

# “I didn’t do it the right way”: Women’s careers as faculty in higher education administration

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the career paths of women faculty in Higher Education Administration graduate programs based on the results of a qualitative study of 18 faculty members at 14 different institutions. The majority of faculty members made their career choice during their undergraduate program, however, most participants in this study made their decision to follow a faculty career after entering a doctoral program or after completing their doctoral degree. Adding the post-doctoral decision point to Bowen and Schuster’s (1997) process of career choice acknowledges the contribution of seasoned professionals to the field of Higher Education Administration and reflects the flexibility of a career path that may be conducive for women as they navigate a faculty career and family obligations.*

Graduate education, in general, is criticized for not preparing graduate students appropriately for faculty positions (Austin, 2002; Gaff, Pruitt-Logan, Sims, & Denecke, 2003; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hinchey & Kimmel, 2000; Nerad, Aanerud, & Cerny, 2004; Nyquist, 2002; Nyquist, Abbott, & Wulff, 1989; Nyquist, et al., 1999; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000). Most of these large scale studies did not seek to identify differences between men and women; however, there is research showing that women experience graduate school differently than men (Gardner, 2008; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Hensel, 1991; Maher, Ford, &

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Thompson, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003). In addition, women do not seek faculty roles at the same rate as men and are still underrepresented in many academic disciplines (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2004; Perna, 2003). It is unclear whether it is the insufficient preparation, the personal experience of graduate school, or decisions prior to graduate school that influence women's career choice of faculty careers.

Women are equitably represented, at least at the assistant professor rank, in the field of Higher Education Administration (HEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), a non K-12 program usually found in colleges of education. While this field can be studied as an exemplar for women faculty, it is a fairly unique professional field. HEA does not have undergraduate programs to feed into graduate programs (Tobin, 1998); master's programs in HEA are primarily terminal degrees for practitioners of administration and may have a focus on student affairs, academic affairs, or general administration of the higher education system (American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 2005; Association for the Study of Higher Education [ASHE], 2005); and doctoral degrees lead to either continuing as a practitioner in higher education or as a faculty member in a graduate program. The path to a faculty career may therefore be structured differently than for other fields of study.

It may be useful to take a step back from the educational preparation of future women faculty in HEA and look at how and when they make a choice to pursue an academic career, which may then help us better understand the role of graduate programs in the preparation of future HEA faculty. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore the choices and career decision points of women's career paths as HEA faculty. Specifically, the research question for this article is: to what extent does the career path of women faculty members in Higher Education fit the current models of academic career choice? It is important to disaggregate women from the larger population as they have been shown to have different career needs than men (Almquist, 1974; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002; Farmer & Associates, 1997). Understanding the career choices and overall career path of women faculty will contribute to better recruiting practices and more effective preparation of future faculty.

## Higher Education Administration and Women

The context for the study is important because Higher Education Administration (HEA) is not a typical degree program that can be described by current research on graduate students and faculty preparation. The complexities of the field begin when defining potential students, as there are no undergraduate majors to feed into the graduate program (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974; Tobin, 1998) and graduate programs accept students from all undergraduate disciplines (Brown, 1987). This means that students enter graduate school with no common theoretical base and no shared perspective of the field (Golde & Walker, 2006; Tobin, 1998). Many students who receive their master's degrees in higher education administration, student development or college student personnel, are seeking a professional degree in order to become a higher education administrator or a student affairs professional. If students choose to pursue a doctorate, they are often looking for advancement within their professional field and may be joined by students who have master's degrees in other fields. Another complexity of the field is that there are typically two types of doctoral programs in Higher Education Administration; one is "practitioner-based" and offers either an Ed.D. or Ph.D., and the other is "research-based" and usually offers a Ph.D. For the purposes of this article, we refer to the research-based program as one that frequently draws students who are looking for faculty careers, however; in some cases the Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs are indistinguishable from one another (Golde & Walker, 2006). Finally, faculty members in both research-based and practitioner-based Higher Education Administration programs may hold either an Ed.D. or a Ph.D. degree.

