

# Navigating Burnout in Student Affairs Graduate Students

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to discover how current full-time student affairs graduate students who also hold assistantships navigate burnout, what factors cause burnout for graduate students, as well as the impacts of burnout before they obtain a full-time student affairs job.

(1) What is burnout for student affairs graduate students? (2) What factors contribute to student affairs graduate student burnout? (3) What are the impacts of burnout on students' perceived professional trajectory?

## Literature Review

### Burnout and Burnout in Student Affairs

- The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) recently revised their definition of burnout to identify burnout as, "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" (para. 4).
- Burnout is one of the leading causes for why student affairs professionals leave the field. One of the leading causes of burnout is chronic stress (Carter, 2019).
- According to Marshall et al. (2016), "50-60% of student affairs professionals leave the field within the first five years" (p. 146).

### Graduate Student Stress

- According to a study by Oswalt and Riddock (2007), a majority of graduate students feel stressed (48.9%) or very stressed (24.7%).
- When forced to balance meeting academic and professional goals with outside family/friends and career responsibilities, graduate students tend to neglect their mental and physical health (Allen et al., 2020).

## Methodology and Methods

### Methodology

- Constructivist approach
- Phenomenological approach
- Qualitative interviews

### Sample

- 11 Full-time graduate students
- Enrolled in a Higher Education and Student Affairs program (or similar program: College Student Personnel, Higher Education Administration, etc.)
- Hold a graduate assistantship

### Data Collection and Analysis Strategies

- Convenience sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) through the use of Facebook student affairs groups (such as "Future Student Affairs Grad Students") to recruit
- Semi-structured, approximately 60 minute interview
- Transcribed interviews to analyze and interpret
- Use coding in order to identify major themes or commonalities.

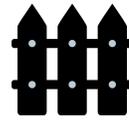
## Results

**Navigating Burnout:** Burnout, according to participants, is feeling an overwhelming sense of stress due to the culminations of work, life, and academic demands.

### Factors that Contribute to Burnout



Low pay



Work Life Balance  
& Boundaries



Intense  
Workloads



Lack of  
Support



COVID-19  
Pandemic

**Impacts of Burnout:** When asked, "Do you plan to stay in this functional area, or do you have other career aspirations within student affairs after graduation?" almost all participants mentioned that they consider going into a field that is not student affairs after graduation.

## Discussion

### Existing Literature

- Previous studies on student affairs burnout found that intense workloads, low salaries, conflicts between work and personal life, lack of advancement, and lack of continued passion contributed to burnout (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018)
- Buchanan (2012), found in their research that "33% of respondents aged 23-36 reported that they did not plan to do student affairs work for the rest of their lives" (p. 5).

### Limitations

- Sample size
- Diversity of GA functional areas
- Lack of social identity representation and specific experience

### Implications for Research

- Longitudinal approach
- Impacts of gender and/or race
- Housing and Residence Life experience

### Implications for Practice

- Discussion of pay in Higher Education
- GA Supervisors and Faculty Members

## References

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