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## **Cultures of Success: Recruiting and Retaining New Live-In Residence Life Professionals**

Holly A. Belch, Maureen E. Wilson, Norbert Dunkel

*A qualitative inquiry designed to understand entry-level, live-in, professional staff recruitment and retention practices perceived as successful revealed a link to elements of organizational culture. Several important areas of understanding emerged: the actual recruitment and retention practices, the impact of leadership, and the role of organizational culture in the success of the department. This article addresses the impact of culture on the organization and its contribution to success in hiring and retaining entry-level staff. The discussion of findings and practical implications broadens our understanding of culture and better informs practice.*

Although estimates of the attrition of new professionals in student affairs vary, retention is “essential to the health of student affairs as a profession” (Davis Barham & Winston, 2006, p. 64). There is a strong need for well-qualified, educated, and trained entry-level live-in professional staff in campus residence halls to support and achieve the academic and educational goals of the institution (Belch & Kimble, 2006; Belch & Mueller, 2003). Senior housing officers have acknowledged a concern with the availability of qualified professional staff interested in entry-level live-in positions (Belch & Mueller, 2003) and have indicated their greatest concern is for the impact on the housing profession rather than any individual campus (St. Onge & Nestor, 2005). Some of the recent literature has examined concerns regarding issues of compensation, amenities, and quality of life (Belch & Mueller, 2003; St. Onge & Nestor, 2005). In this article, we examine the cultures of organizations that existed in institutions identified as having best practices in recruiting and retaining entry-level live-in professional staff.

### *Organizational Culture*

Organizational culture is a shared system of beliefs, values, and assumptions among an organization’s inhabitants (Denison, 1996; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Schein, 2004). Standard elements of culture include artifacts (e.g., traditions, rituals, myths, stories, ceremonies, customs, language, physical, and social environment), values, and basic assumptions (e.g., thoughts, unconscious perceptions) (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Schein, 1992). Organizational members share a common understanding that unites them; helps them to understand how they fit in; and learn what is valued, appropriate, and inappropriate (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Schein, 1992; Sims, 1994). In essence, culture guides the activities of an organization and its members (Sims, 1994).

During the last few decades, researchers have examined the effectiveness of organizations (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Denison, 1990) and the impact of culture on job satisfaction, work performance, commitment, motivation, and retention (Harris & Mossholder, 1996; Schein, 1999). In a study from the business sector, Cameron and Quinn (2006) argued that when the same culture type reflects throughout an organization via policy, leadership style, reward systems, and strategies, this congruency of culture leads to high performance.

Studies of effective organizational practices and culture in higher education have focused on creating environments conducive to student development, success, and achievement (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). The focus of these studies is on student achievement, but they also offer valuable insights and lessons that are applicable to a workforce population and specifically to new professionals. Research from the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) Project (Kuh et al., 2005) revealed that improvement-oriented campus cultures were internally driven and oriented toward innovation, openly discussed what was needed to improve, adopted best practices from other institutions, supported initiatives and invested in success, and utilized data-informed decision making practices to develop and modify policy.

The importance of cultivating relationships with newcomers to the organization, at both the recruitment and socialization phases, is embedded in the ideals of ownership and involvement and essential to communicating organizational culture and values (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 1991). The human element is the nucleus of these organizations that extends beyond the care and concern people have for each other and is reflected in how the ideas of others are valued, integrated, encouraged, and supported (Kuh et al., 2005) as well as how opportunities are structured and created to provide a sense of meaningful involvement (Kuh et al., 1991). Although the DEEP institutions took different paths to creating and sustaining an effective and improvement-oriented culture, all had the same fundamental goal of success for both the participants and the organization (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 1991).

### *Impact of Culture on Job Satisfaction*

Organizational culture is at the core of human resource management because it influences worker attitudes regarding commitment, motivation, morale, and satisfaction (Harris & Mossholder, 1996) and its impact on morale, job satisfaction, performance, and retention is significant (Schein, 1999). The individual employee, the organizational culture, the supervisor, and the leadership all influence satisfaction with work, individual and collective morale,

and personal and group motivation. Job satisfaction results when employees believe their work is meaningful and valued (Goris, Voight, & Pettit, 2000; Kim, 2002; Maslach & Leiter, 1997), know their ideas and expertise are respected (Kim, 2002; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; O'Toole, 1996; Wakabayshi, 2005), and trust that communication is valued (Goris et al., 2000; Kim, 2002).