Because HEA is the context, there is little available literature that specifically addresses the experience of women in HEA graduate programs. The general studies of women in graduate school cite family issues as a major concern for women during graduate school (Adler, 1976; Hensel, 1991; Maher et al., 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003). Women in male dominated fields perceive less sensitivity by their faculty colleagues and administrators relative to family issues (Ülkü-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, & Kinlaw, 2000). While mentoring is found to be beneficial for everyone (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Ellis, 2001; Haworth, 2000), selection of mentors may be challenging for women. When both genders are available for mentoring, women students choose women

faculty (Gilbert, 1985; Keith & Moore, 1995; Wolf-Wendel, 2000). However, they may not always have a choice and some women have doubts that male mentors will be helpful to them in their life choices (Bruce, 1995; Conners & Franklin, 1999); women mentors are perceived to have more concern for their welfare (Schroeder & Mynatt, 1993). Although, some studies show that women take longer to complete advanced degrees because of external obligations (Maher et al., 2004), others show no significant differences in time to completion (Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998).

### **Academic Career Path**

The graduate student literature does not provide answers to the connections between women's experience in graduate school and their career choices, possibly because it is assumed that the choice of an academic career is made prior to entering a doctoral program. Two independent types of career decisions are relevant for prospective faculty, the choice of disciplinary field and the choice of an academic career (Finkelstein, 1984). In addition there are two components that shape career decision-making, early developmental experiences and career specific sources of influence (Finkelstein, 1984). Most students choose their discipline during their early undergraduate years (by choosing a major) and up to 66% make the decision to become faculty by the time of their undergraduate graduation (Lindholm, 2004). Several studies cite the influence of undergraduate advisors and instructors on an individual's choice to attend graduate school and seek an academic career (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Bess, 1978). Students identify a variety of reasons for pursuing a faculty career including, desire for knowledge/research, desire to teach, engage in creative work, contribute to the discipline, contribute to society through service, interact with interesting people, and engage in meaningful work (AAUP, 2004; Austin, 2002; Corcoran & Clark, 1984; Golde & Dore, 2001).

While some of the literature may infer prospective faculty make career choices at different points, there is little that addresses alternate paths to the professoriate. Bowen and Schuster acknowledge three additional career decision points beyond undergraduate studies (Bowen & Schuster, 1997). The first decision point happens during undergraduate education for the individual who develops a "taste for serious learning" as an undergraduate and is encouraged by his or her faculty to continue

immediately into graduate school and the academic life. The second decision point happens after a person completes an undergraduate degree, attains a job outside academe and misses the learning environment, choosing to return to graduate school and begin an academic career. The third point may happen for an individual after he or she enters graduate school with the intent to complete an advanced degree and return to practice as a professional, but instead decides on an academic career.

These additional decision points are important, not only to accurately describe the career choices of faculty members, but also to show future faculty that there are valid alternative paths. In particular, women have competing demands on their lives and if they perceive they can only choose the academic career path at one point of time in their lives, they may never consider the option of returning to a graduate program and academia. While the model assists in the broader view of the academic career choice, it does not fully explain how and why career choices are made, especially for the field of HEA.

## **Method**

This article is based on a qualitative study that investigated the doctoral student experiences of women faculty members within the field of Higher Education Administration (HEA). The intent was not necessarily to exclude the experiences of men but to validate the voices of women, specifically to hear the stories that would give further meaning to the career paths for women faculty in education, which tends to attract greater numbers of female faculty.

Qualitative research focuses on the process of the phenomenon rather than the outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). As this study explored the experiences of individual faculty in HEA, it was appropriate to conduct a basic qualitative study, which is the most common form of qualitative research in education (Merriam, 2009). This type of interpretive study explores individual experience through an in-depth understanding of a particular situation, and assists the researcher to explore the meaning assigned to the situation by the participants (Merriam, 1998, 2009). Similar to an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2005), this study focused less on how the data might represent other disciplines and more on providing a

detailed description of the experience of graduate education in Higher Education Administration and the implications for future practice.

### Participants

Eighteen women faculty in Higher Education Administration, who had been in a faculty role for 1 to 12 years, were selected from a list generated by higher education administration experts (tenured faculty) to provide maximum variation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on the following criteria: race and ethnicity; size of doctoral program; type of doctoral program (practitioner-based or research-based); and length of time in faculty role.

