements made by Callie, George, and Trent, Benjamin acknowledged that working with his peers on the executive board was one of the most taxing aspects of being president of SGA. He stated,

As SGA president, I would have, in my first term, been more careful about who I would have asked to run for secretary and treasurer. I realized later that I had two people that were terribly angry and divisive and did not understand how to participate the way that I knew how to participate and the way that our vice president knew how to participate. (Interview 1)

Like his predecessors, Benjamin admitted that he struggled to overcome the interpersonal conflicts and rivalries that existed within his executive board. Benjamin declared that he believes in allegiance to others. He stated, “Um, I expect loyalty from people. I expect that I will be able to, to make decisions on their behalf and their trust” (Interview 1).

However, he divulged that members of his executive board did not always live up to his standards.

In addition to working with challenging interpersonal relationships and internal conflicts within his executive board, Benjamin also stated, “working with a variety of people was very challenging for me. I had to learn to work with people that did not see things the way I saw things” (Interview 1). He went on to explain, “We were all different people. All five of your executive officers were different people” (Interview 1).

Moreover, he said that beyond the fact that they were all different people that they also “brought completely different perspectives to the table” (Interview 1). Although he disclosed that working with a diverse group at times challenged him, that he learned to value that same diversity. He stated, “if everybody looks alike and thinks alike, um, the product will reflect that and it will be . . . it will be a weak cup of coffee” (Interview 1). He went on to clarify, “I think that, as a leader . . . I learned this at [the College] . . . I learned that you have to sit back and look and assess what is good for everybody. And you don’t do that by yourself, you do that with a group of people” (Interview 1). He further stated,

As a leader, personally, you have to bring to the table, with me, you get, you get people that are different, you get perspectives that are unique. Um, and as a group, you chart a course for what you feel is the correct path to follow. And you follow the path together. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Benjamin acknowledged that he learned through his experience that as a leader,

I expect that before I make that decision, that I’ll make it in concert with them and having given complete consideration to their work and to their



passions and to their thoughts on something. Um, I think that all of those things together make for a strong team. (Interview 1)

Last, he explained,

. . . [what] I have learned is, is that, that there are things that I can bring to the table and I've learned to listen and to not be as intimidated by other people, even my own peers. Um, I learned to, to listen more carefully and to know that their ideas are just as good as my ideas and deserve just as much, um, time and discussion as anybody else's. I've learned that. (Interview 1)

Like her forerunners, as president, Sandra's experience was both positive and negative with the executive board and the student senate. She described her experience as both a constructive and frustrating at the same time. Regarding interactions and work with her executive board she stated, "we worked together as a group" (Interview 1). Although she felt that they worked as a team, Sandra also admitted that she had to learn to delegate to the members of the executive board and she struggled with doing so because of personality conflicts. She said, "I couldn't have a hand on everything, ah, my huh, my executive staff, there are some very good ones and then there were a few that were not so good, and that was frustrating" (Interview 1). She went onto clarify that, like previous presidents, the differing and conflicting personalities of the executive board members did not always mesh, but in the end she felt that they all contributed and played part of accomplishing their goals and objectives. She explained,

I liked them all . . . I tried not to butt heads with anybody, and I don't think I really did, a whole lot. Some of them really annoyed me. Um, the student activities guy at the time didn't really do his job very well, and that frustrated me a lot. But, um, but, I think we all did our part. We all complimented each other . . . I think that was a good mix. (Interview 1)

Sandra also found her relationship with the student senate to be frustrating and a hindrance to the achievement of her goals. She acknowledged that she had difficulty overcoming personality conflicts with a number of its members. She asserted, “Some people gave me heck about certain things . . . whatever, you’re going to have that with everybody” (Interview 1). Sandra went on to state,

There were some students that I did not want to listen to, more personal reasons than not. Because I knew things that they were doing was for personal reasons and not for the bettering of the students and so, I wouldn’t listen. We didn’t really get along very well. A lot people, or, I don’t say WE . . . just as a whole we didn’t work very well together, ah, and there were a few of us that did and there were a few that did not. (Interview 2)

She continued by describing why she found student senate meetings aggravating. She contended,

I thing a lot of times these meetings were very frustrating. Because we would have ideas and there would be half of us that really wanted to do it, and the other half wouldn’t, and unless we could come up with a consensus, we couldn’t do them, and that was very frustrating ’cause it was like, “You just don’t see the big picture.” (Interview 2)

At times she felt that because of the conflicts with the members of the student senate that, as president, she “had no power to change things, within the senate” (Interview 2). She continued,

you just kind of have those unruly people that, I mean, there’s a percentage of voting that had to take place, and we were split a lot of times. Lots of times people were just voting for popularity reasons. They didn’t really care about being there, so they didn’t show up. Ah, there was a lot of people that wanted to be to make the changes and not in a good way. So, I think we had a lot of apathetic people my junior year on the senate. I don’t think we had a whole lot of, like, driven people and so, that caused, I think, a lot of inabilities to change. (Interview 2)

She declared that working with the student senate, “was very difficult, ah, the senate members were not doing their jobs” (Interview 2). In the end, though, she professed, “I expected it to be a lot worse than it was and I had, I think, more fun with it than I had anger and strife and ill-will towards others” (Interview 2).

Similar to Sandra’s experience, Joey’s experience with his peers on his executive board and in the student senate was a mixture of positive and negative. He admitted that he, like his predecessors, struggled with his relationships with his peers in the SGA, but through his struggles he enhanced his interpersonal and conflict-management skills. He attributed the challenges he faced with this peers to his desire to appease others, to interpersonal conflicts, and to communication issues. Joey stated, “I think it was just a combination of attitudes, um . . . strong-willed people, at some point, and just, some just blatant communication issues” (Interview 2). Even though he was challenged by interpersonal relationships with the members of his executive board, he expressed that he had an overall positive relationship with them. Unlike Trent, he was open to their ideas and would, like Sandra, delegate responsibilities to them and empower them to act. Joey contended, “I think just mainly with the executive board we had a lot of, we would meet, you know, before the SGA meetings and it was on a real personal level . . . I was no higher than them, is the way I would like to, to run it. And so, they got their fair share to say things” (Interview 2).

Although Joey felt that he had a positive relationship with the members of his executive board, he admitted that he did not share such a relationship with many of the members of the student senate. Similar to Sandra’s experience, Joey struggled to

overcome the personal attacks and the personal agendas held by some in the student senate. Joey declared,

Dealing with, you know, certain people who may tend to get out of control sometimes, maybe tend to, you know, rub your face in the mud, try to make you look bad, you know. I've always disliked people who try to do that to other people. (Interview 1)

He went on to assert,

I want[ed] to represent the school and try to make it good, and here they are, you know, trying to, you know, bad talk you or, you know, trying to make you look like the person you're not supposed to be. So, I always, I felt, you know, that, I really didn't like that part of it. (Interview 1)

On further reflection, Joey contended,

I think it was just a part of people maybe having their own agendas, too. You know, here's things that they want to get done and so it was really hard to, you know, be that decision maker at the top and have to, you know, sometimes say, "Hey, you know, I really don't feel like fighting for that because, you know, I don't see that being, I see that being as you and your friends as, you know, you have a problem with that." So, luckily, you know, I don't, I don't think it ever came to that, it was just minor. You know, petty issues . . . usually about distribution of funds and stuff, and so . . . . But, uh, I mean, there were times where it was, you know, I wouldn't say difficult, just, you know, a little interesting to work with people, so.... (Interview 2)

The relational issue that challenged Joey the most, in regard to his peers in SGA, was his desire appease everyone. He stated, "the worst parts for me, um, would probably just be the . . . you couldn't please everybody" (Interview 1). He went on to admit, "you know, I was really stupid. I tried to appease way too many people and I got myself in trouble" (Interview 1). He continued, "when you try to appease a, a big student body like that, someone is going to get their feelings hurt, and then, you know, you never know who that, who that could be, you know, what kind of impact that would leave on them,

so. . .” (Interview 2). However, Joey later reflected that as a leader it is not possible to appease all parties. He stated, “you can never do that, but I always was kind of someone that tried to do that, and, um, just the, the lesson I learned from that” (Interview 1).

### *College Faculty*

The participants each indicated that their relationship with the faculty, and particularly the faculty leadership, was a mixture of positive and negative. Callie, for one, could only say positive things about her relationship with the faculty at Emerging College. She declared, “the faculty: that’s the reason I came to Emerging College, and the faculty remained amazing. I mean, they were some of the strongest people that I had ever met and some of the greatest people” (Interview 1). However, because of her close relationship with the faculty and the hostile political clash between the college president and the faculty at the time of her presidency, this positive relationship turned into a negative experience for her. As president of the student body, in “no-man’s land,” between these two warring factions, Callie explained,

I found myself more as a student government president worrying about the faculty and how the faculty were treated than actually worrying about student issues. Um, and so, um, which I mean, to me, you know, faculty issues, if faculty aren’t happy, that does indirectly affect students.  
(Interview 1)

She went on to describe how, because she was placed in an awkward, difficult, and unnerving situation, she was burdened with a significant amount of stress, which she was ill-equipped to handle. She stated,

And, you know, I, like I can’t, like when I think, when I think back on my [the College] experience and I think about the faculty, like, sometimes it makes me just want to cry because there were plenty of times where I just

wanted to quit and I just wanted to leave [the College] and the only reason that I stayed was because of the faculty. (Interview 1)

George, like Callie, claimed to have a positive relationship with the faculty of Emerging College. He contended that his productive relationship with faculty members existed “long before I became student government president, I had developed a good rapport with them” (Interview 1). He went on to state, “there were . . . some faculty with whom I was extremely close, um, particularly as the student government president” (Interview 1). George figures that his positive relationship with the faculty members was due to SGA not pushing an aggressive agenda during his time as president. He stated,

And as far as, you know, my work with, as the student government president, um, because of the nature of our goals and what we were trying to accomplish, we weren’t having to push through anything really difficult with them, so there wasn’t that kind of working relationship that I’m sure other student government presidents had to cultivate or should have cultivated. (Interview 1)

The agenda that George did advocate with the faculty was one of reconciliation of the campus community. He asserted, “I just had conversations like we had always had but they had, had more to do with the college itself and restoring competence” (Interview 1). He maintained, “Um, for us, we were trying to do the exact same thing with and for them that we were doing for everybody else, and that was to create a positive culture” (Interview 1).

Although George contended that he had a positive relationship with many faculty members, he also felt that faculty members could also be difficult and fractious when they felt the students were encroaching on their territory. He stated, “I thought the faculty

could be pretty bitchy about stuff . . .” (Interview 1). This negative perception at times soured George’s relationship with many faculty members.

Similar to the experience of Callie and George, Trent viewed his relationship with the faculty at Emerging College to be both positive and negative. Trent asserted that he “enjoyed working with the faculty leadership” (Interview 1). He went on to say, “the, uh, faculty chairs that I worked with. Uh, it was a pleasure. Um, they were always concerned and always looking to partner” (Interview 1). However, Trent also admitted that he found working with faculty members and especially the faculty senate to be frustrating and a hindrance. First, he felt that the faculty senate was so large that it was unwieldy and cumbersome. He contended, “I think it’s ridiculous that every member of the faculty is on the senate. I think it should be representation” (Interview 1). He also felt that faculty senate was slow to act and interloped into territory that he believed belonged to students. Trent declared, “Now I will say that sometimes it was frustrating because they would drag their feet and have to be a part of issues that I didn’t think was any of their damn business” (Interview 1). That being said, he reaffirmed overall his relationship with the faculty was a positive aspect of his experience. Trent claimed, “sometimes that, uh, process, um, with the faculty, took longer to get things accomplished. But it was good experience” (Interview 1).

Similar to his counterparts, Benjamin felt that his relationship with the faculty at Emerging College was both positive and negative. Benjamin attested that he perceived that he had a solid relationship with members of Emerging College’s faculty. He maintained that his relationship with the faculty was “very strong, very strong.” He

believed that his relationship was positive because he felt that he was “always adopted as a student and as a colleague” (Interview 1). On the other hand, Benjamin felt that his relationship with the faculty was a negative aspect of his presidency because of the internal conflicts within the faculty. He stated, “I did not appreciate the disagreement and squabbles that occurred among the faculty that were very open” (Interview 1). He also stated that it was a negative aspect of his presidency, because he felt the faculty were incapable of taking decisive action. He alleged, “I noticed about my faculty at [the College] that they were paralyzed by their insecurities and incapable of, of dreaming” (Interview 2).

Like the presidents that came before and after her, Sandra considered her relationship with faculty as positive and negative. She believed that she had a constructive relationship with faculty members based on mutual respect. She claimed, “I did have a, I think, a good relationship with, pretty much, all faculty” (Interview 1). She went on to describe how her relationship with faculty members was built on deference and that the relationship went beyond the classroom environment. She stated, “I think it’s getting to know the faculty and the staff and the trustees and earning their respect. And, I think I did and it helped in my classroom relationships. It helped in, um, relationships as far as out of school” (Interview 1). However, even though she felt her relationship with many of the faculty members at Emerging College was positive, she was also was frustrated by what she believed to be some disingenuous faculty members. She asserted, “I respected every professor at that school, on some level. Some I did not like, and some



said they were student advocates and were not—they wanted things to happen the way they wanted them to happen” (Interview 1).

Just as with other participants, Joey believed his relationship with the faculty was both a negative and positive aspect of his presidency. In short, he stated that he “felt like it was a love/hate relationship” (Interview 1). He contended that he found his relationship with the faculty to be both encouraging and frustrating. Joey admitted that he was initially confident that his relationship would be constructive.

I had the opportunity to, uh, speak in front of the faculty senate. . . . And so, I would bring kind of what SGA was doing, and usually, you know, it was, I was mindful of their time and they, so I would keep it very short, you know, and just highlight a couple ideas that we had worked on and discussed. (Interview 1)

At the outset, Joey was heartened by the response he received from his time in front of the faculty senate and believed that he was making inroads in establishing a strong rapport between the two governing groups. He said that a faculty member “pulled me aside and said, ‘You know, how’s SGA going? You know, you know, I’ve heard a lot of good things out of there.’ And, so, it was very encouraging that the, the faculty were on the side of the students” (Interview 1). Joey went on to describe his experience. He stated,

I think it really helped going before them in the faculty senate, and just, if it’s just explaining what we’re doing. I think that was the first time anyone had ever gone before the faculty senate from SGA and just kind of given a report. You know, I’m sure they could talk to somebody and, oh yeah, we had SGA meetings and here’s what we did. But, just the visual of me up there, telling them what we’d done. I think that kind of increased their knowledge . . . . (Interview 1)

However, Joey’s optimism regarding his relationship with the faculty was short lived. He was soon to feel that his presence at the faculty senate meetings was simply being

ignored, which made him cynical about his relationship with the faculty at Emerging College. Joey described his growing pessimism,

Sometimes I felt as I stood up there, you know, they were just kind of looking away or, you know, maybe weren't paying attention. Maybe they didn't feel like these ideas were, you know, good enough. And then, you know, question times, "Anybody have any questions?" and nothing would happen, you know. And so, at times I felt slighted, but there were definitely faculty members who were very willing to work with the SGA. (Interview 1)

He continued to illustrate his frustration by stating,

It's like they didn't, they were trying to, you know, hurry me along. And so, I think I had mentioned before that in our question/answer time, I always asked for questions and never got a single question. And so it was, it was something that I didn't feel like they wanted me there almost. But you know, maybe they just said, "Hey, you know, we agreed to give him this 10 minutes. You know, let him say his spiel, be on with it, you know, if he really starts screwing up, you know, then we'll start asking questions." So, it was, you know, it was, that was the hardest part for me to understand because, you know, here if I, if I was a faculty member and I had the student coming in saying, "Hey yeah, we're going to have. . . ." I think one of the first meetings I had talked about a student that raised a concern about their lack of awareness on sexually transmitted diseases. I mean, if I were to have said that, you know, if a student would have said that to me, and said, "Is that really an issue, do you think that is an issue?" Never once. So, I thought it was, you know, very interesting and it was kind of the, the vibe I got all year was that, you know, they really didn't care if we got there. (Interview 2)

#### *College President*

For the period of time being studied, Emerging College had three different College presidents, two permanent and one interim; however a number of the participants make references to the College president that served a few years prior to the beginning of the period of time under study. For the sake of confidentiality, each of the College presidents has been given a pseudonym. Dr. Franklin served as president for

approximately 14 years and then retired just prior to the period of time for which this study examined; Dr. Newton served as president for approximately three years and then resigned; Dr. Luther served as a one year interim president; and Dr. Ingle has served for approximately seven years and is the current president of Emerging College. The six participants indicated through their interviews that they had a lukewarm relationship, at best, with the College presidents and in one case, this relationship was made worse by the actions of the College president towards one of the student government presidents. Callie and Trent, particularly, even indicated that they had a negative, somewhat contentious, even hostile relationship with the college president during their time in office. In the end, the participants portrayed their relationship with the College president to be a mixture of both positive and negative.

Callie described her relationship with the College president, while president of SGA, as being awkward and complicated. She depicted their relationship as being unpleasant and horrible. Callie went so far as to represent her relationship with the college president as adversarial. To provide context: During Callie's presidency, Emerging College was in a significant state of upheaval and controversy, and a systemic level of discontent surrounded the College president. During the middle of her presidency, the college's faculty senate took a no-confidence vote on both the College president and the College's vice president for academic affairs. The internal campus politics and turmoil created an environment of tension and hostility with the students and, in particular, the student body president was caught between warring factions on campus. The resolution to the growing discontent over the College president's management style

was that the student body, working through Callie, and in collaboration with the faculty leadership, orchestrated his termination by the Board of Trustees. Callie admitted that the intense environment on campus resulted in both emotional and physical strain for her. That being said, even though Callie described her experience with the College president as overwhelmingly negative, she did state that her initial response was positive, for a short time. She said,

I think it started off being good. Um, but I think that when I was SGA president that kind of was when it started off being good, that was before he really started rocking the boat a whole lot. Um, I think eventually, it was pretty bad, and, and I don't know that it was pretty bad with the administration. I know that it was pretty bad with the president. (Interview 1)

Callie described her relationship with the College president as being discouraging and maddening. She asserted,

I felt really frustrated by what had gone on that year, and I was mostly frustrated with [the College president] because I felt like, because of the environment that he created, we focused so much so trying to correct that, that there were other issues that we probably should have been participating in a taking care of, that we didn't get to because our time and energy was spent on trying to diffuse that situation. (Interview 2)

She went on to explain her dissatisfaction by contending,

I was frustrated by that because I felt like, you know, our legacy as, in SGA was that we got rid of the president when our legacy should have been more that we actually did some things to really empower the student body. (Interview 1)

In an effort to describe how unhealthy the relationship between Callie and the College president had become during her presidency, she stated,

I distinctively remember, um, towards the end of my senior year, he called me in his office to talk to him and I remember him recording our

conversation because he felt that students and faculty were attacking him and so he wanted to, to have everything on the record. And I just kind of remember thinking to myself, like, I'm a 19 year old kid, like, you feel that threatened by me that you have to record what we're saying? I just remember really kind of taking offense to that. (Interview 1)

She went on to describe the substance of her remarks during that conversation. She asserted,

I told him that I really felt like he was tearing the school apart, um, and that he wasn't listening to what the faculty had to say and he wasn't listening to what the students had to say, and that it wasn't a one-man-show, that all of us played a, a huge role in how [the College] went, and, and that he didn't understand that. I told him, you know, I was very frustrated by that. (Interview 1)

Callie concluded her comments about her relationship as the student government president with the College president by stating, "I mean, there were definitely times towards the end of my year that, to walk into the president's office made me nauseous" (Interview 1).

As Callie's term as president came to an end and George was elected as the next student government president, Emerging College came to grips with the ousting of Dr. Newton and the appointment, by the Board of Trustees, of Dr. Luther as an interim president. Unlike his predecessor's contentious relationship with the college president, George described his relationship Dr. Luther as positive. George stated, "Um, well, that year it would have been with Dr. Luther. Um, and he was somebody who, as I said, I liked, you know. And he was a breath of fresh air because he was, he was competent" (Interview 1).

Like Callie, George experienced three different College presidents during his time as a student at Emerging College, each of who had distinctly different leadership styles. George explains, “I came when Dr. Franklin was president and I really, you know, I mean, he seemed like a wonderful and genuine man. I also thought, wow, this, this country bumpkin is something else” (Interview 1). He went on to describe Dr. Franklin’s management style by arguing, “from Dr. Franklin, um, I learned that . . . charm can get you far in certain places. Um, and I think it’s got to be genuine, and I think for him it was genuine” (Interview 2).

George went on to describe his experience with his second College President, Dr. Newton. He asserted,

Then we got, um, Dr. Newton in and I was actually very excited initially about him because I thought, “This guy’s really different.” Um, he’s not a country bumpkin. Um, he’s something, he’s something different and he seems very decisive and, um, and seems to, to carry his authority well. Um, but as time went on, things seemed out of place and didn’t seem to add up to, to me and to lots of others. (Interview 1)

In short, George stated, “well, there’s plenty that I learned not to do from Dr. Newton” (Interview 2).

George then put into words his relationship with his third College president, Dr. Luther who served as the interim president while George was student government president. He asserted, “Luther . . . he was a competent, you know, um, interim president. He was just good at that and being, being the interim anywhere is not an easy role and I thought he did it well” (Interview 1). George went on to contend,

[From] Luther, I learned that one of the most valuable things in leadership is, um, um, a something that, that I have since learned to call um, non-

anxious presence, um, that calm centeredness and self awareness that comes from many people after years and years and years and years of leadership. Um, and that, you know, he, and, and its what I, I know part of your question was, you know, what was I looking for in a president. Um, what I was looking for in an interim president . . . is . . . someone who can be a calm, centered anchor for people in the midst of transition; and he was that. (Interview 2)

Although George respected and held Dr. Luther in high regard as an interim president,

George also felt in some measure slighted by Dr. Luther. He explained,

I found his, um, his approach to me as the student government president, somewhat patronizing. Um, and I, you know, its, um, I, I think that he just had different priorities and he wasn't there to, to sort of, um, increase the, the capacity or the role of the, the student government president, um, by having a voice on the board or by, you know, meeting with me on a regular basis or whatever. Um, and not that I rarely ever sought that out or expected it, um, I didn't think that I would be having weekly meetings with the president, or whatever. Um, though, now, as I look back, I sort of think, well, you know, maybe college presidents would do well to do that with their presidents; um, their student body presidents. (Interview 1)

George went on to clarify that even though he felt at times that Dr. Luther was condescending or denigrating toward the student government president that he had a positive relationship with Dr. Luther in relation to his role as an interim College president. He asserted,

so it was a little patronizing but I trusted in his leadership, as a college president, um, and was not dissatisfied with what was going on. Whereas I had been so extremely dissatisfied the year before, but I let that go. Um, and so, you know, overall, it was a positive experience. . . . I couldn't have asked for anything more. (Interview 1)

Though his interviews, George put in plain words what he believed an ideal college president should be like. He stated,

In a broader since, what I was looking for in a president was someone who um, seemed honest, um, and, and I think with that comes the, um, the, the

role of, um, consensus builder and someone who, at least makes people think that, that he or she is interested in what they're thinking and worrying about. (Interview 2)

George further described the characteristics of an ideal college president by asserting, "I also wanted someone who could play [the College] game, um, someone who valued the mission of the place. And it's funny, you know, again, I think that is tied up with listening to, to people with building consensus . . ." (Interview 2).

Similar to the experience of Callie and George, Trent also had the opportunity to observe and work with multiple College presidents during his time at Emerging College.

Trent stated,

It was an interesting time for the College itself because it was a time of transition. Um, I had, in my three years I, I did my four year's studies in three. Um, I had three different college presidents, um, and so there was a time of transition and upheaval for the College itself. (Interview 1)

He went on to explain why he described his time at Emerging College as a time of transition and upheaval. He asserted,

My whole time here at [the College] was a fire storm. I mean, we went . . . I had three different presidents in three different years. Ah, there was a lot of upheaval and unrest in the student body because of the administrative topsy-turvyness. Students, whether they will admit it or not, need and desire and long for, ah, stability in structure, and when that is not in place, then you really have ah, you're really set up for some issues of, of , of different fires across campus. Ah, there was, ah, ah maybe a "fire storm" is not the, the best terms, ah, but it was definitely a period of change, ah for the college. As well, we had just not too long gone from a two-year college to a four-year college. We were still experiencing the growing pains of that, ah, and we, ah, it was just a time of transition, not only because of the leadership but the student body was ah, ah, ah, within the office of student activities we were growing and taking on a more collegiate view because of the four-year program. Ah, so really, maybe less "fire storm" and more just growing pains. Ah, ah, you know,



changing. Change is not fun and it's not easy, ah, and so that may be why I said "fire storm." (Interview 2)

Like George, Trent witnessed and worked with Dr. Newton, Dr. Luther, and Dr. Ingle during their time as presidents of Emerging College. Trent was elected to SGA presidency after Dr. Newton was terminated as the president of Emerging College. He did, though, participate actively in the actions taken on behalf of the student body in an intentional effort to oust Dr. Newton from the College presidency. Trent described how the students helped to cause the ouster of Dr. Newton. He asserted,

I don't know what the official title of the committee was but students concerned about the college or something and it was really, uh, uh a panel of students that had called the administration together and had some very straight and poignant questions that they wanted answers to. Um, and that with other things, you know, led to, uh, the resignation of, of a college president, um, who was ill-equipped to lead the college. (Interview 1)

The year prior to his election to the student government presidency, Trent served as vice-president of the student government while George was president. During that time, Dr. Luther served as an interim College president at Emerging College. About Dr. Luther Trent stated, "The beginning of my term I had Dr. Luther as the college president. He was interim. Um, very sweet fellow, very . . . endearing and just a charming grandpa-like fellow" (Interview 1). However, by the time Trent was serving as the student government president, Dr. Ingle had taken over as president of Emerging College. Akin to Callie's experience and relationship with Dr. Newton, Trent had a positive relationship with Dr. Ingle at the outset. Nonetheless, Trent reflected that the positive nature of their relationship quickly faded. He explained,

[I was initially] very supportive of Dr. Ingle . . . I was very open to new leadership and very embracing of him and, uh, and his wife. Um, but that quickly went sour, um, probably sometime around October or November when, uh, I found him not to be a person of his word. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to clarify,

I was jaded pretty, um, pretty quickly with the president, um, not being a man of integrity, um, or not being a man of his word. Um, that jaded me pretty quick and I was hurt by that, um, and lost a lot of faith in, in his ability to lead and, uh, in his genuineness and his sincerity. (Interview 1)

Trent makes clear his idea of integrity when he asserted, “I’m the type person, you see what you get, and what I say you’ll get is what you get, and I expect that of other people” (Interview 1). He went on to pinpoint his troubles with Dr. Ingle: the idea of establishing a student activities fee. The concept of a fee was being discussed and debated by a strategic planning committee. In our interview, Trent said that prior the committee meeting he felt that Dr. Ingle had pledged support for implementing the fee, and during actual meetings Dr. Ingle spoke out against it. Trent vented,

It was a very frustrating process, ah, but, only frustrating because, ah, I had been lied to by the president who said he supported it, ah, and then later did not. And, I guess it would have been different if he said, “Well, you know, after having a look closer at this, I’ve changed my mind.” Ah, I probably could have accepted that, ah, and then I would’ve at least to go, to said, “Well, you know, let’s look at this and see if there is any room for modification, if we can work on this, ah, to make it something better, ah, for the college.” But he simply acted as if he had never heard it, and, of course, I know that he had ’cause we had, you know, took it through the actual planning process and then through the, ah, personal meetings with him as well, and so, but the process did not have to be frustrating. Ah, but that’s the way it ended up. (Interview 2)

This disagreement or lack of communication and agreement between Dr. Ingle and Trent created a schism, which has yet to be reconciled. Trent described their relationship: “It

was cordial, um, but we didn't care for each other. I didn't care for him, he didn't care for me, and we didn't make any bones about that. Um, and the relationship is still the same today" (Interview 1). He went on to explain that even though he had a falling out with the College president that his negative experience and relationship with Dr. Ingle did not hinder his desire to serve the college even as an alumnus. He contended,

As the college president, I am loyal to the position, um, and if were to call on me in that role as college president, to do something as an alumnus, I would do it and I would do everything within my energy to support the institution. As a person, I do not support him nor do I care for his leadership. But I do see a distinction between the position and the person. Um, I am loyal to my alumnus, uh, to my alma mater and um, will do anything to advance it. (Interview 1)

Comparable to the relationship that George had with Emerging College's interim president, Dr. Luther, Benjamin also described his relationship with the College's president as a mixture of both negative and positive. Benjamin explained that the negative aspects arose where he felt that Dr. Ingle was too distant and cut off from the student population and experience. Benjamin stated,

I did not have a strong relationship with our president because I saw the president's work as being, um, void of an understanding that students were primary, and I saw the work of the college president as disengaged from the [long-standing Protestant] community, disengaged from the community of the [long-standing Protestant] colleges, disengaged from the Atlanta community . . . disengaged from the community that [the College] was founded upon and must exist within. (Interview 1)

Benjamin further contended,

his leadership style did not permit him to be open-minded enough to permit other people's voices at the table to be heard and to be, and their ideas to be implemented... (Interview 1).

He argued,

You have to be willing to not be afraid of people and their ability to think and come up with original ideas. Because the idea wasn't your own, doesn't mean it's not a good one and doesn't mean it's not worth exploring and implementing. . . . Because it wasn't your ideas, the executive, doesn't mean that it's any less a reflection of you. I learned that and you can apply that writ large. (Interview 1)

George went on to explain,

I think as, as college president, you have to be willing to do that, you have to be willing to hire the best and understand that what their going to produce is going to be the best and it's reflecting upon your work as well. Because it wasn't your ideas, the executive, doesn't mean that it's any less a reflection of you. I learned that and you can apply that writ large. Um, don't ever be afraid of someone else's really strong original idea, um, in your department or anyone else's ,because it, if it's as successful as they think it's going to be, and if it's theirs, they'll be passionate about it more so than the adoption of someone else's idea. It's only a strong reflection upon you and other people around you and the school, so . . . (Interview 1)

Beyond feeling that the College president was disconnected from the student population, Benjamin also found Dr. Ingle's personality "did not allow or permit him to be engaging or charismatic" (Interview 1). Moreover, Benjamin reflected that he struggled with the actions taken by Dr. Ingle while he was serving as SGA president.

Benjamin explained,

The worst part for me was having to face the foolish behavior of our president and, and, and justify his actions at times to the students' related to enrollment. I mean, tuition increases, related to, uh, budget cuts, related to foolish decrees that he would hand out, um, related to his disengagement . . . . Um, yeah, that was the hardest thing for me. That was the part that stunk. I hated it when he started messing with student affairs stuff because every time, I had to go translate that, painfully, to the students. I hated it. (Interview 1)

Negative aspects aside, George admitted that his relationship with Dr. Ingle also contained a positive aspect in that he learned a lot about leadership and managing others.

He stated, "I learned a lot about executive leadership styles that were important"

(Interview 1).

