

2023

The Relationship Between Campus Dining, Student Learning, and Student Success

John Boswell
jboswell@niu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations>



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Boswell, John, "The Relationship Between Campus Dining, Student Learning, and Student Success" (2023). *Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations*. 7128.

<https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/7128>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.

ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAMPUS DINING, STUDENT LEARNING, AND STUDENT SUCCESS

John Boswell, Ed.D.
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, 2023
Katy Jaekel, Director

Campus dining does more than provide sustenance to a campus community. Campus dining is an integral part of student success and learning. Limited research has looked at the impact of campus dining, particularly in the areas of student success and learning. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how campus dining directors in the Mid-American Conference (MAC) perceived how themselves and their dining programs impact student learning and success. Data was collected through interviews with MAC campus dining directors and through observations made on their campus dining websites. Three themes emerged from the research on ways campus dining impacted student learning and success: (a) learning leadership and life skills; (b) creating community; and (c) persistence. Recommendations for further research and implications for practice are discussed.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEKALB, ILLINOIS

MAY 2023

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAMPUS DINING,
STUDENT LEARNING, AND
STUDENT SUCCESS

BY

JOHN BOSWELL
© 2023 John Boswell

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Katy Jaekel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my life I have always been motivated by those who pushed me to be the best version of myself, knowing all that I was capable of even when I did not. Teachers, family, friends, and mentors have always played this role in my life. Without them, this journey would not have been possible.

I would first like to thank all my past teachers, from when I was a little child, through high school, undergraduate, graduate work, and this doctoral program. You have shaped me into the person I am today, and to you I am indebted. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to my dissertation chair, Dr. Katy Jaekel. Your confidence in me and words of encouragement were many times what I needed to continue. Thank you for all your time and brilliance you spent editing my papers and giving me feedback; I do not know what I would have done without you. Also, thank you to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Carrie Kortegast and Dr. Xiaodan Hu; your guidance, expertise, time, and advice were greatly appreciated.

To my supervisor, mentor, and friend, Dan Koenen, thank you for encouraging me to apply for the doctoral program and starting the doctoral program with me. Before you, I had never even heard of an Ed.D. Thank you for your companionship on all those Saturdays at the Naperville campus. Now it is your turn to finish.

To my parents, Dale, Carole, and Donna. Thank you for never letting me settle for where I am at. For pushing me to continue my education. Thank you for all the long phone calls and proofreading and editing with me every single paper that I wrote in this program. I hope I can and continue to make you proud. To my brothers, grandma, and friends, thank you for the

annoying questions of “Have you finished your dissertation yet?” Your continual support has always meant the world to me.

Lastly, of course, to my love, Dana, thank you. Thank you for being understanding when I came home late while working on this dissertation. Thank you for taking care of the house and farm animals when I did not have time. Thank you for dealing with me as I was stressed out and not pleasant to be around during this process. Thank you for always giving me a reason to strive to be better.

DEDICATION

To my best friend and love of my life, Dana, you are my reason.

Let this degree help us provide a better life for our future children.

I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF APPENDICES	ix
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Literature Review	3
Overview of Campus Dining	3
Types of Dining	4
Self-Operated Model vs. Outsourced Model	6
Benefits and Limitations of Outsourcing	7
Dining and Student Success	8
Fostering Diversity and Inclusion	9
Building Community, Socialization, and a Sense of Belonging	10
Persistence and Retention	11
Educational Programs	13
Creating a Culture of Sustainability	13
Education about Nutrition	14
Conceptual Framework	16
Research Design	18
Sampling	20
Data Collection	22

Chapter	Page
Data Analysis	23
Trustworthiness.....	24
Researcher Positionality.....	25
Conclusion	27
2. CAMPUS DINING: HELPING STUDENTS SUCCEED IN THE CLASSROOM, IN LIFE, AND BEYOND	29
Introduction.....	29
Background.....	31
Student Employment.....	31
Building Community, Socialization, and a Sense of Belonging.....	32
Persistence and Retention	33
Conceptual Framework.....	34
Research Design.....	36
Methodological Approach	36
Participants.....	37
Data Collection	38
Data Analysis	39
Trustworthiness.....	40
Limitations	41
Researcher Positionality.....	42
Findings.....	42
Learning Leadership and Life Skills.....	43

Chapter	Page
Formal and Informal Leadership Opportunities	44
Life Skills.....	45
Creating Community.....	46
Persistence.....	49
Discussion.....	51
Recommendations.....	54
Conclusion	55
3. SCHOLARLY REFLECTION	57
The Research Process	57
Applications to My Professional Practice.....	68
REFERENCES	74
APPENDICES	79

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. List of Study Participants.....	43

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
A. INTRODUCTORY EMAIL MESSAGE	79
B. CONSENT FORM.....	81
C. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	84

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dining facilities have long played a principal role in colleges and universities as a place of communion (Genovese, 2018). Today, campus dining strategies are also utilized to enhance and encourage student face-to-face interactions and informal learning (Genovese, 2018). Many colleges and universities often use dining to help fulfill their mission, reflect their culture and values, and influence the way students interact. Campus dining allows institutions to influence how students meet and learn, while creating experiences that shape campus society and strengthen campus communities (Genovese, 2018). Although it is understood that campus dining supports learning environments for students, little research has been done to explore how these spaces engage students in learning.

Borrego (2006) portrays a college campus as a “map,” full of different places where students can learn, develop, and grow. The student is at the center of the educational system; they engage in environments which in turn can impact behavior, facilitate meaning making of their experiences, and further develop and grow their cognitive functions due to their engagement with their environment. Meaning-making processes are crucial for transformative learning and student success (Magolda, 2009). Students move through social, academic, and institutional settings by attending classes, eating meals, talking with faculty members, playing games, and engaging with others in their residence halls. All of these settings provide opportunities for students to learn (Borrego, 2006).

While student growth, development, and meaning making emerge from many different environments within higher education institutions, to date, little research has explored how campus dining environments play a role in student development. As such, the purpose of this qualitative multi-site case study (Merriam, 1998) is to explore how college dining professionals perceive how campus dining contributes to student learning. Borrego (2006) provides a framework for understanding how to make an entire campus a learning community by locating learning in every part of campus and in every aspect of a student's experience. Grounding this study in Borrego's (2006) conceptual framework, this researcher will seek to generate ways in which campus dining supports student success that is not thought of or realized typically. The following questions will guide this study:

1. How does dining impact students' holistic college experience in ways that will support the learning outcomes of the campus and enhance students' experience?
2. How does dining use student employment as the substrate for a deeper learning experience?
3. How does dining promote relationships that foster student learning?

Information for this study will be gained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews of college dining professionals. As the recent pandemic might lessen the footprint of dining on campuses going forward, it is important to explore the impacts dining has on a student's educational experience, many of which often go unnoticed.

The following will provide a review of the literature related to campus dining and how it supports student success. This is followed by an overview of the conceptual framework guiding this study. I then will discuss the research design for this study and conclude by outlining the significance of this study.

Literature Review

This literature review will detail the history, background, and evolution of campus dining over the last century. It will also explain the types of campus dining, residential and retail, and the differences between the two. Campus dining operations will be detailed, whether operations are outsourced to a private contractor or self-operated by the university, and the benefits and disadvantages of each operational model will be described. Lastly, how campus dining supports student success will be highlighted, including how campus dining fosters diversity, inclusion, creates a culture of sustainability, builds community, socialization, and a sense of belonging, how it educates about nutrition, and how it helps students persist to graduation.

Overview of Campus Dining

Campus dining is considered one of the few basic support systems universities and colleges provide to their students. Campus dining has progressively become such an integral part of university operations that it is even becoming an integral part of their marketing and recruiting efforts (Kwun et al., 2013). Modern-day campus dining began to take place in the late 1940s as food service greatly expanded to feed the increasing number of students resulting from the G.I. Bill. At this time, universities first began switching from table service to a limited selection “one trip” buffet-style cafeteria (Ruiz, 2009).

In the 1950s and 1960s, dining halls were introduced, with students being able to select from different menu choices, and eventually, all-you-care-to-eat replaced pre-set portioning. The next development in campus dining came in the 1970s when the first food courts began to be introduced on campus (Kinsella, 1978). Food courts were influenced by fast-food restaurants and food was purchased and consumed à la carte instead of all-you-care-to-eat. By the 1990s, food

courts and dining halls began to look similar and function similarly to today's operations. Food courts incorporated more popular brand-name food restaurants, while dining halls had food stations including salad bars, gourmet coffee bars, and action stations with the food made right in front of the student. Dining halls also introduced a more personalized approach with smaller settings looking more like a food court, and choices of dishes from around the world (Ruiz, 2009).

Overall, campus dining has consisted of residential dining, retail dining, and catering. Residential dining usually is comprised of dining halls. Retail dining usually is comprised of restaurants, coffee shops, and convenience stores, while catering provides service for banquets, receptions, meetings, breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and other events where food or drinks are needed. Today, campus dining utilizes technology in its operations. A few technology enhancements include touch screen kiosks for personalized orders and mobile ordering. Campus dining also practices "Being Green" with sustainability practices including using compostable products, reducing waste and purchasing more local and organic products (Genovese, 2018). Dining services have evolved to supply critical functions that support enrollment growth, enhance recruitment, promote retention, and provide revenue for higher education institutions (Clayton, 2014).

Types of Dining

Generally, campus dining is split into three different segments: residential dining, retail dining, and catering (NACUFS, 2020). Although catering can impact students and the university as a whole by providing service for large events such as awards ceremonies, graduations, and receptions, it does not have as great an impact on students as the other two segments, nor is it

incorporated in student meal plans as residential and retail dining is. Catering is not a dining service that students utilize regularly or one that has an impact on their daily lives. In campus catering services, most of the clients are not students; they are off-campus guests utilizing university facilities or faculty and staff utilizing catering for meetings or lunches. Therefore, for this literature review only residential and retail dining will be detailed.

As its name implies, residential dining is primarily used to feed a university's residential student population. Residential dining does, however, service the entire campus community, including faculty and staff, off-campus students, and guests of the university, as residential dining halls are spaces on campus where students, faculty, and staff can congregate to eat. Residential dining locations are typically traditional dining halls where students eat in an all-you-care-to-eat format from different food stations typically including a grill station, deli station, pizza/pasta station, salad bar, traditional food line, beverage station, dessert station, and a variety of different action stations (NACUFS, 2020). Students with meal plans usually have a certain amount of "meal swipes" they can use to access residential dining. Typically, meal plans allow students to have a certain amount of "meals swipes" per week or per semester, while some plans allow for an unlimited number of meals to be eaten. Some residential dining halls are even set up to accommodate meal plans that solely utilize declining balance meal plan dollars and price each item out individually (NACUFS, 2020). Residential dining halls also usually have a "door price" or an amount non-meal-plan holders can pay to enter and eat in the dining hall using cash/credit or a form of campus currency.

During the 1970s, retail dining began appearing in regularity on college and university campuses (Ruiz, 2009). Retail dining consists of a variety of different locations on campuses

including food courts and restaurants (nationally branded, regionally branded, or self-branded), convenience stores or markets, and coffee shops. Retail locations are heavily utilized by off-campus and commuter students, as well as faculty and staff. Unlike a standard residential dining hall, retail dining usually does not have an all-you-care-to-eat format. Instead, items are purchased individually or in a combination meal as done in restaurants. Typical payment at retail locations consists of cash, debit/credit, or another campus or dining currency. In recent years, students have also been able to purchase food at retail locations using their meal plans.

Many campus meal plans now include some type of declining balance campus currency that can be used in retail dining. Some meal plans also allow for meal equivalency or meal exchange to be used in retail dining as well, instead of using a “meal swipe” in a dining hall. A meal equivalency is used when a meal plan holder can use up to a certain dollar amount to replace a “meal swipe.” A meal exchange is a preset combination, such as a burger, fries, and a drink, that can be purchased together in lieu of a meal swipe in a dining hall. The emergence of retail dining, and its incorporation into meal plans, has greatly added variety to meal plan holders as well as increased satisfaction.

Self-Operated Model vs. Outsourced Model

Operations in campus dining are either self-operated (when campus dining is run by the university themselves), outsourced, or a combination of the two (Conradson, 2014). Outsourcing, also known as contracting out, is the obtaining of services from an outside company rather than having them supplied by in-house operations (Phipps & Merisotis, 2005). As such, outsourcing is a form of privatization that allows institutions of higher education to contract with an outside organization to provide a traditional higher education function or service. This type of business

consists of contracting out with private or external businesses to provide vital services or products at less cost and/or of better quality than the university. Therefore, universities oftentimes contract out campus dining. The key to any outsourcing venture is to ensure that the process helps fulfill the institution's mission and long-term goals and objectives. The contractor then either takes over the employees of the higher education institution or supplants the institutions' employees with its own staff (Ender & Fahleson, 1994).

Benefits and Limitations of Outsourcing

Outsourcing is not a new concept to institutions of higher education. Outsourcing permits an institution to concentrate on its core competencies. Colleges and universities are there to provide a quality education and to cultivate the skills needed for their graduates to find good quality jobs. Outsourcing secondary activities, such as campus dining and other services that are not a core competency, allows the institution to concentrate more on education and to worry less about the other functions that are still required to maintain a successful campus (Agron, 2001). Outsourcing, when correctly planned and controlled, is expected to produce a number of benefits, such as decreased costs, improved service quality, and increased efficiency and innovation.