Communication is a crucial aspect of satisfaction in the workplace. A strong connection exists between communication and job and workplace satisfaction that is dependent upon sending and receiving messages throughout levels of the organization – upward, laterally, and downward. This notion of downward communication, or receiving information from those at higher levels in the organization, was a significant predictor of satisfaction with work and colleagues (Goris et al., 2000).

Furthermore, individuals experience respect when opportunities to learn and develop are present (Wakabayshi, 2005) and when unique talents and abilities are considered and acknowledged (Kotter, 1999; Kuczmarski & Kuczmarski, 1995). Deal and Kennedy (1999) recognized the significance of respect in establishing and maintaining an organizational culture that includes a rewarding environment.

Employee motivation, morale, and satisfaction coupled with the principles of engagement in the workplace carry great importance when dealing with new professionals. Initial experiences to the student affairs profession, in both the recruitment and employment phases, are critical to creating commitment to the field and establishing an organizational reputation. New professionals have shared their early career disappointment by characterizing their entry into their first job as informal, less than comprehensive, and haphazard (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Winston & Creamer, 1997). In addition, despite the fact that the supervisory relationship is a key influence on career satisfaction and commitment (Davis Barham & Winston, 2006; Harned & Murphy, 1999), strong evidence confirms that ongoing supervisory contact is not the norm (Ignelzi & Whitely, 2004; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Perceived job satisfaction is pivotal to the recruitment, productivity, commitment, and success of entry-level live-in professional staff and a strong and healthy culture can promote it.

The broader purpose of this study was to identify housing and residence life operations at four-year colleges or universities in the United States that were perceived as having best practices in the recruitment and/or retention of entry-level live-in professional staff to identify the practices these campuses use to achieve their perceived success (Belch & Wilson, 2006). The specific purpose

of this article is to examine the cultures of successful programs identified in the study.

## Methods

This study involved identifying residence life and housing operations in the United States that were perceived to have best practices in the recruitment and/or retention of entry-level live-in staff and then exploring the institutional practices and cultures associated with success in those areas. Because the researchers were interested in discovering and understanding the process of recruitment and retention and there was no previous research to offer insight on this topic, they determined a basic interpretative qualitative study design was necessary (Merriam, 2002).

### *Delphi Panel*

To identify the programs for study, a Delphi method of inquiry was selected. The Delphi method uses an expert panel to collect informed judgments and build agreement on a specific issue (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) and allows for anonymity of panel members, equal participation by all, and flexibility for the participants in terms of their location and time schedule, thus increasing the likelihood of their participation (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustavson, 1975).

The Delphi method has no established agreement on size and composition of the panel (Powell, 2003); however, a general guideline is approximately 15-30 panelists for homogenous populations (e.g., experts from the same discipline or area) (Clayton, 1997). Although this methodology does not require representative samples among panelists (Powell, 2003), the researchers established two selection criteria: a) leadership within the housing and residence life profession at either the regional or national level, and b) professionals employed at four-year colleges and universities throughout the U.S. Most members of the Leadership Assembly from the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I) met those criteria.

This group consisted of 67 mid- to senior-level housing professionals from each of the geographic regions of the organization. An additional 25 group members did not meet the criteria for selection because they were ACUHO-I central office staff, non-U.S. members, business vendors, or individuals no longer working in higher education. The 67 potential panelists were sent an email invitation to participate on the Delphi panel, a description of the study, an explanation of their role as a panelist, a participation consent form, a letter of support and acknowledgement from the Executive Director of ACUHO-I,

and a statement that the project was funded by an ACUHO-I commissioned research grant.

