

ONBOARDING CAMPUS-BASED SORORITY AND FRATERNITY PROFESSIONALS IN REMOTE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to offering robust onboarding experiences for new campus-based sorority and fraternity professionals. As higher education institutions continue to emerge from the pandemic, supervisors and professional associations should be concerned by what new professionals' onboarding experiences means for ongoing supervision, professional development, and longevity in the field. This research provides insight into how new campus-based sorority and fraternity professionals and supervisors navigated early remote onboarding experiences. The findings illuminate a need to better understand supervisory relationships, communication styles, and socialization processes impact the perceptions of newcomers and how intentionality of supervisors can help mitigate anxiety and uncertainty of adjusting to a new role.

Keywords: COVID-19, socialization, onboarding, supervision, professional development

Starting a new job can be both an exciting and stressful time for any new professional. An effective onboarding process is a critical component of any job transition and socialization process. The onboarding process serves as a bridge between the anticipatory stage, or early experiences that shape understanding of careers, and active exchanges of the organizational stage of one's professional socialization (Cable et al., 2013; Lombardi & Mather, 2016). Done effectively, this process can help professionals develop a positive professional identity during a period most new professionals find stressful and challenging (Goodman & Templeton, 2021). In other words, the onboarding phase can either reaffirm what professionals anticipated or completely contradict what professionals anticipated their new role would entail. Yet, starting a new job during a pandemic that required social distancing or mandated an unfamiliar remote work environment upended traditional approaches to staff onboarding (Jones, 2023). This scenario drastically limited both time on campuses and the opportunity to explore local communities and made developing relationships with colleagues more difficult. These challenges have been on top of the experiences new professionals navigate during their professional transitions in student affairs, such as understanding institutional culture (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), adjusting to the nature of the workload (Kuh et al., 2011; Tull et al., 2020), and developing their own professional identity (Goodman & Templeton, 2021; Hirschy et al., 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to offering robust

onboarding experiences for new professionals, particularly during times that required social distancing, remote work, and physical campus closures. As higher education institutions continue to emerge from the pandemic, supervisors and professional associations should be concerned by how the disruption in new professionals' onboarding experiences has impacted ongoing supervision, professional development, and longevity in the field. Notably, professionals who lack social connections to other institutional and student affairs colleagues are likely to depart the field (Duran & Allen, 2020). Practitioners in sorority and fraternity life (SFL) are relatively young, and new professionals have a high turnover (Goodman et al., 2023), which often creates additional work for supervisors and those who remain in the field.

Many campuses have since subsided social distancing or remote work opportunities for administrative staff, yet understanding the early experiences of those hired during the pandemic can help shape future professional development needs. Moreover, a recent study from CUPA-HR continues to highlight a sizeable 65% majority of student affairs professionals who prefer to work remotely in some capacity (Bichsel et al., 2023). Pandemic experiences of student affairs professionals, students, and faculty have been the focus of a number of recent studies (e.g., see Gansemer-Topf, 2023; Jones et al., 2022; O'Shea et al., 2022; Potts, 2021); however, few investigations have been conducted in the context of professional socialization and the onboarding experiences of new professionals. Supervisors and professional associations alike must be attuned to the current onboarding experiences of new professionals to better recognize future training and development needs.

As such, this qualitative study explored the experiences of campus-based sorority and fraternity advising professionals hired during the pandemic alongside their supervisor's perceptions of onboarding and initial socialization. Specifically, this study sought to address the following research questions: 1) How did remote work impact sorority and fraternity professionals? and, 2) What role can supervisors and professional associations serve in supporting professionals hired during early stages of the pandemic? The following review of literature helps to ground this work, as well as the study details that follow.

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the experiences of new professionals in student affairs and the role supervisors play in onboarding a newcomer to their position. We also make use of the terms onboarding and socialization. Onboarding, which encompasses both formal job orientations, refers to explicit training processes or experiences over a finite period of time. Socialization, which can encompass both explicit and implicit experiences, occurs over a longer period. Consistently, researchers have illuminated the need for quality graduate preparation programs, affirming job transition experiences, and supportive supervisor relationships to ensure new professionals in student affairs have successful experiences. As Tull and colleagues (2020) asserted, how

professionals are socialized has long-term implications for career retention, professional efficacy, and work performance. As higher education and student affairs made drastic pivots to working remote, diversifying program offerings, and exposed to increases in stress and anxiety, new professionals during this period are likely to have a dramatically different onboarding experience that will shape their institutional future and longevity in student affairs.