Unlike her predecessors, Sandra did not describe her relationship with the College's administration and in turn the College president as negative. For the most part, she portrayed her relationship with Emerging College's administrative officers and the College president as positive. She stated,

Most of them worked with me as much as they could and most of them wanted to see the students accomplish and achieve things. I think some of them, in the past, maybe tried to suppress the students, or whatever. But, I never really felt like I butted heads with too many of them, or any of them, really. Um, so I didn't ever really have a problem with them. (Interview 1)

Similar to Sandra's experience, Joey indicated that he too had a fairly positive relationship with Dr. Ingle. Joey suggested that, unlike Benjamin, he felt he had a personal relationship with Dr. Ingle. Joey stated,

As far as our college president, you know, I got to know him on a pretty good basis, you know. He would always be one to come up and talk to me, and I was always the one to go up to him and tell him how things were going, you know, whether personally or with student government. (Interview 1)

He went on to assert,

I think he was one of the first people to congratulate me on being elected. I think it was one of the next days, I passed him on the sidewalk again and he had stopped and said something to me. You know, actually stopped, not just in passing, and said, you know, "Congratulations on being elected, I look forward to working with you." And so, that was a big, you know, a big thing in my eyes. It's like, aw, you know, he really did notice, you know, whether he heard it through the grape vine or he actually read an email, or he actually maybe seeked [sic] someone out and asked them, you know, to um . . . And throughout the year, you know, he was um, more than willing to, you know, talk with me. (Interview 2)

That being said, Joey also hints that, like Benjamin, he too felt that the College president was disengaged and disconnected from the student body at large. He pointed out, “So, he was very, you know, personal in that aspect, but at times I felt it was kind of detrimental because it kind of stopped with me, as most people thought” (Interview 1).

Joey went on to explain,

I guess the biggest knock or thing that people say about him is that he is not very personable to the students and I guess I could see that my first years because, you know, um, I had never really spoken to him . . . .  
(Interview 2)

Finding Balance

TABLE 6

*Underlying Categories Related to Finding Balance*

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
BALANCE	
	The Students Versus the College
	Life in General

Another concept that emerged through the data was balance, more specifically, finding balance. There were two underlying categories related to “balance” that were common among the participants. These underlying themes were “finding balance while serving both students and the college” and “finding balance in life in general.”

*The Students Versus the College*

Upon reflection, four of the participants discussed the challenge of seeking to find balance between being an advocate and voice of the students and serving as a advocate and voice of the college and its administration. Four of the participants mentioned that they felt pulled by two opposing interest groups: the student body and the college administration. Because of these conflicting obligations, the participants at times felt torn about what which group to support and what actions to take. The participants grappled or wrestled with trying to find balance between the two differing, and sometimes incompatible, groups. Callie described this difficult situation:

I really feel like the role is, of the student government president, is to really, kind of be that go-between person between the students and the administration. I think that, that, that they are the, they represent the person who listens to what the students need, needs are but they also listen to what the administration needs are. And, I think it is a fine balance and I think that for a lot of student government presidents, I think that can be their downfall is when they don't know how to balance the two. And, I think in most cases, if they can't balance the two it is because they listen so much to what the students have to say but they're not listening to what the administration has to say and there's, their not willing to compromise. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to state,

You are accountable to students, you're accountable to administration. Um, and I think that's where some of the stress comes in because I think, you're not, as a student, as a normal student, you're not, not used to being held accountable to all of those things and having all those expectations. (Interview 1)

In a roundabout fashion, George also acknowledged that as president of SGA he felt there was a struggle to find a balance between the needs and concerns of the student

body and those of the college faculty and administration. However, in the end, he admitted that, the scales leaned more toward the student body. He stated,

I felt like, um, whatever we had been through, the two years before, um, that we could emerge stronger and that students had a role to play in that, that no matter how the faculty were feeling, and the administration, all that was up in the air. (Interview 1)

Trent also described feeling torn trying to find balance between being perceived as a student and at the same time a member of the college's administration. He stated, "the balance between, uh, uh, being that student leader, um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge" (Interview 1). He went on to explain,

You're a student but you are no longer treated as a student. You're not an administrator but you're treated as an administrator. You had the authority to do everything and the authority to do nothing. I mean, it's just a very awkward position. Ah, you have the right to walk into the president's office and have an audience with him, any student has that right, but you have the, ah, ah, you're more quickly recognized, I guess, ah, as a, as a, ah player, ah, it's just kind of awkward because ah, you're feeling that, that ah, difference between, "Well am I a student? Am I a leader? Am I . . .?" I mean, you really are almost, ah, an ex-officio member of the administration and there is no other way to put that, and that's awkward. That's an awkward responsibility for a student to carry, ah, I think it's appropriate and I think it's needed, but it's awkward. (Interview 2)

Like his predecessors, Benjamin conceded that the president has to seek a balance between the needs of the student body and the needs and agenda of the college administration. He responded, "my role was to bring some equality to the work and I saw my role as SGA president in, in that way" (Interview 1). He went on to concede that he felt that the primary role of the president was "being important as an ambassador for the students" (Interview 1). However, Benjamin stressed that future presidents "have got to



be able to understand that their role is not simply related to the students. Their role is beyond that. Their role is much bigger than that” (Interview 1). As one can see, Benjamin sustained the notion that the president of SGA must seek to find a balance between serving both students and administration.

Like Callie and Trent, Sandra also found it difficult to balance being serving the student body and serving the college administration. She declared, “it was, that was hard. It was hard when administration that I would support would do something against the students and yet, I was still supporting them. That made it difficult” (Interview 2).

Although Joey granted the president of SGA must find a balance between the needs and desires of the students and those of the administration, like Benjamin, he believed the primary “role of the student body president is to lead, kind of voice the concerns of the students to other students, administration, trustees” (Interview 1). Throughout his interviews, Joey did not acknowledge a struggle to balance these two groups.

### *Life in General*

The other underlying theme within balance is to find balance in life in general. A number of the participants commented that they found it was challenging to find balance in their life and commitments while they were serving as president of SGA.

Callie affirmed that her life as president was complicated, and that she found that finding a sense of balance in her life to be difficult. She testified, “there were times where people needed me to be in three places at one time and there were times where I was sick as a dog and I needed to be certain places . . . because there are certain expectations, um,

for you so. . .” (Interview 1). She went on to maintain, “I mean, I think, I think a typical day was a pretty hectic day and, you know, it’s one of those days where you make a list of things that you’re going to do and you’re lucky if you get two of them done” (Interview 1).

Similarly, George felt that he had difficulty in balancing his role as president with other aspects of his life. He stated, “you know, that came out of the time that I was spending on student government that affected my academic life. Um, and you know, my senior thesis and stuff like that . . .” (Interview 1). He went on to describe the presidency,

It’s not the kind of position where there are clear-set hours, and so, you know, um, I could pour myself into stuff probably more than was required and not take very good care of myself both, you know, on a, on a health level but also on an academic level and, and just, and in the sense of keeping my life in order, keeping things balanced. (Interview 1)

Likewise, Trent felt challenged while trying to find balance in his life as the president of SGA. He contended,

I think one of my issues, as a student body president is that I was student body president first and a student second. Ah, with the proper perspective you always should be a student first and then student body president. Ah, but I’m sure that every student body president faces that issue. (Interview 2)

Trent went on to say “I was just constantly giving, giving, giving, ah, and didn’t take the, I mean I worked on student issues at all hours of the day, ah, just about seven days a week . . .” (Interview 2). He also asserted, “I felt like I was always owned and always investing in others and didn’t have enough time to invest in myself. And, uh, I remember several times thinking I was going crazy” (Interview 1).

Like his peers, Benjamin recognized that he needed to seek a balance in his life while serving as president. However, unlike his peers, Benjamin contended that he was able to balance his presidential duties, his personal life, and his academics responsibilities without having a sense of being overwhelmed. Benjamin admitted that he “always tried to give a lot of time to the office” (Interview 1). Nonetheless, he also said he “was very dedicated to my academic skills” (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to say that “as SGA president I made my best grades in college because I was working so hard at those classes; A’s and B’s solid, just right through there. My grade point average actually improved my last two years of college” (Interview 1). Moreover, he asserted, “as SGA president I very rarely missed a class” (Interview 1). Throughout his interviews, Benjamin maintained that he “was very committed to making sure I gave a lot of time to the academics, which was my primary focus” (Interview 1).

Similar to her counterparts Sandra also admitted that she felt challenged while trying to find a sense of balance. However, although she felt that her personal life was out of kilter because of the responsibilities and duties of the presidency, she admitted she understood that that to be part of the burden of leadership. She stated that the presidency took “up a lot of your personal time, but that was never really a problem to me” (Interview 1). Sandra went on to assert, “it took up time, as far as, away from my family. I wasn’t able to go home as much, um, and I, not necessarily, didn’t like that but, um, it, it’s just, it’s a commitment that you make” (Interview 1).

Akin to the experiences of many of his predecessors, Joey was challenged while seeking to find balance in his life as president. He stressed,

it was really tough because, you know, I like fast-paced things but, but when it's every day, you know, for a whole semester . . . it was, it was starting to wear but, you know. There were times I remember having to really balance my day, you know, as far as, you know, writing it down on pieces of paper, you know, "Here's what I've got to do." (Interview 2)

He went on maintain,

I had a really full plate, um, my senior year from. I had internships during the fall. I was running cross country, um, to being, you know, serving on the SGA to . . . I'll give Lindsey some credit: Being, you know, having a girlfriend on campus, you know, having to balance that . . . (Interview 2)

### Gender and Race

The participants did not all share the same experiences. Two sources for the differences in their experiences as student government presidents stemmed from the differences in gender and race. In this study, four of the six participants were male, two were female and one of the females was an African American. Both of the female participants acknowledged that they had distinctly different experiences as the student government president than their male and white counterparts.

#### *Gender*

During the course of the interviews only the two female students indicated that their gender influenced their experience as student government president, while the four male participants made no mention of their gender in regards to their experience. The two female participants stated that they felt that they had more to prove as they perceived that there was a different and quite possibly faced a higher level of scrutiny and expectations as the student government president than their male counterparts faced. For example, Sandra stated, "because the female before me [which was Callie], was a good five years

before, I think, um, and it didn't go very well with her as president, from what I understood. .... I think I had a lot to prove as a female" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to say "I think...I had to fight for respect and I think, I think I set the bar at a different level than it had been and maybe that's just me thinking that" (Interview 1). Furthermore, she contended,

I think that, because I followed so many males before me, um, I do think I had to raise the bar to a different level. Its not that I raised it above them, it's that it was just a transition, it was just different, it, the way I handled things were just different. And um, I think it was a good change, you know. (Interview 1)

Sandra concluded,

because there hadn't been a whole lot of positive with a girl being president before me, I felt like I had a lot of things to prove and I think I did a good job with it. . . . I think I did a good job when I was there um, but I do think its, and there have been since me, a few females that have run, they haven't won, but have run and, and I think that's good. I think they should keep running. (Interview 1)

### *Race*

In regards to the issue of race and how it influenced the experiences of the participants as student government presidents, only one of participants admit that race did play a factor in her experience as president. The six white participants made no mention during the course of the interviews regarding their race and how the issue of their race influenced their experiences as student government presidents. Callie, who was an African American, however disclosed that her race did have an influence on her presidency. While attending a predominately white higher education institution, Callie

admitted that she struggled with fitting in to some degree, but that she strived to not let her race and her minority status interfere with her experience. Callie stated,

I went to a predominately white school in the north Georgia mountains so, you know, obviously, you know, being at Emerging College I definitely ran into some adversity and, you know, for some people I was the first black person they had ever met and interacted with. Um, and so, that's fine, you know, I didn't, I really tried my hardest no do think about that so much. (Interview 1)

She went on to testify, "I've always lived my life and like, I'm Callie, I am who I am. African, being African American is a part of who I am but it does not define who I am" (Interview 1).

Callie was Emerging College's second African American and first African American female to serve as student government president. Similar to the experience of Sandra regarding how her gender shaped her presidency due to perceived higher level of scrutiny and expectations, Callie also felt that there were different expectations for her as an African American. She admitted, "I do think there was a little bit of a different set of expectations" (Interview 1). However, she perceived that those higher expectations were from the most part from other African Americans students. Callie stated, "Definitely there was a different expectations by the African American students because I think the African American students felt like I needed to put African American student's interest above all other student's interest" (Interview 1).

In regards to how her race influenced her relationship with the college's administration she asserted, "there was definitely an expectation um, there. I think that, for the most part, I think that, that, I would like to think that the administration didn't care

so much about that fact that I was African American” (Interview 1). However she did acknowledge that “There were a few um, people that really felt like I was not going to good job strictly because of the fact that I was African American” (Interview 1).

As can be seen by the comments from both of these participants, there is a perception that there is a higher level of scrutiny and expectations for females and for minorities who serve as student government presidents by students and the college administration.

#### Personal Characteristics

TABLE 7

#### *Underlying Categories Related to Personal Characteristics*

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
	Integrity
	Passion
	Respect
	Inquisitive Nature
	Risk-Taker
	Citizenship
	Listener
	Being Outspoken

Each participant, using a variety of different terms, described the various personal characteristics they felt were needed by the Student Government Association president. The personal characteristics the participants described included integrity, passion, respect, inquisitive, risk taker, a sense of civic responsibility, listener, and being outspoken. Joey succinctly stated, “I think the student body president, if you had to define it would probably be . . . a renaissance man or something. It’s somebody that’s almost . . . good at everything” (Interview 1). That being said, each of the participants acknowledged that they fell short in many if not all of the above-mentioned personal characteristics but that they learned and grew as a result of their experiences.

### *Integrity*

Each of the participants felt that possessing a sense of integrity was an important character trait for SGA president. Callie asserted that her presidency reinforced her conviction that one must stand firm on their beliefs and opinions. She stated,

It taught me a lot about how to stand up for what you truly believe in . . . While at the end of the day you may not always have the result that you’re looking for, there’s something to be said about standing up for what you believe in. (Interview 2)

Like Callie, George stressed that he attempted to maintain a moral code as president. He claimed, “I still tried to keep . . . a code of integrity and honesty that had sort of been built into me through life in the church and through my parents, especially my dad” (Interview 1). George went on to maintain,

honesty and integrity . . . I mean obviously we would, you know, we would always say that we wanted those from any elected leader and anybody or in any government, but I think that within the context of student government at [the College] specifically you know . . . So, I feel



like the president has to be able to make every good attempt to embody that. We will all fail from time to time, but I think that those are crucial. (Interview 1)

George also described the importance that sense of integrity played in a presidency. He contended,

I think that if you have the honesty and the integrity first, that people will sort of say, "OK, here's somebody who, whose vision I like, or if I don't like it, I at least trust this person enough to, to give my own two cents and let's see where we can go from here." Um, I sort of put all of those on equal footing. (Interview 1)

In a similar fashion, Trent emphasized that a sense of integrity is an important characteristic for someone serving as president of SGA. He said, "A leader is someone who will stand up for what is right regardless if they find themselves standing alone or not" (Interview 1). He went on to state, "[I] was always taught to speak my mind and do it as politely as possible without giving an inch, still stand firm. And, who it is that I am and what it is that I believe and just treat all, treat everyone with respect and the courtesy that they deserve" (Interview 1).

Benjamin portrays his view of the importance he placed on integrity while president by explaining that while he served he sought to be open and up-front with others about his opinions and views as well as not acting in secret or working behind closed doors. He stated,

I never once had a private meeting with someone where I said we could make this go away. I never had once those kind of meetings. I had meetings where I would go and ask for people for support and state my case so they could decide intelligibly for themselves. (Interview 1)

Sandra also discussed the topic of integrity during her interviews. She felt that integrity was a key ingredient for a successful SGA president. She described integrity as holding on to her beliefs and opinions and sticking to her guns when she felt that she was in the right. Sandra stated, “I needed to stick with what my thoughts and my beliefs were, and I needed to stand strong to what I wanted to accomplish. And by that I had to be myself” (Interview 2).

### *Passion*

Similar to the character trait of integrity, each of the participants also agreed that the president of SGA must also be passionate. Specifically, the participants concurred that the president must be passionate about the position of president, the Student Government Association, and the College. Through her interviews, Callie focused on her zeal for the College and how it influenced her presidency. She stated that Emerging College “was truly a place that I love and I was one 150 percent passionate about the place” (Interview 1). In the same way, George also concentrated on his passion for the college as the reason that he accepted the presidency. He contended, “it had to do with this love that I had for the institution and the idea that the institution, um, could be, could be more and deserved to be more” (Interview 1). Like Callie and George, Trent maintained that he too was passionate about Emerging College and that this passion was an important character trait during his presidency. He insisted, “I love this place and I want to see it advance, and I want to do anything that I can” (Interview 1). Trent went on to contend he was not only passionate about the College but that he was also passionate about serving as the president of the student body. He asserted,

I definitely was passionate about, ah, the students, ah, ah, advocacy, ah, and, ah, ah, passionately, ah, I mean, if something happened in the administration I didn't like, uh, I was the first one to tell 'em, ah, and, ah, I was, I was an ardent, ah, I feel like an ardent defender of the students, ah, representative maybe, ah, but sometimes defenders that sometimes needed to be, compassionate . . . (Interview 2)

Benjamin also brought up passion. Similar to his predecessors, Benjamin eludes to the importance that passion for the college in the success of a president. He stated,

I also was fascinated by the structure of higher education, how the small college was designed, and how it was laid out in terms of structure, how it was administrated . . . that was for me most fascinating. (Interview 1)

Benjamin went on to contend, "I would say a majority of SGA presidents have a fascination with institutions of higher education at all levels including administrative and academic student services. All of us have a respect for and an appreciation of it . . ." (Interview 1).

During her interviews and journaling, Sandra also discussed her passion for being the president of SGA. She stated, "Something I had to learn as SGA president was that...my job as SGA president [was] first and foremost" (Journal 1). She went on to contend that the presidency "was a big deal and I always made it a big deal" (Interview 1). Similar to his forerunners, Joey also argued that a vital character trait of a person serving as the president of SGA is a passion for the college. He testified, "you've got to love this college to be . . . a student body president. If you don't, it's almost like, what are you doing it for" (Interview 1)?

*Respect*

In addition to the personal characteristics of integrity and passion, the participants also agreed that an important trait is respect. In particular, the participants concurred that the trait of respect centered on respect for others and their ideas and beliefs. Callie mentioned that her experience as president “really taught me a lot about how to treat people and how to respect people” (Interview 2). Similarly, George contended that his presidency was effective because he was able to develop relationships across campus that built on “mutual respect” (Interview 1). Trent also emphasized that respect for others was an important trait for presidents. He stated that he learned as president he needed to “treat everyone with respect and the courtesy that they deserve” (Interview 1). Likewise, Benjamin agreed that respect for others is an important character trait. He asserted, “I learned a lot . . . about the rules of life that really do apply universally. Treat people well, and always do what’s right and just and fair” (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to state, “You have to be fair and you have to show people that you’re fair and you have to show people that everybody has a voice” (Interview 2). Sandra concurred with her predecessors that respect for others is an important character trait. She insisted, “I think people need to feel that they’re very appreciated” (Interview 1). Joey also discussed the importance of respecting others. He described how his leadership style as president, which centered on engaging others in dialogue and respecting their ideas and opinions, helped make his presidency successful. Joey stated, “I’m kind of the one to sit back and say, ‘Hey, what does everybody else think? Let’s kind of get a group consensus and then if someone’s got to push it forward, we can push it forward’” (Interview 1). He went on to clarify,

I know I'm not the most vocal leader and, you know, that's . . . but I think it's something where sometimes people may respect you more or may kind of understand or not feel as intimidated at points, you know, in my leadership role. (Interview 1)

### *Inquisitive Nature*

Beyond the personal characteristics of integrity, passion, and respect, each of the participants emphasized an inquisitive nature as an important trait for a president of a student government association. The participants all indicated that they were highly curious and took pleasure in questioning anything and everything. Callie described her inquisitive nature in distinct ways. She explained how she intentionally sought to break down barriers between students and the college's administration by continually questioning the policies, programs, and actions of the administration. She stated,

I think I really wanted to break down that line between administration and students because I think that, when I was SGA president, there was a very clear line of, "You're a student, you fit into this box and you don't question so much what the administration does." Um, and from the administration's standpoint, "You're an administrator and you don't really have to care so much about what the students' opinion is." And so, I really wanted to kind of break down that line and I think in some ways, I did that. (Interview 1)

Like Callie, George revealed that he too felt that it was important that the president possess an inquisitive nature. He explained that as president, he had a "proclivity . . . toward kind of trying to be creative, put things together in interesting ways, and see what kind of meaning was created out of all that" (Interview 1). Trent also indicated that he also felt that an inquisitive nature was an important character trait. He described himself: "I was inquisitive. I never was mischievous, um, or just mean. Uh, my problem was I wanted to know why everything worked. I wanted to know how everything worked"

(Interview 1). He went on to say, “if I don’t know the answer to something, I’m going to ask and I’m going to keep asking until I get the answer. Um, and if don’t like the answer that I get, I’m going to ask why that’s the answer” (Interview 2). Last, Trent contended,

Good leaders ask good questions, um, because you, uh, you cannot be a renegade lone-ranger leader. You have to have input from others, and, um, really, you know you’re turning into a good leader, um, when you find yourself, uh, realizing that you don’t have all the answers and that you need to get the answers from someone else. So, good leaders ask good questions. (Interview 2)

Benjamin contended it was his inquisitive nature that was the root of his desire to be president. He stated, “I was inquisitive about making a difference for people. Um, and even now my interest in politics isn’t motivated by a desire to run for election, um . . . I think my inquisitive nature . . . pushed me to a point to run for the student government presidency” (Interview 2). Comparable to the others Sandra also felt that curiosity is an important trait for SGA presidents. She asserted, “I think I do go and seek out the answers” (Interview 2). Likewise, Joey emphasized that his curious nature played a powerful role during his presidency. He stated,

I was always very curious, as in . . . . So I was always, you know, kind of somebody that always wanted to get my hands in things and, kind of, pick things up and say, “What is this?” or if something was there and I would just take it apart just to take it apart. So, I was always very into things and kind of wanted to see how things worked . . . . (Interview 1).

Joey went on to describe the import of being inquisitive while serving as president. He claimed,

The former presidents I know, and I think you have to have that. If you don’t, you’re never going to question yourself. Question, I mean, what you believe and question things on behalf of the students. You know, going into it, you know, you wanted, I just wanted to soak up all the information

I could . . . . So that was, you know, I was very, very intent on doing so, and if you don't have that, I don't think you are going to succeed. You've got to know every aspect of what SGA, you know, is going to do for the students. (Interview 2)

Joey also stated,

If I wouldn't have had that inquisitive mind, I could not have remembered all those details. You know, something like that because, I, you know, I kind of went into researching that, you know, um, looking at it, you know, finding out . . . just finding out all the information that I could. And so, when you do that, you yourself go in to whether it is the SGA meeting, whether it's a meeting of the Student Development Committee with knowledge and credibility . . . . (Interview 2)

Furthermore, Joey asserted, "I was glad I had that inquisitive nature about me to go out and find out information and kind of research all that was, you know, to be asked of me . . ." (Interview 2).

### *Risk Taker*

The participants also added "risk taker" to the list of desirable SGA president traits. The participants agreed that leaders of organizations like student government associations need to have the confidence to expose themselves to uncertainty and the possibility of failure. The participants recognized that their willingness to take risks as a leader grew during their presidencies. A few of the participants claimed to be risk takers prior to their presidencies while others asserted that their experiences helped to develop this trait.

Callie referred to risk taking as stepping outside one's comfort zone. She described this trait: "I think of leadership as someone who is really willing to kind of step

out of their comfort zone. Um, someone who's, who understands that they may have to go against the grain of what everyone else thinks" (Interview 1). Callie went on to state,

I think anybody who is going to be a leader has to understand that they have to step out of their comfort zone, um, and you have to step out and you have to take risks. Um, I think some of the greatest leaders have taken some of the greatest risks ever. I mean, Gandhi wasn't a great leader because he wasn't willing to take risks. You know, same thing as Martin Luther King—they, they were people who were willing to take risks and they were willing to go against the tide, and because they were willing to do that, they were able to bring about great change, um, in the world. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to describe how being a risk taker is an important element in one's ability to be a successful student government president. She stated, "I also see the student government president's role as the person who is open, who is willing to step out of the comfort zone . . ." (Interview 1). Callie clarified:

As SGA President, because you are the leader of the group, you have to be able to step up to the plate and, and take heat and, um, for decisions that have been made, um, even if they weren't necessarily your personal decisions or your personal, um, beliefs, you have to be willing to go to bat and be able to support the decisions that your, um, entire board has made. (Interview 2)

Like a number of her peers, Callie claimed that she came into the presidency with the trait of being a risk taker. She said, "I was just kind of always the type of person that was just like, well, if no one else is going to do anything about it, like, why don't I do something about it" (Interview 1)? However, Callie also acknowledged that her presidency helped to strengthen this character trait. She contended,

It was, it was still, it was the best year and I think a lot of that had to do with SGA because it really did stretch me outside of my comfort zone in a lot of ways. It really did. (Interview 1)



George agreed with Callie that being a risk taker and, more important, possessing the confidence to expose oneself to ambiguity are important personal characteristics of someone who desires to be a leader and, more specifically, a president of a student government association. He asserted,

I think that . . . part of leadership as much as I talk about servant leadership and everything, is that you, you've got to acknowledge the fact that you can do it. Um, and go on out there, and, and put yourself, um, on the line and, and see what happens, and give it your best shot. (Interview 1)

George also contended,

I think the people who don't take that risk, um, you know, end up, um, feeling a little bit unfulfilled um, because I think, I think, I think it's not just that everybody wants to make a difference in the world. (Interview 1)

However, unlike Callie, George admitted that he felt that he did not possess the confidence to be a risk taker when he began his presidency but that it developed over his presidency. George divulged,

Someone there who said, you know, um, "You aren't very sure about your leadership abilities but we are, so stop being such a sissy and holding back and just let yourself go." Um, and some of that happened at [the College]. (Interview 1)

He went on to explain, "You know, I finally had to decide to stop being such a sissy and just kind of get in there and, and, and put to work the gifts that I had been given . . ."

(Interview 1). George furthermore explained that he "learned through student government and through being kind of thrust into it, is that you, you have to step up to the plate and make yourself available" (Interview 1).

Like the others, Trent also identified risk taking as an essential character trait for a student government association president. He succinctly stated, “the student body president is to simply be a lightning rod” (Interview 1). Similar to Callie, Trent also admitted that he came into the presidency with the confidence to take chances and to gamble on the successes of his ventures. He claimed, “I am the type of person that if no one else will step up, I will step up, and I will take the lead” (Interview 2).

Benjamin also recognized that leadership entails risk and being willing to expose oneself. He asserted, “you can’t lead anybody anywhere unless you are willing to step up and take a little bit of a risk and move ahead to the next place” (Interview 2). However, similar to George, Benjamin admitted that early in his presidency he was at times timid or tentative in regard to making decisions or taking action on his own. He explained, “I used to be very hesitant to make a decision by myself. I’d have to call a meeting and I’d have to discuss it” (Interview 1). That being said, Benjamin asserted that by the end of his presidency he had grown in confidence and was more willing to make decisions and to take possibly risky action. He declared, “if I know it’s right, I’m not as afraid to pull the trigger anymore and to chart ahead with that decision” (Interview 1). He further stated, “There are certain things that warrant quick decisions, and I’m readily open to making decisions on my own and quickly” (Interview 1).

Sandra also identified risk taking as defining of a leader. She contended,

A leader is someone who can listen and who, um, can handle the details and, um, someone that is not afraid to, um, to screw up, to mess up, but who, after they do mess up, learns from the mistakes and is able to improve upon them . . . . (Interview 1)

Similar to Callie and Trent, Sandra described herself prior to her presidency as being fairly self-confident and willing to go her own way. She simply stated, “I’ve never been one to just kind of blend into the crowd” (Interview 1). Sandra described a significant gamble that she took as president. She pushed for the establishment of a student activities fee. She asserted, “I think asking for the student activity fee was a huge risk, ah, but students did it. They agreed to it, so, ah, I think just because that was such a *huge* deal to the students” (Interview 2).

Joey also agreed about willingness to take risks as SGA leader. He described how the decision merely to seek the position of president entails taking a risk and that that is just the beginning. He stated, “I mean, its kind of . . . a risk to run for, you know, a position on campus because, you know, here you are in a position of authority” (Interview 2).

### *Citizenship*

Civic responsibility counted strongly in the participants’ reactions to desirable presidential personal characteristics. Civic responsibility is defined by Komives, Lucas and McMahon as “the sense of personal responsibility individuals should feel to uphold their obligations as part of any community” (1998, p. 52). During each of their interviews, every participant emphasized their desire to act in ways that benefited their campus community and its members. Moreover, the participants acknowledged that their presidencies broadened their sense of responsibility to their communities and society.

For example, Callie considered serving as president as a means to build relationships with members of the campus community and to take action to better it. She

stated that she was “able to interact with the community, um, and doing some of the things that we did in the community, I thought, um, were kind of cool” (Interview 1). She went on to explain that her experience “allowed me to, um, not only get involved with students on campus but it also got, helped me to get involved with faculty and administration on campus” (Interview 1). In simplest terms, Callie, said “I just remember thinking that this would be a way for me to give back” (Interview 2). She went on to describe her sense of civic responsibility in the following way. She stated,

All of the things that I got involved in really were connected to helping people and getting to understand, you know, the dynamics of [the College] and what [the College] meant not only to students, but also what [the College] meant to the community and the impact that they had on the community and so, I think that was my motivation for getting involved in all those things . . . . (Interview 1)

Similar to Callie, George considered possessing a significant level of civic responsibility, in particular the desire to work to improve the lives of others, as an important character trait for student body presidents. He stated, “I define leadership . . . in terms of, of benefiting the greater good of, of the larger group . . . .” (Interview 1). He clarified that with student governance,

the concept of leadership was tied to service; that if you’re going to be a leader in this organization, you have to be willing to show up early and to stay late and to, to help people be the best that they can be to achieve their best self. (Interview 1)

Throughout his interviews, George explained that his enlightened sense of civic responsibility originates from his passion for Emerging College. He stated, “it had to do with this love that I had for the institution and the idea that the institution, um, could be, could be more and deserved to be more” (Interview 1). George asserted that the

presidency is “about serving the common good of that particular body, . . . that body being the students” (Interview 1). He contended that his aim as president was to “create a positive environment” for the members of the campus community (Interview 1). He went on to declare “we did lots of things I guess, the year that I was president, but that’s the thing that I wanted the most because I wanted people to say, ‘I like being here because I liked being there’” (Interview 1).

Similar to Callie and George, Trent acknowledged that he believes that civic responsibility was an important character trait. He stated, “I believe in leadership that . . . [is an] engaged citizenship. Whether it be at a college level or in a community, I believe it is necessary” (Interview 1). Trent asserted, “I was very involved . . . I think a good citizen of [the College]” (Interview 1). When asked to define the phrase “good campus citizen” he contended,

Well, a good campus citizen, number one: shows, I guess, you could break it down to four character traits. Ah, first of all honesty, ah, ah, next I would say respect, respect for the rules, ah, respect for you know the traditions that come along, ah, respect for the faculty, the staff, the administration, ah, I’d say responsibility, ah, we all come together, ah, with each with a different role to play and ah students must take responsibility for their actions, and part of that responsibility is academic but part of is social and being involved in giving back and then, ah, lastly to kind of tie it all together is caring . . . . (Interview 2)

He further defined the term as,

A responsible campus citizen, ah, or a good campus citizen, ah, you need to be involved. I mean, you need to, ah, to be a person who supports the you know, the events on campus and all. I mean, you don’t have to go to everything but you should, ah, give back and contribute and be a, a contributing member of the community. (Interview 2)

In a comparable fashion to his predecessors, Benjamin also recognized the need for the president of SGA to display civic responsibility. He argued, “I think a leader . . . would be best described as a person that creatively, energetically, and passionately fulfills the needs of an organization that they’re asked to serve as leader” (Interview 1).

