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Graduate Student Involvement: Socialization for the Professional Role

Susan K. Gardner Benita J. Barnes

Undergraduate student involvement has been linked to retention and satisfaction (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993); however, no empirical research has yet been conducted on the outcomes of involvement at the graduate level. We interviewed 10 doctoral students in higher education in order to explore graduate student involvement, finding that it is not only markedly different from undergraduate involvement, but that it is an integral part of the socialization process for the future profession.

Involvement in the higher education setting has been studied extensively (e.g., Astin, 1984; Camp, 1990; Hartnett, 1965; Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Although much has been learned about the effects of and influences upon involvement at the undergraduate level, no known studies have focused on the effects of graduate student involvement in the higher education setting. Graduate student involvement, whether in local graduate student organizations or in nationally affiliated professional associations, holds many benefits for graduate students, including socialization to the academic profession (Gardner, 2005).

Involvement was described by Astin (1977) as “the time and effort expended by the student in activities that relate directly to the institution and its program” (p. 21). Astin (1977) described involvement as a multifaceted concept, stating that involvement can encompass academic, social, and political dimensions,

but that greater involvement generally leads to greater academic success. Indeed, undergraduate involvement has been linked to multiple variables of academic success including higher retention rates, higher satisfaction rates with the educational experience, higher rates of academic performance and cognitive growth, and higher rates of development of career-related competencies (e.g., Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1993). In general, studies and commentary about involvement tend to encompass time spent in co-curricular activities, such as clubs, social and honorary organizations, and time spent volunteering and participating in community activities, but may also extend involvement to include any interactions within the campus community and the campus setting overall.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influences upon and benefits of graduate student involvement in local, national, and professional associations and organizations. In particular, we employ Astin’s (1984) conceptualization of involvement for this exploration. We begin with a brief background on involvement in higher education settings as well as a discussion of the guiding conceptual framework for the study. Design, findings, and implications for research, policy, and practice then follow.

Background

Over 1.5 million graduate students are currently enrolled in U.S. universities, including

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students pursuing both master's and doctoral degrees (Brown, 2005). Graduate education, and doctoral education in particular, is an integral part of higher education, providing not only the next generation of scholars but also the creation and transmission of knowledge to constituencies both inside and outside of academia. However, doctoral education in the United States is also rife with issues and concerns. High rates of student attrition, excessive time to degree, inadequate training for teaching and research, limited academic job market in some fields, and lack of attraction to pursue the professorial career in other fields, as well as funding difficulties, riddle the commentary and research on doctoral education today. These criticisms have spawned a host of studies that seek to better understand the purposes, processes, and outcomes of the doctoral education experience (Fagen & Suedkamp Wells, 2004; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000); nevertheless, there is still much that is not known about the doctoral education experience. One must only look to the extensive literature on the many facets of the undergraduate experience to see that comparable research has not yet been conducted about graduate school or the graduate student experience. Although many studies have examined the impact of certain interventions and programmatic efforts on undergraduate persistence, satisfaction, and completion, very few studies have examined the effects of similar interventions and efforts at the graduate level upon these same outcomes.

For example, extensive research regarding undergraduate involvement has been conducted in multiple settings and with multiple populations to better understand the reasons students get involved, the benefits they achieve from their involvement, and the long term outcomes of involvement on the students' experience and future. Involvement at the undergraduate level

has been linked to positive outcomes such as increased learning and personal development, academic achievement, retention, and satisfaction with the educational experience (e.g., Astin, 1993; Camp, 1990; Hartnett, 1965; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). However, no such studies regarding the benefits, correlates, and outcomes of graduate student involvement have been conducted, perhaps with the exception of one. In her interviews with 40 doctoral students, Gardner (2005) found that many of the students mentioned the benefits they gained from participation in departmental graduate student organizations, translating into increased social interaction with peers and faculty members, peer mentoring from more advanced graduate students, and professional development opportunities such as brown bag seminars on relevant topics. It was clear from Gardner's study that involvement played a role in the students' socialization to their departments and their disciplines, but the scope of this involvement and its outcomes were unclear.

Perhaps it is the nature of the educational experience that explains a plethora of research on undergraduates and a paucity of research on graduate students. This case can be made when one looks at the literature that exists about student attrition. In other words, whereas undergraduate attrition studies focus on the connections between the individual student and the larger institution (Tinto, 1993), attrition at the doctoral level can be thought of more as the connection between the student and the student's discipline and department, rather than the institution as a whole (Berelson, 1960; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Tinto). As stated by Golde (2005), "The department, rather than the institution as a whole, is the locus of control for doctoral education" (p. 671). Therefore, the role of the discipline (localized through the academic department) is central

to understanding not only the issue of doctoral attrition, but also to all of the doctoral experience in general. This is to say that the graduate experience is not monolithic; one cannot assume that what a doctoral student in chemistry experiences is similar to that of a doctoral student in history or a doctoral student in education. Again, an understanding of the discipline is central to the understanding of the experience in doctoral education.

Academic disciplines have become a focus of study in their own right. Categorized and characterized over time (e.g., Becher, 1981; Biglan, 1973; B. R. Clark, 1987), disciplines have their own particular qualities, cultures, codes of conduct, values, and distinctive intellectual tasks (Becher) that ultimately influence the experiences of the faculty, staff, and most especially the students within their walls. Becher and Trowler (2001) highlighted this point: "We may appropriately conceive of disciplines as having recognizable identities and particular cultural attributes" (p. 44). Therefore, as one seeks to better understand any facet of the graduate student experience, such as involvement, one must look to one particular discipline or field of study to better understand and isolate the phenomenon, understanding that the field of study has its own culture, values, and attitudes that influence those working within it. The culture of a discipline, as described by Becher, readily lends itself to a discussion of organizational and professional socialization, the framework that grounds this study.