Newcomers' Adjustment and Onboarding Experiences

Many graduate preparation programs focus on skills to lay a foundational understanding of student affairs work. However, many graduate programs focus less attention on skills directly related to sorority and fraternity advising (McKeown, 2021). As previously highlighted, onboarding experiences typically include understanding institutional culture (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), policies (Tull et al., 2020), and developing relationships with supervisors and colleagues (Carducci & Jaramillo, 2014; Tull et al., 2020). However, many new student affairs professionals learn or continue to develop competencies and professional identities that are acquired after beginning work as full-time professionals (Hirschy et al., 2015; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). The continued development of competencies and professional identity leaves much of a new professional's growth in the hands of supervisors. For example, new sorority and fraternity life professionals in a study by Goodman and Templeton (2021) noted the need for continual learning about campus communities and knowing when to reach out and ask for help.

Relationship of Supervision on New Student Affairs Staff

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Remote and Social Distance Work Environments

Remote work is not a new concept for much of the business world, yet for student affairs professionals who largely conduct their work

through in-person interactions, the shift to remote and socially distant environments happened at a rapid pace. Quickly, the uncertainty of starting a new role overlapped with concerns about physical health and establishing work routines in foreign environments. Extant research on remote work offered critique on its limit to facilitate casual interactions and relationship building among colleagues (Carlos & Muralles, 2022; Hemphill & Bagel, 2011). For example, Seifert and colleagues (2023) conducted a study of 546 largely mid- and senior-level student affairs administrators prior to the pandemic to understand what contributed to job satisfaction. The authors highlighted that helping students, collaborating with colleagues, and having a sense of autonomy contributed to job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment among professionals. Yet, in light of remote work environments and navigating the crisis of the pandemic, the authors note that ‘helping students’ likely shifted from transformational accomplishments to “nimble emergency management responses” (Seifert et al., 2023, p. 259). Onboarding literature does not often discuss the importance of supervisors considering the self-care or mental and physical well-being of themselves and of new professionals, which can become increasingly salient while navigating crises (Carlos & Muralles, 2022). Seifert and colleagues (2023) highlighted that the rapid transition of the pandemic may have caused increased focus on transactional task management and less attention directed to reflective practices and holistic self-care initiatives.

Adjustments in Sorority and Fraternity Life

Among sorority and fraternity professionals, limited understanding of the pandemic and remote work or socially distant work environments exists. However, in her reflections on navigating a remote start to her advising position, Sauer (2022) described feelings of doubt about performing the responsibilities she was hired to do as a campus advisor and the inability to make meaningful connections with her supervisor and the students she advised. She highlighted how the highly transactional interactions she often had in meetings with colleagues and students “were the antithesis to the career I had chosen” (Sauer, 2022, p. 23). The author wrote about being frequently reminded of the importance of developing intentional connections with others, a responsibility that rested with her.

Ballinger and Workman (2022) reviewed responses from sorority and fraternity organizations and found notable shifts in approaches to human resources. In some cases, while budgets were negatively affected, the forced shift to remote work facilitated a reevaluation of staffing models that presented opportunities for hiring more experienced professionals and made organizations more adaptable and innovative. However, the authors cautioned that while employee expectations improved, event attendance increased due to remote technology, and access to services expanded, concerns that the “relationships’ strength isn’t as strong” (Ballinger & Workman, 2022, p. 10) were noteworthy. This ambivalence to the impact of the pandemic further reinforces the need to better understand how new professionals navigated their ex-

periences and how supervisors and professional associations can not only further support the professionals but also understand the impact on student services. Socialization, then, is an important way of viewing new professionals' experiences, particularly those in this study.