Benjamin contended that while president he sought to answer the question, “Could we, you know, could we improve the student’s position here” (Interview 2)? This highlights his desire to be an engaged campus citizen and to take action to better the experiences of others.

In regard to being an engaged citizen, Sandra emphasized the importance of a leader placing other members of the community above him or herself. She stated that, “[a leader] doesn’t put themselves above others because [a] leader is not any more important than the follower” (Interview 1). She went on to contend, “A leader is a servant and is someone who can give themselves first and foremost, to . . . others” (Interview 1).

Regarding civic responsibility, like his forerunners, Joey focused on the importance of leaders, specifically the president of SGA, to serve others and better the community. He stated, “we really did give something back to this campus” (Interview 1). He went on to contend, “we really did change something that needed to be changed” (Interview 1). He concluded by saying, “I think that’s kind of the aspects of leadership that, you know, you need to strive for” (Interview 1).

### *Listener*

A number of the participants identified being a good listener as essential for success as a student government president. The participants openly discussed how a

president must really hear ideas of other students as well as faculty, staff, administration, and community members in order to effectively advocate for and take actions on the behalf of students. Callie even went so far as to attribute this trait to being a great leader. She stated, “a great leader knows how to take the input from everyone else” (Interview 1). During her interview, Callie linked the importance of being a listener to the presidency. She described the student government president as kind of a “go-between person between the students and the administration” (Interview 1). Callie went on to clarify, “I think that, that, that they are the, they represent the person who listens to what the students need, needs are but they also listen to what the administration’s needs are” (Interview 1). She also admitted, through her presidency, she “learned that I also had to listen to other people’s thoughts and the other ideas that they were bringing, um, to the table” (Interview 1).

Benjamin also addressed being a listener. He explained that while serving as president, he intentionally sought out the ideas of others as he crafted the vision, direction, and actions of SGA. He asserted, “I expect that before I make that decision that I’ll make it in concert with them and having given complete consideration to their work and their passion and to their thoughts on something” (Interview 1). Like Callie, Benjamin also acknowledged that he became a better listener due to his time as president. He stated, “I learned to . . . listen more carefully and to know that their ideas are just as good as my ideas and deserve just as much time and discussion as anybody else” (Interview 1). In the end, he simply stated, that when you “make decisions with people . . . with good counsel that you know will make a difference” (Interview 1).

Like Callie and Benjamin, Joey also discussed the value of being a good listener. Joey described how, as president, he would sit in on student senate and other committee meetings and allow those in attendance to voice their ideas and opinions, and he would help steer the direction of the discussions in effective directions. He stated, “I like to sit back and kind of take in what’s happening, and then at the same time, I like to interject and push people towards what should be done” (Interview 1). Joey believed that an effective president was a quiet listener more often than an outspoken advocate.

### *Being Outspoken*

A final character trait that many of the participants identified with an effective student body president was ability to be a candid and outspoken advocate for the students. The participants made a case that the student government president needs to be forthright in his or her discussions regarding issues facing the student body and other members of the campus community. Moreover, the participants also contended that the president need not hesitate or refrain from resolving those issues.

Callie regarded being outspoken as a not only a character trait, but a responsibility of an engaged and active citizen and leader. She stated, “I’ve always, um, kind of been taught that if you complain about something, you need to have some type of a solution to it” (Interview 2). Callie further said, “I just felt like, if I’m going to complain about stuff, um, I might as well go ahead and try to make an effort to change it” (Interview 2). She concluded her thoughts on being outspoken by reasoning,

It’s kind of like the theory of, if you don’t vote, you can’t complain. Um, so I figured, I wasn’t necessarily pleased with a lot of things that were



going on, so what a great opportunity for me to try to change some of those things. (Interview 2)

George also addressed being outspoken as an essential character for a student government president. He argued that a president needs to be assertive regarding his or her own opinions. He readily admitted that, “I know that I was opinionated” (Interview 1). He reasoned that it was an important trait for him as president.

Trent, like Callie and George, admitted that he was an outspoken president who was a fervent activist on behalf of the student body. Trent explained, “if something happened in the administration I didn’t like, huh, I was the first one to tell ’em . . . I was an ardent, ah, I feel like an ardent defender of the students” (Interview 2). Like Callie, he contended that he was raised to be frank and open about his opinions. He stated, as before, that he, “was always taught to speak my mind” (Interview 1). He went on to contend, “I mean I’m one that’s going to speak my mind, and, uh, and let it be like it is” (Interview 1). He followed this comment up with,

I didn’t go looking for fights but I wasn’t afraid if one showed up at the door. Ah, and so, ah, there was just issues that we needed to address, ah, and so, I felt like, as the student body president, ah, I should be the one at the helm, ah, or the forum of those issues. (Interview 2)

Comparable to those above, Benjamin also described himself as outspoken and frank and that he used this trait during his presidency. He stated, “I was outspoken about my opinions on a few things, um, and that might have had some influence in it . . .” (Interview 2).

## Roles

Throughout the interviews a pattern of roles played by the Student Government Association president were identified by the participants.

TABLE 8

### *Underlying Categories Related to Roles*

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
ROLES	
	Engager
	Mediator
	Voice/Advocate
	Cheerleader
	Mentor

### *Engager*

Each of the participants described being an “engager” as one of the primary roles of a student government president. The participants expressed that the president must seek input from others, connect with them, involve others in decision-making, delegate opportunities for leadership, and empower others to act.

Callie described herself as a president who engaged others. She stated, “I’m the type of leader that I want everyone to be involved. I want everyone to play some type of role in it” (Interview 1). She went on explain how she disliked idle individuals in the student government. She wanted to not only delegate but empower others to act. She

contended, “I don’t want there to be like two or three work horses and then everyone else is just kind of laying back and hanging out. . .” (Interview 1). She went on to assert, “I think really trying to be a motivator and being enthusiastic and trying to get them to see like this is . . . important, let’s all get on board” (Interview 1).

As with Callie, George saw himself as an engager. He felt that his chief aim as president was to design a vision for the future in collaboration with the entire student body. He stated,

it was my task to get my four immediate officers to kind of shape up a vision and then bring some other people on board the senate and have them sort of cultivate a vision so that ultimately . . . there’s a vision being cultivated by the entire student body and maybe beyond that. (Interview 1)

Unlike his two immediate predecessors, Callie and George, Trent was not so much of an engager as SGA president. He freely admitted that he acted as “a lone ranger” (Interview 2). Upon reflection, he learned that his poor relationships within his executive board, senate, faculty, staff, and administration could have been minimized, or avoided all together, if he had been more of an engager. Trent stated that if he was to do it over again that he would “entrust my executive board with more power and I would . . . put more students in the process because it is an important process to be involved in . . . and other students would benefit from that” (Interview 1). He went on to state that he would “lead differently. I would be less lone ranger and would share the division of labor. And I would trust those who were in my cabinet to make decisions and empower them to make decisions . . .” (Interview 1).

Benjamin said that one of his most important roles as president was to engage and bring in others together to make decisions. He stated, “I tried to do as much as I could to bring people alongside me so they could be part of our work together and be a part of our connection as a unit” (Interview 1). Benjamin also said that as president he wanted “to bring everyone to the table and make sure every voice was heard” (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to assert, that one of his other responsibilities as an engager “was to find and groom people to follow us” (Interview 1).

Like Trent, Sandra came late to the idea that the president should seek out and engage others. She readily admitted that she attempted to serve as president as a solo act, but she acknowledged that she soon learned that she could not balance all of the responsibilities on her shoulders alone. She confessed,

You can't do it all as president. You have to delegate. And that's hard for me. And that was really head for me as president, and I would try and do a lot of it by myself and until probably midway through the year, I realized I couldn't do it. (Interview 1)

Sandra went on to say, “having people say they would do something ,and it would be done and it would be done well, that stood out to me and that made me realize that I could rely on people more and trust them more” (Interview 1).

As president, like Benjamin, Joey proactively sought to engage others. He felt that the president's role of being an engager was a primary function. He contended, “I think that was kind of the one thing that I wanted to see. I wanted to see more involvement” (Interview 1).

*Mediator*

Very much like the role of the engager, the participants also described the student government president as a mediator or bridge between the students and both internal campus groups and groups external to the campus. The participants portrayed the president as go-between who works to build relationships among and between groups including groups of students and more often the faculty, staff, administration, and trustees. The participants went on to state that the president must connect and build relationships with other members of the campus community and thereby enhance the influence of SGA and, in turn, the influence of the student body. The president serves as a communicator as well as a collaborator on campus-wide initiatives. The position also requires that one unite factions with conflicting goals and visions and attempt to build a shared vision for the campus on behalf of the students. As a mediator, the participants argued that the president must seek to balance the needs and desires of not only the various student constituencies, but also the staff, faculty, and administration. In doing so, the participants indicated that the president must be a global or macro thinker in order to be successful. In a similar fashion, the participants also described the president as a conductor of a large symphony in that the president must direct many parties in an attempt create harmony.

Callie described how she believes the role of the president should operate as a mediator between campus groups. She explained,

I really feel like the role of the student government president is to really, kind of be that go-between person between the students and the administration. I think that they are the . . . the person who listens to what

the students needs . . . but they also listen to what the administration needs are. (Interview 1).

She expounded, “I think I really wanted to break down that line between administration and student” (Interview 1). Callie went on to state,

As SGA president I saw the divide between administration and student. I wanted to be that person who I felt could understand where students were coming from but also could implement the needs of the administration and really try to be able to some way accommodate both. (Interview 1)

Moreover, she said,

I think that balance is important because I think whoever the SGA president is, has to understand that while you do represent the students, and you want to do what’s in the best interest of the students, you also have to take into consideration what the administration is looking for, what their goals are. And you have to somehow find a way to make the administration see where the students are coming from and the students see where the administration is coming from. (Interview 2)

Akin to the sentiments of Callie, Trent also felt that the student government president must serve as a mediator. He described the importance of the president being able to build connections across the campus, take those connections and develop a shared vision, and then act upon them. Trent stated, “the ability to pull everyone together and get them on the same page and get things going” is a tremendous part of a presidency (Interview 1). In short, he asserted, “A leader is someone who will seek to make sure that everyone’s opinions is heard” (Interview 1).

Benjamin also felt that being a mediator was a significant role of the presidency.

He argued,

So, my role as SGA president, I thought was to bring the student body together. I saw us as very disconnected. So, the first thing I did was I insisted that we meet around a round table. That was very important to me

. . . I think it is important for everyone to be seated equally around table with no clearly defined head. (Interview 1)

Beyond pulling students together for a common purpose, Benjamin also described the role of a mediator as a bridge between the students and the college's administration and board of trustees. He contended,

I tried to see my role as allowing students an opportunity to have their voice heard at the executive level of the college with the vice presidents . . . and with the president . . . I tried to represent the student's voice at board [of trustees] meetings. (Interview 1)

He went on to state, "I also saw my role as being important as an ambassador for the students to the board and as a representative of the college" (Interview 1). In addition, Benjamin clarified that he also felt that as a mediator the student government president must also build connections with the college faculty and its leadership. He asserted, "I tried to do all that I could to connect us up with the faculty senate" (Interview 1).

Comparable to her predecessors, Sandra believes that the student government president must serve as a bridge builder. She stated, "I think the president's a very important position, they're a mediator" (Interview 1). Sandra went on to describe the role of a president as mediator, "To be that one voice that . . . takes . . . the common census of what is needed and wanted by the students . . . and make that decision happen" (Interview 1).

Joey, in his own fashion, succinctly described the role of the student government president as a mediator. He stressed that he hoped that he "would kind of be the moderator. I guess you would say that I would keep people from fighting" (Interview 1).

*Voice/Advocate*

Advocating for the needs and desires of the student body also reached each student-president directly. The participants portrayed the role of the student government president as an anointed representative of the student body. Their role was seen as a voice for the college in general as well as being a decision-maker who takes action on behalf of the student body. The participants explained that the role of the president was to champion causes on behalf of the student body and, on occasion, the faculty and staff.

Callie explained the role of the student government president as an advocate and champion when she stated,

I also see the student government president's role as the person who is open, who is willing to step out of the comfort zone, to listen to what students really have to say, and not only listen, but be able to go back and say that to the administration with the same intensity and passion that the students who are telling this to the student government president have. I think that's really, that's really important. (Interview 1)

Callie went on to stress the importance of the role of advocate for the presidency. She asserted, "You get to voice your opinion to [the] administration that other students wouldn't have the opportunity to do" (Interview 2). She also explained her reasons for seeking the presidency, which relate to the role of the president as an advocate. She stated, "my two big reasons for wanting to be involved in student government were because I felt like, not only would it give a chance for people to hear my voice, but more importantly, it would give the administration a chance to really hear the voice of the general student body" (Interview 1). Callie also mentioned the import of seeking out and exploring the ideas of others and advocating those ideas to the College's administration. She contended, "I made it a point to talk to different groups of people and to see what



their opinions are and to really try to get to the administration and tell them these are some of their concerns” (Interview 1).

George also discussed the advocacy role of the student government president. He felt being an advocate for the student body and the college in general was a significant role and responsibility. George also believed that because of his affable and outgoing nature, he was able to effortlessly step into this role during his presidency. He stated,

I think what came easiest to me was, um, being genuinely in love with the college and trying to share that through whatever means, you know, through whatever activity we sponsored or whatever little message we put out or, you know, all that kind of stuff. (Interview 1)

Like his predecessors, Trent also recognized the student government president’s role as an advocate. He explained,

I felt like I was the mouthpiece for the student body. Um, not only to the administration but to the, the board of trustees. Um, and, uh, I think it’s important that the student body president have voice on the board because, um, not always is the picture painted by those who are in the, uh, seat of painting the pictures, such as the college president, not always is that an accurate picture. Um, and I think that the student body president needs to be able to um, bring folks to reality and let them know that this is an issue. (Interview 1)

Trent described the advocacy role of the president as “a voice of the students and a, a facilitator of change for the good for the students” (Interview 1). He went on to assert, “there was just issues that we needed to address, ah, and so, I felt, like, as the student body president, ah, I should be the one at the helm, ah, or the forum of those issues” (Interview 2). However, Trent also admitted that being an advocate also had its downside. He explained, “because the student body president is, is the voice of the students, you’re roped into every stinking committee meeting possible” (Interview 1). Even though Trent

believed that being an advocate had negative aspects, he emphatically stressed its positive aspects. He contended, “I just remember being proud of that and, and being able to represent the student body at the board of trustees meeting. That was a good feeling and it was, it was, uh, it was important. . .” (Interview 1).

Benjamin also recognized president as advocate as the most significant role and responsibility of his time in student government. He explained,

I tried to see my role as allowing students and opportunity to have their voice heard at the executive level of the college with the vice president for various things and with the president, were it appropriate. I tried to represent the student’s voice at board [of trustees] meetings. (Interview 1)

In addition to being the voice of the student body to the college administration and trustees, Benjamin also saw the role of the student government president as serving as a voice of the students to the faculty. He stated, “I tried to do all that I could to connect us up with the faculty senate and did” (Interview 1). Beyond serving as a voice, Benjamin also argued that the student government president is also a person of action. He felt that the president not only advocates for the student body but also makes decisions and takes actions on their behalf. He argued that, as president, “I expect that I will be able to, to make decisions on their behalf and with their trust” (Interview 1).

Sandra, like her peers, identified advocacy as one of the primary roles of a student government president. She described the advocacy and spokesperson role of the student government president as “speaking on behalf of the students . . . to be that one voice that, you know, 50 to 60 can not be” (Interview 1). She went on to say the role of the student government president is,

to take from those meetings, the common census of what is needed and wanted by the students, who then are supposed to be the voices of those other people, of all the other organizations and classes, and whatever. So, hopefully if they get the ideas from their people, bring it to the senate and it all becomes one decision, then the president can take it from there and make that decision happen. (Interview 1)

Sandra maintained that she did not seek the presidency as a power position, but as a means of advocacy. She stated,

I'm not a power type of person, I really could care less who holds the power, but I like to know that I have a say. I like to know that my voice is being heard and I like other people to be able to feel like their voices are being heard. So, if I'm the go-to, the person that embodies that for them, then and can speak for them, then I want to do that. (Interview 2)

Through our discussions, Sandra felt that she was a successful advocate for the student body. She contended that, "as far as being the voice for the students, I felt I did my job right. I mean, I got it, got the ball rolling, which is what we needed and what we wanted" (Interview 1). She went on to express how much personal satisfaction she received for her role as an advocate for the student body. She asserted, "my best memories were my speaking engagements, whether it was speaking in front of the parents, um, or speaking in front of the board of trustees or the faculty or students" (Interview 1).

Joey also saw his role as student government president as one of advocacy. He contended, "the role of the student body president is to lead, kind of voice the concerns of the students to other students, administration, trustees" (Interview 1). In Joey's discussions regarding advocacy, he fixated on the advocacy role of the president as more of an intermediary or moderator between the students and the college administration. He explained,

things can come from administrators or advisors, but when they come from students and students understand the idea that, hey, we can actually, you know, sit here and make decisions and kind of govern ourselves and kind of say, here's what we want. The administration looks more favorably on that because, you know, we're the life blood of this college. (Interview 1)

### *Cheerleader*

In addition to serving as an engager, mediator, and voice, a number of the participants also identify the student government president as a cheerleader, as someone who passionately and ardently leads, inspires, and arouses others in an effort to build support for the efforts and needs of the student body and the College in general. The participants described the student government president as a dealer of hope who nurtures and builds up the members of the college community. Like a football-half-time cheerleader, the student government president serves as a public image of an energized and engaged student body to both on-campus constituencies and off-campus audiences.

For example, Callie portrayed the SGA president as a cheerleader: "I think really trying to be a motivator and being enthusiastic and trying to get them [students, faculty, and staff] . . . on board" (Interview 1). Callie also referred to the role of the president as a cheerleader in that she argued that they must also serve as a public relations person for the college. She contended,

When you are SGA president, even though there may be things going on, on campus that you maybe don't always understand or that you don't agree with, I think you still have to try as best as you can to put a positive spin on things. And to give students a sense of knowing that even though things may not be perfect, that they're going to be ok, and make them feel comfortable and making them feel good about the decision they made to attend [the College]. (Interview 2)

George also identified the role of the student government president as a cheerleader. He asserted,

there's the visionary piece and the other piece was, honestly, to try to be a cheerleader and to cheer on people who were doing good work, whether they were senators or executive board, or whatever, and also to sort of cheer on the institution as a whole. (Interview 1)

George went on to describe how part of the cheerleading role of the president is to nurture the belief of others in the college. He contended, "I think that that year, that year in my mind, at least was, was somewhat unique in that our, our vision had to do with cultivated a confidence in, in the institution and in one another" (Interview 1).

Similar to Callie and George, Trent also saw the SGA president as a cheerleader. He stated that the, "easiest thing was the ability to pull everyone together and get them on the same page and get things going . . . keeping everybody feeling good about themselves and feeling good about the direction was easy" (Interview 1). He went on to describe the president as peddler of faith and optimism in the institution and the directions it was taking. He claimed, "Well, more and more, I see myself as a dealer of hope" (Interview 2).

Benjamin briefly described the president of the student body as a cheerleader and public persona of the College by stating, "Um, you, you got to put on a blue and gold tie and a blue blazer every now and then because you are, um, that's who you are; you're that to the campus" (Interview 2).

### *Mentor*

All but one of the participants in this study indicated “mentor” as one of the significant roles of the president of SGA. The president is responsible for strengthening the Student Government Association by recruiting new members. In addition, the president serves as a guide and coach to the members of SGA as a means to cultivate future leaders.

Callie described the president’s responsibility of being a mentor by stating, “I think it plays a huge role because I think if you mentor the people that come after you, then you’re setting them up for success” (Interview 1). She went on to assert,

I think it is important to help mentor those students because when you mentor them, they get to really see what you did and what your vision was and how to implement that into their vision and to kind of continue the vision on as a long-term goal. (Interview 1)

In regard to her cultivating a successor, she maintained, “I think that was a huge part of [George] being so successful . . . that he was well prepared to deal with anything that would come his way” (Interview 1).

George agreed with Callie regarding the importance of recruiting new members and mentoring future leaders. He argued,

the student government really, really ought to be about, um, cultivating leadership from, you know, among the students, grass roots level, bringing students up, um, to, to recognize their own particular gifts and to put them to work for the good of the student body and the institution. (Interview 1)

He went on to contend, “if a community is being a good and diligent community, then it, you know, it ought to be able to recognize leadership and it ought to be able to call that person forward” (Interview 2). George went on to describe his vision for mentoring

others, he stated, “the best way to cultivate leadership and to have good programs is to put them in their hands, give them lots of guidance, but to put it in their hands”

(Interview 1).

Trent, like Callie and George, identified mentoring as a key responsibility of the SGA president. Trent reflected on his outlook regarding mentorship. He stated, “I think leaders are born but must be cultivated.” He went on to testify, “My job . . . as a leader . . . is to build relationship skills in those who are below me to work myself out of a job”

(Interview 1). He maintained, “my job as a leader . . . is to reproduce myself in others”

(Interview 1). Furthermore, he argued, “It was very important to sort of mentor the next person” (Interview 1). He went on to say,

There must be a mentoring process. You have to have someone to invest in that leader because to me the best way of learning is experiential learning, and I guess absolutely the best way to learn leadership skills is to be thrown into the fire and have to deal with it, you know, issues and problems and all that stuff. But, the most ideal situation is to have a mentor come alongside of you. (Interview 2)

Trent further asserted,

I think that leadership is something that has to be developed or transferred, and so, if your executive board is not, or your student leadership is not developing that to come up, ah, leadership is not a vacuum, it is not going to happen on it’s own. You’ve got to develop that, and so, ah, that’s part of the major, I would say criterion of executive work, maybe not criterion but responsibility is, ah, training and identifying those who, who are to follow. (Interview 2)

Trent also discussed being mentored by his predecessor, George, and spoke to his role in mentoring his successor, Benjamin. In regard to being recruited and cultivated as a future SGA leader, Trent described how, as a freshman, he was approached by both

Callie and George and encouraged to serve as part of student government. He stated, “Callie came up to me, um, and said, hey, hey I need one more person on the judicial council, will you do it? Um, it definitely has something to do with Callie saying, ‘I want you on it’” (Interview 2). Trent went on to describe how George, who was sophomore and a member of the student senate, encouraged him to become further involved in the student government beyond serving on the judicial council. Trent asserted, “George, I think, was the one who called me aside and said ‘You seem to really be involved and seem to really speak your mind. We have this committee that we want you to on’” (Interview 1). Trent further explained how George approached him at the end of his freshman year about running as his vice president for the following year. He said,

[George] turned to me and he said “Why don’t you run for vice president?” And I said, “OK, why?” He said “Well I’m running for President,” and so ah, George is really the one that ah, ah, ah kind of directed that. (Interview 2)

Following his year as vice president under George, Trent was elected SGA president.

Upon being elected, George gave Trent some words of advice. Trent:

I remember the conversation with [George] telling me, and this was shortly after I had been elected, he said, “Trent you need to find someone to be your, to take up the torch from you and you should begin mentoring them immediately.” (Interview 1)

Trent described how he identified and cultivated students who would one day lead student government. He explained, “what I try to do is find those people and then help them develop that potential into something that can be used.” He further stated,

I saw [Benjamin] and, and a number of other students that I knew would be rising student leaders and, ah, I wanted to help in that process and that’s



the reason I, I picked them and sort of took them under my wings.  
(Interview 2)

Trent went on to clarify why he selected Benjamin to be his successor. He said,

[Benjamin] was a very easy-going no-nonsense-type fellow. Very polite, very kind, and I felt was a true representation of his representatives. He was very active and very involved, and I just thought he would do a good job. He was the, in my opinion, of those who I served with on the senate, he was the best person to continue what had already been put in place by the [George] administration by my administration and to continue it to the next level. In fact, I included [Benjamin] in on a lot of things that regular senator were not involved with. Anything that I thought was very important I made sure he was on the committee. (Interview 1)

Trent concluded by discussing why he believed mentoring was such a vital role of the student government president. He stated,

I wanted to definitely mentor them to come on to lead, and why is that important? That's important because, ah, that allows for a seamless transition, ah, the last thing that you ah need to have is, ah, is just a person in willy-nilly or, or cold, ah, turkey into a leadership position. I mean, there needs to be a, ah, understanding of who you are or, or where you are coming from and all that sort of stuff. I think it's important to, to have that process, and number two, you got to make sure there's leadership coming up behind you . . . . (Interview 2)

He finally stated his philosophy on mentoring, "since, ah, my post as student body president, ah, this, my theory on leadership is this: is that you should always be recreating yourself in someone else so as to replace yourself" (Interview 2)

Benjamin also acknowledged the significance of mentoring as a duty. He said that he saw this role as "primary. As part of your role as a leader is to, is to help other people hone their leadership skills. It's essential for the sustainability of an organization" (Interview 1). He succinctly argued, "One of them [roles of the president] was to find and groom people. . ." (Interview 1). Benjamin even admitted that he, too, was recruited and

cultivated. He said, “I was approached to run for president my sophomore year”

(Interview 2).

Benjamin also described how he recruited and cultivated the leaders that would come after him. He asserted,

I tried to do as much as I could to bring people alongside me so they could be a part of our work together, um, and be a part of our connection as a unit. Um, I would invite people to sit, to executive board meetings so they could see the inside, what happens on the inside. (Interview 1)

He went on to state, “I looked for representatives of the student body, people that I wouldn’t always agree with but people that represented voices of the student body”

(Interview 1).

Conflict

TABLE 9

*Underlying Categories Related to Conflict*

<b>THEME</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
CONFLICT	
	Conflict with Peers
	Conflict with College President

As revealed through the discussions focusing on the relationships between the student government presidents and members of the Emerging College community, all of the participants experienced some form of conflict with other members of the campus community, these conflicts predominately occurred with their peers and the college

president. In regards to the conflicts with peers, the conflicts typically arose out of incompatible leadership styles, inexperience in supervising others and internal power struggles; while conflict with the college president generally arose out of a lack of rapport and trust.

### *Conflict with Peers*

Each of the participants readily admitted that they experienced conflict between themselves and their peers on the executive board and student senate. For Callie, she declared that the primary difficulty she faced while serving as president was the burden of trying to lead other students, especially those who were her closest friends. She found that conflicts often arose as she attempted to supervise and lead her peers. Callie asserted,

Even though they are your friends, like, they have to understand that, you know, they have to respect the decisions you are making . . . when we are in meetings together just respect the fact that I'm the person who's running the meeting and that I'm the person that ultimately is going to have the respons[ibility]. (Interview 1)

Throughout her interviews, Callie described how she struggled and learned to balance her role as a friend and leading her peers who served in the SGA.

For George, conflicts with his peers who served on his executive board often resulted from internal power struggles and with establishing his authority and standing with his peers regarding his role and responsibilities as president. George readily acknowledged that he struggled to retain order and authority within his own executive board. One such person that he struggled with on his executive board was Trent. George described Trent as a "constant thorn in the side" (Interview 1). George went on to say, "I knew that he was, um, saying disparaging things about me and about my leadership and

about, you know, all of that kind of stuff, um, behind my back” (Interview 1). For George conflicts with his peers rested with the internal political power struggle of one of his executive board members.

Trent found conflict with his peers on his executive boards in regards to their challenging his leadership style. Trent admitted that he held the reins of leadership very tightly and that he chose not to delegate responsibility to others, which was where conflicts with his peers arose. Trent emphasized, “The relationships with the executive board, um, was not easy because I wasn’t willing to give up pieces of the pie” (Interview 1). Trent continued to articulate his experience as he asserted,

I could have elected to distribute the, uh, uh, you know, the labor and the leadership and the responsibility to whomever I pleased, and I chose not to do that. Um, so that, that created, at times, a tense relationship with those who I should have, um, had the strongest support . . . (Interview 1)

Because of his inability to delegate and empower others, there existed an internal power struggle within his executive board. Trent reflected “within the executive board, you had other folks jockeying for power, and jockeying for, ah, position and this and that” (Interview 2).

Benjamin acknowledged that he experienced conflict with his peers on his executive board. He admits that working with his peers on the executive board was one of the most taxing aspects of being president of SGA. He stated,

As SGA president, I would have, in my first term, been more careful about who I would have asked to run for secretary and treasurer. I realized later that I had two people that were terribly angry and divisive and did not understand how to participate the way that I knew how to participate and the way that our vice president knew how to participate. (Interview 1)

Benjamin admitted that he struggled to overcome the interpersonal conflicts and rivalries that existed within his executive board. Working with challenging interpersonal relationships and internal power struggles within his executive board created significant conflict for Benjamin during his presidency.

Sandra also experienced conflict with her peers who served on her executive board and the student senate. She described her experience as frustrating at times because of personality conflicts as well as her inability to effectively supervise and lead her peers. She said on, “my executive staff, there are some very good ones and then there were a few that were not so good, and that was frustrating” (Interview 1). She went on to clarify that, “Some of them really annoyed me. Um, the student activities guy at the time didn’t really do his job very well, and that frustrated me a lot” (Interview 1). Sandra also experienced conflict within her relationship with members of the student senate. She acknowledged that she had difficulty leading the members of the student senate as well as overcoming personality conflicts with a number of its members. She asserted, “Some people gave me heck about certain things . . . whatever, you’re going to have that with everybody” (Interview 1). At times she felt that because of the conflicts with the members of the student senate that, as president, she “had no power to change things, within the senate” (Interview 2). She continued,

you just kind of have those unruly people that, I mean, there’s a percentage of voting that had to take place, and we were split a lot of times. Lots of times people were just voting for popularity reasons. They didn’t really care about being there, so they didn’t show up. Ah, there was a lot of people that wanted to be to make the changes and not in a good way. So, I think we had a lot of apathetic people my junior year on the

senate. I don't think we had a whole lot of, like, driven people and so, that caused, I think, a lot of inabilities to change. (Interview 2)

Similarly, Joey experienced conflict with his peers on his executive board and in the student senate. He admitted that he struggled with his relationships with his peers in the SGA and he attributed the challenges he faced with this peers to interpersonal conflicts. Joey stated, "I think it was just a combination of attitudes, um . . . strong-willed people" (Interview 2).

Similar to the experiences of the other participants, Joey experienced conflicts with his peers in regards to personal attacks and the personal agendas held by some members of the student senate. Joey declared,

Dealing with, you know, certain people who may tend to get out of control sometimes, maybe tend to, you know, rub your face in the mud, try to make you look bad, you know. I've always disliked people who try to do that to other people. (Interview 1)

He went on to assert,

I want[ed] to represent the school and try to make it good, and here they are, you know, trying to, you know, bad talk you or, you know, trying to make you look like the person you're not supposed to be. So, I always, I felt, you know, that, I really didn't like that part of it. (Interview 1)

#### *Conflict with College President*

In regards to conflicts with the College presidents, all but one of the participants indicated that they experienced conflict with the college president and that it generally arose out of a lack of rapport and trust. Callie, for example, experienced conflict with the president of Emerging College due to a lack of affinity for and confidence in Dr. Newton. She went as far as to describe her relationship with the college president as adversarial.