Proponents of outsourcing recognize that private sector suppliers provide services more efficiently and at a reduced cost than the public sector (Gose, 2005). Some of the other benefits of outsourcing by higher education institutions include risk avoidance and variable employment (Quigley & Pereira, 2011). Outsourcing allows a college or university to focus on its main mission, not on running an auxiliary service that may compete with private-sector alternatives and not providing a real return for institutional dollars. Outsourcing to a contractor can reduce a

college's or university's labor and benefits costs, provide a sole point of accountability, and provide predictable costs; the resulting savings permit the higher education institution to concentrate more resources on its core educational operations—teaching and research (Gupta et al., 2005).

However, outsourcing can have many negative effects that arise from its implementation in educational institutions. Contractors may simply possess basic skills needed rather than industry-specific and lack the drive, skills, and commitment of the field of higher education (Lafferty, 2000). Bringing in “outsiders” has broken down the distinct cultures that exist within the institution's core fabric, thereby corroding the sector's infrastructure (Lafferty, 2000). Like any other innovative method of managing, if not structured and managed properly, outsourcing can result in a myriad of inefficiencies and dilemmas for institutions of higher education. Opponents of outsourcing claim that private business procedures are contrary to the established culture and missions of higher education institutions. They claim that outsourcing alters and undermines the core mission of a college or university, which is not profit generation but education (Gupta et al., 2005).

Dining and Student Success

Dining supports student success in numerous ways. Komives and Schoper (2006) identified five different learning outcomes that are a result of the overall campus experience and help define student success. Becoming an educated person who supports lifetime learning, the importance of education to one's life, and mastering bodies of knowledge that bring insight to oneself and one's world. Becoming a skilled worker, which emphasizes the career and workforce preparation role for colleges to help students identify their options and master work-related

skills. Becoming a democratic citizen, a goal that affirms the role of civic engagement in public life and the contributions needed to further society. Becoming self-aware and interpersonally sensitive individuals, who are needed to interact in today's diverse society, recognizing that personal identity and culture affect everything someone does in relation to others, and becoming a life skills manager able to construct and manage functions that promote their quality of life (pp. 19–20).

As Hamrick et al. (2002) noted, student success leads college graduates to become an educated person, a skilled worker, a democratic citizen, a self-aware and interpersonally sensitive individual, and a life skills manager. Campus dining helps support student success by fostering diversity and inclusion, creating a culture of sustainability, building community, socialization, and a sense of belonging, educating about nutrition, and enabling student persistence and retention.

Fostering Diversity and Inclusion

In the twenty-first century, when campus dining locations are renovated or newly constructed, their designs reflect higher education's priority of promoting diversity and inclusion (Genovese, 2018). As student bodies have become more diverse and colleges and universities increasingly list diversity and inclusion as priorities in their strategic plans (Genovese, 2018), higher education institutions have come to offer food choices that mirror their diverse student populations. College and universities put an emphasis on inclusivity for those with special dining needs, including physical access needs.

Similarly, more and more dining halls are working to accommodate students who want halal or kosher foods as well as gluten-free or vegetarian alternatives along with other globally

inspired cuisines (Genovese, 2018). Gramling et al. (2005) reported that students from diverse cultures agreed that foodservice has a huge impact on campus operations. In this study, the data found all students decided that foodservice has a great impact on campus operations, especially learning morale, learning outcomes, and the students' relationship to the college. Dining services can become an important tool in meeting the needs of a diverse campus community. Dining services can link different cultures through food. Food-based assignments can be used to enhance cultural awareness (Moore & Andrews, 2012; Sommer et al., 2011). Sommer et al. (2011) reported, "food is a meaningful entry point for learning more about one's personal values and beliefs and the values and beliefs of other cultures" (p. 271). Campus dining services are a program and location on campus where diversity and inclusiveness are promoted, and informal learning is encouraged.

Building Community, Socialization, and a Sense of Belonging

Considering the universal nature of mealtime socialization (Torisky, 2007), it makes sense that dining operations have long played an abiding role in universities as a place of gathering and conversation. Though these friendly spaces and their approaches to dining have evolved, they continue to serve as a destination for socialization. Eating with others provides a sense of support and belonging (Genovese, 2018), which is particularly crucial at a time when young adults are learning to live independently while developing relationships that have the potential to create everlasting impressions. Dining locations also allow for the creation of friendships or social spaces that are explicitly intended for students who wish to signal that they are open to meeting and interacting with peers.

Campus dining can be involved with developing effective strategies to develop and maintain peer relationships and ultimately student success (Bowman et al., 2019). Dining spaces on campuses could function as specific destinations for social and organizational activities and academic support by creating dynamic social spaces (Genovese, 2018.) Rozin (2005) stated, “food becomes a social vehicle, allowing people to make social distinctions and establish social linkages” (p. S108). As higher education moves from traditional testing to more collaborative and experiential teaching, greater emphasis is being placed on learning through experience and institutions are responding by integrating strategies that foster collaborative and experiential learning environments, even when it comes to dining and socializing (Genovese, 2018).

A university goal is the cultivation of a sense of community and belonging within the student body. Understanding the relationships between food, community, and social exchange can help create dynamic spaces of informal learning and student interaction in and around dining locations on campuses. Campus dining locations that are designed correctly can allow institutions to influence how students meet and learn, creating experiences that shape the overall campus society and strengthen campus communities (Genovese, 2018). Food is a necessity in any culture and supports campus networks. Gramling et al. (2005) tied dining service operations to supporting building campus communities. A focus group reported that quality food service provided a sense of “home” (Gramling et al., 2005). Colleges and universities are benefiting from building a sense of community and creating a home-like environment.

Persistence and Retention

The greater social integration an individual has into an institution’s fabric, the less likely they are to leave the institution (Tinto, 1987). Campus dining has progressively become such an

integral part of university operations that universities are marketing their campus dining options in their recruitment efforts. Students are using food to identify material culture and they have become food-savvy cohorts, who successfully express their individual cultural identities through their dining experience (Kwun et al., 2013). Campus dining is much more than a profit center but is an essential component of a student's campus life and satisfaction (Kwun et al., 2013).

There are many ways in which campus dining helps students persist to graduation. Areas in which dining can play a role in persistence are social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, and learning experiences (Roberts & Styron, 2010). An important factor affecting college students' persistence is that of being socially integrated and connected with others. On a college campus, dining locations are one of the most used facilities to socialize and connect with others (Bowman et al., 2019). Campus dining locations offer involvement and engagement opportunities including meeting places, special themed meals, and student employment. Dining halls and retail locations such as coffee shops make for a comfortable atmosphere for a student to interact with faculty and staff. Standard business procedures such as a simple smile or hello from a campus dining employee can make all the difference in the day of a student and go a long way in making a student feel comfortable on campus. Campus dining provides learning experiences by providing different interactive experiences such as chef competitions, contests, challenges, and themed meals.

In a study done by Bowman et al. (2019), data was examined on the number of meal swipes in the dining hall of students who ate with someone else, and then how those students' retention rates compared to students who ate alone or did not eat in the dining hall. The study

supported existing scholarship linking social integration with student persistence. Once again, campus dining locations offer students the space and ease to meet and socially integrate.

Educational Programs

As Borrego (2006) illustrates, students learn in many places on a college campus beyond the classroom. At campus dining locations, students learn about sustainability and they learn about nutrition. Knowledge learned about sustainability and nutrition will help college graduates become democratic citizens, become self-aware, and become life skills managers as they go out into the world post-graduation (Hamrick et al., 2002).

Creating a Culture of Sustainability

Sustainability is an area in which college dining services are joining with students to change institutional culture (Ruiz, 2009). On a college campus, the place where the opportunity for sustainability is most apparent is in campus dining. Campus dining is where the sustainability of food, paper, water, and utilities all converge. Campus dining has therefore become a champion of many sustainability efforts, such as going trayless in dining halls, because being sustainable can also save campus dining programs money while creating a positive image at the same time.

Pittman (2012) makes a connection amongst student learning and growth and sustainability efforts in dining services. A national trend is students asking for locally grown food (Carlson, 2008). Instead of dining services purchasing all food served in dining halls from sizable corporate agribusiness, the trend is to foster relationships with local and regional farmers to offer locally grown food. This is a win-win for colleges and local farmers. Many universities are now acquiring produce served in its dining locations from locally grown farms and have linked sustainability projects to their mission to contribute to the campus life experience.

Sustainability is a cultural change that dining services are instigating and leading an expanding role throughout the country that is realized by students attending institutions of higher education (Clayton, 2014).

Additionally, many universities are taking the locally grown food concept to a new level by growing produce right on campus in their own organic gardens and farms. The trend of growing your own produce is not restricted to smaller more rural schools but is being utilized by a broad range of institutions. Many of these gardens and farms are student-run, allowing students to develop their knowledge of gardening and sustainability through real-world, interactive experiences (Genovese, 2018).

Another part of a sustainability culture that campus dining conditions students to use and understand is composting and recycling (Msengi et al., 2019). Recycling involves taking an unusable product or material and turning it into a usable raw material to make another product. On the other hand, composting entails using organic waste to produce nutrient-rich fertilizer for the soil. This preserves the landfill space and could also be used to produce energy. One of the keys to successful recycling and composting of food wastes is the capability to turn a profit or to show social and environmental benefits for the community. Recycling and composting could create new infrastructure, jobs, and an entire brand-new segment of the economy (Ruiz, 2009). Campus dining creates habitual actions of composting and recycling that students will take with them for the rest of their lives.

Education about Nutrition

Campus dining services not only meet the basic food needs of students and generate revenue for the university but contribute to the development of each student (Clayton, 2014).

Learning to make appropriate food choices may prove difficult for most college students whose meals were once provided by parents (Boek et al., 2012). University dining programs are poised to educate students on the benefits of healthy food choices by introducing nutrition programming into campus dining programs that goes beyond the meal plan program and includes more than just nutrition labeling. Many colleges and universities elect to post nutritional information at both the point of selection and on their dining website or app.

Supplying nutrition information at the point of sale in a campus dining location might be a way to influence students' choice of food for weight maintenance and health. If food professionals can understand the motivation for food choices and balance, along with the responsibility to educate students about nutrition behavior, then campus dining professionals can provide delicious food choices that span the range of healthiness. College students are in a moldable and vulnerable place as they assert their independence at college. Age and levels of education that students may or may not have received at home or high school environments limit their experience with food choice (Conklin et al., 2005).

When it comes to the selection of food, studies have found that habit is more important than attitude in influencing behavioral intention and that many students frequently find themselves acting impulsively and in ways that do not necessarily correspond to their goal (Conklin et al., 2005). However, college students are at the point in their lives where these habits can be manipulated as they are developing their independence. By raising their awareness level about their health goals, a new motive for food choice is introduced at the point of food selection. As portion sizes have increased in America, campus dining professionals can educate students on proper portioning by giving out correct portions in dining halls and making sure self-

serve areas have properly sized and labeled spoons and serving utensils (Conklin et al., 2005). Campus dining personnel have the ability and opportunity to program accordingly to heavily influence college students on how to make healthy eating choices. The choices these students make in college will have a lasting influence on the eating choices they make for the rest of their lives.

Conceptual Framework

The framework put forth by Keeling (2004) argued for the integrated use of all of higher education's resources in the education and preparation of the whole student. It also introduced new ways of understanding and supported learning and development as intertwined, inseparable elements of the student experience, and advocated for transformative education—a holistic process of learning that places the student at the center of the learning experience.

“Mapping the Learning Environment,” based on the concepts in Keeling (2004), is the process of recognizing, identifying, and documenting the sites for learning activities on campus. It provides the framework within which student affairs educators can link their programs and activities to learning opportunities. It is leveraging programs and resources in ways that promote opportunities to deepen student learning. Fresh collaborations for learning are realized by focusing on creating learning outcomes that support student success. A campus committed to engaging members in new paradigms of learning, practicing new pedagogies, and creating experiences to support learning must be truly “learner centered.” This means that all campus educators (both faculty and student affairs professionals) must review and consider changing their practice. Mapping an environment informs practitioners about the kinds of activities that will enhance classroom experiences and help the campus develop a broader understanding of

transformative learning. The critical assumption guiding mapping a learning environment is that the entire campus is a learning community (Borrego, 2006).

This study is guided by the conceptual framework of “Mapping the Learning Environment” (Borrego, 2006). Four principal concepts will be utilized: designing programs and leveraging activities, using student employment, keeping obstacles out of the way of learning, and hosting relationships (Borrego, 2006). This framework first explores how dining personnel design programs and leverage activities in ways that will support the learning outcomes of the campus and enhance student experience. An example of this is providing a lunchtime healthy food series in the student union where student chefs learn from campus chefs how to prepare healthy dishes that can then be distributed to the campus community. This framework next explores how dining uses student employment as the substrate for a deeper learning experience. An example of this would be the development of a student manager program that teaches students leadership skills they can utilize in their future careers and everyday lives. This framework then explores how dining supports student learning by delivering services that smooth the student’s path on campus and reduce obstacles to learning. An example of this would be having dining locations in the library and academic buildings and having a robust meal plan that students can utilize in these locations. This framework lastly explores how dining hosts relationships that maximize student learning. An example of this would be creating a marketing internship position where the director works with and develops the student on a one-on-one basis.

Numerous other studies have used this framework as well. Myers (2008) applied these principles to the learning of students with disabilities and to students learning about disabilities.

Jessup-Anger (2009) used the framework in their study to address concerns about the process by which divisions of student affairs implement innovative policies, programs, and practices.