Conceptual Framework

We utilized Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) framework on socialization tactics to better understand the influence of early pandemic onboarding for new FSL professionals alongside perceptions of their socialization from their supervisors. According to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), new professionals perceive experiences differently according to the tactics used and information received. For example, new professionals without access to organizational information may feel more anxious and less likely to make sense of organizational culture or campus communities. New professionals who are onboarded in group settings (i.e., through central Human Resources processes) and not provided individualized attention are less likely to adopt innovative role orientations, meaning the new professionals are less likely to perceive their agency to be changemakers. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) highlight how and when new information is shared impacts feelings of stability or uncertainty. For instance, wait and see, baptism by fire, or a just-in-time orientation approach shares information in random patterns as issues arise, which contributes to uncertainty and impacts individual efficacy. This framework not only assisted in constructing questions for interviews but also in our analysis to identify contradictions in theory within remote onboarding settings, which were largely present during COVID-19.

Methodology

This article presents an exploration of a subset of new sorority and fraternity professionals and their supervisors from a larger qualitative study exploring onboarding experiences of professionals hired during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this larger study, we utilized a phenomenological approach (Adams & van Manen, 2008) to examine the experiences of new professionals and their supervisors, and thus, findings in this article emerged from those conversations.

Table 1
Sorority/Fraternity Newcomers & Supervisor Participants

Participant Pseudonym (pronouns)	Race/ Ethnicity*	Gender Identity*	Relocated to begin role?	Institutional response to staff during March 2020-March 2021	Supervisor Pseudonym (pronouns)	Supervisor Race/ Ethnicity*	Supervisor Gender Identity*
Helena (she/her/ hers)	White	Female	No (Started remotely)	Everyone is fully remote	Christopher (he/him/his)	Multiracial	Cis-gender male
Judy (she/her/ hers)	White	Woman	No	Staff worked remotely starting on March 16, 2021. No one could work from campus.	Johnny (he/him/his)	Biracial Latino	Male
Andre (he/him/ his)	API/DA	Male	No	At the beginning of the pandemic, all staff worked from home. During the summer of 2020, minor exceptions were made and occasionally staff would return to the office. In fall 2020, staff began rotating/hybrid schedules which included one or two days a week in the office, while other days were virtual work days.	Matt (he/him/his)	White	Male
Patty (she/her/ hers)	White	Female	Yes	Student affairs staff worked remotely but office coverage was expected. Within our unit, there was 1-2 staff members in the office, but generally, the institution was responsive to alternative work locations.	Jasmine (she/her/hers)	Black, African American	Female

**Participants were provided with an open-ended prompt to identify for race/ethnicity, gender, and other salient identities.*

Data Collection

We posted a call for newcomer participants in spring 2021 on various social media spaces (e.g., NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community, Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals, and personal social media accounts). For this study, a total of four newcomers (see Table 1) working directly with campus sorority and fraternity communities and their supervisors participated. These individuals worked on campuses with enrollments ranging from 8,000 to 65,000 and total affiliated membership from 50 to over 6,000. Participants were provided with an overview of the study and were asked permission to contact their supervisor to participate. A series of three interviews were held. Initial one-to-one interviews consisting of open-ended questions were held with each newcomer and supervisor separately, followed by a joint interview with both the newcomer and supervisor dyad lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each. A phenomenological interviewing style was utilized to draw out direct descriptions of participant experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2008). In this approach, the interviewer's role is to engage with participants, learning as much about their experiences as possible and asking follow-up questions to elicit more detail or perceptions (Roulston, 2010).

Newcomers were asked to describe their onboarding experiences, how they differed from expectations, and how their onboarding experiences impacted their ability to build community and longevity in the field. Supervisors were asked to describe how they approached onboarding, challenging moments, and perceptions of the future professional development needs of their newcomers. During the joint interview, participants were asked to share their working relationship, how their collective experience changed their views of higher education, and recommendations for future professional development opportunities.

A similar interview format was used to understand supervisor and supervisee relationships in student affairs (Barham & Winston, 2006). Then, a second dyadic interview (Polkinghorne, 2005) was conducted, where supervisory dyads were interviewed together. This approach allowed the participants to build off of each other's responses and gave researchers the ability to observe the interaction the dyads had with each other. Interviews were transcribed and participants were assigned pseudonyms. Participants who completed the study were offered a \$10 digital gift card to Amazon, Starbucks, or Target. Participant incentives were made possible through research grants received by the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors and the Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators.

