

The Role of College Unions in Developing Students' Sense of Community:
A Narrative Inquiry of Physical and Organizational Environments

Justin T. Camputaro

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Higher Education

Claire Robbins, Chair

Elizabeth Creamer

Gabriel Serna

David Kniola

December 8, 2017

Blacksburg, Virginia

Copyright – 2017

The Role of College Unions in Developing Students' Sense of Community:
A Narrative Inquiry of Physical and Organizational Environments

Justin T. Camputaro

Abstract

Sense of community (SoC) positively promotes persistence and graduation rates of college students by helping them to feel cared about by others, accepted as members of the campus community, and that they matter to their peers and other community members (Cheng, 2004; Harris, 2007a; Schlossberg, 1989). The college union is one of the most influential settings in developing SoC (Barrett, 2014; Janisz, 2014; Maxwell, 2016; Smyth, 2016) and improving student persistence (Tierno, 2013). However, scholars and educators lack understanding of the ways in which the physical and organizational environments of college unions contribute to SoC development among students.

The purpose of this narrative study (Clandinin, 2013) was to understand the role of the college union in developing SoC among college students. Anchored in a modified version of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology framework, the study explored how physical and organizational environments within a college union influenced the community conditions necessary for supporting the educational purposes of student engagement and learning.

To understand the role of the physical and organizational environments of the college union in students' SoC development, this study used photo-elicitation methods and semi-structured interviews with seven participants from one large, public, historically White university with high research activity. Students' stories revealed a College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model in which students progressed through developmental stages: feeling overwhelmed initially, connecting with campus sub-communities, building localized community, and deepening connections and strengthening bonds with administrators and peers. By progressing through these stages, students developed a SoC toward the institution. The data also highlighted how the college union's physical and organizational environments advanced the SoC development process by creating a home-like feeling, encouraging and enhancing interactions through design, cultivating lasting memories, and nurturing a student-centered culture. These findings represent a narrative account describing the students' personal experiences in relation to how the college union shaped their SoC.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife Robin and my daughters Olivia and Zoe. The last four years we have all sacrificed time together, but I could not have accomplished this without your love and support.

This research has been a shared journey.

To Robin, more often than I can count you took on all of the responsibilities of the household and parenting. When I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel, you constantly showed me how to remain strong.

To Olivia and Zoe, it is my hope that you see through this experience that you can accomplish anything with your own commitment, hard work, perseverance, and support from family and friends around you.

Always look out for each other and be each other's support network.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the product of support from many faculty, colleagues, and friends. The guidance from my dream team committee has been immeasurable from day one. I am honored to be the first solo advisee of my Chair, Dr. Claire Robbins, who through shared laughs and tears, has certainly ensured I have become a scholar as well as a practitioner. Dr. Gabriel Serna challenged me to think outside the box but not to over think the study. Dr. David Kniola has been my learning community guide and encouraged me to reflect deeper on my findings. Dr. Elizabeth Creamer has inspired my pragmatic qualitative soul for the past three years.

The findings from this study are from the real experiences of seven incredible students. I am thankful for their open and honest sharing of their stories. We are all on our own journeys, and I will cherish these students for sharing a piece of theirs.

The support from my supervisors and staff has made it possible to work full-time while also conducting this study. I acknowledge Dr. Guy Sims for starting me down the PhD road at Virginia Tech. I thank my current supervisor, Lincoln Johnson, and my Husky Union Building (HUB) staff at the University of Washington for affording me the time and motivation to complete this study while also starting a new job.

I am grateful to many colleagues who contributed directly to this research or who provided the encouragement necessary to keep moving along. A special thanks to Director of the Union at my research site for serving as my host. Also, to my VT cohort: Dave, Ayesha, Chris, and Ryan.

None of this would have been possible without my family. I thank my parents Andy and Jeri, for their love, and pushing me out into the world with the drive that I can accomplish anything with hard work. My writing buddies, Izzy and Mr. Muggles (yes, our dogs) who sat alongside me for many long hours writing in the home office. Finally, to Robin, Olivia, and Zoe...I can finally join the family every weekend again.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures and Tables	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Research Questions	1
College Students' Persistence and Success	2
Persistence	2
Sense of Community Influences Persistence	4
Campus Environments Influence Students' Sense of Community	5
Conceptualizing Campus Environments	7
College Unions and Students' Sense of Community	10
Statement of the Problem	11
Purpose of the Study	12
Significance of the Study	13
Delimitations	14
Organization of the Study	15
Chapter Two: Literature Review	16
Sense of Community	16
Neighborhoods	19
K-12 Education	21
Higher Education	22
Campus Environments	29
Physical Environments	29
Organizational Environments	31
College Unions	35
History of the College Union	35
Research on College Unions	37
Research on Sense of Community and the College Union	39
SoC and the College Union Environment: Missing Pieces	41

Chapter Three: Methodology	43
Worldview	44
Pragmatism and SoC	44
Pragmatism and Narrative Inquiry	44
Autobiographical Narrative	45
Research Design	46
Methodological Approach	46
Sample Selection	51
Data Collection	54
Interview Protocol	56
Data Analysis	57
Authenticity and Trustworthiness	60
Ethical Considerations	61
Chapter Four: Findings	64
Research Site – The Setting	64
Participants – The Characters	64
Emergent Narrative for Building SoC through the College Union	65
The Process	66
Physical and Organizational Environmental Strategies Advance SoC Development	70
Final Reflections	86
Limitations	87
Chapter Five: Discussion	89
Relationship of Findings to Prior Research	89
Sense of Community Actualization Stages	90
Role of College Union Environments in Advancing Sense of Community	95
Implications of the Study	102
Implications for Practice	103
Implications for Research	104
Implications for Policy	104
Conclusion	105
References	107
APPENDIX A: IRB Apprival	122
APPENDIX B: Institutional Recruitment Script	123
APPENDIX C: Participant Recruitment Email for Gatekeeper	125
APPENDIX D: Participant Recruitment Posting	126

APPENDIX E: Participant Recruitment Script	127
APPENDIX F: Informed Consent	129
APPENDIX G: Photo-Elicitation Instructions	132
APPENDIX H: Interview Protocol	134

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. A Synthesis of Organizational Models: How frames and features influence the organizational environment. Adapted from Strange and Banning, 2015, p. 100.....	34
Figure 2. The College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model.....	65 & 90
Figure 3. The Great Hall at the Union.	72
Figure 4. Lounge space depicting several physical features described, including the abundance of natural light, carpeting, the fireplace, and a variety of soft furniture.....	73
Figure 5. An orchestra playing in the Great Hall with many community onlookers.	75
Figure 6. A small corner lounge space with moveable chairs facing each other so that between two to four people can interact together.	76
Figure 7. The Grand Staircase with the Union values engraved.....	77
Figure 8. Life-sized statue on the first floor of the Great Hall in the Union.....	78
Figure 9. The executive leadership room shows the tables arranged in an...O design.....	79
Figure 10. Leadership Center with HU symbols and colors throughout the space.....	79
Figure 11. “What’s Your Story” wall in the Multicultural Center.....	83
Figure 12. Strange and Banning’s Hierarchy of Environmental Design (2015).....	90
Table 1. Sense of Community (SoC) Actualization Process: Stages and Descriptors.....	91
Table 2. College Union Physical and Organizational Environmental Strategies and Descriptors.....	96

Chapter One

A student who is loyal and committed to their institution is more likely to persist to graduation (Brown & Burdsal, 2012). One manner in which students develop deep connections to an institution is through building community among their peers, the faculty, and other campus members. Building a sense of community (SoC) is a fundamental element of college life (Boyer, 1987) Given college union professionals' emphasis on community development, the college union provides a likely setting to explore how SoC is developed (Knell & Latta, 2006). Evidence suggests that the college union is one of the most significant influencers of SoC development among college students (Barrett, 2014). With limited current research on how the college union influences SoC (DeSawal & Yakaboski, 2014), many practitioners and scholars alike are likely eager to further explore this phenomenon.