Conceptual Framework

Socialization is the chosen framework for this study on graduate student involvement, as it is the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization (Merton, 1957; Tierney, 1997; Van Maanen

& Schein, 1979). The concept of socialization as it relates to understanding graduate education and the student's role in it, however, is best understood through the lens of organizational socialization. Van Maanen and Schein described organizational socialization as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (p. 211). In this way, the graduate student acquires the skills and knowledge necessary for entrance to and success in the professional milieu.

This conceptualization of organizational socialization is paired with theories of graduate student socialization in order to better understand the role and structure of graduate student involvement, in particular. Golde (1998) described the process of graduate school socialization as one "in which a newcomer is made a member of a community—in the case of graduate students, the community of an academic department in a particular discipline" (p. 56). She continued, "The socialization of graduate students is an unusual double socialization. New students are simultaneously directly socialized into the role of graduate student and are given preparatory socialization into graduate student life and the future career" (p. 56). In this study, we examine graduate student involvement through the lens of organizational socialization based on the assumption that graduate students' involvement in organizations and associations allows them to engage with their peers and faculty in ways that contribute to their socialization to the norms of graduate school. Furthermore, involvement at the national level concomitantly facilitates engagement with other professionals in the field, thereby contributing to the students' socialization to larger professional norms beyond the scope of their department or institution.

Tinto (1993), although known primarily for his work on undergraduate student

persistence, also developed a working theory of doctoral persistence, which follows closely to existing models of graduate student socialization. His theory is clearly linked with socialization, implying that successful socialization results in persistence on the part of the graduate student. Tinto's theory of graduate persistence includes three stages. The first stage, *Transition*, typically covers the first year of study. During this stage the "individual seeks to establish membership in the academic and social communities of the university" (p. 235). This stage is shaped by social and academic interactions, especially those interactions within the graduate department. Persistence at this stage is marked by the student making a personal commitment to the goal of completion, which depends upon the desirability of membership and the likely costs and benefits of further involvement. The second stage, *Candidacy*, "entails the acquisition of knowledge and the development of competencies deemed necessary for doctoral research" (p. 236). This stage depends greatly upon the success of the individual's abilities and skills as well as the interactions with faculty. The final stage, *Doctoral Completion*, "covers that period of time from the gaining of candidacy, through the completion of a doctoral research proposal, to the successful completion of the research project and defense of the dissertation" (p. 237). At this stage, the nature of the interaction with faculty shifts from interacting with many faculty to interacting with few; as in the case of the dissertation advisor. Tinto asserted, "The character of the candidate's commitments to those communities, such as families and work, and the support they provide for continued study may spell the difference between success and failure at this stage" (p. 237).

Tinto (1993) thereby makes the connection between involvement with peers and faculty to that of socialization and persistence.

Socialization is integral to the success of the doctoral student in his or her degree attainment (Turner & Thompson, 1993). However, as previously stated, socialization in graduate education is not a monolithic experience and depends greatly on the culture and context in which the student is situated. We discuss the contexts of discipline in the next section as well as the methods used to conduct the study.

METHODS

In order to better understand involvement at the level of graduate school as well as the students' motivation to become involved, the benefits they gained from their involvement, and the processes inherent in the involvement experience, 10 doctoral students in the field of higher education administration from five institutions were interviewed. We chose to interview students studying in the field of higher education in order to better understand the influence of discipline or field of study upon the phenomenon of involvement at the graduate level. The field of higher education, in particular, was of interest as it often focuses on the importance of involvement in the educational experience through the inclusion of studies like that of Astin (1984) in the curriculum. In addition, due to the dearth of research and information on the topic of graduate student involvement, we utilized a qualitative approach to the study as it allowed for the identification of unanticipated phenomena and influences (Maxwell, 1996) and facilitated a better understanding in what was largely an exploratory study (Creswell, 2003). This qualitative approach to the study was also indicative of the epistemological and theoretical perspectives inherent in our design. For this study, we rested solidly upon a constructivist view of reality, wherein "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is

contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In this way, we believe that our participants were able to express their own knowledge and understanding of their experiences in graduate school as well as their connection to the larger social constructions of graduate education and higher education in general.

The 10 graduate student participants in the study were drawn from several sources. Initially, the students were identified through contact with graduate student representatives from several national professional associations, and then using a snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) more participants were chosen based upon the recommendation of colleagues in the field of higher education. Participants were initially contacted via email to ask for their participation and then were interviewed in person or over the phone, depending on the distance from our own campuses. We were purposeful in our selection of participants in order to have nearly equal

gender and racial representation, resulting in five women, five men, four Caucasian students, and six students of color from five separate, research-extensive institutions throughout the United States. Students also represented diverse professional aspirations, with five of the students aiming to enter the academic profession and the other five planning to become administrators upon completion of the degree program. Further, with the use of purposeful selection of participants in order to hear the voices of students within different years of the degree program so as to better understand how involvement changes and develops throughout the graduate student experience, half of the participants were in the coursework phase of their programs and the other half had ABD status or were nearing completion. Although the majority of the students interviewed were full-time students, two of the students were pursuing their studies part time while they maintained professional positions on their respective campuses (see Table 1 for more detailed information on each participant). We were also purposeful in choosing to study graduate students in higher