Data Analysis

Once all interviews were transcribed, both authors read through the transcripts multiple times and initially coded the data individually, utilizing an inductive and deductive strategy, using descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2012) and codes generated from the literature on socializa-

tion and student affairs supervision. This process generated 97 individual codes. The authors then met to address discrepancies and began to group similar codes together into categories, and subsequent themes (Saldaña, 2012). For example, “informal interactions” and “water cooler talk” were collapsed to form “sense-making and social connections,” while “explaining the system” and “navigating institutional politics” were collapsed to form “institutional norms.”

Boundaries of the Study

We recognize the boundaries of this study are within the participants’ experiences and want to address some limitations. While an attempt to include newcomers from a diversity of tenure in the field, most newcomer participants also held new professional identities, having recently graduated from a graduate program within the past three years. This context may help explain some of the similarities between studies conducted before the realities of the pandemic (see Goodman & Tempelton, 2021), yet still illustrates the need for quality onboarding experiences regardless of crisis situations. Additionally, we limited our inclusion of newcomers who provided permission to contact their supervisors, which may have usurped our ability to recruit only the newcomer and supervisory dyads with positive working relationships, or those willing to more openly share their experiences with each other. Further, this study focused on the experiences of on-campus SFL professionals and not organization-based professionals. Other studies may want to explore experiences of or comparisons to organizational professionals, who may be more familiar with remote or distant employees (Foster et al., 2019).

Positionality and Trustworthiness

Each of us came to this study with years of experience in sorority and fraternity life and as student affairs practitioners, both as newcomers and supervisors responsible for onboarding. Additionally, we both transitioned to faculty roles during the COVID-19 pandemic when work-from-home orders and remote campus operations for many campuses were still occurring. These former and current positions allowed us to recognize some nuances in sorority and fraternity life that may be separate from broader student affairs and faculty onboarding experiences.

During the interviews, we shared our own experiences as practitioners and our recent transitions navigating new positions during the early stages of the pandemic, and we followed up with additional probing questions for clarification to avoid imposing our own meaning onto participants’ words and experiences. This ongoing reflexive process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) continued into the data analysis phase where we remained sensitive to our own experiences with onboarding. We engaged in peer debriefing with student affairs colleagues, allowing us to verify and/or challenge our explanations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We further believe that the multiple formats of our interviews provided an additional opportunity for each participant to verify previously shared

information and expand or clarify upon their experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005). Further, we tend to believe that, qualitatively, this process strengthened both the conversations and the findings as we were able to more deeply render participants' experiences as a result.

Findings

This study sought to understand how supervisory relationships among newcomer on-campus professionals and their supervisors were impacted during remote onboarding experiences and to address future professional development needs for SFL professionals. Newcomers highlighted a number of challenges when adjusting to a new role during remote work requirements. Supervisors illuminated frustrations with not being able to support new professionals. However, the supervisory dyads also highlighted that some success found during their onboarding experiences suggested opportunities for professional development and navigation of the pandemic's continued impact on campus professionals. Among these experiences, several themes were identified from these supervisory relationships: Individualized Orientation Approaches, Shifts in Communication Tones, Opportunities for Sense-Making and Social Connections, and Uncertainty of Role or Institutional Norms.

Individualized Orientation Approaches

Newcomers and supervisors were both asked to describe any official orientation processes and reflect on opportunities they would have liked to approach differently. Most participants described the approach to orientation as a highly individualized process involving the supervisor meeting with the newcomers one-on-one or suggesting meetings with other individuals whom newcomers should know or regularly work alongside. Helena, for example, described the most structured part of her orientation process was from human resources:

I attended one day have a new employee orientation, with just sort of more general, like HR focused stuff. And beyond that, it was just pretty much unstructured, just sort of filling me in as things came up in meetings, and, you know, just sort of attending as many meetings as possible to sort of get some context for everything.

Helena's supervisor, Christopher, confirmed, "In terms of like training and onboarding, we try to use our previous like in-person onboarding schedule or framework, just adapted to a virtual component." Christopher went on to describe early meetings with Helena as long days on Zoom with her shadowing him in meetings and holding conversations about historical contexts. These extended virtual interactions made it easy for Helena to feel empowered to ask questions of her supervisor and build a quality rapport with each other in a remote setting.