This study uses narrative inquiry methodology to understand the role of the college union in building SoC among college students with a high SoC to their institution. In particular, the study explores the roles of the physical and organizational environments, as well as other environmental conditions that influence the development of SoC (Strange & Banning, 2015). Because “[t]he arrangement of environments is perhaps the most powerful technique we have for influencing human behavior” (Moos, 1986, p. 4), college union professionals can substantially inform their work by developing a deeper understanding of how these environments influence students' SoC development.

In Chapter One, I describe the importance of this study by first grounding the work in factors that affect college students' persistence and success, and, in particular, how SoC has shown to be a key influencer on persistence. Next, I describe the role of campus environments in building SoC. Then, I describe the influence of the college union setting on SoC development. Finally, I provide a summary of the problem statement, purpose of the study, guiding research questions, significance of the study, and initial delimitations of the study.

Research Questions

The primary research questions guiding my study were:

1. What is the role of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution?
 - a. What is the role of the physical environment of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution?
 - b. What is the role of the organizational environment of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution?
 - c. What other environmental conditions of the college union play a role in building college students' SoC to their institution?

College Students' Persistence and Success

Only 38% of youth in the United States are expected to complete a college education in their lifetime. This percentage is just 2% higher than the average among 42 member nations of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. In 2014, the U.S. ranked fifth among OECD countries with 44% of adults (ages 25-64) having attained a post-secondary education, but in the same study only ranked 11th among adults aged 25-35 years old. In 2009, U.S. policy-makers established a goal to become the leading nation of college graduates in the 25-35 age range by 2020 (OECD, 2015). These policy makers aim to improve college completion rates associated with a world-class higher education system that results in acquired knowledge, enhanced economic prosperity, and empowered citizens with workplace skills needed in a rapidly changing global economy. To meet these objectives, policy makers are increasingly holding colleges and universities accountable for achieving student success and meeting measurable educational outcomes, such as graduation rates (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006).

Many students, parents, and policy-makers are rightfully concerned about the accountability of colleges and universities. These stakeholders need useable data to answer questions such as: "Is this the right school for my student?; Are we getting what we paid for?; and Is our collective investment in higher education paying off?" (Malandra, 2005, p. 1). Graduation rates — the percentage of students who complete an academic program — are one measure of accountability to answer these questions and are widely accepted as gauges of academic quality and student success (Arnold, 1999).

Students' failure to complete college is a huge financial loss to the U.S. economy in terms of attrition costs, lost revenues, and lost investments in higher education (Miller & Malandra, 2008; O'Keeffe, 2013). From 2003-2008, state and federal governments spent more than \$9 billion to support students who ultimately left their respective institutions before their second year. Thirteen states each reported more than \$200 million in lost state funds due to students who did not complete their sophomore year of college (American Institutes for Research, 2010). Both from global competitive and economic perspectives, the U.S. has a stake in improving graduation rates among students attending higher education institutions.

Persistence

Persistence, a student's intention and behavior to continue at their higher education institution through graduation, directly influences graduation rates (Arnold, 1999). In a recent national study tracking students who enrolled in a college or university in fall 2010, only 54.8% completed a degree or certificate within six years and 13.2% were still enrolled (Shapiro et al., 2017). Schools can improve graduation rates by better understanding when and why students withdraw (Arnold, 1999). Graduation rates and persistence illustrate a longitudinal and complex interaction between the institution (peers,

faculty, administrators, etc.) and the individual student (Bean, 1990; Tinto, 1975, 2006). Recent theoretical models of persistence have moved “beyond the interactionist approach..., underscoring the critical role that institutional characteristics and context play in influencing student persistence” (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008, p. 541). Although some students will need to leave no matter what an institution does (Bean, 1990), research informs us that a number of considerations do influence persistence. These considerations include institutional commitment, financial aid, and SoC.

Institutional commitment. Institutional commitment is one of the most significant factors influencing student persistence in higher education (Beyer, Davis-Unger, Lowell, Mcghee, & Peterson, 2014; Chen, 2012; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Students’ perceptions of the quality of their educational experiences is one of the most significant variables affecting institutional commitment (Bean, 1980; Lang & Lowell, 2006). Faculty and staff support play a vital role with student persistence (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Advisors who show greater care for their students, particularly with students who exhibit higher risks of dropping out, positively help students with concerns of academic failure. Intervention programs and assistance foster positive student persistence through greater connectedness with programs and the faculty delivering them, resulting overall in students feeling cared about by their institution (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Lang & Lowell, 2006).

Increased expenditures on student services have a positive influence on student persistence (Chen, 2012). Services such as timely, accessible counseling for students struggling with depression and anxiety (Beyer et al., 2014) and child care centers for student parents (Lang & Lowell, 2006) directly support specific needs that help students manage difficult times while in college. By encouraging participation in out-of-class activities such as student organizations, social programs, and learning communities, faculty and staff can facilitate students’ learning and success by helping them to make meaning of their experiences (Kuh et al., 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

Financial aid. The cost of higher education is commonly reported as a primary reason for students leaving an institution (Chen & Hossler, 2017; Edwards, Lang, & Lowell, 2006; Paulsen, John, & St. John, 2002; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Financial need can lead some students to work longer hours at a job, reducing their ability to dedicate time to academic work (Lang & Lowell, 2006; Paulsen, et al., 2002). Financial aid can significantly reduce the strain of insufficient financial resources (Chen & Hossler, 2017; Paulsen et al., 2002).

Financial aid can help students balance their academic and social settings of the institution because students who receive aid packages that minimize their need to seek additional employment have greater time to study and engage in social activities. Additionally, students might view financial aid scholarships as a form of recognition, which can motivate students to maintain high levels of academic performance (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1992). The type and amount of financial aid combined have

different effects on student persistence. Typically, aid that reduces the net costs of higher education (e.g., grant or merit aid) has greater effects on persistence than loans (Chen, 2008, 2012). Students are more willing to accept greater financial burdens to continue their college careers when their education experiences are positive and their institutional commitment is positive (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Sense of community (SoC). Strong campus communities positively influence academic success and student persistence (Kuh et al., 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). SoC is “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). These elements of SoC resemble the core of Tinto's (1975) social integration theory, which accounts for students’ perceptions of relationships with peers and academic experiences. Integration into the social and academic milieu is a function of the extent to which the student feels a sense of fit with their institution and is often considered when examining student persistence (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003).

Effective retention programs assist students in developing strong bonds with their peers, faculty, and staff. These connections, which closely relate to SoC, further promote personal growth, learning, and academic development (Harris, 2007). In some ways, SoC measures a student’s commitment to their institution; students committed to their institution are more likely to persist rather than drop out or transfer to a different institution (Brown & Burdsal, 2012). Because SoC is the central topic of this study, the next section further describes this phenomenon and offers current literature that explores its influence on persistence.