Of the 67 professionals invited to participate, 30 (44.7%) agreed and 29 actually completed the necessary Delphi panel rounds. Final participants were from six of the seven ACUHO-I regions with no representation from the New England region. The Midwest region had the largest proportion of participants (37.9%), with 20.7% from the Southwest, 17.2% from the West, 10.3% from the South, and 6.9% each from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. In the multiple rounds, participation varied from 96.7% to 73.3% with 80% involved in the final round of the process.

The Delphi technique employed included multiple rounds of information gathering. In the first round, panelists who agreed to participate were asked first to identify institutions that they believed had best practices in the *recruitment* of entry-level live-in professionals and then to identify institutions that had best practices in the *retention* of those staff. In the second round, the two lists were sent to panelists for review and identification of any additional institutions that they believed needed to be added, and resubmit their opinions. During the third round, panelists reviewed the compiled list of institutions in each of the two areas (72 in recruitment, 52 in retention) and selected up to 15 institutions from each list that best represented best practices in each area. Panelists agreed upon a final list of institutions and then selected the top eight institutions in both categories (recruitment, retention). After each round, panelists were informed of the aggregate opinions of the entire panel.

In the initial Delphi process, no small colleges were identified; this was likely attributable to the lack of small college professionals in the Leadership Assembly. To address this problem, the researchers developed a parallel panel of experts from small colleges. The 38 eligible members of the ACUHO-I Small College Task Force were invited to participate. Twenty agreed and nine (45%) actually did so; eight participated in all phases. Panelists came from five of seven ACUHO-I regions (New England, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, West).

The panels of experts concurred on 12 institutions as having best practices in recruiting and/or retaining entry-level live-in staff. The researchers notified each senior housing officer of their selection and provided an explanation of the study and what participation would entail; 11 of the 12 institutions agreed to participate. Five institutions were identified as having best practices in recruitment: Alfred University (NY), East Carolina University (NC), Kansas State University, Seton Hall University (NJ), and University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Three represented best practices in retention: Emerson College

(MA), University of Georgia, and Western Illinois University. Three institutions had best practices in both recruitment and retention: Ball State University (IN), University of Florida, and University of Maryland College Park. Alfred, Seton Hall, and Emerson are small, private institutions; the other eight are large public universities.

### *Data Collection*

Each of the three researchers conducted three or four site visits in the spring of 2005. Data sources included group and individual interviews, document analysis, and observation. Researchers conducted 75 group and individual interviews of professional staff at all levels of the organization (e.g., senior housing officer, mid-level staff, and entry-level live-in staff). For each level of staff, we developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Patton, 2001) for recruitment and one for retention, using one or both, depending on the institution and how it was identified. Questions addressed the background of participants (e.g., educational and work histories), their experience at their current institution, recruitment, and/or retention processes and strategies the department employs, why they came to the institution and why they remained there, the culture of the organization, and their career plans. Questions were open-ended to elicit the participants' unique perspectives (Merriam, 1998). All interviews were audio taped and verbatim transcripts of the interviews were prepared.

Documents for analysis included departmental brochures, position postings, policies, job descriptions, web pages, and resumes. Observations about the culture, the interactions among and between staff, and the personal living environment (e.g., staff apartments) on each campus were documented in field notes. Multiple sources of data were used to provide as comprehensive an understanding of these campus practices as possible (Patton, 2001) and to establish consistency and reliability regarding the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002).

An institutional coordinator was identified at each campus to assist the researchers in logistical aspects of the study (e.g., contacting staff, scheduling meeting space, access to documents). All levels of professional staff received an explanation of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation, and a confidentiality statement. Appropriate procedures were established to secure participant permission (e.g., signed informed consent forms), ensure privacy (e.g., enclosed space for interviews) and confidentiality (e.g., anonymous reporting of findings), and minimize potential risks to participants (e.g., confidentiality of data, thoughtful planning and implementation of procedures).

*Data Analysis*

Data analysis in a qualitative research design is the “process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 112). The researchers sought to understand the experiences on individual campuses and to examine themes that were common within and among institutions.