For other SFL newcomers, supervisors encouraged newcomers to ask questions, but unless supervisors were intentional about facilitating space where casual dialogue and check-ins could occur, newcom-

ers were hesitant to reach out beyond formal meetings. For example, Johnny stated,

I think, once we went virtual, something I noticed and appreciated was that now I do one-on-ones once a week. And even if they're just quick, they're like, a nice kind of check in. And I think when we were in-person, they were more unofficial or. . . were just like, passing, like, kind of passing by the office. . . but I was glad when we met virtual. We now still have that ability to do so. So, I think that's something that's kind of evolved in our work relationship.

Even if there was no intentional one-on-one time to process every new experience, each supervisor did comment how most of the one-on-one time with their new professionals was to help explain campus culture and connect newcomers with other professionals across campus with whom they would need to communicate regularly.

Shifts in Communication Tones

At some point during the early stages of their onboarding experiences, participants were asked to work either remotely or to practice social distancing, which shifted the majority of communication to digital modalities (e.g. Zoom, email, or phone). For example, Johnny mentioned how he recognized that using email or written communication would be less effective in conveying information. He shared,

I'll call [Judy] when I have a question sometimes, instead of just sending her a Teams message. So, like, to try to build that, like, direct relationship, and being like, okay, have a question you can call me to or shoot me a text, like, it's okay. Like, so trying to find those other methods of communication that's not just our formal one-on-one. So, calling, texting, because I use to not call or text my staff, because I think, you know, they're like, oh, why is my boss calling prior to the pandemic, but now I do it. So. And I'm not saying I'm doing it well; I'm just saying that these are some of the things I've thought about.

Johnny also illuminated how even traditional formal methods of communication, such as email, have evolved at times to a more informal tone. Extra attention was paid to the tone of his written communication, particularly when policies were rapidly changing. Johnny continued speaking about how he regularly encouraged his staff and Judy to not feel like they were bothering him by sending a message or calling without prior scheduling, similar to how staff could organically stop into his office before the pandemic.

Johnny's supervisor, Judy, echoed some frustrations about developing relationships with campus partners, in which she explained that virtual meetings felt largely transactional:

I think that, virtually it's been like, no, like, I want to build this

relationship, but how authentic can I be on the other side of the screen, like telling you I want to build that relationship, versus the person on the other end being like, "uh huh, uh huh, like, what do you actually need from me?"

Judy elaborated that what normally felt like casual interactions to get questions answered or make connections with other areas of campus became extra work and felt "tedious."

Similarly, Patty discussed that her formal orientation did not cover the new expectations and methods her office used to communicate when social distancing was being practiced. She shared, "I did not know that Zoom had a chat feature before. . . that was never communicated to me. . . I kept getting, like, text messages from my supervisor that I wasn't responding to things." Patty mentioned how she felt she was negatively affected by not knowing about communication norms in the office, causing her to miss out on key conversations and the ability to engage with colleagues before she was told about the chat feature—these included interactions with her other newcomers and staff members.

Uncertainty of Role or Institutional Norms

The socially distant and remote nature of the earlier experiences left the new professionals with many questions about institutional culture and expectations that were previously picked up randomly or implicitly. For example, Patty shared that the centralized onboarding "felt very efficient and effective." However, she continued,

The informal onboarding was harder to pick up because so much of that you get from physically being in a space. . . I think for me it was just the realization that I had to be more intentional. I just had to ask for things. I had to advocate for things, and that could potentially just be my previous socialization.

While Patty in a later interview stated, "I would have liked to have a space where I felt comfortable asking these curious questions," others shared that the lack of opportunities for sense-making and social connections led newcomers to question how effective they were in their new positions. Andre indicated, "Personally, I felt alone, right? I felt alone, I felt isolated. I think there was time I was like, I know, what am I doing here?"