Sense of Community Influences Persistence

McMillan & Chavis's (1986) definition of SoC includes four essential elements. *Membership* expresses that individuals must feel a sense of belonging, identification, and safety within the community. Second, individuals must feel they can *influence* their community, or that they matter to the group and to its members. Being *integrated* into the community is the third essential element and denotes that the resources an individual receives through community membership will meet their needs. Finally, *shared emotional connections* exist among the members of a community because of common history and similar experiences. The combination of these elements provides a roadmap for students to integrate into their campus communities.

Students’ SoC to their institution is synonymous with social integration theories, which imply that positive academic and social experiences lead to successful integration into the campus community (Barrett, 2014; Tinto, 2006). This psychological connection to a community serves as motivation to students to behave in ways that both support the community and themselves (Nowell & Boyd, 2010). Collectively, students who feel cared about and accepted as part of the community, and who have a

positive social life on campus, report greater SoC. The opposite is also true: students who feel lonely on campus report lower SoC (Cheng, 2004). In the higher education setting, the concept of students mattering to peers and other members illustrates how connections to the campus community are vital components of persistence and student success (Schlossberg, 1989).

Developing a SoC among students is critical in helping reach their goal of attaining a college degree (Harris, 2007). Students involved in learning communities and other student activities that establish broad social networks create the contexts necessary for developing SoC (Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1997). For example, students involved in first-year interest groups (FIGs) at the University of Washington indicated deep connections to their peers and the institution, and they showed a 99.2% persistence rate and an average GPA of 3.14 (3.4% higher and 0.17 higher, respectively, than those who were not involved) (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Learning communities help to bridge the gap between academic and social environments by not forcing students to choose between the two. Students who shared experiences that crossed both academic and social environments created richer and deeper learning experiences (Tinto, 1997).

Sense of belonging serves as the first and foundational element in the SoC phenomenon among college students. A student's ability to develop a sense of belonging to their institution is one of the most essential influencers on student retention (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; O'Keeffe, 2013). This is particularly important among first-year students with whom persistence rates are typically the lowest. Peer support is a significant predictor of second-year persistence (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Background and identity play important roles in developing connection to peers. Finding peers who are similar is critical for students to feel socially connected during the first year (Berger, 1997).

Strong campus communities positively influence academic success and student persistence (Harrington, 2014; Kuh et al., 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Colleges and universities can intentionally shape their environments to foster the development of these communities. In contemporary higher education institutions, student learning happens across a web: through interactions with faculty experts, peers, and administrative practitioners, and through engagement within varied sites and venues (real and virtual). This web creates a "holistic process of discovery, insight, and application in a dynamic community of learning" (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 136).

Campus Environments Influence Students' Sense of Community

One way of studying SoC in higher education is through student-environment interactions. Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology framework is a model for examining how campus environments affect student experiences. "Educational environments are most powerful when they offer students these three fundamental conditions: a feeling of inclusion and sense of safety, engaging mechanisms for involvement, and the experience of community" (p. xii). Rooted in Maslow's (1968)

hierarchy of needs, in which lower-order needs must be met adequately before attending to the other higher needs, these conditions take shape as a hierarchy of environmental design. Campus environments must first promote inclusion and safety before students will feel comfortable enough to become involved because both needs must be met in order for a SoC to develop (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Promoting inclusion and safety incorporates both physical and psychological conditions, and institutions must meet both conditions for students to fully integrate into the campus community and embrace their full potential in meeting their educational goals. Inclusion begins with the creation of a welcoming campus milieu that encourages a sense of belonging (the fundamental element of SoC) for all students. If environments fail to welcome students' identities or other characteristics, students may feel threatened. Consequently, they may disengage psychologically and eventually physically by leaving the institution. Coupled with a sense of belonging, safety and security comes from addressing issues of crime, violence, vandalism, and harassment (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Spaces, programs, and services can meet students' basic needs by supporting their individual and cultural experiences. Such support can contribute to students' feelings of belonging and community engagement. Institutions that directly support student diversity on campus create stronger possibilities for students to embrace holistic learning experiences. Such experiences facilitate students' development and encourage multiple community memberships (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Inclusion and a sense of safety are enhanced and foster a sense of belonging when students experience positive interactions with diverse peers (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Institutions can undertake multiple strategies to address issues of inclusion and safety such as incorporating universal design principles, creating safe and brave spaces, developing ethnic cultural centers, and offering living learning communities. Feeling a sense of belonging and experiencing both psychological and physical safety are critical conditions for students to take full advantage of college learning opportunities through academic and social involvement (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Students who feel these conditions are met are more willing to invest significant time and energy to participate and engage in all benefits the campus has to offer (Strange & Banning, 2015). The benefits of learning are directly related to and enhanced through student participation and involvement across campus (Astin, 1993; Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006). Learning and academic success are positively related to levels of "academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups" (Astin, 1993, p. 394). Therefore, it is not simply that involvement happens, but also the quality and depth of that involvement, as well as opportunities for reflection to bring meaning to student's experiences (Braskamp et al., 2006). Engagement indicators from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (e.g., reflective & integrative learning, collaborative learning, and student-faculty interactions) are positively associated with both first-year retention rates and six-year graduation

rates (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2016). Developing a sense of belonging, creating conditions for students to feel safe, and providing mechanisms for active involvement allow students to realize the final environmental condition: community (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Creating communities where student learning takes place are at the forefront of priorities for institutions to foster holistic student development (Braskamp et al., 2006). As Strange and Banning (2015) argued,

The concept of community contains all the essential features associated with powerful educational experiences, as unifying purposes and values, traditions and symbols of belonging and engagement, and mutuality of care, support, and responsibility encourage a synergy of participation and worth, checking and cross-checking, to create a positive learning environment (p. 214).

Communities need spaces to exist where they can fulfill their essential purposes. These spaces create a sense of home and comfort where members embrace artifacts and material culture. Strong communities include a variety of environmental elements, offer a stable context for involvement, and flex to accommodate members' changing demands and circumstances. Most communities exhibit shared characteristics to help individuals identify with others in the group, a trait which attracts members, fulfills needs, and sustains membership. Finally, communities have clearly defined cultures expressed through their values, beliefs, symbols, and artifacts. Collectively, these provide synergy and influence over all aspects of community life (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Higher education institutions provide opportunities for a hierarchy of environmental design to develop through initially promoting inclusion and safety, then encouraging participation and engagement, which in turn helps students to realize the self-actualization and fulfillment of their learning experiences through community. At this level, students "experience a complete sense of membership" (Strange & Banning, 2015, p 141) in which all elements of SoC are realized where students have both been influenced by, and in reciprocal form, influencers on, their campus community.