TABLE 1.
Participant Information

Pseudonym	Phase in Program	Age	Sex	Race	Professional Aspiration	Full or Part Time
Ellie	Graduated	28	F	Caucasian	Faculty	FT
Leslie	Graduated	32	F	African American	Faculty	FT
James	Dissertation	44	M	Caucasian	Administration	PT
Paul	Coursework	27	M	African American	Administration	FT
Anne	Dissertation	35	F	Caucasian	Faculty	FT
Sara	Dissertation	31	F	Caucasian	Faculty	FT
Conrad	Dissertation	26	M	African American	Administration	FT
Beth	Coursework	33	F	African American	Administration	FT
Daniel	Dissertation	31	M	African American	Administration	PT
Michael	Coursework	25	M	African American	Faculty	FT

education in this study in order to best understand the phenomenon of involvement in one particular context. As stated previously, disciplinary culture and context is the true center and basis for the graduate student experience (Golde, 2005).

Interviews with the 10 doctoral students were conducted using a structured protocol (see Appendix) that addressed the types of involvement the student had experienced, the influences for becoming involved, and the influence of this involvement upon the student's coursework, future career aspirations, and professional development. In this way, the protocol was tied directly to the conceptual framework of socialization as it examined both the graduate student environment as well as the professional environment to which the student aspired. Although the protocol was structured, we allowed for great flexibility in the participants' responses, which facilitated a better understanding of the phenomenon of graduate student involvement in the study of higher education.

Each student was interviewed once for the study, resulting in interviews that were approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the constant comparative method, "a research design for multi-data sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 66). The steps of the constant comparative method, according to Glaser (1978) include: (a) begin collecting data; (b) find key issues, events, or activities in the data that become main categories for focus; (c) collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus; (d) write about the categories explored, keeping in mind past incidents while searching for new; (d) work with the data and emerging model to discover relationships; and (e) sample,

code, and write with the core categories in mind. The steps of the constant comparative method occur simultaneously during data collection until categories are saturated and writing begins. This study utilized Glaser's steps in data analysis, which allowed for emergent themes to develop from the data and provided a means by which large amounts of data were compressed into meaningful units for analysis.

Finally, it is important to note the limitations of the study. Although trustworthiness of the data collected and its subsequent analysis were obtained through the ongoing discussions and comparisons of data by the two researchers in the study, the inclusion of only one disciplinary field for the study limited an overall understanding of graduate student involvement. Furthermore, although the purposeful inclusion of a diverse demographic population in regard to enrollment status, race, and gender could be seen as strengthening the study, the more nuanced understandings of how these individual demographic characteristics intersected with involvement may have been lost. Finally, our role as researchers in this study must also be acknowledged. As we had both recently graduated from programs in higher education at the time of the study, our own involvement experiences may have influenced our understanding of the participants' experiences. Again, through lengthy discussions about the data collection, our assumptions about the study, and our individual biases, a more trustworthy analysis emerged. This analysis is presented in the following section, leading to a better understanding of the influences upon and benefits from graduate student involvement in the field of higher education.

FINDINGS

From the analysis of the interviews conducted, four themes emerged regarding the higher

education graduate students' involvement. These four themes, each discussed briefly below, include (a) qualities of graduate involvement, (b) continuum of involvement, (c) influences upon involvement, and (d) outcomes of involvement. The findings are then followed by a discussion as well as the implications of these findings for research, policy, and practice.

Qualities of Graduate Student Involvement

As we spoke with each of the students it was clear that the students qualified their graduate student involvement as being something altogether different from other types of involvement in their previous educational experiences. For example, one finding that emerged from the participants' experiences is that graduate student involvement is entirely different from undergraduate involvement. All of the participants, with the exception of one, were involved in their undergraduate experience and talked about the differences between the two types of involvement; however, even James, the student who was not involved in his undergraduate experience due to his familial commitments, commented on the difference of involvement in graduate school, saying, "It's just more important now. I mean as an undergrad, there are probably not as many opportunities. I didn't see the link as clearly as I do now. I just see the connection for me now—it makes sense—whereas before, I just didn't." Another student, Ellie, remarked, "I think the biggest difference [between undergraduate and graduate involvement] is that I have a goal now, I have something that I'm trying to achieve. In undergraduate there wasn't that kind of goal; there wasn't that kind of connection." Daniel equally forwarded, "In graduate school I feel that my selections were a lot more deliberate. My decision to get involved [was] well thought through and

planned." All of the students, like Ellie, also discussed the social aspects of undergraduate involvement being more important to them at that time than in graduate school. Anne said, "My undergrad involvement was about a sense of belonging, a sense of community, being part of a group." This is not to say, however, that the students do not gain social connections from their graduate level involvement, which Anne further demonstrated in her comment, "With the graduate [involvement], I would have to say there's a part of that because when I moved here I didn't know anybody and wanting to meet people and be a part of the university."

What also came up over and over again was the phrase "professional development" in the students' discussions about their involvement. Making a clear connection to the theoretical framework of socialization, the concept of professional development is often used interchangeably in the literature on professional socialization as the socialization experienced by the graduate student that prepares him or her both for the academic world and its expectations while also preparing them for the professional role and its associated values and culture (Golde, 1998). Like James's comment earlier, the students described a clear link between their involvement and their future professional goals, and Sara remarked similarly:

I look at [graduate involvement] as professional development as opposed to, you know, in undergrad it didn't feel that way; it was almost more of a social type interaction. I look at this as a logical part of being a professional in the discipline.