Table 1

#### *Demographic Information of Participants and Programs Attended*

Demographic	Number of Participants
Self-identified non-dominant identities	
Women of color	4
International	1
Lesbian	3
Years out of doctoral degree	
<1-3 years	3
4-6 years	8
7-9 years	4
10-12 years	3
Doctoral program focus	
Administration-oriented	15
Faculty-oriented	3
Doctoral program type	
Higher Education	10
College Student Personnel	3
Higher Education/Student Affairs	2
Educational Leadership	2
Educational Administration	1

The field of Higher Education Administration is relatively small and providing demographic information about each participant would potentially identify them and compromise anonymity; therefore, only a

pseudonym is provided for each of the participants. Table 1 shows a breakout of the overall demographic information. Participants self identified as African American, Asian American, Latina, International, and Lesbian. The balance of the participants either did not self identify or self identified as White.

## **Data Collection**

Interviews are a necessary data collection method when researchers cannot observe how individuals interpret meaning (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, to gain an understanding of how women make sense of their graduate experience, interviews were conducted in-person with the 18 participants. Five interviews took place at the 2005 Annual Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) professional meeting and 13 were conducted at the home or institutional site of the participant during the Fall of 2005. The interview protocol was semi-structured to provide enough structure to answer the research questions while allowing the participants to tell their experience and how they made meaning of the experience (Seidman, 1998). Each interview began with an orientation to the project, an introduction of the interviewer, and review of the IRB consent forms. After the forms were reviewed, the conversation developed through 12 open-ended questions. The relevant interview questions specific to this article were: Tell me about your graduate school experience?; What prompted you to return for a doctorate?; What were your goals when you entered the program?; and When and why did you decide to pursue a faculty career? Participants were allowed to give as much detail as they wanted and prompts were offered as a way to increase the depth of the answers. The interviews were treated as conversations, with the expectation that knowledge evolved through dialogue (Kvale, 1996), therefore the interview questions listed in the protocol were only the starting points for the conversation. Each interview lasted from one to three hours and was tape recorded with participant consent obtained prior to the interview (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were transcribed and the data were open coded (Charmaz, 2005; Saldana, 2009) and coded to themes based in the literatures of career path and career influences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This analytical coding allowed us to look through different lenses while analyzing the data (Bazeley, 2007). The presentation of the data analysis was organized into themes (choosing a student affairs career, returning

for a doctoral degree, and faculty career choice) and reflected the participants' path through the career decision-making process.

### **Study Trustworthiness**

The choice of research method based on the research questions provided the foundation for this study's trustworthiness by matching the kind of questions (meaning-making) with qualitative methodology (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Coding themes were reviewed by a colleague (peer review), which provided internal validity of the study results (Merriam, 1998). External validity was provided through the extensive presentation of the participants' words as thick, rich description (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the overall career path patterns were presented to several of the participants to verify the themes, thereby providing a member check and increasing the validity of the results (Creswell, 1998). Detailed records of the research process and data provided additional reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

### **Bias and Limitations**

Although the original pool of participants was selected by an expert panel, participants had to be known, either personally or by academic reputation, which may have introduced a selection bias. The primary source of bias in the study was the closeness of the researchers to the field of HEA. Interest in the topic evolved out of personal experiences in graduate education, but not as a desire to assess the field due to a positive or negative experience. Bias has been minimized by using literature-based coding, particularly around the conceptual framework; however, coding to literature can eliminate the unique perspectives of the participants. Open coding of data allowed for participant voices to be heard. Additional limitations of this study center on the study's focus on a specific population. While the study participants were women, men in Higher Education Administration may or may not have similar experiences; however, the focus of this study is on the stories of women. In addition, the study design did not seek to fully represent the demographics of all women faculty in Higher Education Administration. Although the study participants represent a diverse group based on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, the data did not provide enough information to complete a full analysis based on these factors.



## Results

The career choice process for the participants frequently began with the selection of a different career—that of a student affairs practitioner. This usually occurred during the late undergraduate years or soon after in their first job. After attaining a master’s degree, students either became practitioners or continued on to a doctoral program. Those who became practitioners decided at some later point to go on to a doctoral program. Finally, a decision to become faculty completed the selection process into a faculty career.

### Choosing a Student Affairs Career

Fourteen of the participants cited experiences as student leaders on campus in some capacity during their undergraduate education, either as RAs or in student organizations, or both. As they interacted with student affairs staff, they started asking questions—not understanding that there was a separate field of study. Kath relates the moment she realized there was a field of student affairs.

It was a realization that I wasn’t any good at science, I didn’t have the skills or the interest in science, but that was the only thing I’d ever thought I was going to do. In the process of deciding what I was going to do I spent a lot of time talking to the associate dean of students. I finally said, —like what you do, how do you that?”