Analysis of these data unfolded over time and inductive data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2001) was used. Transcripts, documents, and field notes were analyzed and coded. The qualitative data analysis software HyperRESEARCH was the tool used to analyze the interview data. This analysis tool allows the researcher to code the data, conduct hypothesis testing, and examine new observations in these data based on the coding process (Hesse-Biber & Dupuis, 2000). Thus, the process is inductive, deductive, and includes verification as well. Categories emerged from the comparisons that defined specific concepts. These categories and concepts were grounded empirically because they originated from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A draft of codes, concepts, categories, and themes was reviewed and refined during a two-day meeting of the researchers. The researchers also checked the outcomes of the cross-site analysis.

Establishing the trustworthiness of the findings involved addressing issues of credibility through several techniques. Triangulation of data sources supported the credibility of the findings while potential transferability was established through thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The transferability or applicability of the findings is dependent upon the depth of the description of the context and readers’ abilities to draw on similarities in their own contexts. The researchers achieved dependability and confirmability through an audit trail that included documented sources of data (audio tapes, transcriptions, documents, field notes) and a record of emergent themes, notes, and findings that reflect the decisions made by the researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*Limitations*

The results and implications of this study must be considered in light of several limitations. The identification of best practices institutions relied on the awareness and knowledge base of the expert panelists. Consequently, panelists’ input may or may not have prohibited the inclusion of institutions with equally laudable practices in the recruitment and retention of entry-level live-in professionals. Likewise, the attrition of potential panelists representing specific geographic locales or lack of interest in participating may have influenced the composition and geographic distribution of institutions for consideration. The



researchers do not claim to have identified the best institutions for recruitment and retention; rather the institutions were identified by their peers as demonstrating good practices in recruiting and retaining staff. Ultimately, the readers determine the value of information, which may be affected by constraints of panel selection (Clayton, 1997).

Further, the location of the selected institutions may serve to limit and/or enhance the institution's ability to attract and retain staff and administrators discussed those dynamics. Some of the selected institutions are in identifiable college towns while others are in and/or near major metropolitan areas. The perceived attractiveness or desirability of any location can be influenced by an array of factors including, but not limited to, personal preference, individual lifestyle, and life stage. There is, of course, no universal agreement on what makes a great place to live and work. It is one component of fit between an individual and environment.

Qualitative research, by design, maintains a distinct role for the researcher as a human instrument in both data collection and analysis. Consequently, the researcher may influence data generation and/or interpretation, which may or may not affect the results.

Finally, the home institution of one of the researchers, a senior housing officer, was selected by the panel. A different researcher was responsible for data collection on that campus, another staff member served as the institutional coordinator, and the same procedures were followed there as at other campuses.

## Findings

Beyond data that emerged regarding strategies for recruiting and retaining entry-level live-in professional staff, the critical importance of specific elements of the culture in organizations that promote and value engagement, professionalism, and opportunity became apparent.

### *Clear Mission*

A clear departmental and/or institutional mission was evident at most campuses. Several institutions have a very distinct mission and this is communicated throughout the recruitment process so candidates who fit with it can be courted. In one instance, the location is an attractive draw for many applicants who are not always clear on the institutional mission. The director explained, "Now those people may not want to work in [this] type of environment . . . so it's important to be able to be very clear about our

environment and kind of who we are and what we believe in.” Once that message is clear, she believes many people want to be a part of their program and its culture.

In another case, a printed mission statement is shared with candidates and staff, but the director stressed that the organization changes every year as staff leave and others join the team.

We need to think about ourselves as a new organization each year. Our new staff brings their wealth of experience, new perspectives, ideas, and values; they challenge us to think in new ways about students and how we approach our work. Our returning staff [members] carry our history, campus experience, job expertise, and a refined experience regarding their work based on the lessons learned in our department and their knowledge of the political environment. The goal is to capitalize on gifts of our new and returning staff in a way that enhances our work with students.

Although the fundamental mission is consistent, new members and their contributions are welcomed and valued.

### *Culture of Engagement*

The culture of these institutions is engaging. Staff used terms such as collegial, friendly, fun, warm, caring, inviting, open, comfortable, and supportive to describe their organizations. Staff sought a strong, mutual fit between candidates and the department, even if it meant an applicant might be better suited elsewhere. The senior housing officer on a campus in a rural location understood that some from urban areas, for instance, might have insurmountable culture shock in a location like theirs and has a “big picture” view.