Paul also remarked similarly, "Undergrad, I guess, I didn't see as professional development. I guess I see more of the professional organizations as being more professional development affiliations."

Graduate involvement was also described by the participants as encompassing a different level of commitment and having different characteristics altogether. Conrad commented at length on the differences involved:

In college, we just always did our own thing. There was a right way to do things and as long as everyone did their individual jobs, which were not taxing—they were not very rigorous—then you were fine and you would get your picture in the year-book. Graduate school involvement I find to be a little more rigorous but without so much of the protocol, without so much of the right way—wrong way. Graduate student involvement is very adult; it's very independent and people are just free to engage in ideas and to kind of do what you want to do. It's not as stringent as I found college organizations to be.

Connecting these concepts, the students also found the qualities of involvement to be quite distinct depending on the type of involvement. We asked the students about their local involvement in student and campus organizations as well as their involvement in professional associations in order to understand the multiple dimensions of involvement as well as the different types of involvement open to graduate students. Leslie talked about the differences between these two kinds of involvement when she said, "I think the involvement at the national level is from more of a mentoring type involvement where, yes, I form friendships, whereas it was more of a friendship type experience when I was local." In this way, the students found their involvement at the local or institution level as a way for them to meet their peers and connect with others with whom they had things in common or, in Ellie's case, to make change on the campus. She said, "Part of the reason [for my involvement in local organizations] was to try to create change and make a difference

somewhere." Paul differentiated between the two types of organizations further:

Any involvement I have with the professional student organizations are going to be for the benefit to the field or a benefit to my own personal accomplishments, where I see the student-based organizations being more as aiding in the development of students on the campus as a whole.

And, for Anne, part of her local involvement had to do with leaving her own legacy and mark upon the institution from which she will graduate:

The local involvement was really to make a difference, you know. When I leave this school I'll know that I wasn't just a student here, I was part of this organization and I made an impact and that's really important to me.

Anne commented thusly about her national involvement: "The national stuff is really, when it comes right down to it, about the career, although I really think it's important to serve and we should give back—we need to serve the people who serve us," How students decide to be involved in one type of organization over another and when they decide to make this differentiation, however, will be discussed in the following section.

Continuum of Involvement

Just as the students mentioned the vast difference between undergraduate and graduate school involvement, they also frequently made mention of the differences among types of involvement. In other words, the students described a continuum of involvement in professional associations wherein one might be "just paying dues" or "just getting journals" to someone who attends and presents at national conferences. At the local level, this continuum may stretch from "just attending meetings" to "organizing a new group" or even

“serving as the president of the organization.” Interestingly, however, the continuum of involvement also spanned from the local to national level, wherein many students began to “phase out” their involvement in local organizations as they became more involved in national organizations, and consequently, more focused on their careers. Again, we could see the clear connection the students made regarding their need to be involved at the national level for their professional development as they become more socialized in their programs and the career to which they aspire.

Ellie talked about phasing out her local involvement as she became more involved in her dissertation and the academic job search, and said,

I started to write my dissertation and I couldn't really deal with it. I've pulled away primarily given my time constraints—it really changed over time. It may be that my local involvement has decreased as my national involvement has increased.

Leslie remarked similarly,

I did get involved with the graduate association primarily the first two years and after that I really did focus on my work. I think it was probably at that point that I also got involved in national organizations—focusing on the trajectory that would get me that faculty job.

Daniel also commented about his move from more general involvement to more specific, interest area involvement, saying, “My involvement is sort of shifting.”

In regard to their national involvement, however, the students discussed also the continuum of involvement that occurs as they become initially involved in their graduate programs to more significant involvement as they progress. Beth, just beginning her national involvement but involved primarily locally, commented, “The national ones I'm not as

involved with—you go to the conference, that's pretty much it,” and James described himself mostly “as an observer” at the national level. He said, “I've made one presentation and I did a roundtable, but other than that it's been attending sessions, talking with the researchers, talking with colleagues.” Many of the more advanced students reflected back upon their gradual involvement, such as Ellie: “The first year I went to ASHE and AERA it was mostly getting my feet wet, sort of navigating it, and figuring out what this is all about.” Conrad also talked about his involvement as

gradual, meaning that I went to kind of observe what the environments were like, what I was supposed to be getting out of the conferences and to observe presentations and what would be expected of me and the next year I did some and was chair and gradually worked up to where I wanted to be and I did two presentations.

Sara, now at the end of her program, also reflected upon her gradual increase of involvement at the national level, saying, “I've kind of slowly come to get more involved in the organizations. I have a research agenda now and I'm looking for jobs. Now I've kind of gotten to the point where I'm getting more involved.” She hopes her involvement as a faculty member will continue: “I feel like the committee work and all that kind of stuff would just be upcoming steps for me.”

This gradual involvement also reflects the socialization aspect of the students' experiences as they learned by first observing through attendance and then through gradual and increased participation as confidence was gained and their understanding of the conferences and their norms increased. For many of the students, their involvement in ASHE, in particular, was spurred by their initial involvement in the annual graduate student public policy seminar, as for instance with

Leslie, who was asked to run for a graduate student representative position as a result of her involvement, and for James, who has gained professional connections and collaborations as a result of his involvement in the seminar. Indeed, all of the students who had attended the ASHE policy seminar talked about its impact upon their involvement and its influence upon their increased involvement, in particular.