Supervisors also questioned how successful they were in conveying knowledge about the expectations they had, especially during a period of rapidly changing policies and demands from senior administrators. Helena's supervisor, Christopher, shared, "I don't know where to turn, because there are no, there's no magic solution. There's no best practices that I'm aware of, not while in a pandemic in a virtual component." He later stated, "We chat a little bit about her own self-efficacy, like not knowing all the things, the same thing is happening with me, like, I don't know how to best support you in this environment." This comment relates deeply to an element of, you don't know what you don't

know, wherein supervisors in our study felt that even when they were offered a space to talk about these gaps in knowledge or skills, there was no clear direction as to what to contribute or they felt that colleagues did not have meaningful or helpful contributions.

Effectively conveying information was part of the challenge for supervisors. For instance, Jasmine stated, "I think what was a very difficult thing to navigate was helping to teach [Patty] institutional culture, helping [Patty] to understand cultural norms for our student groups." Judy's supervisor, Johnny, questioned his ability to convey information appropriately altogether:

One of the things I've learned is that, even though we talk and over the screen, it's still really hard to build that interpersonal relationship and understanding... I worry, sometimes when we have conversations that either it's misinterpreted, or other things, because it's really hard to tell how that conversation is going and providing follow up.

Sharing information or explaining institutional context was a main concern of every supervisor in our study. This frustration was found largely due to a lack of opportunities for informal interactions or spontaneous encounters.

Opportunities for Sense-Making and Social Connections

Sense-making and historical context were large frustrations that both new professionals and supervisors discussed throughout their interviews. Similar to the shifts in communication tone, the lack of informal interactions presented during remote work became a barrier to understanding institutional culture and the political aspects of the role. Johnny, a supervisor, commented, "Because we haven't had that water cooler talk, maybe there's not that trust. . . for her [Judy] to give feedback and question things." Similarly, Patty talked about not being in the office with other colleagues and, "something I really missed was just like these little water cooler conversations to pick up more of those cultural components."

Accounting for some of this relational uncertainty, some supervisors took to organizing virtual spaces where information could be shared beyond formal meetings or scheduled interactions. For instance, Helena initially worked remotely before she relocated after the campus reopened. Her supervisor, Christopher, took an approach where they would sit on a Zoom call for full days during the first few weeks after Helena started. Helena would have the opportunity to observe Christopher in his interactions, but they both mentioned how it provided an opportunity for Helena to ask questions without feeling as though she was bothering Christopher or needed to schedule a time for a meeting. This approach provided an opportunity for Helena to pick up on subtle contexts that impacted decisions and policies that initially seemed confusing. In reflection of making sense of the work, Helena shared,

I do think I have a good understanding of like, what things normally are like in the office and the team and sort of different dynamics that have just come up through conversations in different situations and like, sort of filling in on context.

When asked about the biggest takeaway from the virtual onboarding experience as a supervisor, Christopher noted, "My biggest takeaway with how sort of we got to know each other in a completely virtual setting on different coasts." Although Christopher and Helena commented that it felt awkward and that they worried it was too much surveillance, the extended time on Zoom calls facilitated some relationship-building that may not have happened in a shorter virtual meeting. Christopher added, "I personally feel very close with [Helena], like, professionally and personally speaking and like, to me that's indicative that we can build relationships virtually." Patty actualized a similar feeling, as she sought to understand how supervisors could improve tactics of onboarding and socialization; for supervisors, this understanding was rooted in naming and making sense of some of the implicit or informal aspects of coming into a new role.

Discussion

We explored the experiences of campus-based sorority and fraternity advising professionals hired during the pandemic alongside their supervisor's perceptions of onboarding and initial socialization. Our findings illuminate the frustration among new professionals in understanding their new role and institutional culture and in making social connections. Our findings also illuminate supervisors' concerns about building trust and conveying important information to aid new professionals in their transitions. The significance of this study is in how supervisory relationships, communication styles, and socialization processes can be more attentive to newcomers and be more proactive in mitigating anxiety and the uncertainty of adjusting to a new role. Implications from this study can not only assist future remote newcomers and their supervisors, but also assist those working in remote organization-based roles or those with limited face-time with supervisors and other colleagues.