Fullerton (2010) used the framework to investigate ways the complexities of transformative learning can be integrated into the practicalities of college student learning and development.

Based on how the above-mentioned studies utilized *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004, 2006) to guide them, I feel this would be an appropriate framework to use for this study on how dining professionals perceive the role of dining in supporting student success.

“Mapping the Learning Environment” (Borrego, 2006) will affect every aspect of the study, from determining how to frame the purpose and the problem, to what to look at and for, and how to make sense of the data that is collected (Merriam, 1998). It will guide the study in the development of research questions, interview questions, and how to receive the best high-quality content from the interviews by helping phrase the questions in a way that practitioners can relate to. Mapping learning environments is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to explore ways in which dining supports student success as they move through a campus’s social, academic, and institutional environments.

Research Design

To investigate how dining professionals perceive their role in supporting student success, I will utilize a multi-site case study approach. This methodological approach is anchored in a constructivist theoretical framework and presumes various social realities and participants’ interpretations of these constructions of the social world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A constructivist epistemological perspective understands knowledge as socially constructed

through collaborations between individuals and the world around? them in a social context

(Crotty, 1998). Characteristics of a constructivist paradigm include:

1. The researcher-respondent connection is subjective, interactive, and interdependent.
2. Reality is multiple, complex, and not simply quantifiable.
3. The values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but brace up all aspects of the research.
4. The research product (e.g., interpretations) is context particular.

(Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 436)

It is important for this study to use a constructivist paradigm, as the perception of each dining professional's role in supporting student success is socially constructed based on their interaction with students, their institution, and with other professionals.

As mentioned above, this study will utilize a multi-site case study approach. Here, a case study is "both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (Stake, 2000). Case study methodology is a "preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context" (Yin, 1994). This approach is appropriate for this study, as I seek to understand how dining professionals perceive the role of dining in supporting student success.

Case study research is illustrated by "the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73) and pulls from different sources of data to generate an in-depth understanding of this bounded system. The bounded system, or case, in this study, is campus dining. More specifically, I am interested in studying how dining professionals perceive their role in supporting student success. Consistent with the central research questions that guided this exploration and given the real-life context of the perception of campus dining professionals supporting student success, a constructivist case

study methodology was most suitable because meaning-making is “not readily distinguishable from its context” (Yin, 2003, p. 4). A constructivist framework establishes the focus of the investigation on the research participants’ meaning-making of their encounters and perceptions of outcomes related to supporting student success (Jones et al., 2013). The design of the study was contextually reliant on and bounded by each site of this multi-site case study (Creswell, 2007).

Sampling

As is with nearly all case studies, the criteria for sampling will be purposeful (Jones et al., 2013), with stress on “those cases that seem to offer the opportunity to learn” (Stake, 2000). For this study, I will use extreme or deviant case sampling. The extreme or deviant case sampling involves choosing “illuminative cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 232) that exemplify contexts where innovation was recognized notably as a success or a failure. The major weakness of extreme case sampling is its lack of generalizability through representativeness. This strategy will be especially suitable for investigating how a program is expected to work under particular circumstances by analyzing successful as well as unsuccessful implementations of the program. For this study, I will interview participants who are full of rich experiences in campus dining and who can use these experiences to highlight how they feel they support student success. Although these perceptions may not be normal for a college dining professional, they will still show what is possible and what dining professionals still may experience.

Campus dining was selected as the bounded system in this case because it is clearly identifiable and limited in scope (Merriam, 1998). My focus will be on how individual dining professionals perceive how they support student success rather than how an individual dining

program supports student success. I also will seek a variation of participants amongst a variety of different sites, in this case, different campus dining programs.

To identify participants appropriate for this study, I will utilize NACUFS (National Association of College and University Food Services). Through NACUFS, I will send out a message detailing the study and explaining that I am looking for campus dining professionals who think they would be interested in participating and add value to the study. The potential participants who show interest will be emailed and asked to fill out a brief information sheet. The information sheet will ask them to list what former colleges/universities they have worked at in campus dining, the size of the operation, for how long, what were their roles, were they working for a contractor or for a self-operated operation, and lastly, they will be asked an open-ended question to briefly describe how they feel their current or past roles in campus dining have supported student success. After collecting their information sheets, the potential participants will be screened and interviewed.

Out of the potential participants, I expect 8–10 will be chosen to participate in the study. Selection will be made based on the answers to the information sheet and interviews that ensure a variety of participants. Participants will also be selected based on their answer to the last question: “How do you feel your current or past roles in campus dining have supported student success?” This answer would strongly indicate if they would be able to have a content-rich interview and would be a meaningful member of the study. Potential participants will be informed that they have been selected to participate in all phases of the study and that they will receive a \$50 gift certificate for participating as an incentive and a token of appreciation. Although 10 participants are the goal, if out of the potential participants it appears there are more

than 10 content-rich participants, then more participants will be allowed to participate in the study. The institution at which I am employed will be excluded from the study.

Data Collection

Consistent with the methodological assumptions of constructivism, interviews signified the primary data collection technique in this study (Appleton & King, 1997). The purpose of the interviews is to investigate the case from another person's perspective (Patton, 2002) because a "case will not be seen the same by everyone" (Stake, 1995). The interviews will be in-depth and semi-structured. I will develop and pilot-test an interview protocol (Creswell, 2007) with two local campus dining professionals who can provide rich content but are not eligible to participate in this study as they work at the same institution as me. I will revise the protocol based on the feedback and responses from the pilot test interviews. I will conduct an initial interview with participants, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Consistent with a case study, interviews will focus on the outcome of the study by exploring participants' perceptions of how they support student success through their role in campus dining.

Guided by the conceptual framework found in Borrego (2006), interview questions will be based on (a) how dining design programs and leverages activities in ways that support the learning outcomes of the campus and enhance students' experience; (b) how dining uses student employment as the substrate for a deeper learning experience; (c) how dining supports student learning by delivering services that smooth the student's path on campus and reduce obstacles to learning, and (d) how dining hosts relationships that maximize student learning. Lastly, participants will be asked to elaborate on how they see themselves supporting student success. As these will be semi-structured interviews, the goal of the interview questions will be to start a

conversation that will hopefully lead to a content-rich dialogue. Interviews will be conducted through a video conference, either Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Calls will be recorded, and each recording will be transcribed verbatim.

I will begin to code the data gathered in the preliminary interviews (Charmaz, 2006). As different themes emerge, these themes will establish the basis for the second interviews, which will examine in more detail the themes which have already become apparent as well as new themes (Charmaz, 2006). After the second interview, participants will only be contacted again if clarification is needed on any items.

When possible, researchers are encouraged to use multiple methods of data collection. Often, there is a primary method of collecting data with support from another method (Merriam, 2002). In this study, the primary source of data will be interviews, with documents serving as the supporting source. The strength of documents as a data source is that they already exist in the situation; they do not intrude upon or manipulate the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator might. They are also not dependent upon people, whose cooperation is essential for collecting data through interviews and observations (Merriam, 2002). The documents that will be researched are campus dining websites. In particular, I will at the websites of ten large, public institutions' dining programs. I will research how these dining programs promote learning through nutrition, sustainability, employment, and diversity.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I will use First Cycle coding and then Second Cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the data compiled during research. Codes are usually, but not always, used to retrieve and categorize similar data chunks so the

researcher can quickly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a certain research question, hypothesis, construct, or theme. Clustering and the display of condensed chunks then set the stage for further data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). During First Cycle coding I will use Descriptive Coding and In Vivo Coding (Miles et al., 2014) to identify words and short phrases that summarize ways in which dining professionals perceive the role of dining in supporting student success.

At numerous points throughout my analysis, I will return to the work of Borrego (2006) to make connections with my findings and the conceptual framework. Also, consistent with constructivism, data analysis will ensue not as a linear process of actual to abstract but in a more dynamic and evolving manner by constantly returning to the raw data with innovative questions, concepts, and interpretations until patterns emerged that define the essence, or core story, of the experience for all the participants (Strauss, 1987).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the conceptual basis on which the research can be assessed is known as trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Triangulating the data by studying it from various perspectives or through several interviews, alertness to bias through researcher reflexivity, and mapping usefulness within the study are all means for mostly addressing trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four criteria by which trustworthiness can be evaluated: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility tries to ensure that the data collected correctly reflected the phenomenon studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this constructivist study, I will establish credibility by aiming to collect data that accurately shows the participants' view of their experiences. Individual

participants will obtain a summary essay of their previous interviews as a means of member checking to confirm that my interpretations of their interviews reflect the participants' own versions of their experiences.

Transferability seeks to ensure that the outcomes of the study are suitably applied in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The burden of determining correct transferability lies with the reader. As the original researcher, it is my responsibility to comprehensively describe all aspects of the study to deliver a wealth of information on which readers of this research can ascertain transferability.

Dependability tries to ensure that procedures are followed and that the data reflect the shifting conditions of the experience being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To check my own subjectivity and confirm dependability, I will use a reflexive journal during the data collection process. Confirmability seeks to safeguard that another researcher can confirm the study when presented with the same data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, I will maintain a detailed audit trail including digital recordings, notes, and transcripts for this purpose.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is also the catalyst for data collection and analysis (Brown et al., 2002). Throughout the research process, I will serve as selector of participants, data collector, interviewer, transcriber, and data analyst. My main role in making decisions about which data will be gathered and what meanings will be made, calls for me to be as reflective, transparent, and open about the perspectives and experiences I bring to this study and mindful of how they will shape the study (Lather, 1993).

My relationship with this topic spans over fourteen years across four different institutions. I have experienced college dining as a student and a student employee, where dining supported my own success in a multitude of different ways and has helped mold me into the person that I am today. I have also experienced this topic as a dining professional. I have worked at private liberal art institutions as small as 700 students, and at mid-sized public institutions as large as 20,000 students. I have also worked as a food service contractor and for a self-operated institution. During this time, I have directly managed in excess of over 1,000 student workers and have been directly in charge of feeding in excess of a million meals to over 10,000 different students.

I was particularly drawn to this topic during my tenure as the General Manager of campus dining at a small private school of 700 students. During my tenure there I was able to transform the campus dining program into one that increased the students' ability to be successful. By my second semester on campus, I was able to take customer satisfaction scores that had historically been in the 70% percentile to 95%. I did this by making the dining program better with higher quality and variety, as well as making it interactive and personal. After being at this institution for less than a year, I was selected as the Grand Marshall of the homecoming parade and gave the speech to the student body on the Friday night of homecoming week. The president of the college on numerous occasions called me the Rockstar of campus. I was constantly being told by students how much better I made their daily lives, how much they appreciated me, and how much I supported them.

Although I will concede that my experience was not the norm, I believe that campus dining professionals support student success on a daily basis at institutions of higher education

all over the country. I believe my background, and personal experience with this topic will lead me to be able to successfully research and show how campus dining professionals support student success.

Conclusion

Since the early 2000s, online education has been on a steady rise for American colleges and universities. American's trust in e-learning has also grown (Eom & Ashill, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased American colleges' and universities' reliance on and use of online education (Sahu, 2020). Although it is uncertain to predict what COVID-19's lasting impact will be on higher education, the increased reliance on online education is certain to continue (Bevins et al., 2020).

As online education reduces the number of students in the residence hall and faculty and staff on campus (Bevins et al., 2020), campus dining will have less of a population to feed, which will result in a reduction of services and an overall smaller impact. Therefore, it is now more important than ever to understand what role dining plays in student success. The significance of this study will be to highlight to campus decision-makers how campus dining plays a crucial role in informal learning and the overall college experience. In addition, this study will provide a useful guide to student affairs professionals and campus dining professionals how best to utilize campus dining programs to increase student success.

As campuses will have tough financial decisions to make in upcoming years (Bevins et al., 2020), it will be important to understand what impact campus dining has on the campus community beyond its financial impact. The results of this study will show how campus dining has a positive impact on the learning environment of students and a positive impact on achieving

learning outcomes representative of a college graduate. After reviewing this study, campus decision-makers will also become more aware of the negative effect a reduction in campus dining will have on student success.

After reviewing how campus dining professionals in this case study perceive their role in supporting student success, student affairs professionals and other campus dining professionals will be able to understand better ways in which campus dining can support student success. They can then implement policies and programs to replicate the results of this study. I hope that this study will influence or provoke other campus dining professionals to strive to do all they can to support student success.

Findings from this study can be used to provide a voice to campus dining professionals when attempting to justify their programs and services to higher education administrators. By developing an understanding of all the learning outcomes of students who utilize campus dining, the college community will have a better understanding of how campus dining is a contributor to the broader academic mission of an institution and that they offer important informal learning opportunities and do more than provide sustenance. By acknowledging how campus dining supports student success, perhaps campus dining programs will be recognized for all they do to support the learning environment of colleges and universities.

CHAPTER 2
CAMPUS DINING: HELPING STUDENTS SUCCEED
IN THE CLASSROOM, IN LIFE, AND BEYOND

Introduction

Dining facilities have long played a principal role in colleges and universities as a place of communion (Genovese, 2018). Today, campus dining strategies are also utilized to enhance and encourage student face-to-face interactions and informal learning (Genovese, 2018). Many colleges and universities often use dining to help fulfill their mission, reflect their culture and values, and influence the ways students interact. Campus dining allows institutions to influence how students meet and learn, while creating experiences that shape campus society and strengthen campus communities (Genovese, 2018). While it is understood that campus dining supports learning environments for students, little research has been done to explore how these spaces engage students in learning.