Finally, it was interesting to note the differences the students discussed in regard to their involvement in different types of national associations. They felt that different conferences demanded different characteristics of themselves and the nature of their involvement in them. Ellie, who initially began a career in student affairs, said, "I'd gone to NASPA a few years prior, so I had some sense of what the conference world was like, but going to a more research-oriented conference was different." Ellie talked about the differences in the more research or academically oriented conferences, saying, "I don't know what it will be like when I'm faculty, but for graduate students I found it very uninviting. AERA is huge and hard to navigate and ASHE can be, you know, very cliquish." These larger conferences, in fact, influenced her to seek out connections through involvement in her specialization area, where she felt more welcomed and more comfortable in general. Students in the earlier phases of their programs also discussed their initial impressions of these large, academic conferences. Paul laughingly remarked, "A lot of times it appears to me at professional conferences that it's almost like cattle driving. There are a few people, a few scholars, that people herd to . . . I don't like that." Students in the study, however, also discussed finding their "professional homes" at many of these conferences, like Anne, who said,

I did go to the NASPA conference and I

just don't mesh with them as well as AERA and ASHE, which kind of made me realize that maybe I am more of a faculty person and less of a student affairs practitioner person. Just going to the conferences, you know, just getting the vibe or whatever. I felt like ASHE was more in line with me—me coming to terms with my academic self, I think.

Again, these professional associations clearly serve as socializing outlets for the students as they learn to seek out the cultures that reflect their own values and those to which they aspire in a future career.

Influences upon Involvement

Each of the participants also discussed how and why they became involved during their graduate school experience. For many of the students, their involvement was prompted by peers who were more advanced in the degree program and, of course, by faculty. One student described how her professor distributed the graduate student application forms for AERA in class and told the students the importance of joining. For many of the students, however, they were unable to remember if there was ever an explicit directive given to them to become involved, but their recollection involved "seeing that the college virtually shut down" and wondering where everyone went. In this way, encouragement to become involved was both explicit and implicit through interaction with the students' peers and faculty members, and therefore, the connection between socialization and the students' involvement was also explicit and implicit as at times they were told to join, whereas at other times they merely observed others' absence.

Some institutions, however, are very explicit in their directives to students regarding professional association involvement. Those programs that prepare their students for the

professorate, in particular, were often cited as giving their students direct encouragement to become involved. For example, Ellie and Leslie, who attended different institutions, described this push for involvement. Ellie said, "They very much track us in that direction," and Leslie remarked, "They kind of groomed me for a faculty job and the kind of opportunities that I got and the people I worked with gave me that kind of mentoring." Indeed, all of the students planning to become faculty members discussed how important their professional involvement was to their career objectives. Anne commented, "I am involved in AERA mainly because I know how important that association is for grad students who are interested in the academic side of the house."

As mentioned before, a great deal of the students' encouragement to become involved came from their faculty mentors in their programs, such as with Beth, who said, "The professors told me about the professional organizations—they actually just told me to join them." For many of the participants, it was the fact that their advisor or chair was involved that influenced their own involvement, as with Ellie, whose former advisor holds a prominent position in a professional association: "She's always asking me to do something," she said. Sara also commented on her advisor's involvement and its influence on her own involvement: "I sometimes wonder if [my advisor] hadn't been so involved in ASHE how I would have gotten into it."

Finally, in regard to their encouragement to become involved at the doctoral level, several students discussed the importance of their master's program. Michael, who attended a master's program directed by a renowned group of scholars, commented on this influence at length:

[My involvement] was mainly due to the encouragement from the faculty at [my

master's institution]. Every single class that I had, the faculty made it a point after the conference to debrief how the conference was, important sessions we went to, what we liked about the conference, what we didn't like, and things of that nature. In that sense I felt like it was really encouraged and faculty provided time and space to hear our experiences so that they could continue to mentor us in a way that was beneficial to our development.

In addition to faculty influence, it was also clear that the students' peers had an influence upon their decision to become involved. Although it should not be surprising to learn that peers have a substantial influence upon one another, the bulk of the literature about graduate education speaks more to the influence of faculty involvement upon student success and outcomes. Many of the students in this study discussed how their peers influenced their decision to become involved, like Paul, who said, "Other students prompted my involvement. I really didn't know much about it. Faculty members might have mentioned it in class, but it wasn't really like, 'You should join this and this is why,' it was mostly from peers." Conrad was also influenced by peers. He said, "It was actually a student who had since completed the program for higher education and he suggested [attending the conference] to me before I was actually in the program." In particular, it was interesting to see how many of the students of color discussed their peers' influence upon their decision to become involved. Paul told us about his peers' encouragement to seek out a mentor at ASHE, a faculty member of color, "someone who is dedicated to helping me," he said.

Students also discussed at length how to become involved, again stressing the differences between undergraduate and graduate level involvement. Many of the most involved students, such as those holding positions on

governing boards of their associations, talked about how important it was for students “to be out there” in terms of their professional and academic involvement to influence greater involvement opportunities. Leslie commented upon this issue at length:

Most students don't realize that you can't send an email asking to get involved. I think particularly in a national organization you start with your academic work and once people get a taste of what you can do academically then that leads to better and more extensive opportunities to get involved in a non-academic fashion.

Ellie also remarked, “Every single person that I run into that ever asked a question about how to get involved, I tell them, well, you really need to be out there and challenge yourself to meet new people and it's hard.” Even students without these positions, like Paul, who is still in the beginning phases of his program and his involvement, commented, “I think the only way I see getting more involved at the national level is getting on their boards, getting on the committee, and making some suggestions and being instrumental there—I really don't see it coming through presentations.” Although discussed at more length in our conclusions, these comments have clear implications for the socialization process in individual programs and the resulting influence this socialization process has upon students' involvement.