Moreover, Callie depicted her relationship with the College president as being discouraging and maddening. She stressed, “I was mostly frustrated with [the College president] because I felt like, because of the environment that he created” (Interview 2).

She described the substance of her remarks during that conversation. She asserted,

I told him that I really felt like he was tearing the school apart...and he wasn't listening to what the students had to say, and that it wasn't a one-man-show, that all of us played a, a huge role in how [the College] went, and, and that he didn't understand that. I told him, you know, I was very frustrated by that. (Interview 1)

George also found himself in conflict with the College president while he served as the student government president. Although George asserted that he respected and held Dr. Luther in high regard as an interim president, George also felt in some measure slighted by Dr. Luther. He explained, “I found his, um, his approach to me as the student government president, somewhat patronizing.” (Interview 1). George went on to clarify that he felt at times that Dr. Luther was condescending or denigrating toward the student government president.

Like Callie and George, Trent also acknowledged that he felt that there was conflict between himself and the College president. Trent asserts that his conflict with the College President stemmed from a lack of trust that he had with Dr. Ingle. Trent clarified,

I was jaded pretty, um, pretty quickly with the president, um, not being a man of integrity, um, or not being a man of his word. Um, that jaded me pretty quick and I was hurt by that, um, and lost a lot of faith in, in his ability to lead and, uh, in his genuineness and his sincerity. (Interview 1)

Benjamin also described his relationship with the College's president as one of conflict. Benjamin explained that the conflict developed from a sense that Dr. Ingle was too distant and cut off from the student population. Benjamin stated,

I did not have a strong relationship with our president because I saw the president's work as being, um, void of an understanding that students were primary, and I saw the work of the college president as disengaged from the [long-standing Protestant] community, disengaged from the community of the [long-standing Protestant] colleges, disengaged from the Atlanta community . . . disengaged from the community that [the College] was founded upon and must exist within. (Interview 1)

Beyond feeling that the College president was disconnected from the student population, Benjamin also found that he struggled with the actions taken by Dr. Ingle while he was serving as SGA president. Benjamin explained,

The worst part for me was having to face the foolish behavior of our president and, and, and justify his actions at times to the students' related to enrollment. I mean, tuition increases, related to, uh, budget cuts, related to foolish decrees that he would hand out, um, related to his disengagement . . . Um, yeah, that was the hardest thing for me. That was the part that stunk. I hated it when he started messing with student affairs stuff because every time, I had to go translate that, painfully, to the students. I hated it. (Interview 1)

Joey also indicated that conflict arose between the College president and himself during his presidency. Joey felt that the conflict surfaced because the College president was disengaged and disconnected from the needs and desires of student body at large. He pointed out, "So, he was very, you know, personal... but at times I felt it was kind of detrimental because it kind of stopped with me, as most people thought" (Interview 1). Joey went on to explain, "I guess the biggest knock or thing that people say about him is that he is not very personable to the students" (Interview 2).



## Conclusion

While each participant had a distinct experience as the president of Emerging College's Student Government Association, there are commonalities of experience and meaning that are relevant in trying to understand the student government presidency. Based on the results, several themes regarding the participants' experiences as student government presidents emerged from the data which include: positive and negative facets of their presidencies, stress as a substantial element during their time in office, dissimilar experiences of women and minority students, varied experiences regarding relationships and conflicts with members of the campus community, the multiple roles required of a student government president, and personal attributes or personal characteristics that a student government president must possess and hone. The next chapter offers discussion and analysis of these findings in comparison with those found in current literature. In addition the next chapter offers recommendations for further research as well as implication for student affairs professionals.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a review of the central problem as well as study design and methodology. The chapter then presents a discussion of the findings, including interpretations connected to existing theory and research. Implications are offered as are recommended areas for future research.

This study is aimed at exploring the experience of the student government presidency based on emerging adulthood and constructionist frameworks. The theory of emerging adulthood assumes that a distinct and critical developmental stage exists for young people in their late teens that lasts through their mid-20s. During this period they experience personal, social, and professional growth and exploration (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2005). Constructionism assumes knowledge and reality are individually constructed by one's experiences and associations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Moran, 2000; Neumann, 1995; Schwandt, 2001; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Importantly, most students who attain student government presidency do so during this developmental period and are continuously constructing meaning from and about their experiences. Therefore, I have interpreted the participants' perceptions of their experiences, and the meanings the participants created, based on their distinct perceptions, viewpoints, values, and previous experiences. Given the data collected here and the participating students' experiences, Golden and Schwartz's (1994) four motivations for student-leadership strike home.

Student leaders desire to make a difference in their community, develop leadership skills, pursue an agenda, and take a more active role in organizations in which they are members. Their conclusions strike me as an especially appropriate way to open the discussion and analysis of this study. Each of the participants had similar definitions of student governance: representing and being a voice of the student body, serving as a tool to develop leaders, and cultivating an actively engaged citizenry.

This study provides a snapshot of student government presidents from the campus of a four-year, private, liberal-arts college in the southeastern U.S.A. While the study's findings are somewhat limited by geography and demography, the picture that emerges is rich and vibrant and focuses the perceptions of these six students and how those views and attitudes affect what they now understand about their experience as student leaders.

#### Statement of Problem

The central research questions being considered are "What is the essence of experience of students who serve and what meanings do these individuals construct out of their experience as president of student government?" The student government presidency is a specific type of experience. Although the higher education community recognizes the importance of developing student-leaders, there is a void in the current research that would focus on student governance and would highlight perceptions held by those who attain student government presidency. Due to the lack of research on this topic, this study sought to explain, emphasize, and understand the experience of actually being student government president. This study offers insights and information to those who are

charged with leading and advising student government organizations. The specific research direction of study focused on three broad categories:

1. What do the students' gain from their participation in student governance?
2. The perspectives of the participants toward their experiences.
3. The meanings the participants derived from their experience and how those meanings affected their lives.

#### Review of Method

This study employed qualitative methods, which included in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews and journaling. The sample was made up of students who served as student government association presidents at a small, private, liberal-arts college. Participants were drawn according to purposeful sampling techniques established by study parameters. The total sample size was six participants. The transcript and journal entries were studied in detail, and themes, patterns, trends, ideas, attitudes, words, and phrases were identified, defined, and coded. Three levels of coding were used in this study: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. From the data derived through the interview and journaling processes, an overall picture of the experiences of the participants and the meanings that the participants construct of their experiences was drawn.

#### Summary of Results

The primary research question considered the experience of the student government presidency. The former student government presidents interviewed for this study described their experiences, and the meaning they made from them, in ways that

resonate with the findings in existing research on higher education student leadership. Although I found few studies that specifically focused on the experience of those who served as student government presidents, the findings presented here validate those of the literature review in chapter 2. That being said, consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, the data derived from the interviews redirected the research. The findings shifted the research from a focus on what individual participants gained from their experience to that of a holistic, macro-view of the experience. The data revealed several common themes expressed by all six participants: the positive and negative aspects of the student government presidency; the multiple roles of the student government president; the personal characteristics the participants felt were needed in a student government president; the need to find balance; and the relationships and interpersonal conflicts carried on with various members of the college community. The data also revealed that there is a perception that there is a higher level of scrutiny and expectations for females and for minorities who serve as student government presidents by students, the college administration, and themselves.

### Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the individuals' experience of student government presidency in higher education. This section provides an analysis of findings from the study in the context of existing literature. Through this section, it will be made clear where the current literature and the findings from this study intersect and diverge.

In examining the results, several themes proved to have been addressed in previous research. Specifically, other studies reported on the positive and negative

aspects of the student government presidency, stress, finding balance, interpersonal relationships, personal characteristics of a leader, and roles of the student government president.

#### Positive and Negative Consequences

The present study's findings, and those of the existing literature, indicate that student leadership involvement, such as the student government presidency, is perceived by participating students as having both positive and negative aspects. Given this consistency among researchers, and given the basic conclusions of the present researcher, analysis of the positive aspects will be treated first. According to current literature, student leadership involvement has a positive impact on personal development, professional development, and academic attainment and satisfaction (Arminio et al., 2000; Cooper; Healy & Simpson, 1994; Cress et al., 2001; Downey, Bosco & Silver, 1984; Harper, 2003; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Kuh, 1995; Logue, et al., 1983; Spencer, 2004; Thompson, 2006; Wielkiewicz, Prom & Loos, 2005). More specifically, the current literature indicated that involvement in student leadership influences improvement in personal development, including self-awareness and self-concept. Also, professional development improvement was seen in interpersonal and management skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Cooper et al., 1994; Kuh, 1995, Arminio et al., 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Harper, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005); Logue et al., 2005; Esterhuizen, 2007; Immerman, 2008). For example, Spencer (2004) stated, "When asked what the highlight was of being student body president, the women responded that the personal growth and development was most significant" (p.

145). In addition the current literature showed that student leadership involvement positively influences students' overall satisfaction with their college experience (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schuh & Laverly, 1983).

The data derived from this study validate the literature. Participants indicated that through their experience as student government president they became more self-confident, and they said their interpersonal and management skills flowered. Moreover, the data from this study also confirm the findings in the literature that involvement leads to satisfaction with their overall college experience. The participants all agreed that their time as student government president was in part, a time of positive growth and maturing, which generally occurred while experiencing negative aspects of the presidency, where they enhanced their self-awareness and self-efficacy as well as interpersonal and professional skills. This study mirrors studies conducted by Komives et al. (2005) and Robinson (2004). Both studies found properties of personal growth, including deepening self-awareness, building self-confidence, and establishing interpersonal efficacy, were associated with student leadership experience. Personal growth from this study is seen in Benjamin where he stated that his experience as president "allowed me to have a little more confidence in myself as a leader" (Interview 1). Moreover, Callie's personal growth was observed when she stated, "it really provided me the opportunity to kind of step out from myself and say . . . these are some of your strengths and these are some of weaknesses" (Interview 2). Callie also said

it taught me some of those, some of those life skills that I needed to know before I went out into the real world. It taught me how to be flexible. It taught me how to be more organized, how to be a multi-tasker. It taught me all of those things that, you know, to be successful in the business world, period. Those are all things that you need to know. And so, I think it prepared me pretty well. (Interview 1)

Similarly, Trent described his experience as SGA president as being

responsible for building me as a leader, and I think that the, being student body president put the icing on the cake. It helped polish me, it helped put me in situations, um, that I could, um, expand my leadership . . . experience and . . . that experience was essential for me, being as successful as quickly as I have been in my professional career. (Interview 1)

These examples support and affirm the conclusions found in existing research. This study's findings, then, reinforce and focus the conclusions drawn by others that positive aspects of involvement in student leadership resound with students long after their tenure as president of their college's student government.

The data resulting from this study also substantiate the findings in the literature regarding negative aspects of student leadership. Current literature demonstrated that student leadership involvement has several unfortunate consequences: high stress levels, high levels of accountability, high levels of scrutiny, difficult workloads, and significant personal costs (Schwartz, 1991; Arminio et al., 2000; Harper, 2003; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; Spratt & Turrentine, 2001; Logue et al., 2005; Esterhuizen, 2007). The data that emerged from this study about negatives also confirm those found in the literature.

Participants pointed out during their interviews and in their journals that they experienced high levels of stress, a sense of isolation, and high levels of scrutiny. All participants also reported a high emotional toll along with feelings of loss regarding their personal



identity, free time, academics, time with family and friends, and opportunities for other employment. Schwartz (1991) found that for the student leaders in her study a “short-term effect was increased stress . . . feeling isolated . . . and feeling frustrated” (p. 453). This study’s data pertaining to the negative aspects of being SGA president included Callie’s sense of isolation and loneliness: “It was a hard time and I, and I felt, I really did feel, um, quite lonely, um, during most of it, just because I felt like there wasn’t really anyone that I could talk to about it” (Interview 1). Trent mentioned being held accountable as a leader of others as an issue he faced as president. He said,

It was also, at the same time, um, very, uh, frustrating at times because, um, um, because there was, you know, there was no blank check, you know. Like it was the first time that, that I had to be really, truly accountable for, for leading a group of people. (Interview 1)

Moreover, Trent stated, “there was a little bit of personal sacrifice of, of individuality.” George said that fulfilling the role of president “did produce a lot of stress” (Interview 1). The negative aspects of student leadership, then, were also reinforced in this study.

Regarding the high level of scrutiny, each of the participants of this study indicated that they felt that they lived their presidency on a stage under a hot spotlight. For example, Callie insisted, “people watch what you do so much more than what other people do, than they do when you are a normal student” (Interview 1). Trent likewise claimed, “I thought I lived in a glass house as student body president” (Interview 1). These thoughts are mirrored by Harper (2003) who contended that the students in his study “felt they were always seen as the president . . . as opposed to ‘regular’ undergraduate students” (p. 172). Esterhuizen (2007) also found that participants

said that their experience was different than that of general student government participants (e.g., congress representatives, club officers), because, as executive council members, much of their work was done in the spotlight. They understood that it was the nature of their jobs to make very public decisions, providing them the glory and just as often forcing them to take the heat if there was disagreement. (p. 49)

On the subject of facing a high level of accountability, the students in this study argued that they were felt that pressure, too. Callie stated, “I think you do feel like you’re accountable to everyone. You are accountable to students. You’re accountable to administration” (Interview 1). She further claimed

I think accountability plays a huge role in the difference between successful and unsuccessful SGA presidents. I think when you realize how accountable you’re going to be held, then it’s up to you to, to understand if you can handle that responsibility. (Interview 1)

This thought is echoed by Harper (2003) who stated, “the participants believed their peers held them to higher standards because of the leadership roles held on campus” (p. 172).

The findings in this study also aligned with those found by Spencer (2004):

The significance of the experiences women had as student body president were clear. The positive experiences far outweighed the negative aspects. The women most often mentioned the personal growth and experience they gained being student body president. (p. 112)

The participants of this study indicated that the positive aspects overshadowed the negative. For example, Callie asserted that “even though it was a year filled with lots of controversy, I still wouldn’t take it back. It was, it was still, it was the best year and I think a lot of that had to do with SGA because it really did stretch me outside of my comfort zone in a lot of ways” (Interview 1). On a similar note, George said, “I don’t

know if I can pinpoint a worst part because it ended up being a pretty wonderful experience” (Interview 1).

The reason participants identified their experiences as both positive and negative, but reiterate that it was overwhelmingly positive may stem from the fact that they regard this experience as one that challenged them and caused them to grow and mature and, in a sense, find themselves. Moreover, this experience allowed them the opportunity to make an impact in the community around them. If one applies Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood to explain the positive meanings that participants constructed of their experiences as leaders, one sees that the participants judged their student government presidencies as a period that provided them the unique opportunity for intense personal and professional growth. Arnett’s theory, the findings from the literature review, and the data from this study all concur that involvement in student leadership roles such as the student government presidency allows students to develop and enhance personal skills, including becoming more self-aware and self-confident (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2005). In addition, Arnett’s theory and the findings concur that students developed occupational skills such as time management and interpersonal communication (Arnett, 2000, 2003, 2005). Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that the participants considered their experience as SGA president as overwhelmingly positive because they felt this experience provided them with an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives and the world around them.

## Stress

Similar to the findings of the literature review, the findings of this study reflect that most of the participants considered that stress was a substantial component of their overall experience. As cited in the literature review, previous studies indicated that student leaders, in particularly student government presidents, often struggled with multiple controversies and issues, a host of responsibilities and obligations, and conflicting allegiances during his or her tenure (Schwartz, 1991; Golden & Schwartz, 1994; Harper, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Logue et al., 2005). Schwartz (1991) noted that “the interviews [in his study] revealed that the participants remembered feeling significant stress and disillusionment” (p. 447). Comparably, Robinson (2004) found that female student government presidents faced a considerable amount of stress because

These leadership roles carry with them a high expectation of skills competency and maturity; ranging from analysis of university policy, to participation in university and student association governance, to the management of staff and budget of student groups and services. (p. 121)

Logue et al. (2005) also found that the participants in their study indicated that there were risks and negative aspects to their experiences as student leaders, including increased likelihood of alcohol abuse, personal costs, pressure, and stressful workloads.

Like the current literature, the student government presidents in this study indicated that stress arose from their trying to accomplish goals and manage multiple responsibilities in a short period while coincidentally battling conflicting views, expectations, personalities, and institutional goals and policies. Callie commented, “I remember that being the hardest semester of my four years. I remember, like, waking up

every morning and just being nervous about what was going to be on that other side of my dorm room. It was, like, it was honestly hell” (Interview 1). Likewise, George asserted, “I do remember there being a lot of stress but it was positive stress, you know. I mean, it was, we knew that we were doing something good and I had, I had really good people to work with” (Interview 1). In the same way, Trent stated, “it felt like there was a tremendous weight on me, and that all the responsibility lied on me and there was a lot of people expecting a lot out of me” (Interview 2). Benjamin reported being stressed as a result of interpersonal conflicts with this peers (Interview 1). Joey attributed his stress to being overwhelmed by the commitments of the office. He said, “there was just a lot of things on my plate, and so, at times, you know, there were, there were long days” (Interview 2).

The existing research, affirmed by the findings of this study, found student government presidencies to be a highly demanding, difficult, and stressful position. The president has to frequently straddle the fence between warring factions of students, the faculty, and administrators as well as juggling incompatible goals and commitments. In short, the student government presidency is a position of immense responsibility, obligation, and conflict, which results in, unsurprisingly, stress for the students involved.

### Finding Balance

In line with predominant existing research, the SGA presidents who participated in this study discovered that it was difficult to find balance in their lives during their tenure. Previous studies indicated that student leaders often struggled to find equilibrium in their lives as they attempted to juggle multiple commitments, including academics,

work, family, friends, and the obligations of their elected position (Hellwig-Olson, 2000; Immerman, 2008; Logue et al., 2005). Participants in the study conducted by Logue et al. (2005) described their lives as being “exceedingly busy with meetings, activities, events, and other responsibilities of school, work, and family” (p. 402). Hellwig-Olson (2000) found that “[t]he task of trying to lead a balanced life proved overwhelming for several of the past presidents. It was challenging for the students to balance their lives when they felt as though they were in the presidents’ role 24 hours a day” (p. 150). Immerman (2008) captured this best where he quoted the mantra of many Massachusetts Institute of Technology students: “Work, Friends, Sleep: Pick Two” (p. 89). The findings of this study concur with Hellwig-Olson (2000) who stated, “[b]alance was something that all the participants hoped to achieve, but few were able to confirm this as a part of their day-to-day lives” (p. 173).

Echoing the findings of existing research, participants of this study commented that they found balancing their life and commitments to be challenging. Trent stated, “the balance between, uh, uh being that student leader, um, and, and just being a regular citizen of the, of the campus was, was sometimes a challenge” (Interview 1). Callie affirmed that her life as president was complicated and thought finding a sense of balance in her life was difficult. She testified, “there were times where people needed me to be in three places at one time . . . because there are certain expectations, um, for you” (Interview 1). She went on to maintain, “I mean, I think . . . I think a typical day was a pretty hectic day. And, you know, it’s one of those days where you make a list of things that you’re going to do and you’re lucky if you get two of them done” (Interview 1).

Similarly, George felt that he had difficulty in balancing his role as president with other aspects of his life. He described the presidency in general by asserting,

It's not the kind of position where there are clear set hours, and so, you know, um, I could pour myself into stuff probably more than was required and not take very good care of myself both, you know, on a, on a health level but also on an academic level and, and just, and in the sense of keeping my life in order, keeping things balanced. (Interview 1)

Trent went on to say "I was just constantly giving, giving, giving, ah, and didn't take the, I mean I worked on student issues at all hours of the day, ah, just about seven days a week..." (Interview 2). Like his peers, Benjamin recognized that he needed to seek balance in his life while serving (Interview 1). Sandra also admitted that she felt that her personal life was out of kilter because of the responsibilities and duties of the presidency. She admitted that she understood that to be part of the burden of leadership. She said, "it took up time . . . but, um, it, it's just, it's a commitment that you make" (Interview 1).

Joey was challenged to seek balance in his life as president. He stressed,

It was really tough because, you know, I like fast-paced things but, but when its every day, you know, for a whole semester, it was, it was starting to wear, but, you know, there were times I remember having to really balance my day. (Interview 2)

The findings of this study reflect those of previous research in that student government presidents were challenged by the attempt to balance multiple commitments and obligations, and at times they felt an overwhelming sense of expectation. That being said, the participants in this study, as well as those in previous studies, argued that their experiences made them stronger and better prepared for future endeavors.

## Gender and Race

The results of this study affirm those found in previous research that focused on the experience of female and minority student leaders. This study concurs with Arminio et al (2000), Kezar and Moriarty (2000), Miller and Kraus (2004), Lavant and Terrell (1994) and Romano (1996) that not all students share identical experiences while being involved in leadership roles; this is especially true for females and minority students. In this study, the white male participants made no mention of their race in regards to their experiences as student government presidents, while the female and minority participants indicated that they perceived that their gender and race did have an influence on their experiences. The differences of experiences in regards to the gender and race of the participants centered on perceived higher levels of scrutiny and expectations faced by female and minority participants than males and non-minority participants. This can be seen as Sandra stated, “I think I had a lot to prove as a female...I think...I had to fight for respect” (Interview 1). This belief, that female and minority student leaders face different expectations, is mirrored by Callie as she asserted, “I do think there was a little bit of a different set of expectations” for her as an African American female student government president (Interview 1).

This study also confirmed what Lavant and Terrell (1994), Miller and Kraus (2004) and Erin (2005) found, that female and minority students were under-represented and served less often in presidential positions within student government than males and non-minority students. Out of the six participants who had served in successive terms as student government president only two were females and only one was a minority.



Moreover, the minority participant was only the second minority on record to hold the presidency at the institution. This being said, Sandra is not discouraged as can be seen as she stated, “there have been since me, a few females that have run, they haven’t won, but have run and, and I think that’s good. I think they should keep running” (Interview 1).

The findings of this study also confirm those found by Romano (1994, 1996) and Aminio et al. (2000) in that students of color value group loyalty over individual needs than white students. This can be seen in how Callie was challenged by other African American students to focus on their needs over the needs of others. She stated, “I think the African American students felt like I needed to put African American student’s interest above all other student’s interest” (Interview 1).

### Relationships

This study’s results and the findings of existing research also interconnect regarding interpersonal relationships. The results here echo those of Robinson (2004) who found “interpersonal relationships emerged as a critical aspect of the student leadership experience” (p. 114). Gold and Quantroche (1994) state, “Student government leaders essentially preside over voluntary organizations. . . . The student body president needs to use his or her personality, enthusiasm, and visionary perspective to excite” others (p. 35). Previous studies, and the findings from this study, indicated that student leaders found relationships with other members of the campus community to be difficult but that relationships, in general, were an area of personal growth and development. Regarding the development of interpersonal skills, the literature review shows that involvement in leadership roles enhanced student’s communication, networking, and

conflict-management skills along with a clear development of understanding and appreciation for diversity (Astin 1984, 1993; Arminio et al., 2000; Cooper et al., 1994; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Kuh, 1995; Logue et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Esterhuizen, 2007; Romano, 1994, 1996; Spencer, 2004). The participants of this study reinforced the findings of the current literature in respect to the development of interpersonal skills. This can be seen where Callie asserted that her experience as president “prepared [her] also for dealing with lots of different groups of people, which I thought was really, um, really important and I think that’s vital to any successful career” (Interview 1).

When the participants discussed how their experience as student government president helped them to enhance their interpersonal-skills development, they referred to becoming more relational as leaders and they grew in their appreciation for interdependence among peers and colleagues. Similar to findings by Romano (1994, 1996), Janc (2004), Komives et al. (2005, 2006), and Immerman (2008), students in this study, through their experience as SGA president, changed their understanding of leadership. It is clear in this study that many of the participants struggled with leading others. However, during their tenure as student government president, a number of the participants acknowledged that their understanding of leadership transitioned from one focused on self to one focused on the group, from pre-eminence to collaboration. In short, the participants transitioned to a relational style of leadership due to growing awareness and appreciation of interdependence. This growing awareness of interdependence is

described by Komives et al. (2006) where they stated that through leadership involvement students recognize

that one could be a leader regardless of one's role in the group. Leadership identity began to be internalized. They did not have to be *the* leader to acknowledge that "I am *a* leader" as a stable characteristic of self. This deepened students' commitment to the interdependence of people working together. In addition to knowing that all people can do leadership in a group, their view of leadership was that it is a process and a responsibility of group members to the group. (p 410)

Similar to the comments made by a number of the participants in this study, the study conducted by Immerman (2008) found that "a number of the students interviewed believe that leadership was a position and dependent on the action of the individual leader, rather than consensual and shared throughout the organizations of which they were a part" (p. 109). This transition can be seen where Trent described how he changed his leadership style from being what he described as a "lone-ranger" style to becoming more team-oriented or collaborative (Interview 2). Trent stated, "The relationship with the executive board, um, was not easy because I wasn't willing to give up pieces of the pie" (Interview 1). Trent continued to articulate his experience:

I could have elected to distribute the, uh, uh, you know, the labor and the leadership and the responsibility to whomever I pleased, and I chose not to do that. Um, so that, that created, at times, a tense relationship with those who I should have, um, had the strongest support.... (Interview 1)

He insisted that his most significant failure was that he "did not engage my executive board . . . and it's, in doing so or in not doing so, rather, um, I created uh, uh, uh a monster for myself" (Interview 1). Trent went on to state,

my leadership style at that time, was that I'm, since I was in that position, that I needed to be the one representing, when I simply could have

delegated some of that to my executive board members or even to, uh, various members of the student body, or the student government association. I chose not to do that so that was my problem. I see that now. (Interview 1)

In both previous research and in this study, relationships are found to be a difficult aspect for student leaders and in particular student government presidents. As is evident in the Trent's comments, this study found that over the period of their presidency, the participants grew in awareness of their interdependence with others and in how to engage others in leadership and how to work together to achieve the group goals and objectives. Hellwig-Olson (2000) succinctly stated, "Success is dependent on the student body president's efforts to maintain communication and collaboration with others, but it is important to note, that without cooperation, the president cannot do it by themselves" (p. 130). Immerman (2008) affirmed this stance,

This student seems to have achieved a complex understanding of leadership as a mix of authority and inclusiveness. The ubiquitous assumption that collaboration is necessary for survival and success may prove the opportunity for students to develop a sophisticated view of leadership within an interdependent environment. (p. 53)

Akin to findings of these and other similar studies, the participants learned through their tenure as SGA president the importance of developing collaborative working relationships with others.

The three relationships most frequently addressed in previous studies, as well as in the findings of this study, were with peers, institution presidents, and advisors. Therefore, discussion of these relationships follows.

*Relationship with Peers*

The most consistently recurrent relationship addressed by the participants in this study was the between the SGA president and his or her fellow students, in particular the peers within the executive board of the Student Government Association. Discussion of the peer relationship is also prevalent in the existing research. Both in this study and in the previous research, participants indicated that student leaders found their relationship with their peers to be important and demanding. The findings of this study are echoed in existing literature. They affirm that although the participants maintain that their experience provide them with the opportunity to develop rich and life-long friendships, the participants stated that it was an ongoing struggle to work with and lead peers on the executive board and the student senate. Robinson (2004) seems correct to state, “It is not surprising that conflict arises in the hothouse environment of a student association, which by nature of its activities tends to attract passionately ideological individuals, but it is apparent that this is a strong factor in shaping the student leader experience” (p. 115).

The struggle with interpersonal relationships is evident in a number of previous studies. Hellwig-Olson (2000) found that, “[c]hallenges mentioned by the students included dealing with difficult . . . fellow student government leaders” (p. 173). Similarly, Robinson (2004) claimed, “All of the student leaders had experienced some form of conflict, usually with fellow executive members” (p. 114). Likewise, Spencer (2004) found that “when women served as student body president, the men in student government often challenged the women’s leadership styles and their ability to lead the group” (p. 146). Esterhuizen (2007) also found that the student leaders in her study also

faced interpersonal conflicts with peers. Esterhuizen asserted, “participants remember painful . . . peer-related conflicts.” (p. 57)

Within this study, each SGA president struggled to work with and lead their peers. Callie declared that the primary difficulty she faced while serving as president was the burden of trying to lead other students who were her closest friends (Interview 1). George also admitted that he struggled with the different personalities on the executive board and with establishing his authority and standing with his peers regarding his role and responsibilities as president (Interview 1). Trent asserted, “My executive board challenged me most” (Interview 1). Trent continued, “The relationship with the executive board, um, was not easy because I wasn’t willing to give up pieces of the pie” (Interview 1). Benjamin admitted that he also struggled to overcome the interpersonal and internal conflicts and rivalries that existed within his executive board. Benjamin stated, “working with a variety of people was very challenging for me. I had to learn to work with people that did not see things the way I saw things” (Interview 1). Sandra described, like previous presidents, how the differing and conflicting personalities of the executive board members did not always mesh. She explained, “Some of them really annoyed me. Um, the student activities guy at the time didn’t really do his job very well, and that frustrated me a lot” (Interview 1). Last, Joey attributed the challenges he faced with this peers to his desire to appease others, interpersonal conflicts, and communication issues. Joey said, “I think it was just a combination of attitudes, um . . . strong-willed people, at some point and just, some just blatant communication issues” (Interview 2).

Each of the participants in this study acknowledged that they were challenged by interpersonal relationships with their peers on the SGA executive board. This challenge being recognized, more intentional efforts to enhance the interpersonal, communication, and conflict-management skills of student leaders is called for. Hellwig-Olson (2000) is correct to state, “A significant effort needs to be made in helping train student leaders in mediation, relationship building, collaboration, compromise, and problem solving” (p. 167).

#### *Relationship with College President*

The second relationship that emerged as a critical in this study as well as the previous research was the relationship between the student government president and the institution’s president. Studies conducted by Schwartz (1991), Hellwig-Olson (2000), Robinson (2004), Sanseviro (2006), and Esterhuizen (2007) found that student government presidents felt that a relationship with the institution’s president was essential to their success. For example, Hellwig-Olson (2000) wrote, “All of the participants agree that the relationship between the student body president and the university president was critical” (p. 131).

However, this study and the other literature found that the majority of participants acknowledged that they were regularly in conflict with institution presidents no matter the college or university, private or public, large or small. The study conducted by Schwartz (1991) indicated that some of her participants “recalled feeling disillusionment resulting from what they perceived to be betrayal and a breach of trust by the college president” (453). Schwartz went on to state her “participants also recalled anger,

frustration, and disappointment, as well as a feeling of being used” (p. 453). Similarly Hellwig-Olson (2000) contended, “Some of the students . . . lamented the fact that the university president showed little to no interest in the student body president” (p.131). Hellwig-Olson also asserted that, “Challenges mentioned by the students included dealing with difficult staff members and . . . lack of support from the members of the administration” (2000, p. 172). Moreover, Hellwig-Olson found that “in some instances, the participants discussed the fact that their biggest perceived obstacle was indeed the university president’s lack of commitment to shared governance and that a great lack of trust exists”. (p.169). In the study conducted by Sanseviro (2006) the students that were interviewed indicated that they felt tokenism and patronizing hampered their relationship with the college’s administration. This notion is mirrored by the study conducted by Esterhuizen (2007) who found “participants . . . perceived their input as not being valued, or where a . . . decision was ignored by administration” (p. 56). Comparably, Robinson (2004) stated that in her study that although “student leaders tended to be somewhat negative about their university administration, it should be noted that this was usually related to the upper echelons: board of governors, presidents, and vice presidents” (Robinson 2004, pp. 115–116). Robinson went on to assert that, “All student leaders believed to varying degrees that student representation in university governance tended to be ‘token,’ that students did not have a strong influence or were not listened to” (p. 116).