Borrego (2006) portrays a college campus as a “map,” full of different places where students can learn, develop, and grow. The student is at the center of the educational system; they engage in environments which in turn can impact behavior, facilitate meaning making of their experiences, and further develop and grow their cognitive functions due to their engagement with their environment. Meaning-making processes are crucial for transformative learning and student success (Magolda, 2009). Students move through social, academic, and institutional settings by attending classes, eating meals, talking with faculty members, playing

games, and engaging with others in their residence halls. All these settings provide opportunities for students to learn (Borrego, 2006).

While student growth, development, and meaning making emerge from many different environments within higher education institutions, to date, little research has explored how campus dining environments play a role in student development. As such, the purpose of this qualitative multi-site case study (Merriam, 1998) was to explore how college dining professionals perceived how campus dining contributed to student learning. Borrego (2006) provides a framework for understanding how to make an entire campus a learning community by locating learning in every part of campus and in every aspect of a student's experience.

Grounding this study in Borrego's (2006) conceptual framework, I sought to generate ways in which campus dining supported student success that is often not thought of or realized typically.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does dining impact students' holistic college experience in ways that will support the learning outcomes of the campus and enhance students' experience?
2. How does dining use student employment as the substrate for a deeper learning experience?
3. How does dining promote relationships that foster student learning?

While the impact of the pandemic might lessen the footprint of dining on campuses moving forward, it is still critical to explore the impacts dining has had on a student's educational experience, many of which often go unnoticed.

The following will provide background information related to campus dining and how it supports student success. This is followed by an overview of the conceptual framework guiding this study. I then discuss the research design and findings. I conclude by outlining the key recommendations.

Background

This literature discusses research that discussed how campus dining contributes to student learning and success. First, it explores the correlation between student employment and student learning and success. Next, this review of literature discusses how campus dining supports student success, builds community, socialization, and a sense of belonging, and how it helps students persist to graduation.

Student Employment

Among benefits of student employment in campus dining are the practical work experience that employers are looking for, and employment helping students persist to graduation. A benefit of campus employment is the opportunity to acquire and hone practical competencies, such as time management, that employers value (McClellan et al., 2018). Employers are concerned that too many college graduates are not prepared to function effectively in the workplace. Among employer worries are that while students generally know a good deal about the subject they studied, they are not always able to readily transfer this information to better understand problems and circumstances on the job. This is a major reason why employers prefer to hire college graduates with work experience (McClellan et al., 2018).

Often overlooked is recognizing that jobs put students in a situation where they can apply what they have learned in the classroom, which is related to persistence, as campus employment helps with goal realization. Goal realization is being able to recognize and appreciate skills and knowledge learned in the classroom when applied to real life, or in this case, work (McClellan et al., 2018). Therefore, employment in campus dining helps students persist to graduation, because as they work, they gain appreciation for what they are learning in their classes.

Discussions of student learning usually focus on classroom teaching and do not consider student employment as important to student learning. However, literature confirms that being a student worker does add to and enhance student learning. Institutions can use their on-campus student employment program to provide students with significant learning and engagement opportunities that can help with retention and build career-readiness skills (Burnside et al., 2019). Institutions can also leverage on-campus student employment as an effective instrument for supporting student success at the institution and beyond by providing students with educational learning experiences that enable them to develop intellectually, build career-readiness skills, and access ample instructional support (Burnside et al., 2019).

Building Community, Socialization, and a Sense of Belonging

Given the universal nature of mealtime socialization (Torisky, 2007), it makes sense that dining operations have long played an abiding role in universities as a place of gathering and conversation. Though these friendly spaces and their approaches to dining have evolved, they continue to serve as a destination for socialization. Eating with others provides a sense of support and belonging (Genovese, 2018), which is particularly crucial at a time when young adults are learning to live independently and while developing relationships that have the potential to create everlasting impressions. Dining locations also allow for the creation of friendship or social spaces that are explicitly intended for students who are wishing to signal that they are open to meeting and interacting with peers.

Campus dining can be involved with developing effective strategies to develop and maintain peer relationships and ultimately student success (Bowman et al., 2019). Dining spaces on campuses could function as specific destinations for social and organizational activities and

academic support by creating dynamic social spaces (Genovese, 2018). Rozin (2005) stated, “food becomes a social vehicle, allowing people to make social distinctions and establish social linkages” (p. S108). As higher education moves from traditional testing to more collaborative and experiential teaching, greater emphasis is being placed on learning through experience and institutions are answering by integrating strategies that foster collaborative and experiential learning environments, even when it comes to dining and socializing (Genovese, 2018).

Persistence and Retention

The greater social integration an individual has into an institution’s fabric, the less likely they are to leave the institution (Tinto, 1987). Campus dining has progressively become such an integral part of university operations that universities are marketing their campus dining options in their recruitment efforts. In this way, campus dining helps students persist to graduation. Areas in which dining can play a role in persistence are social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, and learning experiences (Roberts & Styron, 2010). An important factor affecting college students’ persistence is that of being socially integrated and connected with others.

On a college campus, dining locations are one of the most used facilities to socialize and connect with others (Bowman et al., 2019). For example, Bowman et al. (2019) examined data on the number of meal swipes in the dining hall of students who ate with someone else, and then how those students’ retention rates compared to students who ate alone or did not eat in the dining hall. The study supported existing scholarship linking social integration with student persistence. Once again, campus dining locations offer students the space and ease to meet and socially integrate.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the concepts in Keeling (2004), “Mapping the Learning Environment” is the process of recognizing, identifying, and documenting the sites for learning activities on campus. It provides the framework within which student affairs educators can link their programs and activities to learning opportunities. It leverages programs and resources in ways that promote opportunities to deepen student learning. Fresh collaborations for learning are realized by focusing on creating learning outcomes that support student success. A campus committed to engaging members in new paradigms of learning, practicing new pedagogies, and creating experiences to support learning must be truly “learner-centered.” This means that all campus educators (both faculty and student affairs professionals) must review and consider changing their practice. Mapping an environment informs practitioners about the kinds of activities that will enhance classroom experiences and help the campus develop a broader understanding of transformative learning. The critical assumption guiding mapping a learning environment is that the entire campus is a learning community (Borrego, 2006).

This study was guided by the conceptual framework of “Mapping the Learning Environment” (Borrego, 2006) Four principal concepts were utilized: designing programs and leveraging activities, using student employment, keeping obstacles out of the way of learning, and hosting relationships (Borrego, 2006). This framework first explores how dining designs programs and leverages activities in ways that support the learning outcomes of the campus and enhance student’s experience. An example of this is providing a lunchtime healthy food series in the student union where student chefs learn from campus chefs on how to prepare healthy dishes that can then be distributed to the campus community.

This framework next explores how dining uses student employment as the substrate for a deeper learning experience. An example of this would be the development of a student manager program that teaches students leadership skills they can utilize in their future careers and everyday lives. Next, it explores how dining supports student learning by delivering services that smooth the student's path on campus and minimizes obstacles to learning. An example of this would be having dining locations in the library and academic buildings and having a robust meal plan that students can utilize in these locations. This framework lastly explores how dining hosts relationships that maximize student learning. An example of this would be creating a marketing internship position where the director worked with and developed the student's skills on a one-on-one basis.

This framework aided in both the creation of the research design as well as the data analysis. I used this framework to develop my interview questions by utilizing prompts that scaffolded off the framework. For example, I used the framework of campus-wide experiential learning to help guide questions and frame campus dining as a form of experiential learning. Participants were chosen based on having the experience and being in a position to observe and influence student learning outcomes as well as the ability to tell their perspective. This framework helped me analyze the data by guiding me when coding to look for certain themes to emerge that would be common themes amongst practitioners. Lastly, it gave me a lens to view the data through. The lens was which of these participants' perspectives have the ability to integrate with the learning outcomes of an institution and then be modeled and used at other institutions.

Research Design

To explore how dining professionals perceived their role in supporting student success, I used a multi-site case study approach. This methodological approach is anchored in a constructivist paradigm and presumes various social realities and participants' interpretations of these constructions of the social world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A constructivist epistemological perspective understands knowledge as socially constructed through collaborations between individuals and the world around them in a social context (Crotty, 1998). It was important for this study to use a constructivist paradigm as the perception of each dining professional's role in supporting student success is socially constructed based on their interaction with students, their institution, and with other professionals.

Methodological Approach

As mentioned above, this study utilized a multi-site case study approach. Here, a case study is "both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (Stake, 2000). Case study research is illustrated by "the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73) and pulls from different sources of data to generate an in-depth understanding of this bounded system. The bounded system, or case, in this study, is campus dining. More specifically, I was interested in studying how dining professionals perceive their role in supporting student success. Consistent with the central research questions that guided this exploration and given the real-life context of the perception of campus dining professionals supporting student success, a constructivist case study methodology was most suitable because meaning-making is "not readily distinguishable

from its context” (Yin, 2003, p. 4). The design of the study was contextually reliant on and bounded by each site of this multi-site case study (Creswell, 2007).

Participants

As is with nearly all case studies, the criteria for sampling was purposeful (Jones et al., 2013) with stress on “those cases that seem to offer the opportunity to learn” (Stake, 2000). For this study, I used extreme or deviant case sampling. The extreme or deviant case sampling involves choosing “illuminative cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 232) that exemplify contexts where innovation was recognized notably as a success or a failure. The major weakness of extreme case sampling is its lack of generalizability through representativeness. This strategy was especially suitable for investigating how a program is expected to work under particular circumstances by analyzing successful as well as unsuccessful implementations of the program. For this study, I had participants who were full of rich experiences in campus dining that used these experiences to highlight how they feel they support student success. Although these perceptions may not be typical for a college dining professional, they still showed what is possible and what dining professionals still may experience. Campus dining programs in the Mid-American Conference (MAC) were selected as the bounded system in this case because it is clearly identifiable and limited in scope (Merriam, 1998). My current employer is a member of the MAC athletic conference.

To identify participants appropriate for this study, I targeted professionals at Executive Director or Director levels or comparable positions to ensure a high level of rich experiences; all participants ended up having 20–40 years of college foodservice experience. I sent an email out to all 12 MAC institutions’ Executive Directors of Campus Dining, besides my current

employer, detailing the study and asking them to fill out an attached survey interest form if they were interested in being a part of the study. To incentivize participation, participants were told they would receive two \$25 Amazon gift cards for less than a two-hour time commitment (see Appendix A). The survey interest form asked participants to list what former colleges/universities they worked at in campus dining, the size of the operation, for how long, what were their roles, were they working for a contractor or for a self-operated operation, and lastly, they were asked an open-ended question to briefly describe how they feel their current or past roles in campus dining have supported student success. To gain more participants, I also emailed all Campus Dining Directors in the MAC and included my current institution. This round of two emails over a two-week time frame yielded four more participants to bring the total to seven campus dining professionals from five different MAC institutions, just shy of the original goal of 8–10.

Data Collection

This study utilized two primary sources of data: in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002), and supporting documents. Each participant was interviewed twice via Microsoft Teams; the first interviews lasted between 45–90 minutes. Prior to the first interview, I sent participants a copy of the informed consent form to be signed (see Appendix B). Consistent with a case study, the interviews focused on the outcome of the study by exploring how participants perceived they support student success through their role in campus dining (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). The second interviews lasted 10–30 minutes. Video calls were recorded, and each recording was transcribed verbatim via Microsoft Teams.

When possible, researchers using case study approaches are encouraged to use multiple methods of data collection. While the primary method of collecting data was through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study also utilized document analysis (Merriam, 2002). As noted in Chapter 1, the strength of documents as a data source is that they already exist; they do not intrude upon or manipulate the setting in ways that the investigator's presence might. The documents that were researched were the five campus dining websites of the seven participants. I used research from the websites to increase the effectiveness of my dialogue during the interviews and to spur on conversation. Information from the websites was also used to add depth to the three themes that emerged.

Data Analysis

I began to code the data gathered in the first interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Six different themes emerged: student employment; building a sense of community/belonging; removing obstacles out of the way of learning; nutrition; sustainability; and diversity; these themes established the basis for the second interviews. The second interviews were used to examine in more detail the six established themes and to see if any new themes might develop (Charmaz, 2006). After the second interviews, no new themes were developed, and the six themes were reduced to three main themes: student employment, building a sense of community/belonging, and removing obstacles to learning.

Codes are mainly, but not solely, used to retrieve and sort similar data chunks so the researcher can swiftly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, or theme. Clustering and the showing of condensed chunks then set the stage for additional analysis and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2013). I used descriptive

coding (Miles et al., 2013) to assigns labels to data to summarize in a short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data. These eventually provided an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing the data as I analyzed how the seven dining professionals perceived the role of dining in supporting student success through a direct examination of the interview transcripts from each of their interviews. I then continuously returned to the transcripts to ensure that my interpretations of the meaning of how campus dining professionals support student success are true to their words.

At numerous points throughout my analysis, I returned to the work of Borrego (2006) to make connections with my findings and the conceptual framework. Also, consistent with constructivism, data analysis will ensue not as a linear process of actual to abstract but in a more dynamic and evolving manner by constantly returning to the raw data with innovative questions, concepts, and interpretations until patterns emerged that define the essence, or core story, of the experience for all the participants (Strauss, 1987).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the conceptual basis on which the research can be assessed is known as trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Triangulating the data by studying it from various perspectives or through several interviews, alertness to bias through researcher reflexivity, and mapping usefulness within the study are all means for addressing trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four criteria by which trustworthiness can be evaluated: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility tries to ensure that the data collected correctly reflected the phenomenon studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this constructivist study, I sought to establish credibility by

aiming to collect data that accurately shows the participants' view of their experiences.