Outcomes of Involvement

The outcomes, purposes, and benefits of the students' involvement in their organizations and professional associations were the aspects most discussed in the study. The outcomes of involvement can be divided into three sub-themes: (a) networking, (b) connecting the classroom to the community, and (c) professional development. We discuss each of these sub-themes in turn.

Networking. The students all discussed the great influence that involvement had upon their ability to network as well as expanding currently existing networks of influence. These networking skills tied directly to their potential job searches but also allowed them to find, as James stated, “collaborative opportunities down the road with these folks.” The quotes from the students regarding their networking are so extensive that we include here only a few of the most revealing quotes on this topic. For example, Ellie said, “I've found it to be very valuable to be involved in order to meet people and find like-minded people that maybe you'll collaborate with.” To Ellie, this kind of networking was almost more important than the networking she knew was an inherent part of the job search process. Leslie saw the value in networking in relation to validating her research: “At the national level I think it was very important when I was able to get on the program and get involved because people who quote—unquote mattered were willing to look at my work and talk to me about it.” James equally commented, “I think the social network I've created by attending these conferences—I can't even put a price on it. It's a very, very important thing to get to know people at other institutions and we talk throughout the year.” Michael, in the same vein, remarked,

It is a chance to develop a support network with other students outside the program so that we can get new ideas . . . besides, people are more inclined to give you an interview when they know who you are; when they can put a face with a name.

Several of the students also discussed how important the networking aspect of their involvement was to their job search, especially in regard to name recognition. Anne remarked, “The national association stuff has connected me—when you go to a no-name university, if I just started applying to jobs now without

that involvement, you know, I probably wouldn't even get looked at, so that really helps." For Anne, the fact that her institution is not recognized as being prestigious was something she felt held her back in certain ways, but through her professional association involvement, she was able to overcome the lack of recognition her institution held and translate her experiences to recognition by the scholarly community. Conrad echoed this comment when he said, "It was a good opportunity for me to put my work out there and to meet colleagues in the field, those who are ahead of me a generation—it's just as important for me to know my scholarly community."

Connecting the Classroom to the Community. The students we interviewed felt it was important that they represented their institution at the conferences they attended, but for many of them, it was the ability for them to see the clear connections between what they were learning about at their institutions and the larger academic community that was also important. Indeed, for many of the students, how they view the field of higher education was inextricably connected to their professional involvement. For example, Sara commented, "I think [my involvement] has been essential. How I feel about higher education as a field is tied to my experience with ASHE. You know, I don't know that I could separate the two." Conrad, like his previous comment illustrated, also felt the importance of connecting to others in his scholarly community:

It's an opportunity for you to put your work out there in an even more intentional way because the organization is grouping you with others who have related research and so because of that, and because people are interested in all of the papers, there is the potential there to have some really engaging conversations.

Daniel, similarly, discussed the connection

between involvement and his outlook on research:

My involvement in ASHE has really, really influenced the way that I go about my work now. At ASHE I think I learned the meaning of research. It is one thing to talk about research in class, but it is another thing to go to a conference and hear how people talk about and engage with it.

Beth was also able to see how her coursework is connected to her involvement: "With the classes I've taken and the things I'm getting involved with all just tie together. You learn about it in class and then I'm actually able to apply it with my affiliations." And, as Ellie summarized for all of the students: "I think [my involvement] helps with every aspect of my education and beyond."

Professional Development. Finally, the phrase "professional development" came up over and over again in our interviews with these students. They saw their graduate student involvement as direct preparation for their future careers, providing them with skills, connections, and better understandings of what is expected of them in these chosen careers. As stated earlier, one student said, "I see professional organizations as professional development." Therefore, the students themselves were explicitly describing the professional socialization that occurred as part of their involvement, seeing it not only as important but also as necessary for their future success in their careers. The students felt that their involvement directly contributed to a set of skills that translated to their current or future careers, such as presenting and writing. James, already working in his administrative role, remarked,

I think any time I put myself in a situation where I'm listening to research projects, learning about other people's scholarship, hearing how people use various methods, how they go about getting funding, or

how they go about getting articles published—all that helps me as an administrator because I can then pass that information along to other people.

Ellie talked about how attending conferences helped her develop her skills in presenting and writing and said, “Doing things like presenting, for example, forces you to write a paper you can publish.”

Beyond talking about a skill set, however, the students also talked about how their involvement would contribute to their professional futures, like Ellie, who commented, “The one thing that it really has helped is my vita. I have 25 presentations on my vita and I think that’s helped—I mean, at least it shows that I’m productive and that I’m going to be productive.” Anne and Sara also talked about how their involvement has helped them learn more about the field, helping to “contextualize” higher education. Anne commented,

It really does help me contextualize the study of leadership and organizations in higher ed in a better way than if I wasn’t involved in them. It also helps me politically, you know, it helps me to start to figure out the political realm.

Conrad talked also of the benefits of involvement to his professional development as an addition to his curriculum:

I would feel like my education in the degree program was not as holistic if I were not involved in some of the scholarly organizations. I would feel like my degree—even though I would have gone through the dissertation process—would feel somewhat shallow. I’ve been able to bring those experiences from my involvement into class and impact other students and that’s something I value.