Conceptualizing Campus Environments

Campus environments create the opportunity to contribute to or detract from inclusive, safe, engaging, and community experiences among students (Strange & Banning, 2015). From an ecological perspective, the campus ecology framework describes the influences of environments on individuals and individuals on their environments (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). The assumption behind the framework is that higher education administrators are able, and have the responsibility, to intentionally design campus environments to meet institutional goals, including degree completion (Strange & Banning, 2015). The campus ecology framework includes four distinct environments: physical, organizational, aggregate, and

socially constructed. Student behavior can be explored by understanding the characteristics of each of these environments and their reciprocal features (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Physical environments. The campus physical environment is complex and includes layout, design, and space (Strange & Banning, 2015). Students experience campus spaces differently, and these spaces can have diverse effects on their attitudes and behaviors. Design decisions about all layout features such as seating selections, colors, lighting levels, and signage represent various viewpoints about how individuals can experience spaces (Jamieson, 2003). Researchers have found that college unions, recreational facilities, libraries, facilities supporting students' major program of study, dining halls, and residence halls directly influence recruitment and retention (Cain & Reynolds, 2006a, 2006b).

Physical spaces can adhere to or fail to meet the conditions described by the campus ecology framework. To promote inclusion and safety, campus spaces should be welcoming to visitors and inclusive so that individuals can affirm their identities and expressions of self. To support student engagement, campus spaces should be *functional* to enable individuals to focus on work tasks, *sociopetal* to encourage serendipitous interactions, *flexible* so that individuals can adjust for personal needs, *aesthetic* to inspire creativity, *reflective* to encourage quiet time for meaning making, and *regenerative* to restore energy. Additionally, physical spaces can influence community development by being distinctive so individuals can create unique experiences and personal memories, and by being sustainable to support interactions through scale and available resources (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Campus places that facilitate high levels of community offer opportunities for student engagement, psychological safety, and strong group ownership, and they are highly customizable to satisfy people's needs. Physical spaces can provide hands-on experiences as a learning laboratory for practicing behaviors and perspectives necessary for positive communities. In an increasingly diverse society, it is "critical that students have multiple opportunities to practice productive interaction and constructive disagreement, experience high-quality socialization, and learn to live productively in community with one another" (Rullman & Kieboom, 2012, p. 7).

The construction and renovation of campus facilities offers institutions the opportunity to evaluate and incorporate campus environmental characteristics into architectural designs (Strange & Banning, 2015). This opportunity is essential for fostering SoC because, although some settings may share common elements, SoC is context-specific (Hill, 1996; Warner & Dixon, 2011).

Organizational environments. Organizations can be viewed as purposeful environments with specific aims both expressed (i.e. clearly stated mission, targeted goals and objectives) and implied (general understanding of overall purpose and expectations). The organizational environment focuses on how decisions are made and communicated regarding what is going on and in the distribution of resources (Strange & Banning, 2015). As organizations, college and university settings influence student behavior,

such as persistence. For example, colleges and universities can, to varying degrees, include students in decision-making processes, treat students with fairness through policies and procedures, and provide clear and concise communication about institutional expectations (Berger, 2001; Berger & Milem, 2000; Braxton & Brier, 1989).

Communities can provide mechanisms for students to engage with and influence their environments, and for other members of the community to connect with and influence students. “Organizationally, communities are often a paradox of design” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 220). Communities that offer organizational environments with an appropriate balance between formalized structures and adaptability allow members to become involved, have influence over the community, feel a sense of investment and ownership, and ultimately identify with the community (Strange & Banning, 2015). Environments that establish opportunities for students to connect with faculty and administrators in ways that make them feel cared about, respected, and included create greater chances for community development (Cheng, 2004).

Aggregate environments. Communities are partially distinguished by the characteristics of the individuals who inhabit them. Human characteristics of the members significantly influence the attraction, satisfaction, and sustainability of individuals to communities. Collective characteristics can include demographic features (e.g., gender, age, race, and ethnicity) and psychological aspects (e.g., personality types, interests, learning styles, and strengths). The design of educational settings (e.g., residence halls, first-year interest groups, student organizations, and special interest group services) can be enhanced by understanding the peer influences and student subcultures that result from these human characteristics (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Socially constructed environments. One way to understand environments is through the perceptions of their users (Strange & Banning, 2015). Students’ perceptions of their environments influence their engagement in various settings and are measured through environmental press, social climate, and campus culture. Identifying how individuals describe the community creates a perceived reality of how individuals experience their environment, or environmental press. This press can come from within or beyond the community and establishes a reputation that in turn can attract or repel potential members. The social climate describes the effect of various dimensions on the community, while relationship dimensions describe how individuals are involved in the community. Personal growth and development dimensions measure the basic educational goals of the community, and system maintenance and system change dimensions assess how well expectations are communicated and designed to allow for change to happen. Finally, campus culture entails the “various events, personalities, regulations, programs, traditions, symbols, stories, and interactions” understood by community members (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 131).

In order for students to actualize their learning as members of campus communities, campus officials should understand and design environments (physical, organizational, aggregate, and socially constructed) that foster positive conditions for community (inclusion, safety, participation, and engagement). Because designs vary across campus settings, college and university personnel must assess and adapt environmental elements to meet the educational goals of the institution, including enhancing student persistence. One setting in which this environmental assessment and adaptation process occurs is the college union.

College Unions and Students' Sense of Community

According to the (ACUI, 2017b) website, the role of the college union is to “foster a sense of community that cultivates enduring loyalty to the college.” At its best, the college union is the “heart of campus” that fosters a “small town feel” to facilitate creating campus community (Boren, 2008, p. A34). The college union is an integral component of enhancing the campus milieu and in providing programs, services, and resources that support student engagement. College unions offer opportunities for involvement in student organizations, employment experiences, spaces for relaxation, specialized spaces (e.g., dining facilities, conference rooms), and spaces for specific student populations (e.g., Fraternity and Sorority Life, Veterans Affairs, and LGBTQ). Each of these elements can contribute to student satisfaction and persistence. Serving as the campus community center that promotes connectedness among students, faculty, staff, and other guests was identified as one of six principles of college union efficacy that supports student retention (Tierno, 2013).

In an effort to understand and forecast the evolving function of the college union, Janisz (2014) identified four core purposes: a) building, creating, and fostering community; b) supporting student success; c) serving as the welcome center for campus; and d) serving as the living room of the campus (p. 165). Additionally, in identifying driving forces for the future needs of the college union, Janisz (2014) found the most influential aspect of the college union was the response to students' basic need to connect and belong to the campus community.

Until recently, there was no empirical evidence showing the relationship between the college union and SoC (DeSawal & Yakaboski, 2013). However, Barrett (2014) studied responses from 15,000 student participants in the Middle Atlantic region of the U.S. Student Opinion Survey and found that satisfaction with the college union was the strongest predictor of SoC compared to all other facilities identified in the survey. Specifically, there was a strong, statistically significant relationship between students' self-reported social support network, sense of belonging, and college social activities (identified collectively as the SoC factor) and the college union (Barrett, 2014).

According to recent studies, the relationship between the college union and SoC is enhanced by physical features such as sustainable designs (Harrell, 2012), aesthetics, wide open spaces with natural

light, food venues (Reif, 2014), easily altered furniture and fixtures (Smyth, 2016), and gathering spaces where activities occur (Maxwell, 2016). Additionally, although not explicitly stated as organizational elements, some college union research has identified features that promote SoC, including convenient access to services (Reif, 2014) and student involvement in the decision-making processes of renovation projects (Maxwell, 2016). With established empirical evidence that the college union does promote SoC development, but limited research on how this takes place, the opportunity exists to explore this relationship further.