Transferability, which seeks to ensure that the outcomes of the study are suitably applied in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was upheld by ensuring that I worked to describe all aspects of the study to deliver a wealth of information on which readers of this research can ascertain transferability.

Finally, dependability tries to ensure that procedures are followed and that the data reflect the shifting conditions of the experience being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To check my own subjectivity and confirm dependability, I used a reflexive journal during the data collection process. Confirmability seeks to safeguard that another researcher can confirm the study when presented with the same data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, a detailed audit trail including digital recordings, notes, and transcripts was maintained for this purpose.

Limitations

Like other case study research, this study involved a limited sample size. This bounded and multi-site case study was also limited to the geographic region of the Midwest, and mid-sized academic institutions. Participants in this study were not typical, being experienced and high-achieving campus dining managers who had much to share and discuss. In addition, it is possible that questions and prompts from the researcher could have exaggerated a tendency for participants to provide an overly positive picture when speaking about how campus dining provides students with learning and success. To reduce these limitations, the data was triangulated by studying it from various perspectives or through several interviews, alertness to bias through researcher reflexivity, and by following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) outlined four

criteria by which trustworthiness can be evaluated: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is also the catalyst for data collection and analysis (Brown et al., 2002). Throughout the research process, I served as selector of participants, data collector, interviewer, transcriber, and data analyst. My main role—making decisions about which data was gathered and what meanings were made—called for me to be as reflective, transparent, and open about the perspectives and experiences I brought to this study and mindful of how they shaped the study (Lather, 1993).

My relationship with this topic spans over fifteen years across four different institutions. I have experienced college dining as a student and a student employee, where dining supported my own success in a multitude of different ways and has helped mold me into the person that I am today. I have also experienced this topic as a dining professional. I have worked at private liberal arts institutions as small as 700 students, and at mid-sized public institutions as large as 20,000 students. I have also worked as a food service contractor and for a self-operated institution. During this time, I have directly managed in excess of 1,000 student workers and have been directly in charge of feeding in excess of a million meals to over 10,000 different students.

Findings

This multi-site qualitative case study explored how seven campus dining professionals perceived dining's role in students' meaning-making processes for transformative learning and success. Three main themes and several subthemes emerged from the data analysis, as described in the following paragraphs. The findings highlight campus dining's roles in students' learning

and success, particularly the roles campus dining plays in learning leadership and life skills, creating community, and persistence. Table 1 shows the participants' names and institutions.

Table 1

List of Study Participants

Name	Position	Institution
Angela	Director	Eastern State University
Bill	Director	Southern State University
Dante	Executive Director	Northeast Central University
Derek	Executive Director	Southern State University
Greg	Executive Director	Southeastern University
Jane	Executive Director	Southwestern University
Ryan	Executive Director	Eastern State University

Note: All names of participants and institutions are pseudonyms.

Learning Leadership and Life Skills

Of all the ways campus dining performs a part in a student's learning and success, participants noted that student employment was at the forefront. The consensus amongst the participants was their campus dining programs employ student workers equal to 10–20% of their campus's residential population, making them the largest employer of student workers on their respective campuses. Although most students likely sought employment from campus dining to earn a paycheck, the impact their employment had on them likely had greater influence. For example, participants shared that while students were employed and this was a key way for students to make extra money, it became clear that the experience was more than a mere job. Throughout interviews, participants shared that campus dining was about gaining opportunities

for leadership, gaining key life skills, and creating a sense of belonging among student workers.

Below, each subtheme is discussed in more detail.

Formal and Informal Leadership Opportunities

While all student workers undergo training for their job tasks, participants talked at length about how campus dining provided training that went beyond mere job duties, and instead focused in on leadership skills. One participant, Ryan, [all names are pseudonyms] operated a dining program that required all student leaders to take a one-credit-hour course that requires a project “through The Career Leadership and Development Center, which is where all the recruiters come, and there’s practice interviewing.” Here, Ryan discussed how this program went beyond doing jobs in dining and instead focused in on formal learning to enhance leadership skills.

Ryan shared the course syllabus, which included learning objectives that centered leadership development in addition to job skills. Importantly, the syllabus notes that the course provided opportunities for a deeper understanding of how campus dining operates and provides student workers an opportunity to engage.

Ryan further shared that course projects align with eight leadership skills the university identified. Student workers “do [an] in-depth [project on] one of the eight skills” which provides further opportunity to learn within this campus dining context.

Similarly, Bill also pointed out how his dining program formally taught student leaders:

For student managers we actually have that program that takes our students and teaches them how to effectively supervise and manage a staff, especially when it comes to peers. I think that sometimes managing your peers is a difficult thing, so we use that program to help our students learn and grow as supervisors.

Each of the dining programs included in the study also offered some form of formal training, whether it was leadership and supervisor training taught by another department on campus, or ongoing job-based management training taught by dining managers and directors.

Participants shared that the informal training student leaders received was specifically lasting and influenced the rest of their lives. Angela shared,

If you're one student that works in the math department office somewhere, you're not really going anywhere here. We [campus dining] could take an entry level student, and by the time they leave, they could be a student manager and have picked up these great resources and learning experiences to become a leader.

For Angela, the key skills gained would lead to promotion and the student would be better prepared for the job world. Moreover, these student workers hone their soft skills; as Jane said, "What are they learning? Communication, teamwork, leadership." Participants noted that campus dining provided opportunities to learn about how to be evaluated, how to receive feedback, and how to use that feedback to grow.

Life Skills

When participants were asked what made a job in campus dining more valuable than working for other departments on campus, the consensus was the life skills that are learned. Participants noted that the nature of the work created opportunities for student workers to learn more about different types of labor and an enhanced work ethic. For example, Jane discussed how working in campus dining often involves hard, physical labor that can make you sweat, and for many is their first job. Jane said, "I always felt that the jobs in dining gave a student just another dimension because they are physical jobs." Bill concurred, when he shared,

Other places on campus? You're sitting at a desk. You're answering a phone. You're checking out books or whatever, whereas here they're probably sweating. They're working hard, so I think we're instilling in some of them [a] work ethic

for those who excel. Like I said, we're going above and beyond with them and making them student managers and teaching them how to be effective leaders.

Study participants shared that a physically demanding job can teach student workers the value of time and money, as well as discipline and structure.

Jobs in campus dining also help teach responsibility, efficacy, and interpersonal skills.

Greg noted this in his interview when he talked about the personal aspect of working in dining, and the responsibility that goes with it. He shared,

What could be more personal than appearing or being involved in something that people are going to be putting in their mouths?... Think about the value of what you're doing compared to other campus jobs, you're involved in providing sustenance, nutrition, snacks, which is a big part of a student's college experience, and you get to play a role in that. So to me, that's different than working in a library or working in a computer lab or working in the Recreation Center.

Angela also expanded on why there is something very personal working for campus dining,

There's something very special about giving to others, serving others, putting others before yourself, you know, and in this kind of environment, you're doing that. You're being patient, you're being caring, you're being empathetic, you're being understanding. You know you're not going to get this specific experience or the people or the culture [at other campus jobs].

In campus dining, learning is hands-on and although many of these skills may be taught in the classroom, they are not always in an applied fashion. Thus, campus dining provides opportunities for student workers to apply key concepts and learn these life skills.

Creating Community

Participants also noted that working within campus dining also helped create community and a sense of belonging for student workers. For student workers, campus dining serves as a subcritical support system to provide campus resources to them. Ryan explained how his dining program serves as a support system to student workers,

Well, one of the things where I like to think that we are a subcritical support for students, so, we're usually the first to hear about any difficulties that they're having in academics. It could be issues they're having in their personal lives, and that's why we really focus in our student leader class on training our student leaders as well as our full-time managers. As you hear these conversations, please assert yourself and offer the students, here are places that can help.

Participants noted that campus dining management was often sought after by student workers for guidance and advice due to the personal relationship that formed in the dining setting amongst managers and employees. As Ryan noted, campus dining created a community and people could help provide assistance to student workers. As Angela said, "It is like a family, you know, everybody knows everybody. Everybody works with everybody. You have that support system. You have people." This relationship can be just as important as one that a student would have with a professor or academic/career advisor, thus putting a campus dining manager in a better position to guide a struggling student to the appropriate resources. The ability to guide student workers to campus resources is part of the reason why many of the participants believed dining student workers tend to have higher GPAs and persist at a higher rate.

Another factor that creates a greater sense of community was that many student workers would sit down either before or after their shift to eat their complimentary meal together with other dining workers, as a team or "family." Jane explained,

If you're a student employee, and you want to take advantage of your meal with your shift, you come to the dining center before your shift or after your shift, and you're expected to eat in the dining center. This was another way to students that made our jobs attractive, and I think that brought a lot of students together that otherwise they wouldn't really get to know each other except they were working together. Maybe one in the dishroom, one at the checker's stand. But suddenly they're having lunch together before their shift.

Dante agreed about eating meals together when he said, "Food in general kind of lends itself to the community aspect. You know there's nothing greater than being able to walk through [the]

dining room and see a bunch of kids sitting together, interacting.” Participants shared that they felt that eating a meal together gave student workers a greater chance to make connections as they learn more about each other and form friendships.

Another example, which was shared by Angela, illustrated the sense of community campus dining created for student workers: “The Wall of Fame” where student workers put their painted handprint on a dining hall wall. Angela said,

It’s called “The Wall of Fame” here since, basically, our campus is known for the bricks, so I basically had one of my students that were very artistic, paint ... a wall all white and then when the students [painted, their hands] are green. I’m not kidding. I’ve had students that have graduated, and you know, I’m posting things on social media. They will come back to campus, whether it’s homecoming or whatever. Just to put that hand on the wall because they know, you know, this is my family. I was connected. It’s like I’m honoring them, making it feel like yes you were important to us. You’re getting on the wall of fame because you made it, you’re special, you know.

Angela continued,

Yeah, not everybody can just get their hand on the wall, so it’s a pride thing, you know, and it’s cool, especially spring semester ’cause that’s, you know, typically when you have a huge group of people leaving, so it’s to the point where they will set up times with each other and be like, OK, but we’re doing the wall. This is the time you’re coming in and they know I always film it and everything ’cause again, it’s just something very special.

This special “Wall of Fame” provided an opportunity for the student workers to feel as though they were a part of a community in this space and to be a part of the institutional history by having their handprint on the wall.

Campus dining also creates community between students, not just student workers, and faculty/staff. Derek explained that, at his institution,

So, we try to get faculty/staff in the dining rooms by having meal plans for them that are less expensive than the door price.... Trying to promote more faculty and staff to eat with the students, it has worked. I mean, we do see, we even see

departments coming in and eating together. So, it's great for the students to see that maybe their professors eat in the dining room. Or they see them at Starbucks, builds that sense of community.

Persistence

The participants shared that they felt campus dining played an important role in student persistence. Angela stated, "But people don't realize one of the big reasons they go to university is because [of] their dining program, like it is a big deal for people." For Angela, campus dining is an important part of attending college. Derek echoed this when he affirmed that along with a residence hall and the recreation center, dining is one of those aspects that play a big factor in a student's decision to attend. Derek shared,

I'm a big believer that it's all the other things on a college campus that students think about and affects whether or not they're going to come to that school, or if they're going to stay, and I think dining is just one of those things. If the food is good, if the hours are good. If there's a Starbucks on campus, it's just going to make their experience at [college] better, and if they are happy with the residence halls and if they're happy with the student center. You know, yes, some students will leave a college because, yeah, they didn't know what their major was going to be by the end of their freshman year. They want to go into this, and this school doesn't offer that. Yeah, but if you look at the stuff that why students leave or don't come that are in control of the university. I think it's how we treat students when they're here while they're prospective or current and the services that we offer, and the quality of that service that we offer.

Dante remarked that when he first started in higher education, the Dean of Students told him,

Housing and dining is retention. It isn't about the classes. Do they like where they're living and do they like what they're eating? So, if we can do our part and keep students happy on the food side, that helps with the retention.

Campus dining not only can help students decide if and where they should attend, it plays an important role in staying in school by having a robust dining program with a large choice of locations, hours, and food choices, along with a dining program that builds community by hosting relationships and special events. Campus dining also helps recruit and retain students

with special diets and dietary needs by providing campus dieticians, allergy friendly areas in the dining halls, and menu items that cater to these students. Jane explained, “The dining program is open extensive hours and in many cases they’re opening hours and doing things that don’t make financial sense, but you’re doing it because it supports the student and you know the student needs the service.” Thus, for Jane, campus dining plays an important role in supporting students.

Participants noted that for the students who worked in campus dining, it can help students stay enrolled in their academics. Ryan offered, “I think that they stay in school more if they work for us because they’re more engaged, and they know that they have another support structure that’s there.” For Ryan, campus dining is a supportive place that creates engagement and thus, students are likelier to come back.

Participants also shared that they felt the campus community that dining provided helped with persistence as well. Angela shared,

There’s so many people over the years that have, you know, they’ve gotten married. You know, they met here, and they got married. They’ve got their best friends that they’ve made here. They learned about different groups and sports activities. So, you have such a great bonding experience, and it’s such a family oriented, you know, they look up to a lot of the staff. As, you know, their home away from home. That’s kind of like my mom figure, my dad figure, my grandpa figure. You know, ’cause we’ve got all kinds of age range and staff here.