IMPLICATIONS

From the analysis of the findings, it is clear that many benefits result from graduate

student involvement in both local and national associations and organizations. Involvement in graduate school varies greatly from undergraduate involvement as much as it varies greatly from those who are just beginning their programs to those who are preparing to graduate. Regardless of the type and scope of involvement, however, all of the participants recognized the importance of involvement to their professional goals and success in their future careers. The students clearly saw the socializing dynamic that involvement provides them and are purposeful in structuring their involvement to further develop skills and opportunities that will be needed in their chosen future professions. We discuss here, in conclusion, the findings and their implications for policy, practice, and further research.

From the students we interviewed, there is no doubt as to the many benefits gained from both local and national involvement for graduate students. The students all discussed the differences between undergraduate involvement and graduate involvement as well as the differences between local and national involvement. Although graduate student involvement is, in the students’ words, more directed, purposeful, and independent, it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion for all students. Several of the more involved students, in fact, expressed concern regarding students who were not yet involved and how integral this involvement was to the job search and future success in the field. The students discussed the encouragement they received from their faculty members and their peers to become involved, but it is noteworthy that not all students discussed having both peers and faculty provide this encouragement. This, in our view, demonstrates the inconsistency involved in the socialization experience at different institutions. For example, one institution may have highly involved faculty members, thereby prompting their students to become involved

due to their direct influence or indirectly through observation, whereas there may be another institution that does not have involved faculty members or involved students, leading to a lack of involvement in general. In addition, although some students in their master's programs receive directed socialization to become involved early in their careers, not all students have this opportunity. This disparity has been discussed in the literature as a sort of "Matthew" effect, and can have a detrimental effect on students' future success in their job search and even throughout their future career. A Matthew effect, as defined by S. M. Clark and Corcoran (1986), is basically conceptualized as "a case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer as time goes on" (p. 24). Within the context of academia, one can think of the students with advisors and faculty who are already well-connected in the profession automatically being more connected themselves. Conversely, students who attend less prestigious programs or who are matched with less-connected faculty may need to work much harder to find the connections that are more easily granted to others. In this way, programs and faculty should be mindful of the messages they send to students about involvement and provide direct encouragement to become involved—both in informal and formal ways, such as through conversations with students as well as through the curriculum.

It is important to state that students play an integral part in their own socialization experience. Although students must be made aware of the opportunities available to them in regard to involvement at various levels, they must then take the initiative to become involved for their own future success. Seeking out opportunities for involvement at both the local and national levels can have profound effects upon the learning in the classroom as well as the future career. Much like other aspects of the graduate student experience,

students must be enthusiastic and purposeful about their experience—seeking out opportunities to challenge themselves and to become better integrated into their local and national scholarly communities.

Although the students in the study discussed the benefits gained from their national involvement most pronouncedly, there were still many students who found immense benefits from local involvement. Certainly, for many of the students we interviewed, local involvement provided them initial contacts on new campuses and new networks of peers with whom to interact. In this way, local student organizations can provide incoming students with instant connections to their peers, making them feel more involved and integrated into their institutional culture. Secondly, local involvement, such as representation on faculty search committees or university task forces, can easily contribute to students' socialization as it allows students to learn about faculty and university governance as well as offering opportunities to network with other faculty and administrators on their campuses.

As we have delineated in our outcomes involvement model (Figure 1), both local and national involvement can lead to graduate student socialization for the profession. Therefore, faculty and programs should take care to encourage graduate student involvement by introducing students at orientation to the existing local and national organizations and to continue encouraging this involvement throughout the graduate experience.

Finally, it is important to note the differences among conferences that the students discussed. Many of the students expressed feelings of discomfort and disorientation upon attending their first conferences, regardless of the association or affiliation. In addition, students discussed the different cultures present at different conferences, mentioning