Statement of the Problem

Many students, parents, and policy-makers alike are interested in understanding ways to increase graduation rates among students in the United States (Malandra, 2005). Persistence, a student's intention to continue at their institution, plays a role in improving graduation rates (Arnold, 1999). Researchers have identified multiple influences on persistence. Institutional commitment can influence students' persistence through faculty and staff support (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012), intervention programs (Heisserer & Parette, 2002), and opportunities for in and out of classroom activities (Kuh et al., 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011). Financial aid improves persistence by lowering concerns from financial constraints (Cabrera et al., 1992; Perna, 1998) and serving as motivation for academic success (Cabrera et al., 1992). SoC is a third way institutions promote persistence through strong bonds among peers, faculty, and staff (Harris, 2007).

Students with a strong SoC feel cared about, accepted as members of the campus community, and that they matter to their peers and other members. Such students have shown high rates of persistence and academic success (Cheng, 2004; Schlossberg, 1989). SoC influences persistence in multiple ways, including involvement in student activities such as learning communities (Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1997), first-year programs (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993), peer support (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012), and shared identities through which to connect with others (Berger, 1997). Developing and sustaining strong campus communities is one of the most influential methods college educators can use to improve success and persistence (Harrington, 2014; Kuh et al., 2008; Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

Campus ecology is one framework for understanding how colleges and universities can foster SoC development on their campus. Community sits atop a hierarchical set of conditions that promote student learning and ultimately persistence (Strange & Banning, 2015). In order for students to become fully integrated in their communities, they must first feel a level of inclusion and safety (Locks et al., 2008; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Strange & Banning, 2015) and actively be involved on the campus (Astin, 1993; Braskamp et al., 2006; Center for Postsecondary Research, 2016; Strange & Banning, 2015). Campus personnel can support creating these conditions through the design and integration of four campus environments (Strange & Banning, 2015): physical environments (Cain & Reynolds, 2006a;

Jamieson, 2003; Rullman & Kieboom, 2012), organizational environments (Berger, 2001; Berger & Milem, 2000; Braxton & Brier, 1989; Cheng, 2004), aggregate environments, and socially constructed environments (Strange & Banning, 2015).

SoC is context-specific (Hill, 1996; Warner & Dixon, 2011), and the college union is one of the most influential settings on this phenomenon (Barrett, 2014; Janisz, 2014) and in student persistence improvement (Tierno, 2013). Even with this empirical evidence, only recently studies have begun to explore how the physical environments (Harrell, 2012; Maxwell, 2016; Reif, 2014; Smyth, 2016) and organizational environments (Maxwell, 2016; Reif, 2014) actually foster SoC development in college unions.

In summary, research has shown that SoC promotes persistence, and therefore graduation; however, it varies by context. One manner of studying SoC is from an ecological perspective. The college union is one of the most influential settings in promoting SoC. However, the literature has demonstrated only that this relationship exists, and the process through which these campus environments foster SoC remains poorly understood. It is important to understand how college unions promote SoC so that college educators can make their efforts intentional to encourage SoC and so future researchers can better understand how SoC develops on college campuses. This study sought to provide information about the role of college unions in promoting SoC.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the role of the college union in building a SoC among college students with a high SoC to their institution. I anchored this study in a modified version of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology framework. Specifically, the study focused on how two components of the framework that are most easily influenced by higher education professionals (the physical environment and the organizational environment) influenced the community conditions necessary for supporting the educational purposes of student engagement and learning (Strange & Banning, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the physical environment encompassed the college union design, layout, wayfinding, furnishings, and other physical features of the facility, as well as the activities that take place inside the facility. In this study, the organizational environment was operationalized as the infrastructure of the facility, including degree of structural and task complexity, centralization of decision-making processes, formalization of policies, stratification of rewards, services offered, and organizational efficiencies.

The setting for this study was at one university with a comprehensive college union that included at a wide variety of college union physical elements (e.g., lounge space, a games area, student organization offices, etc.) (ACUI, 2016). The initial sample for this study targeted eight undergraduate

students who had spent at least one full year at their current institution, and who self-reported a high SoC to their institution.

To understand the role of the physical and organizational environments of the college union more deeply, I initially used photo-elicitation methods in which participants took photographs associated with the college union and provided brief journal notes describing the meaning of these photographs (Close, 2007; Pain, 2012). Next, using narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013), I engaged with participants using in-depth interviews. Together, these visual and qualitative methodologies allowed for a rich and multilayered understanding of the meanings behind students' personal experiences in relation to how the college union shaped their SoC.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for a number of campus constituencies including students, architects, student affairs officers, and college union administrators. As the primary beneficiaries of improved practices in the college union, the findings from this study provide an indirect significance to students by identifying ways in which higher education professionals and stakeholders can support and enhance student SoC development through the college union. The results of this study provided architects with data about how the physical spaces of college unions promotes SoC. Architects can use the results to design facility layouts.

Senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) may find information from this study helpful in making decisions about organizational protocols of their divisions. This study sought to describe how the organizational environment and decision-making mechanisms influenced students' SoC. SSAOs might use this information when assessing the organizational structure and degree of (de)centralization of their divisions.

Findings offered information about how college union facilities and programs support or detract from students' SoC development. College union administrators and staff might use this information to assess how well their own facilities and programs support SoC development. Findings also provided insights about furniture arrangements, signage, lighting, physical accessibility, and other physical features. College union professionals might use this information to guide decisions about space layout and policy formulation, review, and revision processes.

This study also had significance for future research. For example, I explored how the physical and organizational environments of college unions promoted SoC. Future studies might examine how the environments of other campus facilities, such as recreational facilities, residence halls, classrooms, and libraries promote SoC. Such studies would expand on the information available about how the interactions between students and the physical and organizational environments of campus facilities promotes SoC.

Another possible study may examine the role of the college union in promoting SoC using quantitative methods. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, this study developed an in-depth storyline from students' collective responses. Adapting the questions to generate a larger response rate across multiple institutions could identify findings that researchers could generalize across multiple college union facilities.

Additionally, future studies may examine the role of the college union in promoting SoC at other institutional types, such as small private institutions, minority-serving institutions, and community colleges. Practitioners may benefit from understanding if students experience SoC development differently at different institutional types.

Finally, this study was significant for institutional planning and policy-making. Findings provided campus planning officers with information about how campus facilities, in this case the college union, can promote SoC. Campus planning officers might use this information when considering policies and making decisions about the prioritization of capital projects in master planning processes.

Institutional policymakers might use information from this study in developing policies guiding students' use of campus facilities. Findings provided campus administrators with information about how to make campus facilities more accessible from both physical and organizational perspectives.

Finally, campus facility interior designers might use findings from this study when developing policies and practices related to furnishings and wayfinding. Findings offered specific information about how sizes, color, and features of furnishings in a college union influenced SoC. Findings also provided information regarding the placements and frequency of, and messages communicated through, signage in a college union facility.

Delimitations

This study had several initial delimitations. The first involved the institutional sample. Data came from students at a single institution. Since SoC is context specific, it is possible that the college union in the study differed in some important ways from other college unions. Any attempt to transfer the results to other institution's college unions should be done with caution.

Another delimitation is related to the sample of participants. Seven students participated in this study. Although this study adhered to criteria for quality in qualitative research, the final storyline generated by this sample may not be an accurate reflection of how students experienced this particular college union. A larger sample size or different sample may have generated different results.