Analogous to the above-mentioned research, the findings of this study indicated that the majority of the participants had a negative relationship with the college’s administration, focusing mainly on the institution’s president. The participants revealed



through their interviews that for the most part that they had a lukewarm relationship at best with Emerging College's presidents and substantially made worse by the actions of the College presidents towards one of the student government presidents. For example, Callie, Trent, and Benjamin indicated that they had a negative, somewhat contentious, and at times hostile relationship with the college president during their time in office. Callie admitted that her relationship with the college president, "started off being good. That was before he really started rocking the boat a whole lot. Um, I think eventually, it was pretty bad, and, and I don't know that it was pretty bad with the administration. I know that it was pretty bad with the president" (Interview 1). Trent asserted,

I was jaded pretty, um, pretty quickly with the president, um, not being a man of integrity, um, or not being a man of his word. Um, that jaded me pretty quick and I was hurt by that, um, and lost a lot of faith in, in his ability to lead and, uh, in his genuineness and his sincerity. (Interview 1)

Benjamin stated, "I did not have a strong relationship with our president because I saw the president's work as being, um, void of an understanding that students were primary" (Interview 1). Benjamin went on to explain, "The worst part for me was having to face the foolish behavior of our president and. . . justify his actions at times to the students. . . . Um, yeah, that was the hardest thing for me" (Interview 1).

Similar to the findings of the study conducted by Schwartz (1991), this study provides insights into the relationship between the student government president and the college president. The evidence revealed that all of this research, the present study included, should be taken seriously by college presidents as strong evidence for the generally poor state and importance of their relationships with student government

presidents. The participants in the studies all sought out an engaged and collaborative relationship with their institution's president and in many cases were disappointed in the response received. Institution presidents too often neglect what could be a truly beneficial relationship. Hellwig-Olson's (2000) findings are right where she stated, "the greater the communication between administrators and students, the greater the potential for a positive relationship to occur" (p. 169). A strong partnership-style relationship between a student government president and a college president could be nothing but a valuable tool for an institution's health. Too often college presidents miss a unique opportunity to utilize a student sounding-board that they could use to gain insights into the student perceptions and issues.

#### *Relationship with Advisor*

The third relationship that was consistently addressed by the participants in this study as well as in the existing literature is that of the advisor. Both the findings of this study and the current research agree that the student government advisor plays a critical role in the success of student government organizations and in particular the student government president. In addition, both this study and previous research converge where the majority of participants felt that their relationship with the student government advisor was positive.

Hellwig-Olson (2000) stated, "It was clear that many of the students felt very close to their mentors, and felt great affection, as well" (p. 169). Hellwig-Olson went on to state,

Advisors in many instances were named as the person most important to the students' success in terms of learning their position, feeling that they had support, and finding resources that could be helpful to the presidents. (p. 169).

Similarly, Esterhuizen, (2007) found that "one of the most frequent recollections of the participants was their memory of their advisor. Each participant's relationship with his or her advisor proved to be significantly memorable" (p. 49).

Gold and Quatroche (1994) state, "helping student leaders to discern real problems and to ethically construct meaningful strategies towards solving them is not to meddle but rather to appropriately discharge our responsibilities as student development educators" (p. 35). Fortune (1999) depicts the role of a student government advisor where she said, "Advisors are assigned to assist student-government leaders towards the enhancement of the overall teaching and learning experience. They provide direction, advice, guidance, and instruction to reach this ultimate goal" (p. 1). This description was affirmed by Rath (2005) who found that "students felt advisors . . . acted in the role of coach or mentor, paying attention to the individual's need for achievement and growth" (p. 108).

Echoing the findings of the existing research, the participants noted that the student government advisor served a number of functions, including being a supporter and guide, to empower them, as well as to provide a sense of perspective and someone to hold them accountable. George described his relationship with the student government advisor,

It was at once both, very, very fun and educational and enlightening to work with adults like [the advisor]. . . . It was also, at the same time um,

very uh, frustrating at times because um, um, because there was, you know, there was no blank check. (Interview 1)

Trent explains that the role of the student government advisor is to empower the students, in particular the student government president. He contended that the advisor

Allow[ed] the students to lead, within reason, the way they want to lead. Um, and it, it was important part of the experience for me, that I was given the liberty and the ability to, uh, make my own mistakes and, uh, sometimes against [the advisor's] . . . words of caution and advice. Um, but at the same time, I was allowed to make my own mistakes and learn from those. (Interview 1)

Trent also, like George, believed that the role of the advisor is to hold the president and the other members or the student government accountable. He declared,

The role of the advisor is simply that to, to be someone to make sure that the, uh, integrity of the student government association is, is in tact, um, to make sure that the, the rules of the college are followed and, and that, uh, you know, everything is done in a legal and safe way. (Interview 1)

Like George and Trent, Benjamin contended, “the advisors [must] be empowering, that they would um, allow us to take on these challenges and, and do them, um, responsibly” (Interview 2). The idea that the one of the roles of the student government advisor is to hold the student government and its officers to account can be see where Fortune (1999) stated, “The advisor should inform students of infractions, point out poor decisions, explain college policies, initiate helpful ideas, and maintain knowledge of college rules and regulations” (p. 58).

Mirroring the findings of previous research, the participants in this study also discussed how the student government advisor challenged the student government presidents to think for themselves, make decisions and to take action. Sandra stated,

I didn't have a clue what to do when I came into the position. . . . [The advisor] would kind of guide me and tell me that, give me ideas to get my brain to start to thinking and then I would explode from there. (Interview 1)

Sandra went on to admit, "there were times I wanted [the advisor] to give me the, just tell me yes or no . . . and [the advisor] wouldn't do it. And [the advisor] would say, you'll, you'll figure it out" (Interview 1). In the same way, Joey said, "What challenged me the most? I think, uh, I think [the advisor] did a great job of challenging me" (Interview 1). This notion of challenge can be founding in the existing research. For example, Fortune (1999) stated, "The advisor should allow students to work out their own problems" (p.58). Similarly, Rath (2005) found, "students felt that advisors [encouraged them to] question assumptions, reframe problems, and approach old situations in novel ways" (p.107).

As can be seen, the relationship the advisor to the student government, and especially the student government president, is a pivotal one. The advisor seeks to balance supporting and nurturing the advisees while at the same time challenging and empowering them. It appears through the findings in this study and those in previous studies that for the most part student government advisors are fulfilling roles and responsibilities admirably and in doing so establishing positive and caring relationships with the student government leaders.

#### Personal Characteristics

Through this study a number of personal characteristics, including integrity, passion, respect, inquisitiveness, risk-taking, citizenship, listening, being outspoken, and being a visionary, were identified by the participants as being essential for a student

government president. However, one trait seemed to stand out and echo throughout the existing research. Citizenship, which is also seen servanthood or stewardship, was a highlight of this study's participants and almost all others'. This strong sense of citizenship was an essential attribute for someone serving as SGA president at Emerging College.

In their own way, the participants sought out the student government presidency to fulfill their desire to benefit their campus community and its members. Callie explained, "all of the things that I got involved in really were connected to helping people" (Interview 1). Similarly, George said, "I define leadership . . . in terms of, of benefiting the greater good of, of the larger group" (Interview 1). He further clarified that with student governance, "the concept of leadership was tied to service . . . and to, to help people be the best that they can be to achieve their best self" (Interview 1). Trent also acknowledged that civic responsibility was an important character trait for a leader of a student government. He stated, "I believe in leadership that . . . [is an] engaged citizenship, whether it be at a college level or in a community" (Interview 1).

The thoughts expressed by the participants in this study are reflected in the existing literature on servant leadership. Golden & Schwartz (1994) contended, "a student-servant . . . views service to the institution and/or community as a direct connection to self-identity." Likewise, Janc (2004), Brubacher and Rudy (1997), Couto (1995) and Ryan and Bohlin (2000) describe leadership through the lens of citizenship where individuals become engaged in their communities and seek to empower others.

Previous research on student government presidents reflects the notion and ideals of citizenship. Hellwig-Olson (2000) found that “[a] number of the students ran for the presidency because in some way they wanted to improve the lives of others or because they wanted to improve the university in some way” (p. 96). Similarly, Janc (2004) mentioned citizenship as character trait for leaders of student bodies that she studied. She stated, “To serve as a student means to be a steward in an organization, to be a servant to his/her peers, and to practice active citizenship” (p. 371). Likewise, Robinson (2004) also discovered that the elected student leaders in her study “all had maintained their commitment to making change on behalf of students” (p. 128). Last, Spencer (2004) found that “the women often ran [for the student government presidency] to make a difference or create change on their campus” (p. 131). Esterhuizen (2007) found, “All participants stayed involved in student government because they wanted to be helpful. They said they wanted to ‘promote change,’ ‘do some good,’ make a difference,’ ‘serve’ students, or to give students ‘more bang for their buck’” (p. 48).

What this means is that one of the principled beliefs and motivations for seekers of the student government presidency is a desire to serve others. Ideal candidates are not those who merely want to pad their résumés, but those who are committed to improving the institutional community and the lives of those who live and work within that community. Those members of the campus community charged with advising the student government and those currently in the presidency need to seek out students who hold this conviction because these individuals will be strong and effective student leaders or government presidents.

## Roles

The findings of this study echo much of the existing research in shared ideas and concepts that the student government and specifically the student body president must perform in and play multiple roles. The student government presidents in this study accredited the following roles to the student government presidency: engager, mediator, voice/advocate, cheerleader, and mentor. However, a role of the student government president that needs special attention is that of mentor. The participants in this study indicated that being a mentor is one of the most critical roles of the student government president. The participants contended the president is chiefly responsible for the recruitment, retention, and advancement of student government members. The president served as a guide and coach to the members as a means to cultivate future leaders and thereby strengthen the student government as a whole.

The student government president's role as mentor can be seen throughout existing research. Hellwig-Olson (2000) stated, "Some of the students got involved in student government early in their college careers and ultimately ran for president because of friends or other individuals who encouraged them" (p. 94). Similarly, Spencer (2004) found that

Peers who were involved in student government were mentioned by the women when they were asked to talk about mentors or role models in their lives, as well as when they talked about how they became involved in student government. (p. 99–100)

Spencer went on to state she found that "peers in student government often encouraged these women to get involved in student government and in some cases run for student



body president” (p. 130). Moreover, Spencer established that “most of the women were mentored or encouraged to run for office, and most started out as senators” (p. 131). In the same way, Komives et al. (2005) asserted, “peers served as sponsors and took the student to initial meetings of a group or encouraged them to join or run for an office” (p. 597). Esterhuizen (2007) found “the participants became involved in student government ...[because] somebody (e.g., instructor, advisor, peer, ‘cute’ student government officer)...asked them to become involved as student leaders” (p. 47). Romano (1996) found that her “respondents also described their peers as role models and were influenced by them to become involved in student organizations” (p. 680). Immerman (2008) stated that students in his study indicated “they would not have gained a student leadership position if they had not been encouraged and recruited to the position by other students” (p. 57). Immerman (2008) further stated, “upperclass students view part of their leadership role as creating opportunities for younger students to become involved, to gain or regain confidence, and to put their leadership skills into practice” (p. 58). Immerman (2008) further asserted,

Students interviewed showed a clear understanding of the role that peer mentorship played in their organization successes as well as acknowledging the extent to which their own success was enabled by those who went before them. (p. 59)

Each of the participants in this study were recruited and cultivated by a student government president who mentored and encouraged them to seek the presidency. Callie recruited George and Trent, while George and Trent both recruited and cultivated Benjamin. Benjamin in turn recruited Sandra who then cultivated Joey. As this reveals,

each of the participants held mentoring as an important role for the student government president.

Callie described the significance of the president's mentoring responsibility by stating, "I think if you mentor the people that come after you, then you're setting them up for success" (Interview 1). She further asserted,

I think it is important to help mentor those students because when you mentor them, they get to really see what you did and what your vision was and how to implement that into their vision and to kind of continue the vision on as a long-term goal. (Interview 1)

George agreed with Callie regarding the importance of recruiting new members and mentoring future leaders. He argued,

The student government really, really ought to be about, um, cultivating leadership from, you know, among the students, grassroots level, bringing students up, um, to, to recognize their own particular gifts and to put them to work for the good of the student body and the institution. (Interview 1)

Trent, like Callie and George, identified mentoring as a key responsibility of the SGA president. Trent reflected "My job . . . as a leader . . . is to build relationship skills in those who are below me to work myself out of a job" (Interview 1). Benjamin also acknowledged the significance of mentoring as a duty of the student government president. Benjamin said, "part of your role as a leader is to, is to help other people hone their leadership skills. It's essential for the sustainability of an organization" (Interview 1). Sandra affirmed the importance of mentoring in regards to presidential roles as she discussed an aspect of mentoring which is recruitment. During her interview, she described how Benjamin recruited and encouraged her to run for the presidency. She said, "I was approached by the current president at the time, to run for president for the

next year, for my junior year” (Interview 1). Sandra explained the significance of being approached,

So, I guess I did it just because, well, when a little bug puts, you know, you know, that in your ear and tells you, you should really do this, it makes you start thinking and you’re like, I could *so* do that. (Interview 1)

It can be clearly seen that each of the participants in this study recognized the importance of mentoring others. Each took it upon themselves to recruit and cultivate future leaders of student government in an intentional effort to strengthen its leadership. The recruitment, cultivation, and advancement of members by their peers within the student government are critical to the success and future of student self-governance. This provides those involved in student governance the feeling of belonging and ownership. Student governance thrives and flourishes when its participants feel that they are a part of something larger than themselves and that they are part of a legacy. This sense of assimilation and ownership culminates as peers take on responsibility for themselves and the other members of their campus community. In the assumption of this responsibility they cultivate younger students to become inspired by the value of student governance.

#### Conflict

The findings in this study pertaining to conflict, specifically interpersonal conflict between the student government presidents and their peers, who serve in their executive boards, the student senate and the institutional president do not receive much attention in the literature. Of the studies that focus on student governance, only two studies specifically address the issue of interpersonal conflicts with peers and only one addresses conflict with institutional administration. The findings of this study correspond with those

of Robinson (2004) and Esterhuizen (2007) regarding interpersonal conflicts between student government presidents and their peers. Robinson found in her study that, “All of the student leaders had experienced some form of conflict, usually with fellow executive members.... In some cases this was serious enough to reduce their own effectiveness, or that of the student association” (2004, p. 114). Similarly, Esterhuizen discovered “participants remembered painful...peer-related conflicts including election challenges, impeachment attempts, controversy, exposure through publications, and theft” (2007, p. 57). The findings in this study further concur with those of Robinson (2004) in respect to the frequency that participants mentioned their interpersonal conflicts that arose between themselves and their peers. This can be seen as Robinson stated, “While student leaders appear to take it for granted that they would be, to varying extents, in an antagonistic position with external bodies, it was differences with their internal colleagues that were mentioned most frequently” (Robinson, 2004, p. 115).

The finding found in the studies conducted by Robinson (2004) and Esterhuizen (2007) regarding interpersonal conflicts between the student government leaders and their peers are mirrored in this study as all six participants discussed their struggle with their peers in far-reaching detail and how their interpersonal conflicts with their peers influenced their experience. The interpersonal conflicts experienced by Callie, George, Trent, Benjamin, Sandra and Joey can be seen in how they grappled with trying to supervise and lead their peers on their executive boards. In addition, each of the participants sought to overcome infighting and power struggles within their executive boards. Each of the participants also had to deal with the conflicting personal agenda of

their peers on their executive boards. A prime example of interpersonal conflicts that the participants experienced with their peers can be seen in George's relationship with Trent. During his presidency, Trent served as George's vice president. Rather than being seen as an asset by George, George considered Trent to be an adversary and Trent's political ambition and agenda to be a detriment and distraction. George goes as far as to describe Trent as a "constant thorn in the side" (Interview 1). George also said, "I knew that he was, um, saying disparaging things about me and about my leadership and about, you know, all of that kind of stuff, um, behind my back" (Interview 1). Each of the other participants also acknowledged that they faced challenges and conflicts with their peers who served on their executive boards.

In addition, to the interpersonal conflict with peers on their executive boards, Sandra and Joey discussed conflicts they faced with their peers who served on the student senate. Sandra described her conflict with the student senate as she asserted, "Some people gave me heck about certain things" (Interview 1). Similarly Joey referred to his interpersonal conflicts with members of the student senate as he declared,

Dealing with, you know, certain people who may tend to get out of control sometimes, maybe tend to, you know, rub your face in the mud, try to make you look bad, you know. I've always disliked people who try to do that to other people. (Interview 1)

In regards to the topic of the interpersonal conflicts between the student government presidents and institution presidents, the current literature is markedly absent. Only one study examined for the literature review, focusing on student governance, addresses this topic and only in peripheral manner. The study conducted by

Robinson (2004) depicts how participants described their relationship and conflicts with the administration of their institution. Robinson even acknowledges that the interpersonal conflict between the student government leaders and the institution administration was not a central theme that derived from her study. She stated,

Actually conflict with university administrators was not a major theme in the interviews; while student leaders tended to be somewhat negative about their university administration, it should be noted that this was usually related to the upper echelons: board of governors, president and vice president” (Robinson, 2004, pp. 115-116).

Unlike the findings from the study conducted Robinson (2004), the findings of this study indicated that the interpersonal conflict between the student government presidents and the institution presidents was a predominant theme. Five of the six participants, including Callie, George, Trent, Benjamin, and Joey, disclosed that they characterized their relationship with Emerging College’s president as one of conflict because they felt that they did not have a positive rapport with institution’s president and did not have confidence the president’s ability to lead the institution. Moreover, a number of the participants in this study indicated that they did not trust the institution’s president. An example of interpersonal conflict between the student government presidents and the institution president can be seen as George described how he felt slighted by Dr. Luther. He explained, “I found his, um, his approach to me as the student government president, somewhat patronizing” (Interview 1). Another example can be seen as Trent described his mistrust of Dr. Ingle. Trent stated,

I was jaded pretty, um, pretty quickly with the president, um, not being a man of integrity, um, or not being a man of his word....and I was hurt

...and lost a lot of faith in, in his ability to lead and, uh, in his genuineness and his sincerity. (Interview 1)

A further example can be seen in how Benjamin struggled with the actions taken by Dr. Ingle while he was serving as SGA president. Benjamin explained,

The worst part for me was having to face the foolish behavior of our president and, and, and justify his actions at times to the students. . . . Um, yeah, that was the hardest thing for me. That was the part that stunk. (Interview 1)

The data from this study indicated that the theme of interpersonal conflicts between the participants and their peers and the institution's presidents is a noteworthy subject as all six participants discussed interpersonal conflicts with these individuals in some depth; however, this same subject was noticeably absent from the majority of the current research literature and deserves further study.

### Implications

The results of this study have direct implications for those who pursue student government presidency and for those who advise student governments. Moreover, these implications have further potential to influence both research and practice in student affairs and higher education. Possible applications of the study to each of these areas are explored in the following sections.

### Future Research

Recommendations for future research flow directly from the findings observed in this study which include: positive and negative facets of their presidencies, stress as a substantial element during their time in office, dissimilar experiences of women and minority students, relationships with members of the campus community, the multiple

roles required of a student government president, and personal characteristics that a student government president must possess and hone.

To begin with, there should be additional qualitative and quantitative studies administered to further explore the relationships identified here. I am particularly concerned about the observations about relationships among the participants and other members of the campus community and this is an area that needs future research. Studies should be conducted that examine the congruence between the perspectives of student government presidents, other members of the student government, student government advisors, college presidents, chief student affairs officers, chief academic affairs officers, faculty members, and members of the board of trustees. The role, influence, expectations, and the future of student governance and the student government presidency should be examined in light of these positions and roles.

I am also concerned about the stresses voiced by the participants in regard to their views of the responsibilities and relationships within their role as president. Strategies should be intentionally developed to aid students to reduce and cope with that stress, and these are the areas in need of future research. Additional research could examine the stress that student government leaders, and particularly student government presidents, face as a result of their positions and responsibilities and how this stress impacts and influences their college experience and development. These studies could also examine the coping mechanism employed by student government leaders to reduce and manage this extra stress. The results from these studies could inform those who advise and mentor



student government leaders of methods, tools, and techniques that could be used to assist student government leaders as they learn to handle and deal with anxiety and stress.

I am further uneasy about the issue of how the participants were confronted by their ability (or lack thereof) to cope with the negative aspects associated with the student government presidency. The high levels of accountability and scrutiny, difficult workloads, a sense of isolation, feelings of loss of personal identity and free time, the emotional toll and interpersonal conflicts should all be studied in more depth. Additional research could examine these aspects in further detail and identify strategies for preparing future presidents for them and could help ascertain methods for reducing their affects.

Research could also be conducted to further explore the roles and personal characteristics the participants identified as being essential to the success of student government presidents. The roles of the student government president that the participants identified included being an engager, mediator, advocate, cheerleader, and mentor, while the personal characteristics included having an inquisitive nature, risk-taking, citizenship, and listening well, and being outspoken. By further examining these personal characteristics, the results could help in the recruitment, cultivation, and mentoring of future presidents.

In addition, research could be conducted to explore the social-economic class of those students who seek and those who attain the student government presidency and how social-economic class influences their decisions to run as well as their decisions, relationships, etc during their presidency. Moreover, further research should explore how

social-economic class influences the overall experience of being a student government president.

Research should be conducted to examine the reasons that those who are eligible to run for the student government presidency, choose not to do so. I think it would be helpful for student government advisors to understand the reasons eligible students do not seek the presidency.

Research should also be carried out to further study how race and gender influence the experience of student government presidents. Additional research should explore how race and gender of those students influence their decisions to or not to seek the presidency as well as how race and gender influences the experiences of those students who attain the student government presidency.

Finally, additional research could identify trends, issues, and best practices emerging among student governance that could help those who participate in and advise student government organizations. This would help student governments become learning laboratories for leadership development and fully influential on college campuses. In addition, this research would help to seek means to improve the experiences of women and minority student government presidents.

#### Professional Practice

In view of the findings from this study, along with existing research, it is apparent student affairs professionals, especially those charged with advising student government organizations, need to understand the importance of their role. Robinson (2004) is right that “the American approach to student leadership training appears to be administrator-

led; student groups generally receive a high level of staff advising” (p. 126). She further argued correctly that “American leadership training appears to emphasize students’ personal development rather than dealing directly with topics related to student advocacy, politics or institutional change” (p. 126). However, the findings of this study diverge in that the participants not only had the opportunity to develop as leaders; they also had the opportunity to deal directly with advocacy, institutional politics, and substantive change.

As this study demonstrates, student government presidents need an actively engaged advisor to help guide and mentor them during their time in office so that they excel as leaders and perform their appointed tasks to the best of their ability. Hellwig-Olson (200) correctly claimed that, “It is important to foster mentoring on the college campus and to develop opportunities for students to find individuals to whom they can turn in times of conflict, turmoil, and stress” (p. 167). Advisors should utilize this information to help student leaders develop and grow and to challenge the students to exceed beyond their current abilities.

Extrapolating from these findings, those charged with advising student governments on college campuses play an essential role in experience of students who are involved in student government and particularly those who serve as student government presidents (Sanseviro, 2006). However, it is even more apparent that student government advisors must increase their level of engagement and become more intentional in establishing mechanisms to not only prepare those who will lead student governments but to also support them during their presidencies. Spencer (2004) is right that there needs to be more mentoring of students who have the potential to be student

government president and that mentorship needs to continue throughout their presidency. I concur with Schwartz (1991) who stated, “student affairs professionals have the potential to provide emotional support, helping student leaders cope with the [feelings of] isolation, anger, and frustration” that arise during their student leadership experiences (p. 453). Advisors should be actively engaged in the inner workings of student government on a daily basis. Advisors should also seek ways to empower students who serve in the student government and encourage them to take action.

Advisors must proactively participate in recruitment and cultivation of future student government leaders. Advisors should promote and market student governance as not only a learning laboratory for leadership development but as a tool for advocating change and civic engagement. As a start, advisors should build strong rapport with underclassmen, especially freshmen, and should identify potential candidates for future leadership positions. As students become involved with the student government, advisors need to intentionally aid those potential leaders into positions where they will develop and hone their leadership skills. Interpersonal skills are key for potential student government presidents, and these should be developed and sharpened. As shown in this study, potential student government presidents need to accept early that their success is interdependent and that leadership is a group activity.

Furthermore, advisors should be hands-on and mentor those leaders who are elected to the presidency. Advisors should consider the specific needs of student government presidents as they progress through their term and keep in mind that each face unique experiences and will construct their own perception of those experiences.

Special focus may be warranted for confronting the challenges faced by student government presidents. As Hellwig-Olson (2000) stated, “Every year, in most cases, a new leader takes the reins of student government, and without diligence on the part of the student affairs staff, the president may end by floundering without adequate guidance” (p. 178). The advisor should be mindful of the personal characteristics that were identified in this study and help to mold and cultivate those traits in students that aspire to the presidency. In addition, those that achieve the presidency should be mentored and steered as they take on the varying roles identified in this study.

There should be a primer for aspiring student government leaders written by student government advisors. This primer could provide potential student government presidents with an overview of the experience of the student government presidency, in turn allowing them to make better informed decisions regarding their decisions to seek the presidency.

Moreover, an orientation for student government presidents should be designed and conducted by student government advisors where the history, core values, mission, vision, and the goals of student governance are emphasized. During this orientation, advisors should use case studies through which the newly elected presidents can reflect on actual issues they may face during their tenure. Also during the orientation, all newly elected officers should be informed in the art of effective methods of student government and how these operations interact. The orientation should focus heavily on developing, communicating, and engaging others in a shared vision. In addition, advisors should

establish a mentoring program for presidents where they have the opportunity to interact and discuss potential issues and resolutions with former presidents.

Bearing in mind the findings pertaining to the experience of female and minority students who serve as student government president, I concur with Aminio et al. (2000) Kezar and Moriarty (2000), Lavant and Terrell (1994), and Romano (1994, 1996) that student government advisors need to become more aware of the unique experiences and the challenges that these students face. In addition, I agree also that advisors need to develop and utilize different strategies to intentionally recruit, cultivate, train, and nurture these students in order for them to meet their potential and for them to have positive educational leadership experience. Moreover, an intentional effort should be committed to recruiting and cultivating female students and minority students by not only the student government advisor, but also by staff, faculty members and administrators but also by fellow students.

Taking into consideration the observations made by the participants regarding their contentious relationships with college presidents, as well as other administrative and academic officers, it is apparent that those tasked with the responsibility of advising student governments need to take a proactive stance in advocating for and encouraging institutional commitment to the value of student governance in higher education. Hellwig-Olson's (2000) claims are again relevant. She stated, "It is of paramount concern that college administrators take the time to understand the history [and role] of student government in the United States. . . ." (p. 178). Moreover, those charged with advising student governments must seek to develop and nurture a mutually productive relationship

and understanding between student government presidents and the institution's president and officers. Fortune (1999) asserted, "In their role as student government advisors, student affairs professionals have a major influence in the creation of an environment that allows students and other members of the college community to interact harmoniously" (p. 17). Fortune (1999) goes on to contend, "The role of the advisor serves to enhance and encourage such interactions among students [and college administration]" (p.72). Likewise, Hellwig-Olson (2000) stated, "Relationships with other entities and individuals such as the administration, governing board, student newspaper, and mentors are some of the key factors that need attention" (p.129).

In light of the current trend toward increasing costs, accountability, and assessment, and high-profile campus crises, the institution's president and officers need to recognize the merits of establishing an intentional and constructive relationship with the student government and particularly with the student government president. I concur with Robinson (2004) as she asserted,

While it is unlikely that student leaders and administrators will often find themselves in either philosophical or practical agreement concerning the over-arching nature of the university, it is likely that common ground can be found in specific areas.... On the administrative side, establishing early goodwill and identifying areas in which the two sides can co-operate may help reduce tension (p. 117).

I agree with Robinson that a strong working relationship between the student government president and the institution president is essential and that this relationship should be dedicated to discussing and seeking mutual understanding on topics related to student life, student services, and, potentially, academic affairs or other functional areas of the

institution. More than this, this relationship should be seen as more than merely an avenue for providing information and consultation. The relationship should be, rather, a partnership where the student government president can champion and advocate for the needs of not only the student body but the institution as a whole. I also concur with Robinson (2004) that, “This model would be less a top-down . . . and more of an exchange of ideas” (p. 127). Robinson (2004) is right,

It is important to remember that elected student leaders see themselves as contributors to the educational mission of the university . . . and that they are therefore much more likely to respond to an approach based on an egalitarian sharing of ideas and goals. (p. 127)

Hellwig-Olson’s (2000) claim is also correct, “that the greater the communication between administrators and students, the greater the potential for a positive relationship to occur” (p. 169). However, this view of the relationship between the student government president and the institution president has not been seen in evidence in the data derived from this study or in an examination of the current literature. For example, Hellwig-Olson (2000) found “The need to communicate effectively with the student leadership appears apparent; however, some campuses do not currently work with the student body president” (p. 168). Too often, college presidents undervalue and underutilize the position of the student government president as a direct link to the students and therefore both parties lose. The conclusion that is to be drawn from this is that a shared responsibility of the student government president, college president, and the student government advisor exist to build and nurture an intentionally collaborative relationship between the student government president and the college president and if



this is accomplished both the students and the college as a whole benefit as the institution administration will gain a strong partner with “insider” information and perspectives whereupon they can make better and more informed decisions which could impact the recruitment of new students, retention of current students, and satisfaction of alumni and alumnae.

### Conclusion

There are numerous studies aimed at exploring student leadership development and studies that explore the student government presidency. Existing literature, however, has largely failed to account for the experience of student government presidency at a small, private liberal-arts college. This study directly addresses this issue through the examination of the reflective experiences of student government presidents at such a college. This study seeks to add to current research on student governance and its impact on participating students and higher education in general. The findings from this study provide an important foundation from which to increase the understanding of this experience. Moreover, it strives to contribute to the body of knowledge about student leadership that goes beyond simply the development of an individual’s leadership skills and experiences. Its contribution is in the understanding of the meanings that the participants construct from their time as student government presidents. The findings of this qualitative research study provide insight into how involvement in leadership positions within student government organizations can influence and have an impact on college and university students.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Georgia State University  
Department of Educational Policy Studies**

**Informed Consent Form**

**Title: Student Governance: A Qualitative Study of Leadership Roles in a Student Government Association**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Philo Hutcheson, Georgia State University  
Student-Principal Investigator Mr. Walter P. May, Georgia State University

I. Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to investigate the experience of students who participate as officers in college student government. You are invited to participate in this study because you served as a student government association president. A total of 6 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 6 hours of your time over 4 months beginning in November 1, 2007 and ending in February 30, 2008.

II. Sponsor:

None. There is no funding agency.

III. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in two 45 to 90 minute informal interviews and will be asked to maintain a journal for a period of 8 weeks wherein you complete a single entry every other week for a total of 4 entries. The interviews will take place in public location such as a library or restaurant. The interview will take place in November and January at a date, time and location that is convenient for you. Each of the interviews will be audio taped. The tapes will be used to transcribe the interviews. The tapes will be used to transcribe the interviews. The journaling will take place during the time in between the initial and follow-up interviews. You will provide a copy of your completed journal entries to the researcher at the time of the follow-up interview. In addition to the interviews and the journaling, you will be provided an opportunity to review the transcripts from your interview sessions, and to read and comment upon the conclusions reached by the researcher. The opportunity to

provide feedback will be in late January and early February. Your name will not appear on the written record of the interview. The records will be kept in a locked cabinet in the student-principal investigator's home office. Throughout the study, you will interact solely with the student-principal investigator.

IV. Risks:

There are no major foreseeable risks to being involved in this study. However, there is the possibility that participation in this study may cause you some discomfort as you may be disclosing personal information.

V. Benefits:

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. The benefits to you will be that you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experience and a satisfaction that you have contributed to a study on student governance. The benefit to society is such that this study will provide information and insights about students who participate and lead student governance, and possibly create new theories of student development that have implications for colleges and universities and student affairs personnel.

VI. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right not to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can have the results of your participation, to the extent that it can be identified as your own, returned to you, removed from the research record, or destroyed.

VII. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. We will use pseudonyms (fake names) rather than your name on study records. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. Only Dr. Philo Hutcheson and Walter May will have access to the information you provide. All information related to this study, including informant information, transcripts, and audio tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and password- and firewall-protected computer. The above material will be stored for five (5) years from the date of the beginning of the study, and will be destroyed at the conclusion of that time period.

VIII. Contact Persons:

Any questions about the research now or during the course of the project may be answered by the following persons: Walter P. May at 770-720-5540, and Philo Hutcheson at 404-413-8284. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu).



IX. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:  
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

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Participant

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Date

---

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As a former student government association president, I am interested in your perspectives on your leadership experience at this college: who you are, your cultural background, your most salient leadership experiences, and those factors you feel have impacted your experience.

This research will result in a qualitative study on you and your perspectives on your experience as a student government association president. In order to gather data in this study, I will need to interview you. Therefore, your contribution to this study will be rather involved as I will be spending time exploring in depth your perceptions on your experience.

I realize a great deal of trust is invested in your participation in this project, as I am asking you to share your experiences with me. However, please rest assured that I will hold all that you say in the strictest confidence. Your true identity will be disguised in the study and I will ask you to select an alias with which you are comfortable.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to helping other student government association presidents through sharing your experiences.

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This study will investigate the question, how do participants perceive their experiences as leaders within a student governance organization? (The point of the interview is to have informants elaborate on their perspectives. So, I will ask only a few questions but probing each in depth).

1. Tell me about yourself. Share with me some background information about yourself:
  - a. Describe yourself as a student
  - b. Describe your cultural background and upbringing.
  - c. How did you come to study at this college?
2. Define leadership.
3. Define student government.
4. Describe your role as a student government association president.
5. Describe an average day as a student government association president.
6. What lead you to become the president of the student government association?
7. What is it like for you to be the president in your college's student government?
8. Would you give me some of the details of your work as a student government president?
9. Identify your most prominent memories of your experience as a student government association president.

- a. What are some specific examples?
  - b. What made these examples important to you?
  - c. What did you learn from these experiences?
10. What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
  11. How did the experience affect you?
  12. What changes do you associate with the experience?
  13. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
  14. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?
  15. Choose an alias for yourself by which you will be known in the study.

## APPENDIX D: HISTORY OF STUDENT SELF-GOVERNANCE

### Introduction

Student self-governance has long been a topic within higher education. Authors consistently address the subject of student self-governance, and its history and impact on institutions and students, in support of the argument that student self-governance has had not only a significant affect on colleges and universities, but also on the students who participate in it. Francis Foster Bradshaw (1931) quoted Charles W. Eliot as he described the importance and impact of student self-governance in higher education.

Student self-government or student participation in college government conforms to three of the most fundamental principles of education—principles too often neglected, even by persons whose lives are devoted to educational service. The first of these fundamental principles is that the real objective in education, so far as the development of character is concerned, is to cultivate in the youth a capacity for self-control or self-government . . . The second [of these] fundamental principles, to which properly conducted self-government seems to me to conform, is that in youth it is of the utmost importance to appeal steadily, and almost exclusively, to motives which will be operative in after life . . . The third fundamental principle in education is Froebel's doctrine that people are best developed through productive activities, that is through positive, visible achievement in doing, making, or producing something. Student self-government enforces positive activity; it appeals steadily to motives in students which will serve them in after life; and it is constantly trying to develop in the campus community the capacity of self-government. (p.5)

I agree with Eliot—involvement in self-governance allows students not only to develop skills and gain experiences that will benefit them after they graduate, it also provides those students with a sense of empowerment, direction, and involvement, which in turn engages students within their campus community. I also concur with Laosebikan-Buggs

(2006), “Student government is one of the oldest and most constant student organizations on campus, and regardless of their specific roles, contributes much to campus life for students, faculty, and staff” (pp. 2–3). It is my contention that student self-governance has evolved along with higher education in the United States over the past three centuries. Crane (1969) is also correct that “student governance and issues of student freedom have evolved as faculty and university solidified an organization and a system, developed traditions and a culture—a collegiate way of life” (p. 54). In defining the term “student self-governance,” Freidson and Shuchman (1955) provide an apt characterization of the institution when they state, “By student government we mean a type of organization which by virtue of its composition and constitution is entitled to represent the student community as a whole” (p. 6). Throughout this work, I will discuss the evolution of student governance, how it evolved from literary and honor societies in the late 1700s to the formation of recognized student government associations and councils in the late 1800s and early 20th century to its current status beyond the 1950s.

Historians contend student self-governance in higher education in the United States has been a reality since the 1700s (Coates & Coates, 1985; Cohen, 1998; Klopff, 1960; Falvey, 1952; Lunn, 1956; McKown, 1944). A number of authors argue that the first effort toward engaging students in self-governance can be found at the College of William & Mary in the late 1770s (Klopff, 1960; Lunn, 1956; McKown, 1944). In 1944 McKown wrote,

Probably the first example of student participation in American colleges was at William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, in 1779, after the college had been in existence for more than three-quarters of a century. . . . The

students elected representatives to a central body and this handled lesser details of “general improvement,” and routine discipline. The plan was very simple, but it was a beginning. (p. 11)

However, as with many entities, student self-governance’s origins are often disputed and muddled with inconsistencies. Historic records are not always as clear as one would hope, and there are often different interpretations and conclusions drawn from these records. Klopf revealed the murkiness of the history of student self-governance when he discussed the struggle to determine and give credit for the location of the first student governing body. He stated,

Some form of student government has been apparent in American colleges since the late 1700’s when William and Mary College[sic] organized a student governing body. With the founding of the University of Virginia, Jefferson recommended a modified plan of student discipline, and since that time many other institutions have claimed that American student government was founded on its campus. Although early attempts were fraught with failure, the seeds were sown. (1960, p. 40)

Although the location of its origins is debated, student self-governance has survived and continued evolve as an integral element of higher education in the United States. Falvey wrote,

thus the movement toward student participation in college administration, apparent about 1800, became widespread. By the turn of the twentieth century there were examples of the student council, the graduate manager, the women’s self government association, the men’s council, and the student court on hundreds of college campuses in the United States. (1952, p. 42)

Klopf affirmed Falvey’s position by stating, “Student participation in college government is neither a novelty nor a modern idea . . . The practice of having students responsible for and exercising control over their conduct and activities extends over a period of many

centuries” (1960, p. 37). As higher education in the United States has matured and expanded, so has student self-governance, sustaining the argument that student governance is a key component to higher education in the United States. Student self-governance has a presence at almost every college and university in United States.

Student self-governance has played an integral, but many times an overlooked, role in higher education in the United States. Although student self-governance is viewed as an extracurricular element, it has had a significant impact on higher education. Student self-governance will continue to evolve and expand, particularly as a means to reach students on a level beyond which college administration and faculty are able or willing.

The evolution of student self-governance has not been seamless. And, the stages of student self-governance are not independent, but are interrelated by time, institution, and organization. Over the centuries, student self-governance has morphed from debate societies, literary societies, class officers, honor societies, unions, and associations. I will treat each of these groups as somewhat separate entities for the purpose of this project, but in reality, many of these bodies existed simultaneously and were interconnected. Debate and literary societies, as well as honor societies and class officers, existed at the same time at the same institutions, but they each had their own affects and influence on its evolution. Nonetheless, I will treat them as separate units, as they each have a unique history and story to tell, and each has had its own impact on the evolution of student self-governance. I will also detail how they interrelate and how they each influenced the current state of self-governance.



Student self-governance evolved from a combination of the need for extracurricular outlets, disengagement with the academic curriculum, dissatisfaction with institutional rule and disciplinary procedures, and a desire for empowerment by students. Colleges in the 18th century were much different from colleges today. The student population at each institution was quite small during the colonial period and into the 18th century, oftentimes numbering less than one hundred students per campus (Boyer, 1987; Cohen, 1998; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). In addition, the student population was, for the most part, restricted to upper-class white men; women and minorities did not have access to higher education during this period (Boyer, 1987; Cohen, 1998; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Furthermore, the curriculum in the 1700s focused on classical education, and elective and professional courses of studies beyond the study of theology were not available (Boyer, 1987; Cohen, 1998; Greenstreet, 1996; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Moreover, the instructional method was composed of recitation and lectures with little student engagement (Boyer, 1987; Cohen, 1998; Greenstreet, 1996; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Additionally, there were no extracurricular activities as we would define them today (Boyer, 1987; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Last, there were few freedoms and many rules for students (Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Kelley (1974) described student life in the 1700s, “The students who lived and studied in old Yale College had about as much freedom in both life and studies as there was room in the study closet” (p. 41). The faculty, and in particular the college president, had control over the student population (Boyer, 1987; Caple, 1998; Horowitz,

1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Crane (1969) wrote, “In fact, Colonial college governance denied any role to student opinion or to student voice” (p. 56). Students had little autonomy or control over their lives during this period, which often lead to frustration and confrontations between students and faculty members.

As with students of any era, they sought to find ways to express themselves, to find something to fill their time, and to empower themselves and become engaged in their campus environments. Greenstreet (1996) described best the response of the students to the restrictive early college environment as he wrote,

It should come to no surprise that students found such an atmosphere stultifying. In response to constraints modern students would find laughable, colonial college students developed an outlet which enabled them to engage in intellectual pursuits of their own choosing through their own methods. (p. 3)

The response of the early colonial students was the establishment of the first model of self-governance.

### Literary Societies

The first step in the evolution of student self-governance in higher education in the United States can be found in formation of debate and literary societies, which for the purpose of this project will be collectively identified as literary societies. Literary societies were created by students to challenge their institutional frustrations, which included narrow curriculum, limited instructional methodology, lack of institutional resources, and no extracurricular activities (Coates & Coates, 1985; Crane, 1969; Greenstreet, 1996; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990). These societies were the students’ proactive means of becoming engaged in the learning process (Greenstreet, 1996).

Horowitz (1987) described the students' efforts to create their own culture within their college, "Collegians withdrew from open confrontation to turn to covert forms of expression. They forged a peer consciousness sharply at odds with that of the faculty and . . . gave it institutional expression in the fraternity and club system" (p. 11). The first forms of expression were the literary societies. Within their covert, secretive walls, students ruled their own lives, set their direction, and truly became leaders. In a brochure from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the argument is made that its

Student Congress finds its roots in the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies founded by students in the eighteenth century. At that time, every student belongs to one of the societies. The societies were instrumental in shaping the University in many ways, including founding our library system, . . . publishing several literary magazines and newspapers, establishing the State's largest and finest portrait gallery, creating our unique honor system, and much, much more. The societies served as the voice of and for the students at Chapel Hill for over one hundred years. (Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Student Congress, 1989, p. 2)

Literary societies, such as the ones found at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, shaped the lives of not only the students, but also the institution itself (Coates & Coates, 1985; Greenstreet. 1996; Rudolph, 1990). Students were able to become engaged educationally and socially, and at the same time, the societies made significant and lasting impact on the university by opening the institution's first libraries and initiating its honor system.

There is some question about where the first literary societies were created. Some authors argue they were first started at Harvard, while others contended that they first formed at Yale (Handlin and Handlin, 1970; Harding, 1971; Kelley, 1974). Harding

(1971) wrote, “Beginning with small groups of students at Harvard in 1716 and in the 1720’s literary and debating societies multiplied rapidly in the colonial chartered colleges” (p. 305). However, Handlin and Handlin (1970) contended,

The literary societies, the first of which had been founded at Yale in 1753, served both purposes. Their debates, libraries, and publications were often more effective modes of study than the formal academic exercises; and their ability to exclude some students gave gratifying recognition of the distinction of those admitted. (p. 39)

In light of their impact and influence on not only the study bodies, but also entire institutions, literary societies prospered and flourished. Kelley (1974) maintained that literary societies were pervasive throughout higher education in the 1700s and 1800s. He wrote

The major new . . . activity that had become important since the first period of Yale history was the literary societies. Of the first, Crotonia, which disappeared before the end of Clap’s presidency, nothing is known. It was followed by Linonia, whose founding dates is thought to be 1753, and, in the following decade, by Brothers in Unity. All undergraduates were members of either Linonia or Brothers, and though the clubs were highly intellectual they were much loved by the students. (p. 107)

Hardy argued,

The chief reason for the popularity of the college literary society in the period between the Revolution and the Civil War (and in the West until the end of the nineteenth century) was the fact that it was the major (and usually the only) student extracurricular activity. In absence of competition the literary society had a virtual monopoly of the student’s free time. (Harding, 1971, p. 317)

Literary societies allowed college students of the 1700s and 1800s to take an active and engaged role in their own education (Coates & Coates, 1985). Seeley (1871) wrote,

The existence of societies in our colleges, in some form, is a necessary outgrowth of human nature. When a body of youth are brought together

for the purpose of receiving a liberal education, those who are enthusiastic and ambitious immediately seek help for their self-improvement, especially in rhetorical and literary exercises. The college cannot furnish all the aid necessary for the highest culture in this direction, nor if it could would it be either as acceptable or as efficient as the curriculum which is devised and managed by the students themselves. The object of the organization of our college literary societies is justly recognized to be for the purpose of securing to the members the highest possible degree of 'mental, moral, and social' improvement. (pp. 6–8)

Literary societies provided students with an outlet for co-curricular and extracurricular activities which the college faculty and administration did not provide (Coulter, 1979).

During the 1700s and 1800s, colleges did not possess the resources in the ways of personnel, finances, or programs to provide for the needs of their student population.

Kelley (1974) affirmed this by stating about Yale,

All undergraduates were members of either Linonia or Brothers, and though the clubs were highly intellectual they were much loved by the students. There they could debate, orate, and discuss to their hearts' content. And from the small society libraries they could borrow books of a lighter character than those owned by the college. (p. 107)

Literary societies were integral to higher education in the United States. They filled a vacuum and satisfied the needs of the study body. Greenstreet (1996) contended,

The contributions of literary societies to American higher education include broadening of the classical curriculum . . . the roots of the service library . . . the beginning and development of student publications, the roots of the student government and student governance over student concerns . . . . (p. 13)

Handlin and Handlin (1970) wrote about the formation of student literary societies in the 1770s to 1870s, stating that students, of their own volition, created these groups to fill the extracurricular and co-curricular voids that existed on college campuses. They asserted, "Sooner or later within each college a narrower circle of students associated, either to

pursue common interests or to achieve a sense of identity by virtue of passage through a section process” (Handlin & Handlin, 1970, p.39). Just as on modern college campuses, students in the Colonial period and into the early 1800s banded together under common bonds and interests and sought some semblance of control and ownership over their lives. Crane (1969) contended,

At some unmarked point in history, and the literary societies could have been the spawning grounds for such, recognition was given the positive potential for the consultative role of students, of the effective assistance in control and overall institutional support they could offer. This undoubtedly led some colleges and universities (particularly Eastern ones) to delegate to students deliberately and constitutionally some direct responsibility for governance of their own affairs. (p. 57)

In many cases, institutions recognized the efforts of the students and relinquished to varying degrees authority and responsibility to students for disciplinary and self-governing issues.

Literary societies were the first recognized student organizations on college campuses. Harding (1971) contended, “They were the only approved extracurricular activity on the college campus” (p. 305). Literary societies were the students’ way of escaping into an environment where they were in control and therefore could establish their own governing structures. Harding (1971) argued that,

Indeed, the college literary society was ideally suited for such a role. Although subject to college regulations, the societies were virtually little republics, with their own laws and a democratically elected student administration (p. 1).

Literary societies were self-regulated entities outside the jurisdiction of faculty, which allowed for the first steps toward self-governance (Eller, 1949; Greenstreet, 1996;

McConagha, 1988). During this period, literary societies were a dominant feature on college campuses. Kelley (1974) claimed,

The great age of the literary societies was probably the fifty years from about 1780 to 1830. In these years they performed two very worthwhile functions. First, at a time when there was almost no freedom in the curriculum, they gave the undergraduates a chance to discuss the questions that seemed important to them. Second, through their libraries they provided many of the books the students wanted to read at a time when the college library was seldom open and, in any case, contained little light literature. (p. 223)

As can be seen, literary societies were the focal point for co-curricular resources and extracurricular activities for 100 years. However, as higher education evolved and became more complex, diverse, and established, literary societies outlived their usefulness.

Literary societies began to decline as the institutions began to grow, not only in the size of their student population, but also as their curricular and co-curricular offering expanded (Coates & Coates, 1985). Kelley (1974) contended,

The slow decline began in the 1830s. It may have been due in part to the banning of the literary society exhibitions, probably because they became too elaborate and difficult for the faculty to control. There may also have been a lessening of interest in speaking; but probably most important, the growth of the college began to undermine the closeness that had once existed among the members. As the size of the classes grew, new societies in which the undergraduate felt a more personal interest emerged. (p. 223)

In the late 1800s, colleges and universities the student population became more diversified and the extracurricular offerings became more plentiful (Boyer 1987; Coates & Coates, 1985; Cohen, 1998; Coulter, 1979; Handlin & Handlin, 1970; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Somers, 2003). Fraternities and other Greek-letter organizations

encroached upon the territory of literary societies. Handlin and Handlin (1970) argued that literary societies “lost ground after 1825 to the Greek letter fraternities which provided living quarters, an election process, and a ritual relatively free of faculty control” (p. 40). Harding’s thinking aligns with Handlin and Handlin, who argued that Greek letter organizations and other extracurricular activities led to the downfall of literary societies. Harding (1971) found that,

At Amherst College the three societies in existence in 1827—Alexandrian, Athenian, and Social Union—began to suffer during the year 1844–45. Their honors became party to spoils for the secret fraternities, which now for the first time multiplied in the college. (p. 149)

Harding went on,

Largely responsible for their [literary society] decline were the rise of athletics; the popularity of social fraternities; the competition of music clubs, dramatic clubs, and similar specialized organizations; the slow but gradual liberalization of the curriculum with a consequent influx of non-forensic minded students; the spread of periodicals and other competing forms of communication; and the relaxation of administrative regulations which removed many of the initial causes for the founding of the societies. (p. 262)

As higher education institutions became larger and more diversified in the areas of other extracurricular activities and curriculum, literary societies lost influence and attraction (Kelley, 1974; Otten, 1970). By the mid-1800s, the student population had outgrown the sphere of influence and control of literary societies. Membership within such groups was no longer compulsory, and these societies soon withered (Eller, 1949; Harris & Dyer, 2006).



## Honor Systems

Literary societies were the first step in the evolution of student self-governance. They successfully allowed students to become actively engaged in their educational process. This gave students activities outside of the classroom, coordinated by student will. McConagha (1988) wrote, “these societies provided a very strong bond between the students’ academic and social life” (p. 53). McConagha went on to lament the demise of literary societies: “Many believe that academia lost a real source for education, specifically oral and written communication and syllogistic reasoning, when these organization and activities were abandoned” (p. 55). However, literary societies did not resolve all of the students’ contentions regarding their higher education experience. Students in the 1700s, 1800s, and early 20th century were frustrated by the lack of power and control over their own lives. Otten (1970) found that,

Seldom indeed was college authority itself an issue . . . . However, one aspect of authority did create certain problems. Students did not approve of the faculty as agents of control . . . . The tension between students and faculty on this matter was in part responsible for the establishment of student government. (p. 22)

Up through the early 20th century, lives of students were strictly controlled and monitored by the faculty and college administrations. Nearly every aspect of the students’ lives was dictated to them, from the time they awakened to the time they laid down (Boyer, 1987; Horowitz, 1985; Horowitz, 1987; Palmieri, 1995; Rudolph, 1990). What made this level of control easy was that the student population on college and university campus was small, often less than 100 students. Part of the culture of higher education of the time supported the belief that college students were a subservient class, who did not

possess the same rights and power as the instructors or even other citizens (Katz, 1968).

Coulter (1979) argued that, through the early 19th century, colleges such as the University of Georgia did not consider students as possessing inherent rights or privileges. He found that college officials at the University of Georgia felt that students

had no rights that need be respected in fact they were not supposed to be important enough to have rights. They were in college for a definite purpose, which had been fixed. It was not for them to question—obedience should be their watchword. (1979, pp. 47–48)

Jackson (2000) argued similarly that, “perhaps the most oppressive aspect of the college rules was their utterly nonnegotiable status. The college government dictated its laws from on high and student commentary on them was almost, by definition, considered an impertinence” (p. 55). Student self-governance arose from student frustration with regard to how their lives were presided over and regulated. This frustration revealed itself in a number of student revolts and actual rebellions during the late 1700s and early 1800s (Jackson, 2000; Novak, 1977). Students openly challenged institutional control and attacked instructors, burned buildings, and protested their treatment as a subservient class (Jackson, 2000).

The period surrounding the American Revolution is key to the rise in student self-governance. Democratic principles first espoused by students appeared, as they began to seek ownership of their lives. The rebellion of college students coincided with that of the emergence of republican ideal and of the American Revolution. Jackson (2000) claimed,

The language of republicanism provided not only for a model of the ideal society; it also laid out an elaborate justification for rebellion and revolution, in the name of social survival. The disorderly students saw

themselves as men deprived of rights of men, who were fighting for their independence from tyranny and domination. (p. 68)

On a similar note, Geiger (2000) wrote,

After the Revolution, students probably behaved with greater license, and the consensus undergirding social control began to fray. At the end of the century a new phenomenon emerged: the student revolt, or full-fledged defiance of college authority by a significant portion of the study body. (p. 10)

The rebellion of college students emanated out of the revolutionary ideals of self-rule and egalitarianism, as the authority and governance did not lay with college students of the era, but with the college faculty and administration, causing dissatisfaction and restlessness (Novak, 1977). Albright (1931) claimed that, “student opinion was decidedly against such strenuous faculty regulation” (p. 10). Horowitz (1987) described this discontent,

College life was born in the violent revolts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. All over the new nation colleges experienced a wave of collective student uprisings, led by the wealthier and worldlier undergraduates. College discipline conflicted with the genteel upbringing of the elite sons of Southern gentry and Northern merchants. Pleasure-seeking young men who valued style and openly pursued ambition rioted against college presidents and faculty determined to put them in their place. (p. 11)

Horowitz adds that college students “were adolescents in a particular context: they were a subject people. They entered a society in which they did not make or enforce the rules”

(p. 13). Moreover, Horowitz said,

College authorities generally insisted that students regard college as a period of self-abnegation in which they denied present needs in the hope of future reward. Fearful of disruption, college masters forbade students the freedoms and pleasures generally accorded to youth of their era and subjected rule-breakers to censure and punishment. (1987, p. 13)

Jackson (2000) described how the

Emphasis on restraint and control of student behavior extended beyond the classroom and the library and into the wider realm of student activity. One of the most striking features of college life in the eighteenth century was just how thoroughly well regulated it was . . . . The college *Laws* laid out a schedule that defined a student's entire day from waking to retiring. (p. 54cx)

Novak (1977) argued that, “discipline was the most common student complaint” (p. 13).

He went on to highlight this discontent:

On October 25, 1796, the University of North Carolina's undergraduate Philanthropic Society debated, “Whether the laws of the University are generally good or not?” After a heated discussion, it was resolved that they were good “except that the Faculty has too much authority. (p. 14)

Geiger (2000) concurred, regarding the discontent of students, he claimed,

Frustrations arose out of the basic predicament of students who occupied an inherently subordinate status without protective rights. Having an indeterminate status of youth, they had no legitimate avenues for dealing with grievances, even those of their own making. . . . Living under a regime that aspired to completely control their lives, students compensated through collective resistance, surreptitious most often becoming overt at the moments of heightened confrontation. (p. 11)

Students questioned and at time rebelled against institutional authority of their lives.

Novak (1977) claimed,

Resistance allowed students to assert their manhood and maturity. The rights of youth was an issue in every confrontation—whether students should have a voice in disciplinary procedures, in awarding honors, in judging the competence of the faculty. (p. 56)

Student self-governance originated, then, partly out of the students' discontent regarding the high level of control that college officials had over their lives. To garner favor of one group of these officials, the faculty, and to gain jurisdiction over their lives and actions,

students sought to create student-led honor systems to adjudicate student disciplinary and honor cases. Through the early 19th century, informal student-led honor systems became formalized into written honor codes and established honor councils and tribunals (Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990). Falvey (1952) contended that there were “experiments in ‘self-government’ during the period 1780-1840, such as the mock court at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, the House of Students at Amherst, student courts at Union College, New York, and vigilance committees at Yale” (pp. 41–42). Falvey described this shift toward student governance in colleges. He wrote that, “the movement for student participation was gaining momentum in schools other than Oberlin” (1952, p. 42). Falvey indicated that the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, the University of South Carolina, Indiana University, Lafayette College, the University of Maine, the University of Illinois, Amherst College, and the University of California all established systems of student governance “to serve as an intermediary body between faculty and the students” (p. 42). Often, the honor systems and councils emerged out of the actions of the early literary societies (Harding, 1970). Albright (1931) described how the honor system at the University of North Carolina arose out of the literary societies.

He stated,

By a joint resolution, the two societies petitioned for the faculty to allow them to control all matters of student discipline. In 1876 President Battle endorsed the adoption of an honor system. . . . The societies immediately assumed the responsibility for the enforcement of the new system, and the University saw the beginning of a form of self-government which has since developed and characterized campus life and the University itself.  
(p. 11)

The authors of the multivolume *The College of William and Mary: A History*, contended that even though

The Honor System had not been codified in 1875 . . . the older students helped orient the newcomers to the institutional standards. “We were simply made to understand that there were several things William & Mary men couldn’t do . . . .” Students also enforced the code. “There were no student councils or formal trials” . . . but “the student who did anything dishonorable was either boycotted or, if the offense was a grave one, was told to leave College.” (Godson, Johnson, Sherman, Tate & Walker, 1993, p. 393)

It was through the self-regulated honor systems that students were able to take control of their institutions’ judicial and disciplinary process (Otten, 1970; Rudolph, 1990). Over time, students were successful in their efforts, and institutions withdrew their objections and allowed students to oversee their own lives and take the place of faculty and institution-controlled disciplinary processes and procedures (Geiger, 1937). This can be seen in the following quote from Eller’s (1949) *Student control since 1795: The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill*:

During the eighty-seven years in which the Societies enjoyed campus-wide influence they were instrumental in achieving better conduct and better student-faculty relations. Their authority extended to students on and off the campus and despite the fact that their rules and regulations were only slightly less stringent than those of the faculty, they were enforced much more effectively. In 1807 President Caldwell recognized and guaranteed the right of Societies to prohibit faculty attendance at their meetings or trials. In 1856 the Societies received the responsibility for the operation of the Honor System. . . . Throughout this entire period the Societies had been active in assuming responsibility for student conduct and for the regulation of their own affairs. (p. 16)

Students created codes of behavior for themselves and through membership in literary societies, and through honor systems students held themselves accountable to those

standards (Handlin and Handlin, 1970). Otten (1970) wrote that “the students were no longer willing to accept presidential guidance unquestioningly, not to mention authority” (p. 81). It was through this desire to gain control over their lives that students sought to create honor systems that would be recognized by their respective institutions. Coulter (1979) asserted,

This revolt against a system of petty rules was only a symptom of a much more fundamental contention of the young rebels. They were contending for a real University, using university methods and management to supplant the outgrown worn out detention station called Franklin College. They wanted students to be regarded as young men, and the honor system to be instituted. (p. 196)

Geiger (1937) described the creation of the honor system at the College of William and Mary. He wrote,

One of the priorities of the College of William and Mary . . . is that of having been the first to formulate and adopt the ‘honor system’ as a method of student government. Up to that time student government had been conceived and organized along the lines closely analogous to a police system. In 1779, however, the faculty of the College of William and Mary, inspired by their ideal of democracy and by their faith in human nature, appointed a committee to draft a plan of college discipline which should be in keeping with the ‘liberal and magnanimous’ attitude of the college toward its students. (p. 5)

Geiger (1937) also contended that honor systems were

primarily, if not exclusively, a form of student self-government; and the other is that, because no form of self-government can be permanently adequate unless it is educative as well as regulative in its effects, the honor system must aim at producing such effects in the character of those who live under it if it is to regulate their conduct in a permanently effective manner. (p. 14)

Nidiffer (2000) described the beliefs of Ada Louise Comstock, dean of women at the University of Minnesota from 1906 to 1912, regarding student participation in self-rule:

Comstock believed that student-development and student-enforced policies achieved more positive outcomes than those dictated by administrators and, in the meantime, the process taught students about leadership, consensus, law and order, and good citizenship. (p. 99)

Eller (1949) described the proactive nature of the student-run honor system at the University of North Carolina. He said “On September 26, 1799, a little over four years after the University opened its doors, the first student was expelled from it by his fellow students” (p. 7). Honor systems on college campuses stemmed from literary societies. It was customary that every student be a member of a society, and each honor society had a set doctrine of behavior and integrity (Eller, 1949; Somers, 2003). Albright (1931) claimed that as

societies reached the height of their power . . . their regulations governed the conduct of their members not only during meetings, but in all campus relations. Since every student was compelled to be a member of one of the societies, their control was all-encompassing, and to be expelled from one’s society was to be expelled from the University. (p. 11)

Harris and Dyer (2006) affirmed this argument as they contended,

The role of the literary societies and debate societies went beyond the intellectual aspects . . . . Societies provided for and regulated their membership in a number of ways . . . . The societies also took on the responsibility for the conduct of their members . . . . This student self-regulation is clearly a precursor to student involvement in campus judicial matters setting the groundwork for the student government that arose in their wake. (pp. 34–35)

Throughout the 19th century, the role and influence of honor councils and honor systems grew while the literary societies, from where they originated, declined and died out (Albright, 1931; Eller, 1949). Harris and Dyer (2006) go on to describe the rise of the student-led honor system. They claimed that,



Following the Civil War, there was a trend of moving some the disciplinary 'burden' and power from the increasingly overworked faculty and administration back to the student body . . . . This movement continued through the turn of the century and became widespread by World War I. (p. 35)

By the early 20th century, the seeds of student self-governance had sprouted through the development and evolution of student-led honor systems. These seeds have since flowered on campus throughout the United States, and honor systems have become an integral part of student life and student development. Godson et al. (1993) described how the honor system of William and Mary endured into the 21st century. They said,

The growth in the size and diversity of the student body between 1919 and the early 1940s undoubtedly had an effect on the operation of the Honor System. It did not work perfectly, but it retained widespread student and faculty support; it was destined to remain very much a part of the William and Mary scene. (p. 604)

Honor systems as part of student self-governance have continued to evolve and adapt to the ever-changing higher education environment and are still an integral part of many colleges and universities (Rudolph, 1990). Sansing (1999) described the founding of the student honor council at the University of Mississippi in 1907 and how it evolved into the institution's student government organization. The author claimed,

Another of Chancellor Kincannon's early initiatives to demonstrate the university was the establishment of a student honor council . . . . Each class in the college of liberal arts and the professional schools elected a member to the honor council, which had the judicial authority over a wide range of disciplinary problems. The honor council was the forerunner of the Associated Student Body, established in 1917. (p. 185)

In the early 20th century, the honor systems evolved into judicial branches of student government organizations, which will be addressed below.