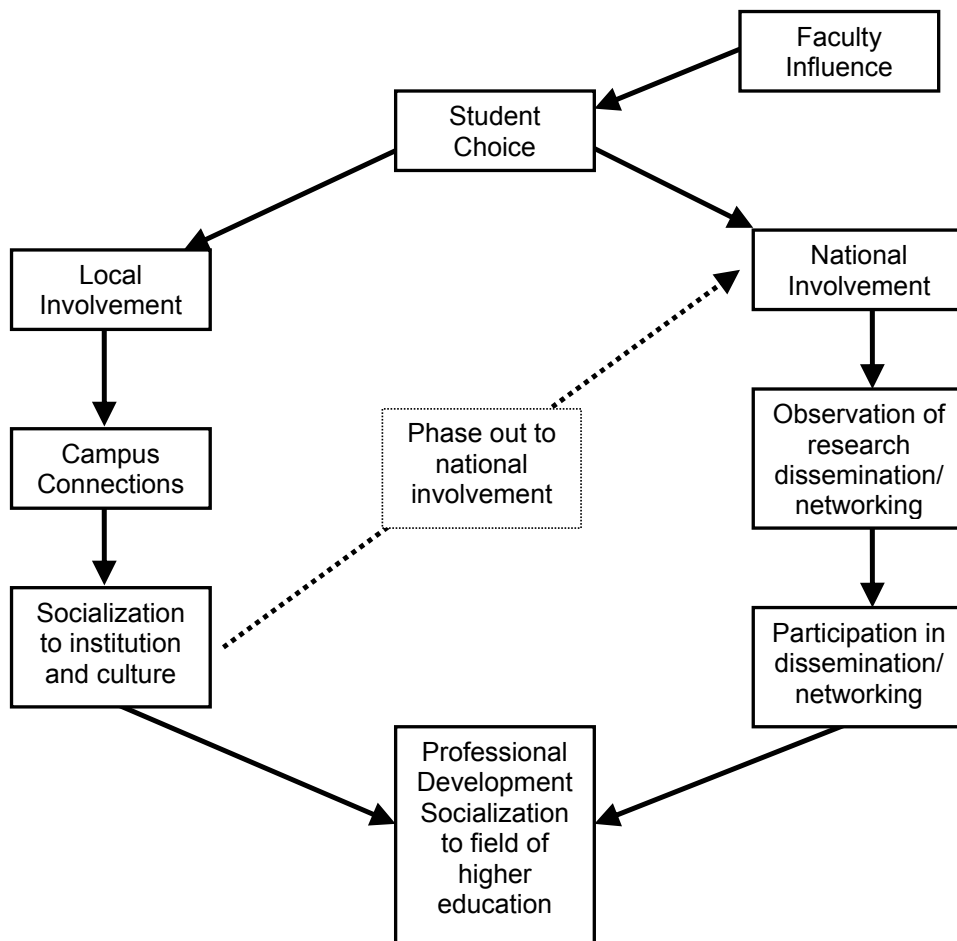


FIGURE 1. Model of Local and National Involvement Continuum and Outcomes

that some were much more welcoming to graduate students whereas at others it felt more difficult to feel comfortable or to gain *entr e*. Although many conferences offer graduate student orientation to the conferences and special graduate student sessions, not all students seem to be aware of these offerings nor are all students aware of special opportunities for involvement such as the ASHE policy seminar for graduate students. Again, faculty should be cognizant of the opportunities for students to become involved and should share this information with them through various means, perhaps through

working with established graduate student organizations and with students who have regularly attended conferences in the past to facilitate a peer-mentoring of sorts. Also, professional associations should be aware of the messages they send to students about their involvement and their importance to the association, whether explicit or implicit, through the cultures engendered in the annual meetings. Making graduate students feel welcomed and important (and, indeed, many associations rely greatly upon their graduate student contingent for membership dues and numbers) should be a high priority. After all,

who will be our next generation of scholars and leaders, if not our current students?

From a theoretical perspective, we were able to view our findings through the lens of Tinto's (1993) model of graduate communities and doctoral persistence. In particular, Tinto and others (e.g., Boyle & Boice, 1998; Lovitts, 2001; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001) have stressed the importance of social and academic integration to graduate student success and completion. Although Tinto differentiated between academic and social integration at the undergraduate level, for graduate students he remarked that social integration "within one's program becomes part and parcel of academic membership, and social interaction with one's peers and faculty becomes closely linked not only to one's intellectual development, but also to the development of important skills required for doctoral completion." He continued, "In a very real sense, the local community becomes the primary educational community for one's graduate career" (p. 232). The connections, therefore, between both local and national involvement to professional development and career success cannot be understated. Indeed, Tinto alludes to these local and national communities as part of the overall socialization process needed for degree and career success (p. 233). Therefore, when viewed through Tinto's stages of graduate persistence, we underscore the need for students to be involved in both these local and national communities in the first, or transition, stage of their experience; faculty and peer influence are particularly helpful in this regard. Within the second stage of graduate study, as students gain skills that are necessary for success, it is important for them to branch out in their involvement through presenting and dissemination of their work. Finally, as

students progress to the final stage of their persistence and working on their dissertation, they should also become more integrated into their professional communities as they transition from the role of student to the role of professional. Again, it is important to note that within Tinto's model, a blurred line exists between the academic and social communities in which the graduate student is situated. In this way, the characteristics of involvement at the graduate level can be seen as part and parcel of the persistence model forwarded by Tinto.

Although this study focused upon only one disciplinary field, distinct influences and benefits by type of involvement resulted from the students' descriptions that warrant further exploration in other disciplinary contexts. Much more research must be conducted to explore how different disciplinary cultures encourage student involvement, the benefits this involvement can have upon the students' current and future success, and how the socialization process influences this involvement. Furthermore, studies could be conducted with recently minted doctorates to discuss if and how they feel their graduate student involvement influenced their early career success. The study of graduate student involvement is certainly a new addition to the literature about involvement as well as to the existing body of literature about the graduate experience; much more research must be conducted in order to better understand the phenomenon of graduate student involvement in all of its manifestations.

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APPENDIX.

Protocol

Background Information

- 1) Tell me a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a graduate student in this program.
 - a. Prompt for age, program, year in program, educational background, family educational background, previous professional experience
- 2) What are your career aspirations when you complete graduate school?
 - a. Prompt for academia – why or why not?
- 3) Have your career decisions changed over time? If so, what influenced these changes?

Involvement

- 1) In what graduate or professional organizations/associations are you currently involved?
- 2) How long have you been involved in these organizations?
- 3) What prompted your involvement in them?
- 4) How would you describe your involvement in these organizations?
- 5) Were you involved in organizations during your undergraduate education? Do you think this played a part in your decision to become involved in graduate school?
- 6) Does your current involvement relate to your degree program?
- 7) What influence, if any, do you feel your involvement has had on your career preparation?
- 8) Talk about a specific example of an experience in your involvement that has prepared you well for your future profession.
- 9) What would you say are the major lessons you have taken from your involvement? Are these lessons different by the type of involvement you've experienced?
- 10) (If applicable) If at all, how would you differentiate between your involvement in undergraduate versus now?
- 11) What else can you tell me about your involvement that I didn't ask about?

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