A third delimitation was timing. I interviewed students during the summer and asked them to take photographs and reflect on previous experiences. The summer is typically a slower time of the year on college campuses, and therefore participants may have had difficulty recreating from memory the level

of activity during other times of the year. Interviewing students during the fall, winter, or spring may have provided deeper responses.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized around five chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic and the broader issues around the study, the purpose statement and research questions, and significance of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature around the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study, including the sampling approaches, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter

Four reports the findings. The final chapter discusses the findings and their implications for future practice, research, and policy.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

To explore the role of the college union in building students' sense of community (SoC) to their institution, I examined literature in three categories: SoC, the campus ecology framework, and college unions. In the first section, I draw upon the general literature of SoC, including the varied definitions that describe this construct. Additionally, this section describes the elements that influence SoC development in local neighborhoods, secondary education, and higher education. The second section reviews literature associated with how the physical and organizational environments described by the campus ecology framework influence behavior. In the final section, I examine the literature specifically on college unions, including studies on the physical and organizational environments and SoC.

These three groups of literature provide the foundation for my study, which is described in Chapter Three. The literature review presented in this chapter illustrates the current state of knowledge regarding the interplay between campus ecological environments, SoC, and the college union, while identifying the gaps that my study aims to fill.

Sense of Community

Regarded as the pioneer of the construct, Sarason (1974) described SoC as the “sense that one was part of a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend, and as a result of which one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness” (p. 1). As a community psychologist, he advocated that psychological SoC should be the essential principle of community research and action. The challenge with this principle has been agreeing upon a shared definition of SoC (Nowell & Boyd, 2010).

The prevailing idea across most accepted definitions is that SoC is a “needs theory” that explains an individual's psychological association to a community. SoC begins when the community is able to meet the physiological and psychological needs of individuals. From a rational perspective, people will behave in ways that enhance the opportunities to meet their needs. When the community fulfills that purpose, individuals are more likely to maintain a connection to the community and engage in civic involvement that enhances additional community efforts (Nowell & Boyd, 2010).

Throughout my review of the literature, McMillan & Chavis's (1986) definition was the most commonly cited. They described SoC as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Serving as the foundation for my study, this definition incorporates four primary elements of SoC: (a) *membership*, (b) *influence*, (c) *integration and fulfillment of needs*, and (d) *shared emotional connections*.

Membership is the “feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Membership describes who is a part of the community and who is not through an understanding of a common cultural system of symbols that outline secure boundaries. The boundaries provide emotional safety for individuals. Feelings of safety allow individuals to have a psychological sense of belonging to the community. Belonging and emotional safety combined leads to individuals investing their efforts into the community as a whole (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Sense of belonging is the foundational and essential element of SoC. While studying the relationship between group members’ perceptions of cohesion and individual member’s behaviors, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) provided the theoretical definition of perceived cohesion as one that “encompasses an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership in the group” (p. 482). This feeling of belonging is linked to members feeling “stuck to” their group. This feeling defined the level of value they acquainted with membership in the group, and the extent to which they will reengage later.

The second element of SoC is *influence*, which is the feeling members have that they matter to the group and they are able to make a difference in the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Mattering is an emotional state in which people feel others appreciate their efforts, show pride in their accomplishments, and are saddened by their failures. As a result, a person’s behaviors are influenced by the dependence on others (Schlossberg, 1989). Individuals are more attracted to a community in which they feel their voices are heard and either directly or indirectly influence the decisions and actions of the group. A sharing of power among members of the community leads to greater ownership and thus greater satisfaction and cohesion within the group. Influence is a reciprocal process in which members are also open to community influences on them as individuals through shared norms (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Third, in order to remain satisfied and engaged with a community, a person must feel rewarded by their membership in the community. The *integration and fulfillment of their needs* met by the resources received through their group membership reinforces the level of association and worth the individual feels toward the community. This is most significantly highlighted through shared values between the individuals and the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The final element of SoC is having a *shared emotional connection*, “a commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). The more often individuals interact with one another, the more likely they will develop personal bonds; the more important and positive the experiences are, the stronger those bonds will form (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Community is found across many different settings, and although there are shared global features and characteristics of community among these settings, the elements that influence SoC are context

specific (Hill, 1996; Klein & D'Aunno, 1986; Warner & Dixon, 2011). SoC “represents an overarching concept whose form depends, in part, on specific aspects of its referent settings (e.g., schools, workplace, neighborhood), its people (e.g., students, single mothers, the coloured population of South Africa), and its purpose (e.g., safety, child rearing, education)” (Lorion & Newbrough, 1996, p. 313). The aspects of social support depend, in part, on the community setting (Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994) and considerations must be given to both the positive and negative influences that enhance and inhibit SoC development among community members (Brodsky, O’Campo, & Aronson, 1999).

One can find community in a variety of settings (e.g., workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools), yet these settings often have shared global features (Gardner, 1996; Lorion & Newbrough, 1996). Communities can often be described by their shared purpose, internal commitment, shared responsibility, relationships among the members, and a sense of inclusion (McDonald, 2002). Understanding these features and their implementation in different settings is vital to the success of individuals to make meaning of their experiences in society at local, national, and world levels (Gardner, 1996).

Regardless of the setting, Gardner (1996) outlined ten characteristics of community to describe how these global features present themselves:

- Incorporating and valuing diversity – communities balance group purposes with individual diversity (and sub-group diversity such as national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences).
- Shared values – individuals and groups make meaning of life and focus on serving a common good through a shared sense of purpose.
- Web of mutual obligations — within healthy communities, groups may emphasize their rights, but will also give back in ways that make the community better as a whole.
- Fostering effective internal communication – communities have mechanisms and times when members discuss matters of public concern.
- Participation – an intentional effort to consider individual and sub-group needs, which results in greater member participation.
- Continuous reaffirmation – traditions and celebrations link to the community’s histories and affirms the cultural influences.
- Links beyond the community – communities have purposeful and extensive relations beyond their boundaries.
- Concern for development of young members – preparing members to continue the community through future leadership.
- Looking to the future – proactively prepare for change.
- Arrangements for maintenance – processes and governance that encourage participation and sharing of leadership responsibilities (p. 7).

These features represent the basic elements that should exist in all settings for positive SoC to develop and flourish. “Community building is both intentional and happenstance, and both should be valued” (McDonald, 2002, p. 170). Understanding the characteristics that make-up healthy communities creates a foundation for individuals to think analytically about their design (Gardner, 1996). Community leaders who intentionally build these features into their settings, and who allow for others to develop organically, best position their groups to exhibit strong community elements of SoC among their members.

Although my study specifically focuses on the higher education setting, once college students graduate, they continue on and become members of other communities, as do their children (for some). Therefore, the next sections describe many of the features that positively and negatively influence SoC across three different settings: neighborhoods, K-12 education, and higher education.

Neighborhoods

Growing up, when someone would say the word “community,” the first thing that would come to mind is my local neighborhood. Much of the scholarly literature about SoC focuses on the local neighborhoods in which people reside. Neighborhood research points to the primary benefit of SoC: increasing personal well-being, including elements such as happiness, life satisfaction, level of worrying, assessment of personal coping efficacy, and degree of loneliness (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996; Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001). Much of the literature explored how SoC develops within local communities and the elements that influence this development: civic participation, neighborhood relations, life circumstances, and perceived cohesion.