Jane shared similar sentiments:

They make friends. We have had more people get engaged in dining than probably anywhere on campus. You know coworkers that end up getting married. I mean, there’s been a lot of this, so the network, the friendships that develop because the people are working together, and I think there’s a real camaraderie when you’re working in a dining facility versus in an office or desk environment.

Bill believed working for campus dining played a part in students returning to school, saying, “[If] you don’t form a connection in some way personally to the university you’re not going to want to come back.” Bill continued,

Why would you want to go to a place where you don’t have a personal connection? I think dining and those jobs, and those personal connections you make in the dining hall or working in the dining hall are huge at keeping people willing to come back [to school].

For participants, it was clear that campus dining provided a structure for students to become and stay engaged, thus assisting in students returning year after year.

Discussion

The study’s findings highlight campus dining’s roles in students’ learning and success and overall engagement. As participants noted, campus dining has played key roles in assisting students with learning more about leadership and life skills, creating community, and assisting in persistence. Previous research acknowledged how campus dining did have a positive impact on student learning and success; however, this study further explored how those in management positions with campus dining describe these impacts.

The first finding in this study discussed how campus dining was more than a job; rather, it was an opportunity for student workers to learn about leadership and engage and apply real-life skills. This is echoed by McClellan et al. (2018), who focus on how campus employment made student workers more attractive to future employers by giving them experience encountering real-life situations and honing soft skills. This study further offers that while working on campus does provide opportunity to engage in real-life situations, it also assists student workers in learning more about leadership, how to engage in leadership, and how to apply those skills in work settings. In one of the case sites, student workers were given the opportunity to take a one-

credit course that focused on leadership strategies that scaffolded off of the university's leadership values. Further, student workers were encouraged to formally develop and apply their leadership skills. These experiences in campus dining provided student workers with the opportunity to learn and grow both personally and professionally.

The second finding from this study discussed how campus dining helped student workers create a sense of community and how it functioned almost as "a family." This finding is supported by previous research by Genovese (2018), who wrote that dining spaces on campuses function as specific destinations for both social and organizational activities. This was seen by participants sharing about how student employees sat down to meals together, met in dining spaces, and even participated in the "Wall of Fame." From this example, as well as others shared by participants, this study further illustrated that campus dining created community by hosting relationships, whether it was student to student, student to faculty/staff, or campus dining to other campus departments. Participants shared how student workers in particular developed relationships in those dining spaces and how those relationships provided support and mentorship.

Participants also shared that campus dining was noted to be a space not only for social engagement but also academic support by creating dynamic social spaces. Genovese (2018) also found that campus dining integrates strategies that foster collaborative and experiential learning environments when it comes to socializing, and those campus dining locations are designed to allow institutions to influence how students meet and learn, creating experiences that shape the overall campus society and strengthen campus communities.

The final finding from this study was that student persistence, particularly among campus dining student workers, was bolstered because of campus dining. Existing research has showed that campus dining can play a role in persistence in the areas of social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, and learning experiences (Roberts & Styron, 2010). Research also showed that campus dining was heavily connected to a student's persistence because campus dining locations offer involvement and engagement opportunities including meeting places, special themed meals, and student employment.

All the participants in this study spoke to a resounding concurrence with all existing research and they were able to show evidence of persistence with real-life accounts. The study participants also spoke of how they saw in their institutions that campus dining plays a large role in persistence by making students happy and increasing their quality of life by having a robust dining program with a significant choice of location, hours, and food choices, along with a dining program that creates community by hosting relationships and special events. As one participant was told by a dean of students, retention is not just about classes, it is about whether students like where they are living and what they are eating. Providing various locations and venues for student dining contributes to recruitment of prospective students as well as retention of current students. Furthermore, a strong campus dining program establishes the conditions for physical and emotional support for the entire community by offering foods from different cultures or specific dietary needs.

Recommendations

The idea for this study was brought on by the reduction of dining programs due to COVID-19 and the fear that many of these reductions could continue, even beyond the pandemic. With an increase in online classes, virtual activities and get-togethers, accompanied by less students on campus, highlighted what students are losing with less of a campus dining footprint. Simply put, a smaller campus dining program means less opportunity. As participants in this study have shared, campus dining programs are more than merely an auxiliary service that provides a need to the campus community. Campus dining programs are woven into the fabric of how students find learning and success outside of the classroom. Students who participate in campus dining, as noted in this study, have opportunities to apply leadership skills, learn life skills, create a community, and persist.

Given the role campus dining plays in the lives of students and on campus, it is critical that colleges and universities invest in campus dining. Importantly, investment should not just be in the physical locations of campus dining programs, but also in the services provided, including expanded hours, meal plans, and quality of food. An increased investment in campus dining personnel will also pay dividends in student learning and success.

I recommend that when higher education administrators discuss what allocations and resources should be spent on campus dining, the impact that campus dining has on students' learning and success must also be factored in. A reduction in campus dining negatively impacts students in ways not often realized. I also recommend that campus dining programs must begin to advocate for themselves and begin to tell their own stories of all the ways they impact students. If campus dining programs do not advocate for themselves then they risk not being

heard, noticed, or thought of when student success and learning are being discussed. Campus administrators risk reducing the overall experience for college students and their learning and success by not continuing to invest in campus dining.

Future research on how campus dining supports students' learning and success needs to have a quantitative component to it. Many times, participants anguished about things they knew to be true but didn't have the data to back them up. Some items may be quantifiable while others may not. Future research should show data on the GPA of campus dining student workers compared to other workers on campus and then compared to those without a job. It should measure the retention and persistence rates of campus dining student workers, along with job placement after college. We should research whether student managers have a higher starting salary after college compared to other students in their major. Other data would be harder to quantify. Looking for correlations between expenditures in campus dining per student and retention rates, and determining how to quantify the impact of campus dining creating community, would be a few examples. In the future, the more quantitative data that supports dining, the likelier it will be invested in by campus administrators.

Conclusion

This study is one of the first to research how campus dining supports student learning and success from the perception of campus dining directors. As future delivery methods for higher education are still uncertain, on-campus support services, such as campus dining, must continue to fight to show their value and importance to students. As one participant noted, over the years campus dining has become a genuine partner of the university and student success. For campus

dining to be relevant in the future, dining professionals are going to have to continue to do the same, and document and show their success.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOLARLY REFLECTION

The Research Process

For the proposal component of this dissertation project, my hope was to explore campus dining and show how it supports student success. I have long known the critical role campus dining has played given my own roles within different campus dining units on college campuses. Given my own experiences of seeing students interact with each other, with staff, and watching them transform over the semesters, this project was one that I was eager to explore further.

My initial goal was to establish and justify why a campus needs a robust dining program beyond just providing sustenance. In addition to my own experiences, I selected this topic for a few different reasons. When looking at current research on campus dining and student success, I discovered research on the topic to be scarce. I knew based on my experiences how crucial campus dining was to student success, and therefore I was confident that my research could make a difference. I also picked this topic because I hoped to have a long career in campus dining. I thought to myself, whatever topic I choose, I have the chance to become or be thought of as a subject-matter expert. The best subject matter to be an expert in in campus dining to help my career was campus dining and student success. Lastly, I picked this topic because it was one of the very few topics in higher education I felt I already had experience in. My only higher education experience was the four institutions I had worked at in campus dining, and with my

goal of not wanting to make my dissertation any more difficult than I knew it already was going to be, sticking with a campus dining topic made sense.

The only other topic that I entertained researching was campus dining and the viability of a campus garden. Being an avid gardener myself, the idea fascinated me. I spent time thinking about whether I could prove labor invested in a campus garden saved money or was the investment worth it for being sustainable and eating local foods. I wanted part of the research to be trying a campus dining garden at my current institution and recording all the statistics on its production. In my research, most institutions with campus gardens tied to campus dining, either had agricultural programs or were very elite schools with the ability to input money into a campus garden. My institution was neither an agriculture institution nor an elite one.

I settled on dining because it is such an important yet often invisible entity on campus. I knew from personal experience as a student and as a campus dining practitioner that if done well, it has the power to transform student experiences. While in college myself, as a student living on campus, I would argue that my time spent living in a residence hall, working, and spending time in a dining facility, and time spent in the recreation center, impacted and shaped my college experience more than my time in a classroom, and taught me more as well. For me, campus dining led me to success. Working as a freshman, I instantly felt like I belonged, like I was tied to the institution. I felt like I had a “family” through my co-workers. I also met many friends and learned an immense amount of life skills.

After a few semesters, I became a student manager and began to develop into a leader. The confidence and maturity I gained by having to lead, manage, and discipline my college student peers, put me on the path to become a successful manager at a young age after

graduation. All the other skills of time management, communication, customer service, problem solving, and other soft skills, were skills I learned and honed as a student manager. Campus dining also gave me a spot in the dining hall to hang out with my friends and influenced me to live on campus because the food was really good and convenient. I say campus dining is an invisible entity because although many students had similar experiences as me, campus dining is not widely considered as an integral part of student success.

As a practitioner, I was able to see dining as such an important yet often invisible entity on campus as well. This was particularly evident at an institution where I oversaw the entire campus dining operation. This institution was a small, private liberal arts school with only a few hundred residential students. I was able to reshape the dining program that I know influenced student success. I had students tell me part of the reason they returned to school was because of how much they loved the food. I was able to participate in remodeling the seating area in the dining hall where students then never wanted to leave, even after they were done eating. I was able to hire numerous students for whom I had a direct impact on their success learning outside of the classroom. I know I had this impact because I was voted by the students to be the grand marshal of the homecoming parade after my first full year working there. Campus dining's satisfaction scores at this institution were amongst the highest in the country.

After I had announced my departure from this institution, I had numerous interactions with students thanking me for all that I had done to make their institution a better place. After I had been gone a year, the Dean of Students messaged me to see if I would be willing to surprise the students and show up unannounced to host their variety show during Homecoming Week. If

anyone doubts the impact campus dining can have on an institution, they should have heard the applause I got that night when I showed up on the stage.

The initial themes I wanted to base my research on were fostering diversity and inclusion, creating a culture of sustainability, building community, socialization, and a sense of belonging, educating about nutrition, and enabling student persistence and retention. I developed these initial themes based on my own experience, the limited research that existed, and by talking to my peers in campus dining and peers in student affairs. In my research, I also planned on noting how campus dining's roles in student success changed based on the type of dining, residential or retail. Going into research, I was not sure if I would find much data on the two different types; I just knew, having worked in both types of dining, that they impacted students differently. I also hoped to note in my research the service type, self-operated model versus outsourced model. My reasoning for including the service type was out of the four institutions I worked at, three used an outsourced model and only one used a self-operated model. To me, despite what I believed to be the common opinion, I thought an outsourced campus dining operation could have as much of an impact on student success as a self-operated operation, and I hoped to prove that.

Campus dining was selected as the bounded system. For sampling, I planned on identifying rich participants by utilizing NACUFS (National Association of College and University Food Services). Through NACUFS, I planned to send out a message to recruit participants. I planned on then reducing the potential participants down to ten participants who could give the study the best variety with the ability to provide content-rich interviews. I joined NACUFS in 2019 and attended one regional conference that was well attended. Knowing NACUFS had an extensive network of campus dining professionals, this was the only network I

knew of in campus dining to reach a large number of potential participants at once. Participants from my current institution would not be eligible to participate but would be used to develop and pilot-test the interview protocol. I put this rule in place because I thought my personal relationship with these participants and knowledge of the same institution would limit the amount of relevant data I received. Interview questions would be guided by the conceptual framework in *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*, in particular the chapter “Mapping the Learning Environment.” After deciding on the topic for my dissertation, I struggled to find a conceptual framework for it because, as I mentioned, there was little research done on campus dining. Fortunately, my professor teaching my last class of my Ed.D. program suggested this chapter as a conceptual framework. After reading the chapter over a few times I knew this was exactly what I needed to guide my dissertation. I still feel this chapter should be used as a manual for anyone working in student affairs, particularly in auxiliary services.

After my dissertation proposal was approved, I set out to collect the data. The data collection process for me was very rewarding. The participants I interviewed ranged from 20 to even over 40 years of experience working in campus dining. To them, campus dining was essentially their life work and/or career. While I knew I was passionate about this topic, I did not realize how rewarding and touching data collection would be for me. Asking these participants, who were experts in their profession, to discuss their life work, which was the same as mine, was extremely sentimental and emotional for me, as I am sure it was for my participants as well. So many times, these staff are invisible and often not thought of as educators. It was rewarding for me to connect with them, hear their stories, and contemplate how they mirrored my own.

Hearing and seeing participants smile and glow with pride when they discussed all the ways they had helped students succeed made me feel very special for giving them the opportunity to share and reflect. It also created a bond between us.

The most significant change between my proposal and my dissertation revolved around the number of participants selected to interview. This began with my dissertation chair recommending that I restrict my bounded system from all campus dining programs to specific campus dining programs. It was decided that my bounded system would be the eleven campus dining programs from institutions in the MAC (Mid-American Conference), not including my current institution. I thought this change made sense, as it helped give my research a narrower focus and gave all my participants something in common. It also gave me, the interviewer, something in common with the participants knowing that we worked in similar sized institutions in regionally similar areas. Because of switching my bounded system, how I recruited my participants therefore changed. Instead of using NACUFS, I personally sent emails to the eleven campus dining directors in the MAC. To discover their email addresses, I researched each one of their campus dining websites, locating the section that listed their management directory. From there I located the highest-ranking campus dining employee and then recorded their email. I also used this time to read the bio of the top dining employee and look over their website so that I was more prepared for my interview. Particularly, I looked over their management structure, which I was fascinated to see how different it was from institution to institution. I always researched how their meal plans worked, what locations they had, what hours they were open, what branded concepts they had, and if they were self-operated or outsourced.