I’d rather be frank and honest with you. If there’s things that right now that [this town] or [this university] can’t meet for you, I’d rather have you happy in the field as a colleague than go somewhere, not get what you thought you were gonna get. And I see many people just leave the profession and I feel like everyone suffers then.

Several of the institutions are located in very rural areas or places where the location often presents more hurdles than draws. Perhaps in light of this and the resulting need to be very clear and intentional in recruiting candidates to campus, these institutions are able to articulate clearly their mission, culture, and goals. Staff are meaningfully engaged in the department and welcomed into

a supportive environment where they are cared for both personally and professionally.

Open communication was an indicator of engagement. Communication was not limited to those directly above or below on the organizational chart. Entry-level staff members are typically included in departmental staff meetings, able to hear information first-hand and contribute to discussions and decisions. They have access throughout the organization. Knowing the department head is willing to meet with anyone in the organization sends a powerful message of their value, even if entry-level staff never seek an appointment. The opportunity for participation, access, and input makes employees feel as if they matter. This type of communication promotes satisfaction with work and colleagues (Goris et al., 2000).

On one campus, the top-level residence life staff member meets with each staff member near the end of the first year to have, as she described, “an individual, intentional conversation relating to what their experience has been the first year. ‘How’s it been – the good, the bad, and the ugly?’ And try to get a sense of, ‘Do we need to do something different?’” This is an important opportunity for relationship building and information gathering that may lead to improved practice. It is also an example of using data-informed decision-making practices to develop and modify policy that Kuh et al. (2005) identified as a practice of improvement-oriented campus cultures.

### *Culture of Professionalism*

Throughout the levels of the organizations, mid- and senior-level professionals spoke of significant autonomy and responsibility given to entry-level staff. They were empowered to act in their positions and to design a plan to create the experience they want. One senior housing officer captured the essence of this by noting,

I feel like we have tried to give the live-in staff as much autonomy as possible. We want them to take ownership for the areas they are responsible for . . . . [We] treat them as professionals. We tell them, ‘This is your area, and you have to work within certain boundaries, but you are the decision maker.’

On one campus, each staff member develops a curriculum to identify his or her plan for development. Supervisors question them about their progress and “[challenge] them to take ownership over who they are, what they want to become.”

Some systems had undergone departmental restructuring with the specific intention of adding an entry-level live-in professional staff position or to increase the level of responsibility in those positions. During the period when staff who had worked under the prior structure remained in the organization, struggles ensued. Some staff members were reluctant to surrender former responsibilities and new staff sensed their hesitation. However, it appeared that the larger organization continually reinforced the value of including the full range of staff in departmental communications and decisions and those tensions eased over time.

One manner in which the culture of professionalism was reinforced was improving staff apartments and living conditions. Viewing it as a quality of life issue, most campuses have a plan to upgrade staff living quarters. A senior housing officer explained,

And it's sort of paying attention to those issues and recognizing, these are young people in their first jobs and you know they measure themselves against others, what they have, what they don't have. I want them to be happier, I want them to be active, I want them to be involved, I want them engaged, I want them to have opportunities, and I want them to come home at night time and say, this is a pretty okay place I live in. You know, it's not fancy, but it's okay.

When possible, staff members are permitted to choose things such as furnishings and paint colors for their apartments. Even when some staff members are living in apartments that need to be remodeled, just knowing that the department has a renovation plan and continues to make progress on it makes them feel good. Furthermore, the departments respect the homes of staff; in one case, the apartment phone number is not published anywhere as a sign of that respect. Autonomy and responsibility combined with a comfortable place to call home promotes a feeling of professionalism for staff.

### *Culture of Opportunity*

The institutions studied seem to overflow with a variety of professional opportunities and that is clear to candidates in the search process. A senior housing officer spoke about what is on the minds of new professionals as they search for a position.