## Student Assemblies

An added avenue of engagement and self-governance beyond literary societies and honor systems emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries: the student assembly. Throughout this period, the entire student body of each institution was often gathered together in scheduled assemblies to discuss and vote on matters of concern (Somers, 2003). This was made possible as the small number of students on each campus made it easy to gather the student population together with the intent to address issues or impart information. These assemblies were for the most part the governing body of the student population. Somers (2003) contended that at Union College, the “student body meetings were the only form of student government until 1900. By that year, the students, for governmental purposes, collectively constituted “The Student Body”” (p. 705). However, in the early 20th century, the governing structure of the student population again evolved. The unwieldy mass assemblies morphed into a more representative form of governance, the governing councils and their elected class officers. Somers (2003) asserted,

After the installation of representative councils, the Student Body continued to meet, in part as a means of making announcements and delivering exhortations, but also, at first, to ratify the actions of the councils. Later the power of the Student Body was limited to electing officers and ratifying constitutions and, as mentioned below, its name was changed. (p. 705)

As the governing councils became established in the early 20th century, the role and importance of the student body assemblies declined. These student body meetings soon became a mere formality of information dispersal—the new power lived with newly elected class officers. As higher education institutions grew in size and complexity, these

new student subdivisions centered on class rank rather than their level of academic proficiency (Handlin & Handlin, 1970). Otten (1970) argued about the University of California,

From 1890 to 1900, the institution had expanded from a little college of 400 students to a major university with nearly 2,000. This rapid growth changed the pattern of authority to allow for . . . a new kind of student control, the old forms having been outgrown. (p. 40)

Campuses were no longer composed of intimate numbers of homogeneous students and teachers; campus populations were growing more diversified by gender, socioeconomic status, etc. (Otten, 1970). Furthermore, students were no longer required to study a fixed classical curriculum, but were able to study a number of subjects and professional fields as well as a multitude of co-curricular and extracurricular activities (Coulter, 1979; Harding, 1971). Crane (1969) asserted that,

After the Civil War, little or no student rebellion was in evidence, for student involvement in governance became real as their demands for freedom were somewhat realized, first in changes in curriculum, particularly the elective system which introduced freedom of choice of courses; second, in the change in attitude on the part of the faculty to the students; who accepted them more as young adults; and third, in the introduction of the most important factoring calming and sophisticating campus life-coeducation. (p. 58)

Students during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were no longer in the same classroom with the same instructors for their collegiate tenure, and there were multiple academic tracks and courses; consequently, students associated themselves by class status as a means of distinction (Geiger, 2000; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965).

### Class Councils and Class Officers

A newer social and academic atmosphere of class rank appeared alongside the rapid increases in student populations, which, coincidentally, spurred the need for more-inclusive organizations on campus. These new peer groups occurred naturally as larger and larger incoming class groups enrolled together. Students were identified as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and students reveled in their classification and the camaraderie that came along with this association. Coates and Coates (1985) claimed that, “the organization of the campus by class was proposed on the theory that if Society organizations failed because they did not include all students, class organizations would succeed because they did include all” (pp. 142–143). Otten (1970) described the rise of the class structure in the later half of the 19th century in his work *University Authority and the Student: The Berkeley Experience*. He stated that, “for the most part, student life centered around campus offices, and extracurricular activities flourished. Class solidarity grew and class rivalry intensified” (Otten, 1970, p. 20). Otten went on to argue that,

The organization of the student community was in fact so tight during this period that even deviance became institutionalized. Freshmen were expected to get drunk and make fools of themselves. Sophomores attacked freshmen, and the upperclassmen supposedly conducted themselves with manly dignity. (Otten, 1970, p. 25)

Handlin and Handlin (1970) described the transition from literary societies to class organizations and their officers. They wrote,

For the great majority of young men who passed through it, the college was a social experience, shaped not by their elders or by the subject matter of instruction, but by contact with their peers. That was all efforts as those of Ticknor at Harvard, Marsh at Vermont, and Fisk at Wesleyan to classify students by proficiency in courses rather than by length of time in

attendance failed. The primary unit was and remained the class, the group that entered together, passed together from status to status—freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior—and celebrated commencement together. (pp. 38–39)

Kelley (1974) affirmed these contentions that class became the dominate classification and delineation of the student body in the 19th century at Yale University. Kelley claimed, “many of these new activities, though undermining the literary societies, did reinforce the concept of the class as the center of Yale life” (p. 226). Jackson (2000) also maintained that at Harvard University during the late 19th century, “The academic class was the most powerful unit of social organization legitimately sanctioned by the college” (p. 70). Colleges, like their students, also began classifying students by their academic class, which allowed for a more regimented and regulated student population.

As students became organized by their class associations, they elected class officers to represent their needs and serve as activity scheduling agents (Coates and Coates, 1985; Otten, 1970; Peckham, 1994; Rudolph, 1990; Somers, 2003). Class officers were elected by the members of each class, freshmen elected their own representatives as did the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. Each class had its own president, vice president, secretary, etc. Otten (1970) asserted that class officers “help[ed] create a distinct class character” (p. 24). These class officers planned events and socials for the members of their class and voiced the concerns of the class to the college administration (Somers, 2003). The class officers governed their respective classes. They monitored their fellow students and handled honor and discipline infractions, as well as making recommendations and requests to their institutional administrations.

Along with the rise of the class officer, there emerged the student governing council or student council. The representatives elected to this council presided over the student assemblies and the student body as a whole (Godson et al., 1993; Peckham, 1994). This was the case at the University of Connecticut in the early 18th century where “the entire student body made up the Students’ Organization, the legislative branch of government, while the Student Council was the executive branch” (University of Connecticut, N.D., p. 1). An example of the establishment of a governing student council can also be seen at the University of North Carolina in 1904 when

President Venable called together the presidents of the undergraduate classes and suggested a ‘student commission’ to dispose of all cases of hazing and violations of the honor system. This idea was presented to the classes, adopted by them, and put into immediate effect. The body formed was called the University Council and consisted of the presidents of the three upper classes, a second year student from each of the three professional schools, and a representative from the Senior Class. (Albright, 1931, p. 12)

A similar governing council was established at the College of William & Mary during the 1919–20 academic term. Godson et al. (1993) stated,

The constitution of the Men’s Student Self-Government in 1919-20 provided for a general Student Council to try students accused of cheating on examinations and other honor offenses, as well as for all manners of acts, including drunkenness and gambling. In 1922 this was separated into two councils, one for the Honor System and another for other disciplinary matters. (p. 603)

Student councils were presided over by the senior class officer who acted as the chief student officer of the student body. Coates and Coates (1985) contended,

Presidents of the senior class were the preeminent political leaders on campus until the creation of the office of the student body president in the early 1920s. In addition to their responsibilities as class officers, senior

class officers also served as chairmen of the newly created Student Council and Greater Council. (p.180)

The student council was not only an agent for the student body for voicing their agenda to the institution's administration, but it was also the adjudicator of their peers' transgressions (University of Connecticut, N.D.). In these roles, one can see the direct ties between the student council and the literary and debate societies. Eller (1949) argued, "Student Council had been, since the decline of the debate societies, both the legislative and judicial agency," (p. 20). The student council was both the voice and the disciplinary arm of the student body, just as the literary societies were during the prior century. Somers (2003) wrote, "The Council was to manage all student social functions on campus, conduct class elections, make freshmen rules, [and] nominate dormitory proctors" (p. 706). The council was both an advocate and an authoritarian.

However, the reign of the class officers and class councils was short, from about 1875 to 1925. As the governing organization grew in size, it also became segmented, and class solidarity weakened (Harris & Dyer, 2006). Coates and Coates (1985) stated that "in practice it was found that the new class units did not have the supporting sanctions of old Society traditions" (p.143). Students were not as concerned with or tied to their classmates and to the actions of the members of the other classes (Coates & Coates, 1985). Otten described the evolutionary transition from society-bound affiliations of small-population colleges to the large-class-specific freedoms later when he claimed, "increasing size was partly responsible for the change . . . . Although it is difficult to

measure the specific effects of size, the rapid growth seems to have added to the breakdown of community solidarity” (1970, p. 79). Otten also contended,

Significantly, the undergraduate class structures, which had been central to paternalistic self-government, lost their power. It will be remembered that self-government and senior control were once interchangeable phrases, yet in the 1920s the senior class no longer had any distinctive identity and observers were continually bemoaning the apathy of the fourth-year man. (p. 86)

Students further associated themselves with their academic course of study rather than their class status as there was increasing emphasis on academic tracks and academic courses (Geiger, 2000; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). In addition, with the growth of extracurricular activities, students were less likely to identify themselves by their class status but were more likely to identify themselves by their club, Greek affiliation, team memberships, or residential status (Geiger, 2000; Horowitz, 1987; Levine, 1986; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). Otten wrote that due to the changes in higher education in the 1920s, “New groups emerged which no longer shared in the former rich commonality of interest and outlook . . . . Class traditions which had been crucial to senior control withered away . . . .” (p. 79). Moreover, “the student body itself became more sophisticated, more controversial, and more divided within itself” (p. 84). Coates and Coates (1985) concurred with Otten:

Students gradually realized from experience that though class organizations were all inclusive, the student body was greater than the sum of all its parts; that though the class might be the starting point they could also not be the stopping point of campus organizations. (p. 143)

Even though the influence of the class officers and class councils was not long-lived, the concept of a governing student council remained a fixture in student self-governance.



## Student Councils

As early literary societies gave way to class organizations, multiple student councils, some very specific, preceded the contemporary model of student self-governance we know today. Coates and Coates (1985) described this evolution at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

The Student Council thus represents the unbroken continuity of the student-governing tradition, and this continuity is reflected in the fact that for one hundred years after the opening of the University in 1796 the students in the name of the Societies were handling the same sort of disciplinary problems that the Student Council has been handling in the name of the University since the early 20th century . . . . (p. 155)

The student councils continued to evolve from their predecessors, as Falvey (1952) noted,

Thus the movement toward student participation in college administration apparent about 1800, became widespread. By the turn of the twentieth century there were examples of the student council, the graduate manager, the women's self-government association, the men's council, and the student court on hundreds of college campuses in the United States. (p. 42)

Along with the evolution of the governing structure of the student body, the role of the student council continued to expand beyond issues related to honor and discipline, adding managing the affairs of the student body. Albright (1931) maintained that during the early 20th century, through the

steady growth student government broadened to its present limits. Through the agency of the Student Council, [the student government] assumed full responsibility for the supervision of all campus affairs, and for the maintenance of good campus citizens. (pp. 13–14)

Otten (1970) asserted that along with the legislative influences of the student government at the University of California at Berkeley, its judicial authority also increased. He said,

Student judicial power grew alongside student managerial power. In the fall of 1903, the Executive Committee of the ASUC voted to set up the Student Affairs Committee. Through their demonstrated responsibility, trust was accumulated, and this new committee grew in power, stature, and perhaps a certain wisdom. (p. 60)

Albright (1931) described the evolution of the student council into an early version of student government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He stated,

The Council, gaining each year in prestige and jurisdiction, retained its form of organization until 1921 when two significant developments took place: the chairmanship of the group was taken away from the Senior Class president and placed in the hands of a newly elected officer, the President of the Student Body, elected by the whole campus, and the eighth member was chosen by the new Council from the Council of the previous year. (pp. 12–13)

Albright (1931) went on to claim,

As these changes in organization took place, there was a continuous broadening of jurisdiction, extension of powers, and a deepening of the concept of student self-government in the minds of students and faculty. About 1910 the Board of Trustees tacitly recognized the Student Government . . . . By 1915 the Council was handling all types of cases involving student discipline, and its successful administration was such as to earn the confidence of the entire University community. (p. 13)

The evolution to a more representative role of the student governing body highlights the transformation from being class-oriented council to a college-wide council (Somers, 2003). Albright (1931) asserted that at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “The year 1926 saw a further division of powers of student government when the class presidents yielded their seats on the Council to representatives of their respective classes elected to serve as councilmen” (p. 13). Coates and Coates (1985) contended that at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

The campus which outgrew Society organizations began to outgrow class organizations. . . . In 1926 the Student Council membership was dissociated from all class presidencies and given to specifically chosen class representatives. By 1938 the Student Council consisted of a president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer elected by the student body . . . . (p.153)

During the first quarter of the 20th century, the student body and student life became more diversified and sophisticated, and in response so did student self-government.

During this period, student government organizations expanded to include a variety of roles and sub-organizations. The student councils evolved into the format that more closely resembles state and national government (Coates & Coates, 1985; Eller, 1949; Somers, 2003). The student council developed into what is now known as an executive branch, while legislative and judicial branches were established to broaden representation of the student body and to oversee disciplinary and academic-integrity violations, respectively (Coates & Coates, 1985; Eller, 1949; Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006; Somers, 2003).

#### Executive Branch and Student Body President

The dominant figure of the executive branch was the president of the student body who was the chief student officer. The position of the president of the student body evolved along with the rise of student self-governance. In the early years of student self-governance the role of the student body president was largely ceremonial and had very little authority. Typically, the student governing council or student council was led by the president of the senior class who was the ex-officio president of the student body (Albright, 1931; Eller, 1949; Somers 2003). However, as the organization evolved, so did

the role and responsibility of the chief student officer. With the increased responsibility and importance of the student government organization in the early 20th century, the role of its president became more vital. Between 1920 and 1950 the position of the president of the student body evolved from that of the senior class president to a campus-wide elected position that represented the entire student body (Albright, 1931; Eller, 1949; Somers 2003). This transition can be seen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where the

Presidents of the senior class were the preeminent political leaders on campus until the creation of the office of the student body president in the early 1920s. In addition to their responsibilities as class officers, senior class presidents also served as chairmen of the newly created student council and Greater Council. (Coates & Coates, 1985, p. 180)

This change can also be seen at Union College in 1942, where “the Student Council passed a constitutional amendment that provided for direct student body election of the chairman of the Student Council/President of the Student Body” (Somers, 2003, p. 707).

Eller (1949) explained how the student body president became a key and essential position on campus in regard to student self-governance at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Eller showed that, “The Student Constitution places a much greater emphasis on the office of president of the student body. Now the student president is the sole person to whom the students or the administration may look for immediate responsibility” (p. 26). Eller went on to claim,

The student president is an ex-officio member of virtually all boards and committees on the campus. He sits regularly on every committee . . . . Specific among his powers are those to appoint the chairmen and members of all boards not otherwise provided for, to make all initial standing committee appointments, to appoint students to vacancies in the Student

Legislature, to administer and enforce the laws of the Student Legislature as well as to veto its acts within proper time, to call mass meetings and preside, to require reports of committee as he deems necessary, and to represent the student body in all its dealings with the students of other schools, colleges, or universities, in all dealings with the faculty, and in all dealings with the Board of Trustees. (p. 26)

One can find similar descriptions of the role and responsibilities of the student body president at the University of Michigan, Union College, Yale University, and the College of William and Mary, which signifies the importance of the evolving position of president of the student body (Albright, 1931; Coates & Coates, 1985; Eller, 1949; Godson et al., 1993; Kelley, 1974; Somers, 2003; Wills, 2003). Freidson (1955) provided an excellent portrayal of the student body president, which has not changed much over the past century. He wrote,

First, the character of the student body president seems to be important to the prestige of the student government. Faculty, administration, and student leaders all agree that it is important to them as well as the to the student body. . . . He seems to have a delicate path to walk—on the one hand he must seem ‘reasonable’ and pleasant to the administration (and, I suspect from my own experience, be able to cultivate an appearance of earnest ingenuousness), while on the other hand he must not be seen to the students to be a tool of the administration.  
(p. 38)

Even though the position of president continued to evolve over the next century, it continues to play an active role in student self-governance on college and university campuses. While each student body president leaves their mark on their institution, every one, good or bad, upholds a legacy that stretches back to the first organized students and their dream of self-governance.

### Legislative Branch

As mentioned previously, along with the evolution of the student council into an executive branch in the early 20th century, came the establishment of the legislative branch of student self-governance. This was the case at the University of Connecticut: “In the early 1900’s, the entire student body made up the Students’ Organization, the legislative branch of government, while the Student Council was the executive branch” (University of Connecticut, N.D., p. 1). This can also be seen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1938 and Reinhardt College in 1957 (Albright, 1931; Coates & Coates, 1985; Eller, 1949, Yates, 1969). In all of these institutions, the role of the legislative branch was to draft a written constitution and by-laws, as well as to be the avenue for various student constituencies, including class officers and clubs and organizations, to voice their opinions and advocate for their needs (Albright, 1931; Coates & Coates, 1985; Eller, 1949; Godson et al., 1993; Miller & Nadler, 2006). The role and responsibilities of the legislative branch have not changed over the last century—that role is still to represent and advocate for the diverse needs of all students.

### Judicial Branch

Along with the formation of the legislative branch came the formalization of a judicial branch. Student judicial systems have been in existence since the 18th century. The responsibility for overseeing the judicial process in regard to honor and disciplinary issues, however, originally fell to literary societies, then on class councils, and then on student council (Albright, 1931; Coates & Coates, 1985; Eller, 1949; Godson et al., 1993; Harrison & Dyer, 2006; Kelley, 1974; Otten, 1970; Somers, 2003). In addition, Rudolph

(1990) and Harris and Dyer (2006) argue that during the 19th century there was a trend on college and university campuses to shift the disciplinary responsibility from the faculty to the students. However, as higher education institutions became more complex, so too did the student governing body. There then arose the need to both formalize the process and distinguish between the organization that drafts the bylaws and policies that govern the student body and the body that enforces and adjudicates the disciplinary and honor cases. Eller (1949) described the need to establishment the judicial branch at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the early 20th century,

The Student Constitution greatly changed the form of student government and opened up several new areas of student responsibility. Principal among the changes was the arrangement of the judiciary. In contrast to the old Student Council, which heard Honor and Campus Code cases under the direction of the president of the student body and legislated when it chose, there was a new and rather complicated judiciary. (p. 23)

The establishment of a formal judicial branch can also be seen at the University of California at Berkeley. Otten (1970) indicated,

Student judicial power grew alongside student managerial power. In the fall of 1903, the Executive Committee of the ASUC voted to set up the Student Affairs Committee. Through their demonstrated responsibility, trust was accumulated, and this new committee grew in power, stature, and perhaps a certain wisdom. (p. 60)

Throughout the 20th century, judicial branches of student self-governance organizations continued to evolve and adapt to the ever-changing higher education environment. Harris and Dyer (2006) argued,

Student governance on campus judicial affairs can have a positive impact on students and the institution as a whole. . . . Student controlled judicial systems are not without their challenges for administration and faculty alike. Yet the benefits argue for their continued support and existence. (p. 39)

Harris and Dyer also contended that “from its historical roots in the literary and debate societies, student involvement in judicial governance has played a key role in the development of American higher education and countless individual students” (p. 41). As such, judicial councils are very much a part of college and university campuses in the 21st century.

#### Since the Beginning of the 20th Century

By the middle of the 20th century, student self-governance organizations had evolved into the model similar to that of the national system of governance, carrying executive, judicial, and legislative branches. Across the country student governance on colleges campuses shared similar roles and responsibilities from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the new millennium. This can be seen as Laosebikan-Buggs (2006) described the common function of student government organizations in the 21st century. He claimed,

Although some functions of student government vary from institution to institution, there are some student government functions that are universal: serves as the official voice of the students to the administration (representation); allows students to participate in the decision-making processes of university governance (voice); ethical and responsible collection and dissemination of student fees; and recognition of student organization as well as the coordination of the student activities of clubs and organizations on campus (advocacy). (p. 3)

Cohen (1998) also provided a brief description of the evolution of student self-governance in higher education from the 1940s onward:

By . . . [the 1940s] most institutions had a student government made up of an executive council, a lawmaking body with elected representatives, and a student court to adjudicate violations of regulations. (pp. 247–248)



Cohen further stated that student self-governance since the second half of the twentieth century has gone beyond supervising and managing campus life and has sought to gain entry into other areas of colleges and universities including academic and administrative affairs. He claimed that,

Subsequently, the type of student participation in institutional governance expanded. One of the goals of the student activism of the 1960s had been to gain a greater voice in academic management. Accordingly, students gained seats on institutional governing boards and on college committees where they could discuss admissions policies and faculty and administrative appointments. (p. 248)

Schlesinger and Baldrige (1982) continued this thread:

By the mid-1970s, which marked the end of student activism, student participation in faculty and administration decision-making bodies had become generally accepted throughout the nation. For the first time, student government was not thought of as merely a developmental student activity. Rather, it became recognized as a political activity, typical of other types of political interest stimulated by motives and behaviors of groups working to achieve access, recognition, and efficacy in matters of policy formation and governance. (p. 9)

Throughout the past three centuries, student self-governance has continued to make advancements and expand its realms of influence beyond those mere extracurricular interests; student government organizations participate in decisions-making processes not only in the student affairs, but also academic and administrative affairs of their respective colleges and universities (Crane, 1969).

The surge of interest in student self-governance on college campuses across the nation in the early 20th century manifested a number of national coalitions and associations. These were established to advocate for and study the impact of self-

governance on college students and on colleges. The National Self-Government Committee, Inc. was established in the 1920s; the National Student Federation of the United States of America was created in 1926; and the National Student Association was founded in the late 1940s (Boren, 2001; Falvey, 1952; Horowitz & Friedland, 1970; Klopff, 1960). Each of these organizations sought to bring together student government organizations on college campuses so that they could work in concert to pool their resources. The above associations held annual conferences, conducted research, and published articles and pamphlets in an effort to enhance student governance locally and nationally (Falvey, 1952; Klopff, 1960). Falvey (1952) described the effect these national student government associations had on higher education:

It is impossible to overestimate the influence to the National Self-Government Committee, Inc . . . on the development of student participation in college administration in this country. In its three decades of existence this group published and reprinted numerous articles and pamphlets and at least one book. Members of the committee spoke before student groups and assemblies of educators whenever the opportunity was offered . . . . Although the primary concern of the National Self-Government Committee was the education for citizenship, it gave encouragement and recognition to student participation as an indispensable means to that end. (p. 44)

These groups promoted student self-governance as positive concept and campaigned on a national scale for the needs of students. Each of these national associations is the forerunner to the American Student Government Association (ASGA), which was founded in 2003 (American Student Government Association, 2006). As of November 2007, over 600 student governance organizations from 49 states have become member of ASGA. These national associations supported the principle of student self-governance

and promoted it by providing an effective means for networking and advocating for an effective, influential, and autonomous student governance organization on all colleges and universities (American Student Government Association, 2006). The prolonged existence of associations on a national scale supporting student self-governance indicates its importance in higher education in the United States.

However, it has not all been rosy for student government on college campuses since the mid-19th century. Following World War II, a wave of student apathy and disinterest arose at higher education institutions across the country. That being said, apathy did not originate after World War II, but has plagued student self-governance since its inception (Coates & Coates 1985; Horowitz, 1987; Otten, 1970; Rudolph, 1990). Otten discusses the rise of apathy following World War II,

Yet for all their basic political noninvolvement, paradoxically student concern for the larger world increased in the 1920s, and the change had enormous consequences on campus. As students began to mirror the hostilities and conflicts of the outer world, the student body itself became more sophisticated, more controversial, and more divided within itself. (1970, p. 84)

Otten further claimed that the lack of interest in student self-governance at the University of California at Berkeley increased during the middle 20th century. He wrote,

Although it is impossible to measure such a phenomenon, a researcher in the period gets the distinct impression that student boredom reached unprecedented depths in the mid-1950s. In the nineteenth century collegiate activities seemed important to students. In the early twentieth, Wheeler's self-government provided a sense of excitement and responsibility. In the 1920s, students were busy flaunting nineteenth century Protestant morality. The 1930s had their politics. But, the 1950s developed only a mild brand of social criticism prefaced with nervous affirmations of personal loyalty and ritualistic disclaimers that things were worse in Russia. (pp. 136–137)

This upsurge of indifference by the student body can also be seen at Union College.

Somers (2003) contended, “By 1955, Study Body meetings were held only in connection with elections. In the spring of 1961, a critic goaded the Student Council into complying with the constitutional requirement to call a Student Body meeting once a term, . . . but only thirty-six students attended” (p. 705). Somers went on to argue,

Fifteen years later, a Student Body meeting [at Union College] called to amend the constitution drew only forty students (despite the promise of free beer); it was probably the last attempt to hold a Student Body meeting for governmental purposes. Henceforth, voting on matters requiring student body approval would be by ballot at one or more polling places, sometimes over a period of days. (p. 705)

Moreover, Somers wrote that by early 1970s, there was so little interest in student government that “When a new constitution replacing the Student Senate with the Student Steering Committee was passed . . . the change was of so little general interest that the *Concordiensis* did not mention it” (2003, p. 708). Student apathy regarding student self-governance in the 1970s can also be seen at the University of Michigan. Peckham (1994) asserted,

Student interest in running the University had so declined that it was often difficult to fill the student slots on committees and boards their recent predecessors had worked so hard to infiltrate. By becoming part of the system, the mystery had been taken out of it. (p. 323)

Moffatt (2000) concurred: “Student government . . . was a joke in the opinion of most students. The undergraduates voted for its representatives in the tiniest of turnouts” (p.

39). Researchers and authors alike contended that the waive of disinterest arose from students being more concerned with off-campus issues including the war in Vietnam and

the Civil Rights Movement in addition to the fact that more students were living off-campus and holding full- or part-time employment positions (Boyer, 1987; Caple, 1998; Cohen, 1998; Deconde, 1971; Freidson, 1955; Geiger, 2000; Godson et al., 1993; Handlin & Handlin, 1970; Harris & Dyer, 2006; Kelley, 1974; Otten, 1970; Peckham, 1994; Rudolph 1990; Somers, 2003). Furthermore, due to the tumultuous times in the 1960s and 1970s, college administrations were seen as heavy handed and overly controlling, so it is no surprise that students saw their role in the governance in their institutions as a charade. Harris and Dyer (2006) contended, “With the restraint of its powers by the increasing prominent role of the administration, student governments often came to be viewed as mostly irrelevant in campus governing matters” (p. 35). Moffatt (2000) claimed,

Student leaders must be lackeys of the administration, the students imagined. Even in they were not, they had no chance of accomplishing anything against the weight of deanly bureaucratic power. The only reason to become a student leader was to get to know some dean for reasons of your own, many students assumed. (p. 39)

Aronowitz (2000) contended,

In the 1960s and 1970s, student protests led to a new, incipient partnership of students, faculty and sometimes administrators in university governance. Since the late 1970s, student participation in the various committees of faculty and institutional decision making has become token at best. These relationships should be renewed; without a voice in the life of the university the college students become akin to alienated labor. (p. 165)

Throughout the 20th century, student self-governance on college and university campuses has gone through intermittent levels of heightened and waning support from students. This does not detract, however, from the important and vital role these organizations

play in higher education in the United States, as student governments evolve and voice student concerns.

### Inclusion of Underrepresented Groups

Though student self-governance had been in existence since the early years of higher education, inclusion in higher education and student self-governance was not available to all enrolled students. There were two underrepresented groups in higher education until the late 20th century: women and minorities. From the early colonial years until the beginning of the 20th century, women and minority students were outsiders and did not play an active role on college and university campuses, especially student self-governance, due to sexism and racism. Horowitz (1987) defines outsiders as those who “. . . did not partake in a distinctive collegiate culture.” They were excluded by cultural, social, and professional norms from having access to the curricular and extracurricular opportunities their White male protestant counterparts enjoyed (p. 62). Horowitz described the entrance of women and minorities, as well as other underrepresented groups into higher education,

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century other outsiders took the pastors' places: ambitious youth from all over rural America; the first college women; immigrants, especially Jews; blacks; veterans after World War II; commuters; and, beginning in the 1960s, women continuing their education. (p. 14)

Gordon (1990) affirmed this by stating, “The small number of Jewish, Catholic, and black women in higher education did not increase appreciably until the 1920s” (p. 6). It was not until the late 19th and early 20th century, and in some cases not until the *late* 20th century at certain colleges and universities, that these underrepresented groups

began to break the restrictions of cultural and institutional norms and began to participate in student governance as equals. The entrance of both women and minorities into student self-governance on college campuses, and the role that these groups currently play on college campuses in student governance, follows.

### Women

During the formative years of higher education in the United States, women were not sought out as students due to cultural mores and beliefs regarding their academic abilities. From the 17th to the 19th century, the common perception of women was that they were intellectually unable to handle college-level education. Rudolph (1990) wrote, “The colonial view of woman was simply that she was intellectually inferior—incapable, merely by reason of being a woman, of great thoughts. Her faculties were not worthy of training. Her place was in the home . . .” (p. 308). Rudolph went on to write,

In the common schools and in the academies, and in a number of schools founded especially for girls, the American female was recognized as capable of being educated—up to a point. College was the point at which most Americans resisted, for before the Civil War the college was not considered a very appropriate place even for most American men. (1990, pp. 309–310)

Moreover, it was felt during this period that advanced education for women would hinder or distract women from their primary cultural roles as wives and mothers (Caple, 1998; Cohen, 1998; Frankfort, 1977; Horowitz, 1987; Peckham, 1994). Farnham (1994) described the notion of separate spheres for men and women in her work *The Education of the Southern Belle*. She argued,

Reinforcing republican motherhood by the second quarter of the nineteenth century was the ideology of separate spheres, also known as the cult of

domesticity and the cult of womanhood. . . . focus[ed] on the bipolar split between public and private, between the world and the household. (p. 16)

The Victorian notion of separate spheres dominated this period; the proper place for a woman was in the home, while the man's place was outside the home (Horowitz, 1987).