Civic participation is one element that affects citizens’ SoC to their local community. As the influence element of McMillan & Chavis's (1986) definition explains, SoC is a reciprocal construct. Members’ behaviors have direct effects on the community and in turn, the community influences members’ actions. One local neighborhood advantage of SoC is the association with increased civic participation. People who feel more connected to their neighbors are more likely to participate in local community affairs (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Individuals and families within local neighborhoods have a reasonable claim on community resources to meet their needs. At the same time, the community can reasonably expect individuals and families to be active community participants. Local neighborhood officials can influence community development through public policy that fosters intervention programs that enhance human development of their citizens (Dokecki, 1983). Understanding this reciprocal nuance highlights how SoC “is the glue that can hold together a community development effort” (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 74).

Neighborhood relations, or the quantity and level of social relationships and support individuals have with other community members, describes one of the strongest predictors of SoC in the local context (Pretty et al., 1996; Prezza et al., 2001). Local neighborhoods that offer opportunities for positive

connections among members facilitate stronger social bonds and ultimately higher levels of SoC than neighborhoods without such opportunities. Walking, both for transport and recreation, provides an opportunity for increased social interaction (French et al., 2014). Individuals who are vigilant in talking with their neighbors about local problems show high levels of social bonding (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Local programs and services that foster membership and provide support help to develop shared emotional connections (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Pretty et al., 1996). Attending religious services at church, synagogue, and mosque (Brodsky et al., 1999), participating in block associations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), and being a member of community groups (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981) are examples of how individuals can connect to others and strengthen emotional bonds. Yet, densely populated neighborhoods produce less interaction and lower SoC among community members. In lower density neighborhoods, individuals seek out others for interaction, whereas too many interactions with unfamiliar people cause people to withdraw and attempt to minimize these interactions (French et al., 2014).

People's life circumstances also play a critical role in SoC development by influencing their rootedness, or degree of attachment, to a local neighborhood. Higher levels of rootedness indicate positive SoC among neighborhood members (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Positive influences on rootedness include living in the neighborhood a longer time, living with a spouse partner, and living in particular areas of a neighborhood (Prezza et al., 2001). Older and well-educated adults show high levels of rootedness to their local neighborhoods (Brodsky et al., 1999; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Children are a positive influence in that regardless of age and education levels, adults with children show the highest levels of attachment to their neighborhoods (Prezza et al., 2001; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981).

Life circumstances are also negative factors in SoC development, in particular when they are uncontrollable by the individual. Economic conditions may impede individuals from being able to move away from neighborhoods, causing a withdrawal from their community (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999). Additionally, adolescents who feel unwelcome or unsafe may want to leave their neighborhood. However, typically youth cannot leave because that is where their parents live (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999). Worries about worsening economic conditions for themselves as individuals and within the neighborhood can magnify people's low SoC (Brodsky et al., 1999; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Chipuer & Pretty, 1999).

A final influence on SoC in local neighborhoods is perceived cohesion to the neighborhood and among community members. Such perceptions can have a greater influence than factual data on individuals' SoC (Boessen et al., 2014). Perceptions of neighborhood quality, infrastructures for walking (French et al., 2014), safety, the degree to which community members' needs for resources are being met, and social ties beyond their home neighborhood all influence SoC development (Boessen et al., 2014). Safety is one of the most significant perception factors, especially when children are involved. Parents

strive to protect their children and their perceived cohesion to the neighborhood is directly linked to how safe they feel (French et al., 2014; Martinez, Black, & Starr, 2002).

This section has described the literature about the SoC developing in local neighborhoods, which briefly addresses children, but mostly in the context of the larger community. The next section explores public schools, which in some instances represent a microcosm of the local neighborhood and one of the primary communities that engages children.

K-12 Education

Educators and parents alike are interested in understanding elements that influence persistence at the K-12 level of education (Foley, Gallipoli, & Green, 2014). In this age group, middle and high school students have the highest dropout risk (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; McMillan & Reed, 1994). “Students from grade school through college have difficulty sustaining academic engagement and commitment in environments which they do not feel personally valued and welcome” (Goodenow, 1993b). Accordingly, much of the literature regarding SoC in the K-12 education system has focused on the membership element (Osterman, 2000). In this setting, Goodenow (1993b) defined “psychological membership...[as the] extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environments” (p. 80). The primary element of membership within SoC is a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Failure to achieve a sense of belonging in school has predicted decreased academic motivation and school withdrawal (Goodenow, 1993b).

The experiences and benefits of belongingness are important across all ages and school grades. Students’ experience of acceptance influences several dimensions of their behavior (Osterman, 2000). Students with a high sense of belonging have increased levels of academic motivation, participation, and achievement, which correlate with students’ perceived value of schoolwork, expectancy, and persistence. Students with a high sense of belonging express the belief that their time in school is satisfying, meaningful, and important (Goodenow, 1993a; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000). Students who are more connected to their school communities have lower levels of drug use and delinquency than their less-connected peers, focusing their attention on the positive aspects of school (Battistich & Hom, 1997). Students with a high sense of belonging show to be more resilient; they build stronger self-efficacy, are goal-oriented, and show higher levels of personal responsibility, optimism, and coping abilities than their peers (McMillan & Reed, 1994). Belongingness is also directly and negatively related to students’ feelings of loneliness (Pretty et al., 1994). Overall, research suggests that to form a sense of belonging, “students must feel that they are worthy of respect and that the others in their group or social context care for them” (Osterman, 2000, p. 351).

Two prominent elements influence sense of belonging in K-12: relationships and engagement with the school. Positive relationships with adults, parents, teachers, and counselors are a strong positive

predictor of sense of belonging. These individuals provide encouragement, high expectations, and a support system for the students (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Osterman, 2000). In particular, relationships with teachers are clearly the most significant influencers on students' SoC development (Goodenow, 1993a; Goodenow, 1993b; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Osterman, 2000; Wallace, Ye, & Chhuon, 2012). Interactions with teachers influence students' belief in themselves and their self-worth (Osterman, 2000) and prevent alienation from their academic work (J. H. McMillan & Reed, 1994). Students' perceptions of teacher support, fairness, and conflict are baseline elements that can predict sense of belonging. However, the most significant elements are the effectiveness of the instructor's teaching framework and the extent to which the teacher shows care for the student's development (Goodenow, 1993a; Wallace et al., 2012).

Relationships with classmates and peers also influence students' sense of belonging. When students feel accepted and that they fit in with their peers, they are more likely to indicate a positive sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993b; Wallace et al., 2012; Wentzel, 1997). While peer support is a positive indicator of belongingness, peer rejection has shown to be the most significant factor in anti-social behaviors and withdrawal (Wentzel, 1997).

The second element influencing K-12 students' sense of belonging is their engagement with school. Keeping students motivated and engaged with school enhances their learning (Osterman, 2000). Developing ways for students to identify with school goals aids in preventing alienation from their academic work (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). Students who participate in multiple school-related activities maximize their chances of persistence (Finn, 1989). School clubs, sports, and other activities create a support system for students, providing opportunities for recognition and accomplishment (McMillan & Reed, 1994). Showcasing student's work, such as through permanent art displays, is another mechanism for recognition (Killeen, Evant, & Danko, 2003). These opportunities increase students' sense of ownership, pride, and belongingness associated with their school. These influential elements also set the stage as students move into higher education, which I discuss in the next section.