Going into the dissertation process, I imagined all sorts of challenges that could arise from writing a lengthy paper of such importance. However, I did not imagine one would be recruiting participants. After all, I gave participants a \$50 Amazon gift card for less than two hours of their time. All they had to do was talk to me about their life work. Looking back, the \$50 Amazon card was just thanking them for their time. I do not think the participants who chose to be a part of this research chose to do so because they wanted a gift card; they chose to participate because they believed that what I was researching mattered. They believed campus dining truly did positively affect student success. They believed their story had a chance to make an impact. They also trusted me to be the caretaker of their knowledge, experiences, and stories. They trusted me to be able to tell their story. I am grateful my participants trusted me, for many of whom I was a stranger, for without that trust, this research would not have been possible.

As I reflect on data collection now, I better understand why it was difficult to get people to participate. I understand now that campus dining directors receive many spam emails and emails from salesmen every day, but I figured my email would stand out. I initially sent out an email to all eleven MAC campus dining directors detailing my study and asking for a brief information sheet to be filled out. After two weeks I had only received two responses from willing participants. It was summertime, so I did not despair. I sent another round of nine emails.

After two weeks I had recruited only one more interested director. After one month of emails, I had recruited only three out of eleven dining directors. As I was starting to get worried, I received permission from my dissertation chair to expand the participant criteria to directors one step below in the chain of command, in positions like the one held by myself. This time, in hopes of getting more responses, I no longer asked potential participants to fill out the

information sheet. Even though this round of emails included over twenty additional potential participants, I only received one more response. After two months of recruiting participants and only having recruited four participants, I expanded my search to include my institution and the two participants I planned to pilot-test the interviews on. Going into my interviews, I had six participants to interview. While interviewing my first participant, I lamented my recruiting struggles. They suggested I reach out to a director at a MAC school who had retired in the last year who might be interested. I reached out to this former director, and they eagerly joined the study, bringing it up to its final number of seven participants.

Reflecting on the participation recruitment process, I now think about why so many participants did not respond. I think many campus dining directors and managers can be drowned in work. Items that are not relevant to daily operations or beneficial to them, are not deemed worth their time. Often, campus dining management positions are not glamorous. They are filled with long, grueling work weeks including nights and weekends. Some management also may look at work through the lens of food service manager and not the lens of a student affairs practitioner, so they might have thought this study was a waste of time or something that they would not have been able to contribute to much. Maybe it was the fear of thinking they would not be able to contribute, or concern that they might be embarrassed if they did not have much of an answer to questions. I believe and understand that for many campuses' dining managers, student affairs ideas such as transformational learning are foreign concepts that are thought to be made up or overdramatized.

Another change that took place, which is a common one, was the shift in my themes as my research progressed. My original six themes, as mentioned above, were used to develop my

interview questions and as a guide when I began to code my data. As I began coding my data, it quickly became apparent that, although I asked my participants about them, I did not have enough data to move forward with the themes of fostering diversity and inclusion, sustainability, and education of nutrition. This was a learning moment for me. I learned that instead of trying to create themes before data collection, I needed to collect the data and let the themes naturally emerge on their own. I really believe that those themes that did not make it past data collection were themes that I was hopeful would emerge, instead of themes that were backed by experience and research. I thought that if I pushed them enough, asked the participants enough questions about them, the themes would emerge. Ultimately, I ended up wasting valuable time chasing these themes instead of letting the themes come to me. I also think overconfidence in the subject, and in my belief in campus dining impacting areas far outside its scope, led me to chase these themes.

The three remaining themes of student employment, building community, and removing obstacles to learning each had three subthemes develop. Student employment had subthemes of leadership and training, life skills, and sense of belonging. Building community had subthemes of hosting relationships, special events, and persistence/retention. Removing obstacles out of the path of learning had subthemes of meal plans, hours, locations, service methods, and dietary restrictions. Through multiple drafts of the written dissertation, these themes and subthemes were then combined, blended, and reduced to the themes of learning leadership and life skills, creating community, and persistence. After coding my data it also became apparent that I did not need to write about the difference in campus dining outcomes based on the service type—self-operated

model versus outsourced model—as no difference was discovered. Similarly, it was determined that I did not need to elaborate on the different outcomes based on residential or retail dining.

Overall, there were a few surprises regarding the data I collected. As mentioned, I did not have enough data to move forward with the topics of diversity and inclusion, sustainability, and nutrition, even though I spent a large part of the interviews trying to spur conversation around these topics. Looking back, I suppose these were a stretch or maybe I was a little overconfident to think my line of work impacted these topics drastically. The other surprise that emerged from the collection of data was the importance to the research topic and the amount of data collected on student employment. It became undeniable that all participants agreed and were able to recount in detail how student employment led to student success. This even became more evident as instead of being one theme, student employment ended up becoming significant parts of the final three themes: learning leadership and life skills, creating community, and persistence.

If I were to think about what went well in the dissertation process, I would say the actual interviews themselves. I was nervous about the content I was going to receive in these interviews. I was nervous about whether the participants I interviewed were not very outgoing and whether it would be like trying to pull teeth to get any usable data. I was nervous thinking what would I have done if this was the case. Fortunately, this was not the case. Many participants went over the 90 minutes in their initial interviews. Conversations went to many places that I was not intending them to go, and I think this made the data even richer. I also think the participants enjoyed the interviews, utilizing them as a time of self-reflection on their past accomplishments and remembering how much they impact the lives and future of the students they serve.

Besides the participation recruitment process, the only part that did not go well was staying on schedule to finish the dissertation. I try not to go through life making excuses, but if I were to make excuses, it would be that I had some amazing, yet distracting changes in my life during this process. After finishing data collection in the summer of 2021, I got engaged in the fall. My partner and I bought a home and moved in together around the time of submitting my first draft, between new house projects, planning a wedding, having a wedding, a honeymoon, etc. etc. I had about eleven months where I could not get the ball rolling again on my dissertation and essentially made no progress, all while having a sense of unease in the back of my mind knowing I had to get this done, and that I had gone too far to give up. However, looking at the positives, I learned a valuable lesson about myself. I need to have deadlines. I have never considered myself a procrastinator but trying to complete this project without hard deadlines proved problematic.

If I were to do things differently, if I would do this again, I would have found the motivation to continue to work on the dissertation instead of taking eleven months off, no matter how busy my personal life was. Looking back, when I took the break between my first and second drafts of my dissertation, the amount of time I needed to submit my second draft only ended up being eight hours' worth of additions and provisions. To think that for eleven months I carried the weight of knowing I still had this project to complete, when I was so close to moving on, is a lesson on the value and worth of perseverance that I will take with me for the rest of my life. Besides not taking a break, the only other step I wish could have gone better would have been the recruitment of the participants. In retrospect, I should have tried different methods to contact the potential participants. I only tried via email; I should have tried calling, or having my

supervisor contact them. I could have changed the incentives or stressed the importance of the project more.

Applications to My Professional Practice

Given my findings, I have realized the need for campus dining professionals to become more vocal and to advocate for themselves in letting others know the impact they have on student success. Essentially, for campus dining programs to continue to be robust and at the center of a student-centered campus, we must be our own cheerleaders. Although I have always believed this, I now have the confidence and the research to show this. The fact that so many participants shared similar experiences on how campus dining teaches leadership and life skills, creates community, and helps students persist, to me, means that this is going on in many or most campus dining programs all over the country and world.

I will also use this research in my own practice to reinforce the importance of what campus dining does that supports student success beyond providing sustenance. For example, more time spent on developing a student manager program that creates leaders and teaches lessons students will take with them into their careers, should be looked at as more than an investment in having a better campus dining program, but also an investment in our students. Creating a family-like work environment, having expanded hours, locations, and menus, and hosting special events is not just about feeding the campus community, it is about helping students persist and creating community.

As I make operational decisions in the future and decide what we, in campus dining, allocate resources to, such as our employees' time and food purchases, I will not discount the effect we might be having on students beyond providing them a nutritional meal. For example,

hiring a student worker and keeping them employed should not just be looked at as a labor expense. It should be looked at as an opportunity to give a student at our institution a reason to return the following semester, giving them a sense of belonging, while teaching them life skills as well as supporting them financially. When deciding if it makes sense to have a coffee shop open on campus late into the night, I will not just think about whether the operation has enough sales to cover all the costs during the slower later hours. I will think about how having the coffee shop open late at night gives students a safe place that allows students to study without distraction and gives students a place to meet and form lasting friendships.

In my recommendations section I noted that, given the role campus dining plays in the lives of students and on campus, it is critical that colleges and universities invest in campus dining. Importantly, investment should be in the physical locations of campus dining programs, and in the services provided, including expanded hours, meal plans, and quality of food. Increased investments in campus dining personnel will also pay dividends in student learning and success. Essentially, I urged institutions to invest in campus dining. By doing so, an investment in campus dining is an investment in the students and in turn an investment in the institution.

To implement this recommendation, I must advocate and lobby for campus dining to have as many resources as possible at their disposal. Campus dining must not be viewed as merely a revenue-generating department but as an investment in the students of our institution. Once again, campus dining personnel must be able to tell their story; they must be able to show the impact they are making on students outside of providing meals, because a difference is being made. Campus dining must also do whatever it can to collaborate with other departments.

Campus dining can positively impact so many other departments by providing food, services, event spaces, and generally enhancing any services that a department might offer to students. The more campus dining collaborates with different departments, the more supporters they will have and the more intertwined into the fabric of the institution they will be. This will enable them to gain even more funding and better support student success.

How has this dissertation changed how I understand the problem? To me, the problem was always how we stop the reduction of campus dining programs. When I was choosing what topic I wanted to write my dissertation on, I thought, “What is an issue that I can help fix or change, and what is something in higher education that I actually have knowledge of?” My experience was in campus dining, and the problem was evident as COVID had just begun. As COVID began, I watched all nine (many of which were new) dining locations shut down. Almost all of my roughly 50 full-time employees, including salaried managers, were without work or got laid off for about five months. When everyone returned to work, in the Fall of 2020, I saw us serving fewer students, in fewer locations, for fewer hours. I saw us not having special events and not collaborating with other departments. We also employed way fewer student employees. It became very evident to me that campus dining was not having the kind of impact on students that we used to or were capable of. Campus dining was not teaching leadership and life skills, creating community, and helping students persist as they had before.

I began to believe that this was a problem that would not entirely go away. Although in-person classes came back, they were less prevalent than they were before COVID. Although faculty/staff came back from working remotely, they still work remotely more than they did

before COVID. All these trends will continue to be a problem for campus dining, as they have a bearing on the impact campus dining can have on students.

I understand now that this problem will not go away; in some sort of capacity as technology evolves, we will find easier ways to communicate and teach that don't require being in person or on campus. I understand now that campus dining professionals cannot use this as an excuse but rather must double down on all efforts to increase their robustness, physical footprint, and involvement on campus. Campus dining cannot rely on what they have done in the past. Instead, they need to forge new campus partnerships and continue to be innovators and campus leaders.

Now that this dissertation is complete and I have earned an Ed.D., what is next for me? That is a great question. I don't know exactly what I expected going into this journey to obtain this degree, but I know I was very nervous, worried, and intimidated. Although I was Salutatorian in high school, had finished *magna cum laude* and *cum laude* in my undergraduate and graduate work, respectively, and was always a good student, this felt like I was reaching for something beyond what I was capable of. I had been out of school for seven years, taking classes with other students who had been in higher education for decades, and I was just a food service guy who had worked at institutions of higher education. I remember having to go to the writing center for my first couple of papers because I doubted myself; I was so nervous to receive feedback on my first assignments from professors.

However, I stuck with it. I felt more confident as I went along and felt more like I belonged in the Ed.D. program. I had a great support group of family and friends who believed in me and who I would not allow myself to let down. It is incredibly reflective to look back over the

last five years. I think about my growth as a professional and as a person, and I am thankful for the part my journey in this program played.

When I talk to students or colleagues about school, taking classes, or learning in general, I have always said, and have always believed that to many extents, it is less about the actual ideas and facts you learn in the classroom, and more about what you learn about yourself during the journey. In this journey, I learned and was reminded how I can adapt and how I am able to learn new things. My personal learning style, how my mind works, and how I can take a problem or idea that I do not know much about and come out the other side understanding it. Most of all, I learned that I am resilient, determined, persistent, and capable of finishing whatever I set out to do. I truly believe that there are few traits less important to a person professionally and personally than being self-confident and relentless in their pursuits.

When I began this journey to obtain my Ed.D., my goal was to eventually become a Vice President of Auxiliary Services, and perhaps even one day a Vice President of Student Affairs, and maybe even one day a President of a college. Writing this today, I still do not know where my path in higher education may lead. I have yet to reach the midway of my thirties, and I may still have three decades of working in higher education.

One thing that has changed through this journey is I now have a renewed confidence in the ability of campus dining to positively impact students. Most practitioners, like me, do what they do because they can see the impression they make on young adults. Five years ago, I was worried about how far I would be able to go with campus dining, worried about reaching my limit to affect students. I now understand that I will always be able to have an impact through

campus dining. I would now argue that there are few non-academic departments that can impact a student's life more than campus dining.