The cultural role for women was to focus attention on home and for men to be in the world working. Given this expectation, it was considered superfluous for women to seek higher education beyond primary and academy studies. In addition, the mores of the time deemed it unfeminine to be perceived as "educated." Frankfort (1977) claimed that the perception of educated women was "as asexual and physically grotesque. These first college women were acutely aware that many Americans expected them in 'hoofs and horns'" (p. 86). Frankfort asserted that it was feared that educated women would experience the "loss of physical as well as behavior femininity" (1977, p. 87). This perception of women can be seen at Union College. Somers (2003) contended,

As Union College was founded in an era when higher education for women was unknown, the drafters of its charter did not think it necessary to specifically exclude women. American society of the 1790s assumed that women either were not intelligent enough to profit from higher education, or if capable, would be spoiled by the experience of study for their essential role as wives and mothers. (p. 795)

As such, women were for the most part excluded from higher education until the latter half of the 19th century. From the 17th century to the start of the 19th, those women privileged or wealthy enough to gain access to education beyond the primary level did so through private tutors, institutes, and seminaries (Frankfort, 1977; Nash, 2000; Rudolph, 1990). For the most part, these female institutions, although some were collegiate in nature, offered those who enrolled an "ornamental education in addition to academics"



(Nash, 2000, p.170). Nash further contended that “Less-affluent students . . . participated in arrangements in which they performed all of the household labors in addition to their academic work, thereby demonstrating that learning Virgil does not make them unfit for the kitchen” (p. 170). About the 19th century Cohen (1998) asserted,

The early colleges for women developed curriculum considered appropriate for their charges. On the one hand, they followed the men’s colleges in providing instruction in humanities, sciences, and social science. On the other, they elevated to the status of collegiate studies and professional areas that were considered traditionally peculiar to women. Home economics and social work became prominent, along with music and art, child care, and teaching in elementary schools. (pp. 146–137)

It was not until the latter half of the 19th century that the institutions enrolling women offered academically rigorous curriculum for women students (Cohen, 1998; Rudolph, 1990). However, Gordon (1990) asserted that even those “colleges and universities did not enthusiastically open their doors” (p. 21). Somers (2003) described the emergence of women in higher education:

In 1837 the first stirrings of the women’s rights movement brought the first experiment with collegiate coeducation, at Oberlin; the same year saw the beginning of teaching at Mount Holyoke. After the mid-century first-class private women’s colleges like Vassar (1865), Wellesley (1870), Smith (1871) and Bryn Mawr (1880) began to be founded. Women could also enroll at many of the land grant colleges established under the Morrill Act (1862); these were often coeducation from the outset because duplicating facilities for men and women was judged too expensive. (Somers 2003, p. 795)

However, the enrollment of women at higher education institutions did not truly take off until the 20th century (Palmieri, 1995). Frankfort (1977) claimed that, “in the early 20th century, coeducation was flourishing, women outnumbered men in some institutions and threatened to do so in others” (p. 87). An example of the enrollment trends of women at

colleges and universities can be seen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as Coates and Coates (1985) argued that

The number of women students today is a far cry, too, from that early band of five in 1897. From 25 in 1917 the number has steady grown to 120 by 1925; 247 by 1932; 827 by 1941; 1,100 in 1946, the first time there were as many as 1,000; 1,800 by 1960; 4,478 by 1967; and 11,075 by 1979. The total number of women registered for the fall term of 1984 was 12,087; of these 8,594 were undergraduates . . . . The total number of men registered for the same term was 9,525. (Coates & Coates, 1985, p. 254)

It can be seen by those enrollment numbers that by the early 20th century, the presence of women on college campus was permanent. “The number of female students rose steadily throughout this period, until, by 1920, they constituted 47.3 percent of American undergraduates; over 90 percent attended coeducational schools” (Gordon, 1990, p. 43). Gordon contended that during this period, “Women’s culture influenced student life, and women’s campus communities flourished” (p. 43). By the 20th century, it was seen as more socially acceptable for women to attend higher education institutions (Frankfort, 1977). Horowitz described the first college women as those who were seeking to throw off the cultural chains of the time. She claimed that, “the first college women came with ambitions and determined independence. They had defied feminine conventions to take their minds and aspirations seriously. They ventured to college to become teachers or doctors or scholars” (p. 67). The pioneering women of the later 19th century sought to step outside Victorian notions of femininity and to become actively engaged in the world. The number of women enrolling in colleges and universities soared.

However, the increasing presence of women on college campus in the early 20th century is not an indication that women shared an equal or common experience either

academically or socially with male counterparts (Frankfort, 1977; Gordon, 1990; Handlin & Handlin, 1970; Horowitz, 1984; Horowitz, 1987; Nidiffer, 2000; Rudolph, 1990; Somers, 2003). College women of this era were considered outsiders: “As women entered coeducational and all-female institutions of higher education in the nineteenth century, distinctive female variants emerged” (Horowitz, 1987, p. 11). Handlin and Handlin (1970) claimed that from the 1870s to 1930s, “young ladies could not be full and equal participants in coeducational activities or studies and were generally shunted to secondary roles even in literary and cultural organizations” (p. 65). Moreover, women during this period on college campuses were unwanted by their male counterparts (Bishop; 1962; Frankfort, 1977). Horowitz (1987) wrote,

Where they [women] penetrated into formerly male preserves, such as the University of Michigan and Cornell, they were as unwelcome as any uninvited guests. College men . . . rejected them as outsiders . . . . At Cornell the men barred the women from campus organizations and excluded them from social events . . . . Those college women who were determined to have their own college life created auxiliary extracurricular activities . . . but until the mid-twentieth century these received secondary status. (pp. 67–68)

Horowitz went on to argue,

At many places, an obstacle emerged to the creation of college life among women. On some coeducation campuses a faction of male students were seeking to create traditional male college life. As they organized fraternities . . . sports, and campus activities, they pretended that only men attended the university. They pushed women students aside, barring them from any place they might serve as troubling reminders that Cornell was not Yale. What this meant was that women were kept out of key activities on campus: student government, the newspaper, honor societies, athletics. In response the women created female equivalents, but these lacked the status of the dominate male groups. (1987, p. 202)

Gordon (1990) contended that, “hostility, ridicule, and neglect characterized the experiences of pioneering women students at Michigan, Wisconsin and Cornell” (p. 22).

Gordon also described the unenthusiastic reception female college students received at Rochester in the early 20th century. She wrote,

Male students at Rochester were equally unwelcoming, banging their feet loudly when a woman entered the classroom or slamming doors in her face. They sneered openly and formed crowds in front of campus buildings, forcing women to elbow their way through to get to their classes. (p. 46)

It is easy to see that when the first female students were admitted to coeducational colleges and universities in the second half of the 18th century, they found themselves unwanted and unwelcome; but in little more than a half century, women students left an undeniable mark on coeducational higher education and on college life in particular.

Conversely, women who enrolled at women’s colleges had different experiences from those at coeducational institutions. Without the shadow of the male college student hanging over them, female college students attending single-sex institutions thrived.

Horowitz stated, “When they entered an all-female world in the women’s colleges, they began quite early to develop a college life with many parallels to that of their brothers”

(1987, pp. 67–68). Gordon (1990) affirmed Horowitz’s argument,

. . . [Men] continued to compete with each other and with the students from other colleges in class events, school elections, debates, and athletics. But because competitiveness, and its accompanying assertiveness, belonged to the world of men, coeducated women competed only occasionally, for offices in their own organizations or in intramural athletics. At women’s colleges, however, competition became an important focus of campus life. Since the Vassar community believed its graduates would be active in the public sphere, competitiveness, normally thought of as a manly attribute, played an important role in student

activities. The absence of male students made it possible for women to incorporate aspects of manliness, such as competition, into their social education. (p. 143)

Women who attended women's colleges competed in athletics, were officers in campus organizations, and were engaged in self-governance during the late 19th and early 20th century, which was not generally the case for women enrolled at coeducation institutions (Horowitz, 1985; Horowitz, 1987). By the early 20th century, the number of women's colleges had grown to over 100, and quite a few of them had recognized student self-governments. Nidiffer (2000) argued that student government associations for women,

originated in the women's colleges . . . . In fact, during the first decade of the 20th century, self-government groups became increasingly common on coeducational campuses, more likely than not at the instigation of deans of women who had experience with them from their own undergraduate days at women's colleges. Lucy Sprague on Berkeley's campus was convinced of their efficacy in building leadership skills and the urgent need for them on coeducational campuses. (p. 99)

Falvey (1952) contended that a report of the Department of Education conducted by Bowden and Clarke in 1910 indicated that student government organizations existed at the following institutions: "Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Elmira, Goucher, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Randolph-Macon, Rockford, Simmons, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, and Wells" (1930, p. 44). In her *In Adamless Eden*, Palmieri (1995) illustrated how the female students established their own student government,

. . . the advent of student government at Bryn Mawr made Wellesley students conscious of their own lack of authority over nonacademic affairs. Students soon began to criticize the faculty for their omnipotent control of student conduct . . . . In 1901 the trustees and faculty of Wellesley College granted students self-government, thereby passing on students responsibility for their conduct . . . . The authorities of the college pledged to support the student association and in turn asked that the

student government cooperate with the president and faculty to maintain a high standard of scholarship and social life. (pp. 209–210)

Without a doubt, women who attended single-sex institutions had a distinct advantage over their coeducation counterparts who had to compete directly with the male college students. Horowitz (1987) wrote,

Women at Vassar differed from women at Cornell, not in their backgrounds or interests, but in the scale and opportunities the women's colleges offered . . . . At Vassar and at other Northern women's colleges, female undergraduates had a chance to define themselves on their own terms. They quickly developed a collective culture that they, too, called college life. (p. 195)

Women at single-sex colleges in the late 19th and early 20th century were free to establish a curricular and extracurricular college life similar to that of their male counterparts. In addition, similar to their male counterparts, every woman at both single sex and coeducational institutions were “regarded as a member of the [women's] SGA” and was expected to adhere to its policies and procedures (Nidiffer, 2000, p.99).

Women who attended single-sex institutions had more freedom and opportunity to explore self-governance in the early 20th century, as they were true college insiders within their respective institutions. Women who enrolled at coeducational institutions during the same period, however, were considered outsiders and had to struggle to integrate themselves into the campus life and culture (Gordon, 1990; Horowitz, 1984; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1990). In most cases, due to their outsider status female students at coeducational colleges and universities were forced to create their own campus life and organizations, which ran in parallel to those of their male counterparts (Gordon 1990). This can be seen as Gordon (1990) contended, “Women students had no

other option than a separate social and extracurricular life; clearly male students would not integrate their organizations and activities” (p. 69). Gordon continued that “women would have no social life at coeducational universities unless they created their own” (1990, p. 93). Consequently, female college students in the late 19th and early 20th century began to establish their own literary societies, clubs, and even their own student government organizations, which operated independently and in parallel to those operated by male college students. Horowitz (1987) argued, “In coeducational institutions the female version of the outsider existed from the beginning, but the female equivalent of the college man began to emerge only in the 1890s” (p. 201). Eller (1949) compared the Women’s Council at the University of Chapel Hill to the Men’s Council in the early 20th century:

The Women’s Council is composed of three seniors, three juniors, one graduate student, two women at large, and one hold-over member. . . . Jurisdiction of the Women’s Council is approximately the same for women students as the Men’s Council is for men students, and its procedures virtually identical. The Women’s Council, of course does not hear nearly so many cases as does the Men’s Council, there being only about 900 women students as compared to over 6,500 men students.  
(p. 39)

Another example of a parallel for women can be seen where Gordon (1990) described how the women at the University of California established a student government organization for women. She wrote,

They began by forming the Associated Women Students (AWS) in 1894. In 1887 men organized an all-campus student government, the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC, still in existence today), but women although members, felt that ASUC did not meet their needs.  
(p. 60)

Gordon went on to illustrate how women's student government at the University of California vied for power, influence, and control against the campus-wide student government that was dominated by men. She further said,

ASUC . . . had no women officers and put few resources into women's activities. Many women students resented the situation but were divided as to a solution. . . . Some women . . . argued that both sexes should feel their 'first loyalty and interest in the large association [ASUC].' . . . Others felt that total separation benefited women. They wanted to sever all relations with ASUC and demand that the group change its name to Associated Men Students of the University of California to reflect its activities more accurately. (1990, p. 78)

Ada Louise Comstock, who was Dean of Women at the University of Minnesota from 1906 to 1912, helped to establish a women's student government association to help operate Shevlin Hall, a women's building, as she felt that it was an ideal mechanism to learn responsibility and develop leadership skills (Nidiffer, 2000). This parallel self-government structure for men and women could also be seen at the University of Connecticut where,

In the early 1900s, the entire student body made up the Students' Organization, the legislative branch of government, while the Student Council was the executive branch. The council and the co-existent Women's Student Government Association, both elected bodies, had some regulatory and disciplinary powers. (University of Connecticut, N.D., p. 1)

Moreover, Falvey (1952) asserted that by 1910,

twelve coeducational colleges were reported as having some form of self-government among women: Mills College (California), Trinity College (Washington, D.C.), Newcomb Memorial College (New Orleans), Adelphi, Allegheny, Brown, Cornell, Lee Land Stanford, Rochester, Swarthmore, Syracuse, and Tufts. (p. 44)



Other institutions with women's self-governance organizations operating in a parallel with men's during the first half of the 20th century were the College of William and Mary, Maryville College, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Connecticut (Falvey, 1952; Godson et al., 1993; Sansing, 1999; University of Connecticut, N.D). Gordon (1990) contended that in some cases women overtly contested and took control over campus governance from their male counterparts. She said, "During the 1910s, as the off-campus movement for women's rights gathered momentum, culminating in the federal suffrage amendment in 1920, women college students on some campuses openly challenged men's right to shape and dominate campus activity" (p. 42). Gordon further argued that

women made a place for themselves on campus, forming a separate and distinctive community. United in their own organizations, "the women of the university" maintained an uneasy, unequal, and frequently discussed balance of power with male students. Ultimately, women students used their separate power base to challenge men for control of the Berkeley campus and to demand a redefinition of gender roles. (1990, p. 53)

Moreover, Nidiffer (2000) claimed, "The Student-Government Associations (SGAS) were a significant component of the separate women's culture because they encouraged independent political activity among students" (p.137).

Similar to the evolution of the male-dominated student governance organizations, women's self-governance organizations developed and changed during the 20th century. Nidiffer (2000) asserted that women's student government associations quickly expanded their scope beyond merely regulating the women's hall to considering "all aspects of campus-conduct policy potentially under its purview" (p. 99). As higher education

became more complex, and as society advanced, so did women's self-governance. Coates and Coates (1985) provided an example of this progression found at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They wrote,

[Women's] first recorded formal organization after their admission was the Women's University Club, established in September 1906, 'for the purpose of establishing cordial relations between women students [and male students], . . . promoting their interests, and bringing active members into touch with alumnae. . . . By 1921 an Honor Committee, corresponding to the Men's Student Council, had been elected, a self help bureau established, and a housing organization effected. . . . In 1923 the Women's Association was renamed the Women's Student Government Association, and all women students became members on registration. In 1941 this Association was reorganized into three elected governing groups – the Honor Council, the Interdormitory Council, and the Senate – and renamed the Women's' Government Association. (Coates & Coates, 1985, pp. 251–252)

Gordon (1995) offers an additional example of how women's self-governance evolved at the University of California. She stated,

Slow to begin, AWS had three committees, whose functions demonstrated the limited nature of women's campus life: a Ladies Room Committee, a Lunchroom Committee, and a Lost and Found Committee. Eventually, AWS sponsored and supervised separate women's clubs—the Sports and Pastimes Association, all-female debating societies, women's drama and music groups, the YWCA—and selected candidates for the women's editorships on campus publications. . . . Pleased with President Wheeler's idea of senior control and student self-government, AWS found ways for women to manage their own relations with the university. . . . (p.60)

Godson et al. (1993) provide a further example of how women's self-governance evolved during the first half of the 20th century at the College of William and Mary. They wrote,

The constitution of the Women's Student Government Organization for 1921-22 provided for only one council, which included among its many duties dealing with infringements of the rules and dishonorable conduct. This lasted until 1925-26, when the constitution was changed to provide for both a Judicial and an Honor Council. (p. 603)

Godson et al. went on to illustrate the evolution of the Women's Student Government Organization through its subsequent name changes. They contended,

The name of the organization varied. The 1919 *Catalogue* referred to the Women's Self-Governance Association. This became the Women's Student Government Organization in 1921 and a few years later the Women's Student Government Association. In the 1930s it was named the Women Student's Co-operative Government Association. (p.726)

As one can see, the evolution of women's self-governance imitates or mimics the growth and development of men's self-governance discussed earlier.

The changing societal structures and norms, as well as growing complexity and diversity of higher education during the early 20th century, however, brought the demise of separate, independent women's government. Beginning in the 1940s, women entered the once-closed-off academic and social spheres of college men. The growing diversity and complexity of college life, the impact of World War II, and the Civil Rights movement (Caple, 1998, Coates & Coats, 1985; Eller, 1949; Falvey, 1952; Godson et al., 1993; Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph 1990; University of Connecticut, N.D.) all worked to free-up women's access. Sansing (1999) described the impact that World War II had on one college's women and their involvement in student governance. She wrote,

As male enrollment declined during the war years, Ole Miss coeds assumed leadership roles in many campus activities. In the spring of 1943, Maralyn Howell Bullion, a junior from Oxford and a member of the Ole Miss Hall of Fame, became the first woman student elected president of the Associated Student Body. (p. 257)

The inclusion of women in all aspects of campus life, and particularly in self-governance, made the parallel women's organizations unnecessary. By the 1970s virtually every

independent women's student government organizations was gone. This can be seen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Coates and Coates (1985) described how the "Women's government was again reorganized in 1946, and in recent years there has been unification of the governing groups of the campus under organizations including men and women" (p. 252). Another example of the merging of these men's and women's organizations can be seen at Carleton College in the early 1950s: "The Carleton Student Association has revised its constitution to provide for a 'house of representatives' which will represent both men and women students on a proportional basis" (Falvey, 1952, p. 133). The University of Connecticut also marked the merger of men's and women's governing groups: "during World War II, . . . their [women's] participation became permanent following that war's end in 1945" (University of Connecticut, N.D., p. 2). In Ann Arbor, the students and administration at Michigan worked to integrate women on campus academically, athletically, and socially. Peckham (1994) found that, "all-male bastions began to fall throughout the University. In 1972, women students became eligible for membership in the Michigan Union on the same basis as men students" (1994, p. 313). Since women were gaining an equal footing on college campuses, there was no longer a need for separate and distinct women's student government organizations.

Even though women's governance organizations dwindled on college campuses after the 1950s, women's involvement in self-governance in the academy has continued to evolve. Falvey (1952) and Horowitz (1987) are correct that the participation of women in self-governance has played an important role in enhancing the educational experience

of women and the evolution of student governance in higher education. Due to their involvement in self-governance, women were allowed to break away from traditional cultural mores and the notion of separate spheres. The experiences acquired provided women with tools they would need as they became active and engaged citizens upon their graduation. Furthermore, by establishing and maintaining separate student self-governance organizations, women helped to both sustain and expand the student self-governance movement.

### Minorities

Similar to the experience of women, minorities, especially African Americans, have had delayed and limited access to higher education in the United States. As a result, their involvement in student governance on college and university campus has also been constrained. Like women, minorities were considered outsiders in higher education (Horowitz, 1987). Akin to their female counterparts, the cultural practices concerning the education of minorities prior to the 20th century demanded that they be considered limited intellectually, and their (lack of) success in higher education followed that formation. Moreover, reminiscent of the Victorian notions facing women, college education was perceived to be inappropriate or unnecessary for minorities, as it would be outside of their cultural and vocational sphere of manual and menial labor. One would not need a college education to work on a farm or in a factory. From 17th century through the late 19th century, then, minorities were largely excluded from virtually all forms of formal education, and higher education in particular (Handlin & Handlin, 1970; Horowitz, 1987; Levine, 1986; Ogren, 2005). Cohen (1998) contended,

Prior to the Civil War, scarcely two dozen African Americans had graduated from colleges in the United States, despite the fact that freemen numbered close to one-quarter of a million in 1825 and nearly half a million by the time the Civil War started. Few colleges in the North or South would consider enrolling them. (p.146)

It was not until the conclusion of the Civil War that colleges and universities began enrolling African American students, but even then it was “with severe limitations” (Ogren, 2005, p. 67). Horowitz (1987) described minority college students as being unseen during this period. She claimed that,

College men gained contact with young men of other regions, but they did not become tolerant of those from other ethnic groups, for, although there were a few Jews, Catholics, and Negroes in college, they remained essentially invisible in the nineteenth century. (Horowitz, 1987 p. 51)

Levine (1986) described how when given the option of admitting African American students, “the student council at Antioch, a leading progressive school, voted in 1925 that it was ‘a matter of expediency’ not to admit a well-qualified black that year,” which revealed how ingrained the cultural racism was at the time (Levine, 1986, p. 159). When minorities gained access to higher education in the late 19th century, they found that their access was segregated from the white population. This separation was due to cultural mores and Jim Crow laws and Black Codes of that period (Caple 1998; Horowitz, 1987).

Handlin and Handlin (1970) wrote,

The establishment of segregation by law extinguished any expectation that the [segregation] situation would change for the better. And after the turn of the century, the spread of racist doctrines Northward actually lessened the prospects of Negroes for higher education. The result was the development of a system of separate colleges, some private, others created by the state in order to preserve the lily-white character of existing institutions. (p. 65)

Caple (1998) described the entrance of black students in the South to higher education through private colleges and universities during the late 19th and early 20th century.

Caple asserted,

From the Reconstruction Era through the Great Depression, black higher education in the South existed essentially through a system of private liberal arts colleges. . . . As late as World War I, almost all black college students in the southern states were enrolled in privately owned colleges. (pp. 14–15)

For the most part, these private institutions were established by churches and philanthropic organizations after the Civil War. Cohen (1998) claimed,

Over fifty historically black, private, four-year colleges were set up. A few . . . became prominent, but several others remained unaccredited well into the middle of the twentieth century. Publicly supported colleges for African Americans received a major boost in 1890 when a second Morrill Act was passed. (pp. 110–111)

Regardless of colleges' private or public status, segregation for blacks and exclusion of other minorities was the accepted norm of the time across the country, especially in the South. Nevertheless, other minorities, such as Jews and Asians, were admitted to public institutions in northern as well as the southern states during the early 20th century, but they were enrolled in a limited number, based on quotas (Horowitz, 1987; Levine, 1986; Ogren, 2005). Conversely, blatant racism found in the southern states obviated the need for a similar quota system to prohibit students of African descent from enrolling at colleges and universities, public or private. Ogren (2005) argued, "In the South, segregation restricted African Americans to black-only institutions" (p. 67).

Consequently, even though the number of black students enrolling in higher education was on the rise, blacks were for the most part relegated to attending black colleges and

universities until the middle of the 19th century. Levine (1986) contended, “While the number of students at black colleges and universities leaped by six times, from 2,132 in 1917 to 13,580 in 1927, the number of black students at predominantly white colleges increased barely at all” (p. 158). The experience of minorities attempting to enroll at single-sex institutions also followed the cultural norms of the time. Gordon (1990) wrote that, “during the Progressive Era, the eastern women’s colleges continued to be socioeconomically and ethnically homogeneous communities, admitting a few minority women but resisting significant diversification of the student body” (p. 46). Student populations during the first half of the 20th century were homogeneous in nature due to, again, cultural attitudes about one’s “place” in society and state laws regarding segregation. African American students, and other minority groups, were relegated to single-race higher education or normal schools, and restricted from colleges and universities until after 1945.

Like female students of the early 20th century, blacks and other minority students who were enrolled in predominately white colleges and universities were outsiders to college culture and student life (Horowitz, 1987). Levine (1986) claimed that, “the 1,500 blacks who did go to ‘integrated’ colleges in the 1920s and 1930s were essentially pariahs: at some places they were not welcome in the dormitories, in the bathrooms, or at the annual school prom” (p. 159). Ogren (2005) affirmed this outcast existence of minority students by asserting, “On majority-white campuses, pioneering black and Latino students, as well as Jews, Catholics, and members of other ethnic minority and immigrant groups, remained outside mainstream campus life” (p. 67). Gordon (1990)



continued the thought: “Few black women attended the University of California, but those who did found no place in the women’s community. . . . Jewish, Catholic, and black students . . . sometimes had to form their own organizations, or have no stake in campus life” (p. 42). This outsider status for minority students can be seen in Somers (2003): “While many black students joined in the mainstream of college life, others would later recall a sense of isolation and speak of a paucity of social outlets” (p. 111). Consequently, in the same vein as college women, minority students created their own separate college culture, which, in many regards, paralleled the culture of white, Protestant college men (Gordon, 1990; Horowitz, 1987; Levine, 1986; Somers, 2003). Handlin and Handlin (1970) described how from 1870 to 1930 minority students sought to develop a mirror image of the white campus culture for themselves. The authors claimed that,

“Negro students, whether segregated or not, aspired to emulate the model of the college man. . . . Within the Negro colleges, there was a pervasive effort to follow the curricular and extracurricular activities accepted as normal in the United States” (p. 66).

Cohen (1998) concurs with Handlin and Handlin as he stated, “The colleges for black students imitated the liberal colleges, offering comparable courses along with a complete roster of fraternities, sports, and rituals designed to duplicate the collegiate experience” (Cohen, 1998, p. 146). In the early 20th century, then, minority students began to create their own student organizations, athletic teams, etc., in order to enjoy a similar college experience to that of whites. However, even with these social outlets, blacks and other minority students were not truly accepted as equals on college campuses.

It was not until after World War II and the Civil Rights era that African Americans and other minorities gained access to both public and private colleges and universities (Cohen, 1998; Handlin & Handlin, 1970; Horowitz, 1987; Levine, 1986; Ogren, 2005; Somers, 2003). Social change came during the late 20th century as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pressed legislators and sued in an attempt to gain equal access and educational opportunities (Cohen, 1998). The breakthrough came for the education of minorities in the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, when separate was no longer accepted as equal. However, the desegregation process was slow to take hold. Not even federal legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which authorized federal involvement enforcement of desegregation to allow for open and equal access of minorities, truly desegregated schools and workplaces (Caple, 1998; Cohen, 1998). Coates and Coates (1985) illustrated the sluggish integration of black undergraduates at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill beginning in September 1955. The authors claimed,

The years following the admission of the first black students to the University showed a slow expansion in the black student population, and campus was relatively quiet. Three black freshmen were enrolled in 1957, 2 in 1958, 4 in 1960, 5 in 1961, 2 in 1962, and 18 in 1963. (p. 271)

They continued, “the black undergraduate population continued its slow growth. Twenty-three blacks were enrolled as freshmen in 1964, 11 in 1965, and 22 in 1966” (p. 272).

The slow integration of blacks can also be seen at the College of William and Mary in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Godson et al. (1993) described the integration of blacks there:

As segregation began to breakdown in public colleges, William and Mary quietly admitted its first black graduate students. With little fanfare, Hulon

L. Willis enrolled for graduate work in physical education in the summer session of 1951. (p. 767)

However, it was not until more than a decade later, in 1963, that the College of William and Mary enrolled its first undergraduate of African American decent (ibid.).

Nevertheless, by the beginning of the last quarter of the 20th century, the student population on college and university campuses across the nation was growing in size and in diversity. Caple (1998) indicated,

In the fall of 1969, 7,976,834 students were enrolled in American colleges and universities. Ten years later the number had risen to 11,669,429. . . . Diversity was increasing with the enrollment of African-American students, increasing from 7 percent in 1969 to 11 percent in 1976; women from 28 percent in 1969 to 51 percent in 1979; and adults 25 years or older from 28 percent in 1972 to 35 percent in 1977. (p. 168)

By the end of the 20th century, college and university campuses, both public and private, were growing in size and becoming more diverse as a result of the societal changes. Equally, minority students evolved from being solely outsiders to becoming engrained in the campus culture, and their involvement in student governance increased. This can be seen in Somers (2003): “In the twentieth century, as foreign students and members of American ethnic groups began to attend Union in increasing numbers, student organizations arose to serve their needs” (p. 691). Minority students, particularly African Americans, established student organizations that advocated for their needs on college and university campuses. For example, black students at Union College created the Black Student Alliance in 1968; the Black Student Movement was launched at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1967; and the Black Student Union was chartered at the College of William and Mary in 1971 (Coates & Coates, 1985; Godson et

al., 1993; Somers, 2003). Sansing (1999) described the founding of the Black Student Union at the University of Mississippi in the late 1960s:

During Chancellor Fortune's first year, black students asked the new chancellor for permission to organize a Black Student Union and to celebrate Black History Week. Fortune agreed to their request and the BSU was organized in late March 1969. With the establishment of the BSU, African American students now had a voice to give expression to their aims and goals. (p. 323)

Through these and other similar groups, minority students began taking on active roles within student governance on higher education campuses. Although these groups existed on supposed equal footing as more-established groups, they were subordinate. They all gained official recognition, and received funding through, the white-dominated, campus-wide student government organizations. Nevertheless, they played an integral role for minority students on college and university campuses, advocating for their needs and voicing their opinions (Coates & Coates, 1985, Somers, 2003). The increasing influence and power within student governance of the minority students through their own student organizations can be seen by the late 1960s on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:

Within student government, the Student Legislature began to appropriate funds to the BSM in 1969, and black representation on the student courts and in the Legislature was ensured by reforms which culminated in 1974. The UNC student code now requires that at least two blacks be elected or appointed to the Student Legislature's successor, the Campus Governing Council, and that eight blacks be appointed to the thirty-member Honor Court. (Coates & Coates, 1985, pp. 275–276)

Coates and Coates further contended that the sway of minority students extended beyond their own organization and influenced campus-wide student governance. The authors wrote,

The impact of black students is also felt outside of the black community, especially in campus politics where their block vote is often sufficient to determine the outcome of an election. Their power at the polls is reflected in the election of black students to campus-wide officers, their appointment to their student government positions, and in the day-to-day operations of student government. (1985, p. 278)

As one can see, similar to women, when given equal access to higher education, minorities took the opportunity to participate in campus life and student government. For instance, two decades following the admittance of African American students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the first African American student body president was elected in 1972 (Coates & Coates, 1985). However, for some institutions it took quite a bit longer for minority students to gain the chief student officer positions. For example, whereas the first African American student, James Meredith, was enrolled at the University of Mississippi in 1962, it took nearly forty years to elect the first African American as student body president. In 1999 Nic Lott would serve in that post (Khayat, 2002).

In spite of the long history of limited access, blatant racism, unjust laws, and societal forces that conspired to shut them out, minority students, particularly African Americans, have earned their secure place in higher education and student governance and proved that the institutions they serve are resilient enough to accommodate all.

## Conclusion

Throughout this discussion of the origins and evolution of student self-governance in the United States, one can see that as the nation and society developed, so did the idea of student self-governance. Students, through the past three centuries of higher education, have aimed at self-rule and involving themselves in the decision-making processes of their respective institutions. Freidson and Shuchman (1955) stated it best:

the most important point to make is the extent to which student government is universal. It is a characteristic feature of the present-day American college no matter what the sex or size of the student body or the nature of the governing board. (p. 9)

Freidson and Shuchman continued,

. . . the fact of its universality leads us to conclude that student government is a symbol which almost everyone connected with the American college feels is desirable; the differences lie in the realization of that symbol. (p. 9)

Student self-governance is emblematic of the democratic ideals of this country. The earliest student bodies desired to establish representative governments mirroring those of the emerging young nation. The evolution of student self-governance continues its healthy course on today's colleges and universities campuses, and it is truly a mark of this nation's democratic principles and standards. As higher education in the United States has matured and expanded, so has student self-governance, sustaining the argument that student governance is a key component to this growth. Student self-governance will continue to evolve and expand, particularly as a means to reach students where administration and faculty

cannot—by engaging students in the campus community and by giving students a voice.