For others, the student affairs staff made the connection for them or suggested that they might be interested in the field. Mary notes that the staff had to convince her that her experience as an undergraduate could lead to a career.

I was sort of complaining about [the lack of a career goal] to one of the professionals in the residence life office where I spent time... He prompted me, —What have you really been majoring in for four years?” “Well, engineering and then I was...” “No, where were you putting your energy?” It was three years as an RA and before that Hall Council officer, the judicial board, student leadership and activities. When we started to talk about the professional pieces it started to make sense.

While these two scenarios were the most prevalent and resulted in undergraduates enrolling directly into a master's program, there were other entry points into the field. Nan, Val, and Dina entered the field through student affairs jobs and then returned to school for career advancement. Finally, Rita took a somewhat unique approach by coming to student affairs based on a negative experience. —looked into career searching resources; I was really interested in the process. I decided that I didn't think my undergraduate career office had been very helpful for the likes of me and I thought I could do it better.” Almost all participants entered their master's programs with intent of advancing their careers as practitioners in student affairs, with three exceptions. Terri and Dina had master's degrees outside the field and worked in their fields before going back for doctorates. Barb had a higher education focus rather than a student affairs focus and knew that she would stay in academia.

### **Returning for a Doctoral Degree**

Only Nan and Jean continued directly from their master's into doctoral programs (both had worked in the field prior to returning for their master's), the rest of the participants were practitioners for one to fifteen years after attaining their master's degree. Participants offered differing motivations for pursuing a doctorate. One motivation was simply career advancement. Specifically, the next step up the career ladder was to attain a PhD and become a dean of students or a vice-president of student affairs. For several, this was a part of the decision, but it was also labeled —the right time” to go back to school because they did not have commitments that bound them to their jobs or geographic location. Lara and Wren, who had been out of their master's programs for over ten years, cited a desire to learn about recent theories—there was more to student development than Chickering who was the primary student development theorist in the 1980s. Mary, Zena, and Sela cited the desire to return to an intellectually stimulating environment. Mary remembered how her colleagues responded to her enthusiasm for intellectual discussion.

I tested [the idea of going back to school] by taking one course just to make sure that I wasn't kidding myself that I wanted to do this. I suspected that it would be okay because I was the one in the staff meetings who read the latest book or saw something at a conference and wanted everyone to talk about it. [The response

was] —No, we need to do work we can't talk about it—go take a class.”

Two related how they drifted into graduate school, not making a conscious choice to be a doctoral student until they were in the program. Zena, the only participant who attended school part-time, started by taking a class to keep herself intellectually challenged. Two years later someone pointed out that she had completed half of the courses toward a doctorate. Rita had been trying to place a graduate student intern at her own institution when the intern coordinator suggested that she apply for the doctoral program.

Once the decision to return to a doctoral program was made, prospective students looked for programs to fit their needs. Several women looked for a particular program such as student affairs or higher education with a student affairs focus. Some women looked at geographical location: either they wanted to stay where they currently lived or they wanted to move to a specific geographical area. Others sought specific faculty who would support their research interests or they had made personal connections with faculty at conferences. Ultimately the decision to attend a particular institution, as Mary explained, was based on the connection to faculty, the location of the institution, and the overall perception of the departmental environment.

The place I felt most at home and felt excited about what other students were doing was [university]. It turned out nice because my family was two hours away. I'd read the importance of having a support system, so family was there for that one. Also, the community itself felt like it would be a support system. Even though I didn't know anyone there yet, it was pretty clear that I would get to know them. It was close between there and a couple of other places but ultimately all the faculty I clicked with, their interests clicked, and it made it logically a good choice. It felt like a good place to be.

### **Faculty Career Choice**

Participants chose a faculty career prior to entering a doctoral program (5 participants), during their doctoral program (8 participants), or at some point after attaining their degree (5 participants). The majority of the participants went into practitioner-based doctoral programs designed for

future/continuing administrators and not designed to socialize future faculty. Even the three students who went to research-based programs, with more of a focus on future faculty, thought of themselves as administrators until some midpoint in their program. Of the five who had initial plans to go into faculty roles, none attended a research-based program.

At the point of admission to a doctoral program Barb, Sela, Kath, Helen, and Jean had the goal of a faculty career. Additionally, Kath decided early in her master's program.