I'm certain that new professionals are/were thinking the same thing that I was thinking as I was trying to decide where my next step was gonna be and that you wish to go someplace that's well respected. You wish to be someplace where the professionals that work there have/are accomplishing really great

things, and are churning out well-skilled people. You want to be a part of a program that's vibrant, where you have opportunities to learn and opportunities to partake in things. You want to be with other people who are passionate and really care about what it is that's happening and what it is that's occurring.

These departments have a broad view of professional development and provide support for it. On one campus, staff members earn the right to chair important committees. Another institution has a formal policy permitting staff to do a practicum in another office up to five hours per week. That option is particularly helpful for a staff member exploring job possibilities outside of housing, and many programs support that goal in various ways. On many campuses, there is strong support for enrolling in a doctoral program. Although staff members who have just completed a Master's program are unlikely to enroll in another degree program, seeing others working on a terminal degree demonstrates a strong departmental commitment to staff development and role models professional engagement and advancement.

Furthermore, staff members are strongly encouraged to be involved on campus and in the field. One mid-level professional said, although she had good financial support to attend conferences in other positions, "the push to be involved, the push to work with committees, is way different here than what I have [had] at other institutions." There is a positive expectation of involvement. Several programs articulated clearly that staff involvement in professional organizations helps build and maintain their reputations and aids in recruiting candidates. To tailor the experience to the needs of individual staff members, most provide support to attend a variety of meetings (e.g., counseling organizations, outdoor programs), not just those firmly targeted toward student affairs professionals, and believe those different perspectives are valuable.

Others stress that not all professional development opportunities require a cash outlay. It does not take extra funding to permit a staff member to chair committees in the department or the student affairs division, be involved in campus-wide committees, or teach a class on campus. A financial commitment is not needed to write a piece for a newsletter or other publication, and those can be excellent development opportunities. Most departments have a variety of roles in which staff can participate and they are open to myriad ideas for staff seeking to personalize their experiences.

Although the length of time spent as an entry-level professional can vary greatly, most do not plan on staying in a live-in position for an extended number of years. Candidates typically plan to move on in two to five years, and

most of these departments are very intentional in preparing staff for their next move. In one program, employees are often asked for a job description for the next job they want so staff members can help them get there. Said one entry-level live-in staff member about her supervisor, "So then she starts setting in stuff that builds your resume that gets you to that point . . . . We know when you are recruited out of here that you need to have these experiences." Similarly, a resident director from a different campus said about the senior staff:

They're retaining me but they're preparing me to leave from day one . . . . If you're going to stay one, two, three, four years, we're going to make sure you're better when you leave here than you were when you came . . . . [They know] that eventually we're going to move on so they want us to be prepared when we do.

Another supervisor said they stress to new professionals that they are glad they are part of the organization and want them to learn as much as they possibly can. "And while you're learning and contributing to our organization, we want to be contributing to your development and learning also." This commitment to help staff craft a valuable professional (and personal) experience that also prepares them for positive career progression is vital and meaningful to new professionals. These departments want their staff to be successful in their positions and to compete well for promotions, internally and externally. A mid-level professional concluded "We're willing to spend our time and energy to do it and it gets you those next skills so you can go. That's good mentoring."

## Discussion

Kuh et al. (2005) argued convincingly about the power of culture in their study of DEEP colleges in noting, "Students will be better prepared to manage successfully the many challenges that college presents if beforehand they have an idea of what to expect and when and how to deal with these issues" (p. 313). It appears that administrators in the programs we studied do just that for staff members. Beginning with the staff recruitment process and continuing through an employee's experience, a clear mission and departmental vision are communicated. Rather than sugarcoat or hide challenges such as location, salary, or living quarters, these programs are open about those challenges, but balanced them with supportive environments, outstanding professional development opportunities, and a commitment to the success of all staff members. Similar to the DEEP research, these best practices programs focus on creating environments conducive to staff development, success, and achievement. Furthermore, these programs cultivate relationships with newcomers to the organization, welcoming their input and granting them

autonomy and responsibility; they are meaningfully involved in the organizations. Factors identified earlier as critical to job satisfaction, including the belief that one's work is meaningful and valued, one's ideas and expertise are respected, and communication is prized (Goris et al., 2000; Kim, 2002; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; O'Toole, 1996; Wakabayashi, 2005), were also evident in the programs the researchers studied.