The individual approach to newcomer onboarding echoes prior research in higher education (e.g., see Cable et al., 2013; Lombardi & Mather, 2016; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull et al., 2020). However, the pandemic added another layer of complexity in which in-person or larger group meetings were highly discouraged. This complexity often resulted in highly formalized communication in the form of emails, which newcomers had a difficult time interpreting and had limited opportunities to exchange relational information and build social connections with others. At the same time, Christopher and Helena spoke about their hours-long Zoom meetings that provided an opportunity for Helena to observe Christopher; this experience led to Helena feeling more comfortable asking Christopher small questions throughout

the day instead of waiting for a scheduled meeting or communicating through email. Given this experience was a unique arrangement, supervisors may be grappling with information overload and newcomers' desire to get questions answered or contexts clarified.

Newcomers highlighted the need to feel connected to the larger field of SFL and engage in continuing professional development. However, they also acknowledged the limitations the pandemic had on the traditional form of face-to-face professional development. Yet, as Judy illuminated, the opportunity to connect with other SFL colleagues statewide through regularly organized Zoom meetups was beneficial to share a space with other professionals navigating similar realities. This opportunity made professionals in our study feel less alone in their transition and supports former research on new SFL professionals asserting their desire to continue their learning beyond graduate school and to collaborate with other professionals beyond their campuses (Goodman & Templeton, 2021).

Similar to previous work by Renn and Hodges (2007), newcomer participants described feelings of incompetence or ineffectiveness because of a lack of supervisor and colleague feedback. The idea of you don't know what you don't know was ever-present and has continued even years into the pandemic as a concern for improved student affairs practice. Participants' supervisors, too, shared their frustration with not being able to provide clear direction or answers to newcomers' questions and onboarding needs in the face of rapidly changing laws, campus policies, and job responsibilities during the early phase of the pandemic. Newcomers tended to focus more on developing relationships with student leaders and mentioned the increased availability made for newer opportunities to engage students. However, solely prioritizing student relationships may also make it harder to understand institutional politics or how administrative decision-making prioritizes SFL communities, or not (Garcia et al., 2022). Given these insights, there are several implications for both practice and future research.

Implications for Practice

First, to address continued concerns of student affairs staff turnover in fraternity and sorority life (Bichsel et al., 2023;), there are several important implications for practice. Senior among them is recognizing that, as Jasmine asserted, "we proved that we could do this virtually. We proved that we could have more flexibility and still do our jobs effectively." Student affairs administrators overwhelmingly prefer some type of remote work arrangement, and 62% of administrators stated they feel that most of their duties can be performed remotely (Bichsel et al., 2023). However, both new professionals and their supervisors must develop effective practices to ensure quality services so students do not suffer and senior administrators feel confident in supporting continued remote work opportunities. These practices may be a constant negotiation between remote work and on-campus needs. On the other hand, remote onboarding can have some advantages

over in-person onboarding. For example, it can allow new staff members to start working more quickly and efficiently, since they can begin their training and orientation from their own homes. Moreover, remote onboarding can also be more cost-effective and time-efficient than in-person onboarding.

Considerations for New Professionals

New professionals, whether starting remotely or in person, should seek out opportunities to learn as much about their new role and institutional culture as possible. Seeking out virtual meetups or spontaneous encounters was the largest missed opportunity for developing familiarity with colleagues and insight into institutional politics and decision-making (Woo et al., 2023). Beyond the pandemic, virtual meetups may continue to be beneficial as declining budgets and a proliferation of professional development opportunities may limit the ability of newcomers to take advantage of face-to-face opportunities. Ballinger and Workman (2022) highlighted that virtual programming has resulted in increased attendance and opportunities for more regular communication with campus stakeholders to build proactive relationships.

Attention to how virtual interactions may limit deeper relationships and informal interactions that might facilitate deeper connections among campus-based professionals is essential (Ballinger & Workman, 2022; Woo et al., 2023). Virtual formats may pose additional challenges for professionals who work in states that limit travel to states with discriminatory legislation (e.g., California Assembly Bill No. 1887 previously prohibited state-funded travel to locations that had discriminatory laws related to gender expression, gender identity, or sexual orientation). Professional associations in particular (e.g., Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, NASPA, ACPA, and other organizations) can explicitly work with campuses to address this threat and gap in opportunity, which may mean programming intentionally through virtual platforms or offering financial resources for newcomers who are in locations with the most challenge.