Coming out the sciences where you went straight through, I wasn't quite clear that that wasn't the norm [to the PhD]. Somebody had looked up reasons for doing a PhD and I was the only one who thought research would be interesting... I loved my theory classes and I liked the research I was doing. I made that decision really early.

Sela thought she would have to go back to administration after completing her doctorate before pursuing a faculty career because there had been only —*all* guys" teaching in her master's program.

The most prevalent career goal at the point of entry into a doctoral program was to return to an administrative position. The decision to pursue a faculty career came at some later point in their academic program. Cate summarized the views of most of the participants.

When I went back my intent really was to come out as a dean of students, I was really interested in continuing to work in student affairs. But I really wanted to go full time [as a doctoral student] because I was young enough to be able to do that. You're not making a huge amount of money in student affairs at mid level. So to be able to go full time was really manageable.

The decision to pursue a faculty career was based on four factors: a realization that they could do the work; the encouragement of a faculty member; a positive teaching experience; or the cumulative effect of the doctoral process. While all participants at some point came to the conclusion that they were capable of doing the work of faculty, Gail realized that she could exceed the performances of those faculty members in her program.

At first I think I was very, very intimidated. I thought he was a wonderful researcher. I was really impressed by his CV and felt very inferior. And the second person I worked with had a lot of baggage and I questioned some of her ethics around the research... There was a moment when I looked at both of them and thought, —Oh my God, I could do what you are doing.” If they can do this thing, I can do this thing.

Most of the women received encouragement from their faculty to pursue an academic career once they had made the decision; however, Fran had not even considered a faculty career until an advisor made the suggestion. The suggestion came after she spent a day caught up in the process of research. On her return her advisor said, —You aren't going to be a president, you're not going to be an administrator, you're going to be a faculty member.”

Of the eight women who decided on a faculty career during their doctoral process, all but one had teaching experience, either prior to or during graduate school. For two, the teaching experience they gained as a graduate student prompted them to change career paths. As Mary put it, after the second co-teaching experience she was hooked. Rita found herself more motivated to teach her one class than she was to do her full-time job. Val's prior experience as a secondary teacher helped her to realize that being an administrator meant she had less direct contact with students, which was the direction she wanted to pursue.

My original plan was to go eventually go into student affairs administration and become a vice chancellor or vice president, but as I was moving up in my office I realized how much time I was spending in meetings talking about being with students and not actually dealing with students and that was important to me. So I decided to make the transition into faculty, which that meant I needed to be full time [as a student].

Cate and Pat described the cumulative effect of the entire graduate experience. It was the combination of personal research, teaching, presenting at conferences, and interacting with intellectual peers that steered them away from administration and toward a faculty career rather than one event or aspect of their graduate student experience.

On the other end of the spectrum were those women who, throughout their graduate programs, had no intention of following a faculty career. Zena moved prior to completing her dissertation and found a student affairs job, thinking that she would complete the dissertation while working. However, she found the position unsatisfactory. A faculty friend introduced the idea of a visiting professor position.

—Here’s the job description, you need to think about this.” I had never thought about it; it had never crossed my mind to consider coming into a faculty position. She helped me with my vita, she helped me with my letter. I got an interview. I completely bombed the interview, I must admit. I approached it like a student affairs interview and this was an academic interview and they are completely different. In hindsight I can’t believe how ignorant I was, and they offered me the job!

Two others took student affairs jobs immediately after completing their degree. Wren applied for a position that combined an administrative role and a faculty role, but only because someone said she would be perfect for the position. Lara had several children and many years of student affairs experience before her doctoral program and looked forward to returning to the field with new learning and new enthusiasm. Two incidents occurred during her first position after her doctoral program that steered her toward a faculty career. The first was a realization that as a dean of students she was not fully supported by her VP. The second incident occurred during a class she taught when she received an unexpected response from a student.

One of the students in the class was also an RA and so one time in my office we were talking about residence life stuff and I said, —By the way, how are you liking the class?” He says, —I really like it and you’re a really good teacher.” And jokingly I said, —Am I a better teacher than a dean?” And he said, —I think so.” I was like, —really?” He said, —Will, yeah, you’re pretty good at teaching. You might want to think about teaching full time.”

This positive feedback from the student gave her an opportunity to reassess both her desire to continue as an administrator and her ability to teach in a formal classroom setting.