Whether my journey in higher education takes me to larger schools or back to smaller schools, in roles with campus dining or beyond, the research in this dissertation, and the dialogue I had with the participants will always renew my faith in what I do. Knowing from so many other campus dining directors that they also see the impact and importance of campus dining has been rewarding and motivating.

To close, in true self-reflection, my emotions are thankfulness and gratitude. I am thankful for everything I have learned about higher education administration, campus dining, and myself. I am grateful that I was put in a position to better myself. Lastly, I am excited and eager to see what I will do next as I am empowered by the new status and credibility this degree gives me.

REFERENCES

- Agron, J. (2001, September 1). Privatization study: keeping it close to home. *American School & University Magazine*. <https://www.asumag.com/facilities-management/business-finance/article/20851131/keeping-it-close-to-home-privatization-study>
- Appleton, J. V., & King, L. (1997). Constructivism: A naturalistic methodology for nursing inquiry. *Advances in Nursing Science*, *20*(3), 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00012272-199712000-00003>
- Bevins, F., Bryant, J., Krishnan, C., & Law, J. (2020). *Coronavirus: How should US higher education plan for an uncertain future*. McKinsey & Company, Public Sector Practice. https://mycourses.aalto.fi/pluginfile.php/1312515/mod_resource/content/3/Coronavirus-How-should-US-higher-education-plan-for-an-uncertain-future-final.pdf
- Boek, S., Bianco-Simeral, S., Chan, K., & Goto, K. (2012). Gender and race are significant determinants of students' food choices on a college campus. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, *44*(4), 372–378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2011.12.007>
- Borrego, S. E. (2006). Mapping the learning environment. In R. P. Keeling (Ed.), *Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience* (pp. 11–16). ACPA, ACUHOI, ACUI, NACADA, NACA, NASPA, NIRSA. <https://nirsa.net/nirsa/wp-content/uploads/LearningReconsidered2.pdf>
- Bowman, N. A., Jarratt, L., Polgreen, L. A., Kruckeberg, T., & Segre, A. M. (2019). Early identification of students' social networks: Predicting college retention and graduation via campus dining. *Journal of College Student Development*, *60*(5), 617–622. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0052>
- Broido, E. M., & Manning, K. (2002). Philosophical foundations and current theoretical perspectives in qualitative research. *Journal of College Student Development*, *43*(4), 434–445. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ650160>
- Brown, S. C., Stevens, R. A., Jr., Troiano, P. F., & Schneider, M. K. (2002). Exploring complex phenomena: Grounded theory in student affairs research. *Journal of College Student Development*, *43*(2), 173–183.
- Burnside, O., Wesley, A., Wesaw, A., & Parnell, A. (2019). Employing student success: A comprehensive examination of on-campus student employment. *NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605714.pdf>

- Carlson, S. (2008, September 26). Colleges chew on local-food phenomenon. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(5), A14. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-chew-on-local-food-phenomenon/>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/papers/v86n0.825>
- Clayton, R. M. (2014). *Cultural implications of organizational change in dining services* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama].
- Conklin, M. T., Cranage, D. A., & Lambert, C. U. (2005). College students' use of point of selection nutrition information. *Topics in Clinical Nutrition*, 20(2), 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00008486-200504000-00003>
- Conradson, J. R. (2014). Outsourcing: The higher education of tomorrow. *Journal of Higher Education Management*, 29(1), 48–58. <https://aaua.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/JHEM-Vol29-2014.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). SAGE. https://www.academia.edu/33813052/Second_Edition_QUALITATIVE_INQUIRY_and_RESEARCH_DESIGN_Choosing_Among_Five_Approaches
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. SAGE.
- Ender, K. L., & Fahleson, G. (1994). From outsources to alliances: Strategies for sharing leadership and exploiting resources at metropolitan universities. *Metropolitan Universities*, 5(3), 51–60.
- Eom, S. B., & Ashill, N. (2016). The determinants of students' perceived learning outcomes and satisfaction in university online education: An update. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, 14(2), 185–215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dsji.12097>
- Fullerton, J. R. (2010). *Transformative learning in college students: A mixed methods study* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska–Lincoln].
- Genovese, T. M. (2018). Student centers: Building community with new dining experiences. *Planning for Higher Education*, 46(2), 42–49.
- Gose, B. (2005, January 28). The companies that colleges keep. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-companies-that-colleges-keep/>

- Gramling, L., Byrd, R., Epps, L., Keith, D., Lick, R., & Tian, R. (2005). Foodservice management and its impact on college operations: A business anthropological case study. *Foodservice Research International*, 16(1-2), 15–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-4506.2005.00007.x>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). SAGE.
- Gupta, A., Herath, S. K., & Mikouiza, N. C. (2005). Outsourcing in higher education: An empirical examination. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19(5), 396–412. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540510607734>
- Hamrick, F. A., Evans, N. J., & Schuh, J. H. (2002). *Foundations of student affairs practice: How philosophy, theory, and research strengthen educational outcomes*. Wiley.
- Jessup-Anger, E. R. (2009). *Implementing innovative ideas: A multisite case study of putting learning reconsidered into practice* (Order No. 3381261). [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2013). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203123836>
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. American College Personnel Association, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Learning_Reconsidered_Report.pdf
- Kinsella, S. (1978). *Food on campus: A recipe for action. A step-by-step guide to improving your college food service*. Rodale Press.
- Komives, S. R., & Schoper, K. (2006). Developing learning outcomes. In R. P. Keeling (Ed.), *Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience* (pp. 17–41). ACPA, ACUHOI, ACUI, NACADA, NACA, NASPA, NIRSA. <https://nirsa.net/nirsa/wp-content/uploads/LearningReconsidered2.pdf>
- Kwun, D. J. W., Ellyn, E., & Choi, Y. (2013). Campus foodservice attributes and their effects on customer satisfaction, image, and word-of-mouth. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 16(3), 276–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2013.810534>
- Lafferty, G. (2000). Public sector outsourcing: Implications for training and skills. *Employee Relations*, 22(1), 76–85. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01425450010299918>
- Lather, P. (1993). Fertile obsession: Validity after poststructuralism. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34(4), 673–693. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1993.tb00112.x>

- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- Magolda, M. B. B. (2009). The activity of meaning making: A holistic perspective on college student development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 621–639. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0106>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- McClellan, G. S., Creager, K. L., & Savoca, M. (2018). *A good job: Campus employment as a high-impact practice*. Stylus.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from Case study research in education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*, 1(1), 1–17.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Moore, C. K., & Andrews, F. E. (2012). Celebration of culture: Cross-cutting themes in a quantity foods course. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 104(1), 22–28. <http://www.aafcs.org/Resources/Journal.asp>
- Msengi, I., Doe, R., Wilson, T., Fowler, D., Wigginton, C., Olorunyomi, S., Banks, I., & Morel, R. (2019). Assessment of knowledge and awareness of “sustainability” initiatives among college students. *Renewable Energy and Environmental Sustainability*, 4(6), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1051/rees/2019003>
- Myers, K. A. (2008). Using learning reconsidered to reinvent disability education. *About Campus*, 13(2), 2–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.246>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Phipps, R. A., & Merisotis, J. P. (2005, September). Is outsourcing part of the solution to the higher education cost dilemma? A preliminary examination. *Institute for Higher Education Policy*. https://immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/IHEP_US/I050919P.pdf
- Pittman, J. S. (2012). Student services and auxiliary enterprises. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2012 (137), 29–39. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20012>
- NACUFS (National Association of College and University Food Services). (2020). *NACUFS collegiate dining body of knowledge*. <https://www.nacufs.org/BodyofKnowledge>

- Quigley, B. Z., & Pereira, L. R. (2011). Outsourcing in higher education: A survey of institutions in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 76(2), 38-46.
- Roberts, J., & Styron Jr., R. (2010, January). Student satisfaction and persistence: Factors vital to student retention. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 6, 1. <http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/09321.pdf>
- Rozin, P. (2005). The meaning of food in our lives: A cross-cultural perspective on eating and well-being. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 37(2), S107–S112. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046\(06\)60209-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60209-1)
- Ruiz, L. (2009). *Rethinking food services in higher education institutions: A case study of dining services at The University of Cincinnati* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati].
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4), e7541. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7759%2Fcureus.7541>
- Sommer, C. A., Rush, L. C., & Ingene, D. H. (2011). Food and culture: A pedagogical approach to contextualizing food-based activities in multicultural counseling courses. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 50(4), 259–273. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2011.tb00123.x>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 435–453). SAGE.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511557842>
- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Torisky, D. M. (2007). *History of dining services at James Madison University*. Health Sciences Department Dietetics Program, James Madison University. <https://cdn1.lib.jmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/JMUDining.pdf>
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL MESSAGE

[Subject Line:]
Campus Dining Dissertation Project for MAC Schools

[Body:]
Hello,

My name is John Boswell, I am the Director of Retail Dining at Northern Illinois University. I am also a Doctoral Candidate working on my dissertation.

For my dissertation, I will be researching “Campus Dining & Student Learning & Success”. Particularly, I will be looking at MAC schools. The hope for my research is to highlight how campus dining is a contributor to the broader academic mission of an institution and that they offer important informal learning opportunities and do more than provide sustenance. This research is especially important to campus dining programs as the recent pandemic has lessened our footprint on campus.

I am sending out this email to all 11 MAC schools (besides NIU) in hopes to have one campus dining professional from each school be willing to participate. I will ask each participant to participate in 2 interviews with me, with a total time commitment of less than 2 hours. Based on my information, I have identified you as being in charge of your school’s campus dining program. If you OR someone who reports to you who you think would be a good fit for this study can reply to this email by filling out and attaching the short Survey Interest Form (attached), that would be greatly appreciated!

As a token of appreciation for your time, participants will receive **2-\$25 Amazon Gift Cards**, one after each interview, as well as a copy of the research.

It is my goal to begin interviews in June, with a 2-week gap in between the two interviews.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me.

I appreciate your time and look forward to working with you!

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Northern Illinois University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Campus Dining & Student Learning & Success

Investigator's Name: John Boswell Dept.: CAHE Phone: XXXXXXXXXX

Key Information

- This is a voluntary research study on Campus Dining.
- This study involves interviewing Campus Dining professionals in the Mid-American Conference to discuss how their respective institutions' dining programs support student learning and success.
- The benefits include that this study can be used to provide a voice to campus dining professionals when attempting to justify their programs and services to higher education administrators. By developing an understanding of all the learning outcomes of students who utilize campus dining, the college community will have a better understanding of how campus dining is a contributor to the broader academic mission of an institution and that they offer important informal learning opportunities and do more than provide sustenance. There are no risks.

Description of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the impact campus dining has on a student's educational experience. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: be interviewed and discuss campus dining's role in supporting student learning and success in an initial interview lasting between 45-90 minutes and a follow-up interview lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Risks and Benefits

There are no reasonably foreseeable (or expected) risks.

The benefits of participation are having time to reflect on one's role in campus dining in relation to supporting student success and learning in a manner in which this may not be routinely done. Insights may be gained that will increase the participant's ability to positively impact students. Participants will also receive a copy the study and will be able to learn from colleagues.

Confidentiality

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity.
- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Only John Boswell will have access to any audio recordings

that are made, and they will only be used for educational purposes. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Compensation

You will receive the following compensation for your time: Two-\$25 Amazon gift cards for a sum of \$50 in an Amazon gift card balance. The first \$25 gift card will be sent to your designated email upon completion of the first interview, and the second \$25 gift card will be sent following your second interview.

Your Rights

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to skip any question or research activity, as well as to withdraw completely from participation at any point during the process.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher, John Boswell, at [REDACTED] or by telephone at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators or if you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety at (815)753-8588.

Future Use of the Research Data

After removing all identifying information from your interview data, the data could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Participant's Signature

Date

I give my consent to be audio recorded (or video recorded, as appropriate) during any interviews.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Individual Interview Protocols

Interview 1

Part 1: Review Informed Consent Document

1. Give participant the informed consent document (via email) prior to meeting
2. During meeting, discuss and review document
3. Collect signed informed consent document

Part 2: Open-Ended Discussion Questions Themes & Representative Questions

A. Demographic Information and Contexts

- a. What MAC institution do you work at and in what campus dining role?
- b. How long have you been at your current institution and how long have you been in your current role?
- c. What other institutions have you worked at in a campus dining role? What roles and for how long?

B. Institutional Role in Learning Outcomes:

1. Review data collected on dining program website.
2. What programs/activities does your campus dining program run that supports learning outcomes and enhances the student experience?
3. Tell me about your student employment program. What does it do to create a learning experience?
4. What does your dining program do to host relationships on campus? These relationships can be student to student or student with faculty/staff.
5. How does your dining program support student learning by delivering services that smooth the student's path on campus and minimize obstacles to learning?

C. Personal Perception of Roles in Learning Outcomes:

1. How have you personally seen dining programs support learning outcomes and enhance the student experience? Have you done this on a personal level? These can be at current and past roles.
2. How do you create a learning experience for your student employees? This can be at current and past roles.
3. What have you done to host relationships with students on campus? What have the outcomes of these relationships been? This can be at current and past roles.
4. What have you done to support student learning by delivering services that smooth the student's path on campus and minimize obstacles to learning? This can be at current and past roles.
5. What has changed regarding your current role compared to your past roles in how you support student learning and success?

D. Ask participants if they have any questions and thank participants.