Throughout the programs, efforts often focused on improvement. What do individual staff members need to thrive? How can they be developed for successive positions? How can the recruitment process be enhanced? Even when change is slow to occur, knowing there is a plan in place and that it is progressing encourages staff and boosts their morale. Based on our findings, we make these recommendations for practice. Although they may appear to be basic or fundamental to some, participants described experiences in their prior employment and/or job search processes where these things were not done well. Furthermore, as they kept in contact with classmates and colleagues, they compared notes and could see important differences between their and others' experiences. Focusing on these issues intentionally may promote the successful recruitment and retention of staff members.

*Articulate a clear mission to candidates and staff members.* This sets the tone for an organizational culture and helps an organization recruit and retain staff that fit well with it and want to contribute to its development. At the same time, efforts should be made to incorporate new members and the ideas they bring. The issue of fit was a key theme in Renn and Hodges' (2007) study of new professionals' first year on the job.

*Engage members in the life of the department.* Involve them in meetings and conversations. Give them autonomy and responsibility to make decisions and do their jobs. Winston and Hirt (2003) cited lack of autonomy as a cause of attrition in student affairs; the alternative likely promotes retention.

*Recognize success.* Successful programs recognize the accomplishments of their members. This happens in bold ways by promoting staff from within, sending a message that hard work and contributions are rewarded. It happens by staff members "earning the right" to chair important committees. Recognition occurs in smaller ways by returning from a conference and sharing widely within the department and university what contributes to an organization's success – a long list of awards and recognitions received by staff, programs they presented, leadership positions they hold, and committees and projects on which they serve.

*Create opportunities for development and advancement.* Consider organizational restructuring that creates opportunities for internal promotions. Chairing important committees and supporting involvement in professional organizations are also good examples of developmental opportunities. When new professionals have broad experiences and increasing responsibilities, it helps to retain them in their positions and prepare them for promotions within the department or at new institutions. Being able to show the career progression of former staff members is a strong selling point in staff recruitment and retention processes. A culture that cultivates opportunities is appealing to potential employees and keeps current ones engaged.

### Conclusion

Davis Barham and Winston (2006) identified a variety of factors believed to contribute to early departure from the student affairs field including low job satisfaction, lack of autonomy, lack of institutional or departmental fit, difficulty in being promoted, frustrating work environments, and poor supervision. Winston and Hirt (2003) listed new professionals' criticisms of supervision including lack of autonomy, lack of support, poor communication, and insufficient professional sponsorship. New professionals in this study who were recruited successfully and retained in positions reported the opposite of these problems. They spoke about high job satisfaction due to their sense of autonomy and responsibility, a strong professional and personal fit in an enjoyable environment, good supervision, effective communication and access throughout the organization, a strong network of support in the department and on campus, vibrant professional development opportunities and support for them, and chances for promotion within the department or strong preparation for advancement at another institution. Although each organization had its challenges, there was a commitment to tackle those and pay close attention to the personal and professional needs of staff.

The long-term impact of working in these successful organizational cultures for the new live-in professionals in this study has yet to be determined. Additional research is necessary to discern if the positive aspects of organizational culture identified in this study impact the longevity of these new professionals in the field of residence life specifically, and/or student affairs or higher education generally. Does organizational culture play a role in the immediate and/or long-term career decision-making of new live-in professionals? How do the experiences of new live-in professionals who leave organizations after a short time compare to their peers who are retained? Are these elements of organizational culture specific to residence life departments and live-in professional staff or are there similarities to other departments and new professionals in student affairs?



Ultimately, the members of an organization establish and communicate its culture to others. The power of an organization's culture in the recruitment and retention process for new professionals is embedded in the ability to articulate what it is, engage staff in their own development and in the development of the organization, and support the multiple paths staff members take in shaping a rewarding career. Evidence from this study indicates that in residence life, promoting a positive, growth-enhancing culture can lead to success in recruiting and retaining new professionals.

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