Dina insisted that she only applied for a visiting faculty job because she did not want to offend the faculty member who recommended her for the position. In fact, she considered the job a temporary situation, a way to gain credibility to take back to administration. It was not until she came up to tenure, which she had never intended going through, that she committed to her profession as a faculty member. And, finally, Terri said —[The] whole time I was there I was on the fence about whether to go faculty or administration.” She applied to both faculty and administration jobs and ended up taking a faculty position.

The process of selecting a career was complicated by the selection of two separate careers, a student affairs career and a faculty career. Although the first choice provided a knowledge base or a field of study and led to the second choice, the process by which participants arrived at a faculty career varied. Most of the participants who chose their faculty career after entering a doctoral program qualified their experience by saying their stories might not be of interest because —didn’t do it the right way,” or at least they perceived that others had more direct paths to the professoriate. However, each of the participants exhibited self-reliance—they took charge of their own development as a future faculty member. They were not inhibited by the lack of programmatic experiences specific to their career goals and rarely questioned their ability or right to pursue a faculty career.

## **Discussion & Implications**

The purpose of this article was to explore the career paths of women HEA Faculty and determine the extent to which the career path of women faculty members in Higher Education fit the current models of academic career choice. This assessment includes both the reasons behind choosing an academic career and the decision points (timing) or path taken.

The participants’ reasons for pursuing an academic career in this study fell into two categories. First, a connection to teaching drew them to either consider a faculty career for the first time, or confirmed their choice. Mary and Rita found their teaching experiences to be so engaging that they changed their career goals from administrator to faculty member. Val, as an administrator in student affairs while enrolled as a doctoral student, missed the student contact that she had as a high school

teacher. Other reasons for pursuing an academic career focus on the intellectual environment and life of an academic, which Cate and Pat found stimulating. Several, like Fran, found the research aspect of a faculty role appealing, particularly after a faculty member pointed them in the right direction. The participants' reasons for choosing a faculty career were consistent with the literature based on all disciplines, which include interest in teaching, research, and the intellectual environment (AAUP, 2004; Austin, 2002; Corcoran & Clark, 1984; Golde & Dore, 2001).

The primary difference between HEA students and the graduate student literature was that their decision was prompted by the academic environment of a doctoral program or a specific teaching experience during the program rather than an experience prior to entry into a doctoral program. Therefore, the participants' experiences did not fully fit with the career decision literature about when a faculty career is chosen (Lindholm, 2004).

According to Lindholm (2004), most students choose their discipline in their early undergraduate years by selecting a major. Higher Education Administration is not available as an undergraduate major; therefore, students have an undergraduate degree that is not related to student affairs or higher education. As Kath and Mary relayed, student affairs practitioners were more influential in guiding an undergraduate student into the field of student affairs than faculty. Therefore, the first decision point (Bowen & Schuster, 1997) was relevant as a career choice into the field of student affairs, but was not relevant for any of the participants as a career choice into a faculty career.

One of the reasons given for returning for a doctorate (but not for a master's) was the desire to return to the learning environment, which fits Bowen and Schuster's (1997) description of professionals who miss the learning environment and return for an academic career. However, the description is not a perfect match as very few of the participants were considering a faculty career prior to admission into a doctoral program.

Over two-thirds of the participants fit Bowen and Schuster's (1997) third decision point of an academic career path, making the decision during a doctoral program. As undergraduates, none of the participants considered a faculty career, and only Kath considered the option during her master's



program. The faculty path was not evident to undergraduates or most master's students. One explanation for this is might be "structures of opportunity" (Astin, 1984). As college seniors, the participants looked toward a master's program and career in student affairs, not a faculty career, so they did not see the academic opportunities available to them. Several participants, while in master's programs, reported seeing the faculty as much older and never placed themselves in the same category or realized that a faculty career was an option. Once they became doctoral students, the structures of opportunity changed and they became aware of new career possibilities. In addition, once practitioners returned for a doctoral degree, individual faculty members were influential in their decision to pursue a faculty career. Faculty served as role models, encouraged students to consider careers in academia, and supported students once the decision was made to pursue a faculty career. This result is consistent with the literature that cites the influence of faculty on an individual's choice to become faculty (whenever that might be in the career process) and the need for continuing support and encouragement through graduate school (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Baird, 1992; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Tinto, 1993).