New professionals should feel encouraged to reach out to supervisors or other trusted

Colleagues if sustained anxiety or uncertainty about their roles persist. While the remote onboarding experiences highlighted a need to “reintegrate” with campus when face-to-face, these findings point to a broader need to ensure uncertainty is mediated by asking questions, seeking additional information and relationships, or adopting an overall ongoing learning mindset toward their role (Goodman & Templeton, 2021). Particular attention should be given to making observations and understanding how decisions are made, and by whom. This insight can help newcomers understand what types of information are valued or utilized and illuminate how SFL communities are prioritized in campus decision-making (Garcia et al., 2022).

Considerations for Supervisors

Supervisors of remote employees should clearly encourage newcomers to ask questions and should provide clear support on how to seek information about job tasks and performance (Woo et al., 2023). Supervisors should be transparent during the onboarding process about the unique perspectives newcomers bring to their roles. Not only is this transparency imperative during times of crisis and rapid change, but supervisors holding these conversations can also identify strengths beyond student affairs practice that newcomers bring to their positions, which can empower and showcase the agency newcomers should have in implementing new ideas (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For example, some newcomer participants in our study highlighted how they tapped into their crisis management background as camp counselors to help navigate conversations with students. Additionally, supervisors also mentioned how they had to engage skillsets developed in former professional roles to help navigate the rapidly changing nature of policy on campus.

Supervisors should be mindful of how power dynamics may impact relationships among newly hired staff, especially younger professionals. Many newcomers did not expect it to be a norm for front-line staff and senior administrators to be so present and available in virtual meetings. In these spaces, newcomers were better able to see how decisions were made at more senior levels. Not only should the practice of regularly holding meetings with a wide range of professional ranks continue, but supervisors should also hold debriefing sessions with newcomers to process institutional politics and the culture of decision-making. For supervisors, this practice is also an opportunity to engage with newcomers about how they fit into the institution. Anecdotally, a supervisor shared that a mid-career colleague, who recently began at their institution during the study period, made efforts to independently reach out to campus partners with similar titles and responsibilities at her previous institution with whom she regularly collaborated. This anecdote may point to a difference in how newcomers across career tenure navigate their onboarding experiences and may highlight different implications for practice.

Finally, supervisors should proactively engage new professionals in reflective conversations about their experiences and assist new professionals in reconciling theoretical knowledge with practical application. This reflection is crucial for newcomers to see how decisions or experiences fit into the larger culture or are reflective of the politics of the institution, which is more likely to lessen the anxiety newcomers face within a new role (Goodman & Templeton, 2021; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Moreover, supervisors should support the new professionals in ways that validate new professionals' experiences and should trust the use of new professionals' internal voices (Magolda, 2001) or new professionals may risk developing an over-reliance on supervisors' opinions. (Perez & Haley, 2021).

Implications for Future Research

Newcomers and supervisors alike illuminated the frustrations they had with not being able to navigate the rapidly changing nature of campus policies and procedures. The rapidly changing nature of the pandemic combined with a demand to maintain some sense of stability within institutions of higher education likely caused additional stress for supervisors and newcomers that contributed to feelings of reduced efficacy. Future research should explore this phenomenon to better understand its impact on the supervisory dynamics and on new professionals' feelings of uncertainty and integration. There is value in additionally understanding how SFL professionals hired during the pandemic impact the career trajectory and long-term influence on student affairs professionals moving forward. Understanding lessons learned and impacts on professional philosophies will be critical to understanding the long-term needs of the field and navigating future crises.

Conclusion

Overall, this research suggests that remote work has had a significant impact on the onboarding experiences of new staff, with both positive and negative effects. Although the full impacts of COVID-19 and remote work are not fully understood, there is continued concern with the retention of new professionals in sorority and fraternity life and student affairs more broadly. As Bichsel and colleagues (2023) highlighted, remote work opportunities remain desired among student affairs employees, yet institutional policies and processes have yet to be largely implemented. This research provides insight into how new campus-based sorority and fraternity professionals and supervisors navigated early remote onboarding experiences.

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