Bowen and Schuster's (1997) career choice process does not address the actions of the final group of participants who did not choose a faculty career until the very end of their doctoral program or after graduation. Therefore, this model, while helpful in describing some of the participants, did not encompass all the participant experiences. In addition, it does not acknowledge the difference between a master's and doctoral degree in HEA. The goal of the master's degree is to prepare individuals for a practice-based profession, whereas the doctoral program can serve both practitioners and future faculty.

### **Implications for Theory**

The study results suggest an addition to Bowen and Schuster's (1997) academic career model. Their model denotes three points at which an individual might choose a faculty career: first, during the undergraduate years; second, after the undergraduate degree while working outside academia; and third, during a doctoral program. Based on the data, HEA faculty members were heavily concentrated at the last decision point and they experienced an additional career decision point. This new decision point came after completing a doctorate, returning to administration, and later choosing a faculty career. The individuals who made their decision

at this additional decision point are especially important to HEA because they represent the faculty who have had successful careers as practitioners and offer their rich experience to graduate students in the classroom. Without acknowledging that the field draws from this additional career decision point, we would be devaluing the importance of professional experience in a field that primarily educates practitioners.

This addition to the model would also suggest implications for the timing of a faculty career choice and actual preparation for a faculty position. While it may be intuitive that the earlier an individual decided on a career, the more prepared they would be, our study has shown that this may not be case. Preparation depends on type of program; opportunities for administrative, teaching and research experience; motivation of the individual; and the timing of the decision.

### **Implications for Practice**

Faculty members in Higher Education Administration serve an integral role in that they lead and guide current and future student affairs professionals. At the same time they direct the research undertaken in our field that contributes to the understanding of not only college students, but institutions, systems, and policy development of higher education. However, there appears to be a lack of intentionality in recruiting HEA faculty. Unlike other fields (Lindholm, 2004), faculty career choice in HEA is often made after enrollment or even after completion of a doctoral program. Student affairs professionals may have the greatest influence on colleagues who are considering doctoral programs. They see the degree as a stepping stone for professional development within higher education administration not as a path to a faculty career. Perhaps, we are missing an even earlier opportunity—during the Master’s program—to begin encouraging academically motivated students to return for a doctorate and a faculty career. While master’s students need professional experience in the field, they also need to know that a faculty career is a viable option. This may be particularly helpful for women as they try to balance family and career priorities (Farmer & Associates, 1997; Gerson, 1985). The flexibility of the career path for faculty in HEA allows choices to be made at different points in time, rather than only during the undergraduate years.

This research study indicates a connection between the experience of teaching at the graduate level and choosing a faculty career. Faculty in

HEA can ensure that students are aware of faculty careers when they enter a doctoral program and offer opportunities for them to explore those options—courses or institutionalized teaching opportunities—even within programs that are practitioner based. Research experiences are also important to help students understand faculty roles; however, research itself was somewhat less likely to be the reason for choosing a faculty career.

In addition, very few programs intentionally recruit seasoned professionals as faculty. By not acknowledging the additional entry point into a faculty career—after a successful career as a practitioner—we are devaluing experience, which is particularly detrimental to a field based on practice. We need to be intentional about the people we recruit to join the faculty ranks, both current students and current higher education professionals. This intentionality can be viewed at the macro level—what can our field as a whole do—or at the micro level—what can each program do to support our future faculty.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Further research is necessary as this project focuses on women in Higher Education Administration. A parallel qualitative study is necessary to determine if men in HEA have the same entry points into an academic career and in the same proportions as women. If not, then the question would be why are their experiences different and are they more aligned with other disciplines? While the results from this project are not necessarily generalizable to other fields, the four-point career choice model may be consistent with other professional fields that value practitioner experience before entering a doctoral program and further study may be fruitful.

## **Conclusion**

Higher Education Administration master's and doctoral program curricula are not based on a common undergraduate major, therefore continuous enrollment is not imperative for graduate student success. This influences the decision point for a faculty career, resulting in later entry into a faculty career, either during a doctoral program or after doctoral completion. This flexibility may be particularly conducive for women as they make decisions about career and family. Experience in the field is valued by doctoral program admissions committees, thereby

giving women exposure to careers that were not were not apparent during their undergraduate years. In addition, those women who have families prior to their doctoral program would not feel the pressure to attain tenure prior to having children (Bracken, Allen, & Dean, 2006). There is an opportunity to improve the preparation of future faculty to better suit the changing context of higher education and to better prepare our students, no matter the path they take.

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