Higher Education

Although the McMillan and Chavis (1986) definition of community provides a foundation for all researchers and practitioners to work from, at an individualized level, community can be a difficult concept to define and even more challenging to achieve because it means different things to different people and defies a universal application across various educational settings (Cheng, 2005; McDonald, 2002). In higher education, "any discussion of community without student involvement will be problematic because key constituents will not be represented in the community-building process" (McDonald, 2002, p. 175). Students typically define their own SoC in terms of the extent to which institutions meet their expectations of higher education. As a result, campus administrators and faculty

concerned with community-building need to be flexible and open to multiple versions of community as it develops among students, groups, and sub-groups (Cheng, 2005).

Ernest Boyer (1990) identified six principles that characterize effective campus communities, which are widely used across higher education in developing community-building programs and services:

- Educationally purposeful – faculty and students share academic goals and work collaboratively to strengthen teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom.
- Open – a college is an open community that protects freedom of expression and strongly affirms civility.
- Just – diversity is aggressively pursued with the purpose to honor each person and provide a supportive climate to all campus members.
- Disciplined – individuals accept their obligations to the community for the common good and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior.
- Caring – the value of individual members is recognized and respected through support and service.
- Celebrative – the heritage of the institution is remembered through rituals that affirm both tradition and change (p. 9).

Using these six principles as a focal point, McDonald's (2002) book presented five case study examples of institutions that have implemented programs and practices intended to build campus community. Across the campuses at Penn State, Messiah College, Oregon State University, Carson-Newman College, and SUNY Stony Brook, the authors articulated the importance of community building at their institutions. At Messiah College (Boyer's alma mater), educational purposefulness towards building community served as the foundational concept for the institution's mission. This appeared in practice through their "community covenant" that articulated common expectations for interpersonal relationships and a set of clear standards of behavior (p. 53). The Division of Student Affairs at Oregon State University adapted all the six principles, developing their own definitions for each, as dynamic "campus compact" initiatives that defined their expected outcomes and actions (p. 78). Some action items included focusing services on student transitions, enhancing the physical settings of learning environments, developing professional development programs for staff, and improving on-going assessment plans (McDonald, 2002). As these examples suggest, community represents a set of shared relationships that acknowledge and celebrate a common vision for colleges and universities beyond developing knowledge and skills in students.

Benefits of SoC development in higher education. Students want to be members of a community, and at the core of their concerns is to be academically successful and to fit in (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002). Community development, therefore, is an important part of student success, and

SoC is a building block of the educational process (Hamrick et al., 2002). “Community cultivates the teaching and learning process, but more importantly, it creates a sociocultural environment that fosters holistic student development...It is the bedrock to creating an ethos of inquiry and scholarship” (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006, p. 161). A positive SoC among college students supports mental health and reduces stress, alienation, and apathy (Astin, 1993).

Students’ integration into the social and academic life of the institution leads to a greater sense of commitment, which in turn, fosters a stronger environment for learning and development, and student success. The more successful students are and the more they feel appropriately challenged and supported by the campus community, the greater the likelihood of their persistence (Braskamp et al., 2006; Elkins, Forrester, & Noel-Elkins, 2011; O’Keeffe, 2013; Tinto, 1993).

Campus administrators and faculty who make decisions that reflect the goal of increasing community improve the opportunities for students to succeed and stay on campus (Boren, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2003). Policy makers, researchers, and practitioners in higher education need to understand the elements that positively influence SoC. This information can assist educators in decisions regarding how to best allocate institutional resources and developing programs and services that foster student success and ultimately persistence (Elkins et al., 2011; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009).

Elements influencing SoC in higher education. Although common elements exist in many settings, SoC in higher education is context-specific (Hill, 1996; Warner & Dixon, 2011). In order for institutions to foster SoC development, there must be a mutual connection between academic and co-curricular activities on campus (Hoffman et al., 2003; Tinto, 1993). SoC literature in higher education can be conceptualized in three settings: (a) holistic campus setting, (b) curricular settings, and (c) co-curricular settings.

Holistic campus setting. College campuses provide a variety of experiences that influence SoC. Peer support is one of the core elements that influences SoC both positively and negatively. Students who have strong peer support networks have a greater SoC than those who do not have such networks (Brown & Burdsal, 2012; Cheng, 2004; Henry, 2012; Hoffman et al., 2003). These peer relationships do not have to be face-to-face. Students who engage in online social media also report high SoC (Henry, 2012). In a study that targeted undergraduate students at a 4-year public research university in the southwest United States, explored the intersection between students’ use of technology and aspects of SoC in college. Results indicated that time spent using technologies that were social in nature positively fostered SoC, while conversely, increased time using technologies that were solitary in nature, contributed to lower SoC. Increased time spent playing video and computer games with others contributed to lower measures of loneliness, depression, and shyness, and higher levels of social skills, and self-efficacy (Henry, 2012).

Students do not necessarily find SoC linked to a broad attachment with their institution; instead, it is more often found as an outcome of connections to smaller communities. SoC is positively influenced by association with activities relevant to the student such as student clubs, organization of sports, cultural and recreational events, and participating in religious and volunteer activities (Cicognani et al., 2008; Elkins et al., 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lounsbury & Neui, 1995). Positive interactions with others from different backgrounds are another experience that influences SoC in the holistic campus setting. Experiences with diversity, in particular experiences with students from diverse backgrounds that require intentional critical thinking during the engagement, strengthen SoC among students (Brown & Burdsal, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008).

Collectively, students who feel cared about, accepted as part of the community, and who have a positive social life on campus report greater SoC (Cheng, 2004; O’Keeffe, 2013). The opposite is also true: students who feel lonely on campus (Cheng, 2004) or who are unable to participate in campus activities due to financial barriers (Berger, 1997) report lower SoC. Engaging in cognitive mapping, in which students get to know their environment through multiple group memberships, can enhance these feelings and expedite students abilities to develop skills necessary for success in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Safety and inclusion are two basic expectations students have of their environments and serve as key aspects for students to have a positive campus social life (Cheng, 2005).

Students from specific populations experience these feelings of care and acceptance, and their subsequent effects, differently. For example, commuter students in particular often experience lower SoC. Many commuter students are “in and out”; they come to campus to attend class and then leave (Kirk & Lewis, 2015, p. 56). This reality limits their opportunities to build the relationships necessary to feel connected to the campus community (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Similarly, students of color and LGBT students who have to seek out peers similar to themselves due to the lack of diversity on their campus report lower SoC (Berger, 1997; Kirk & Lewis, 2015). In another example, students from underrepresented populations at predominantly white institutions often need to look beyond the campus community to find connections (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008) and look to the institution to help them feel safe so they can connect with the campus community (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006).

Collectively, out-of-class experiences influence students’ SoC. Using Astin’s theory of involvement and Boyer’s principles of community, a study involving 336 online respondents sought to understand how involvement in out-of-classroom activities influenced students’ perceived SoC. The researchers found that students with higher levels of campus involvement in student activities positively contributed to SoC development in a targeted way through teaching and learning, campus history and tradition, diversity and acceptance, and decreased loneliness and stress (Elkins et al., 2011).

The physical environment is a final aspect of the holistic campus setting influence on SoC that is found in the literature. However, researchers have devoted considerably less attention to this topic (Harrington, 2014; Temple, 2008). The physical environment supports the development of cultural behaviors that contribute to community engagement (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006), and enhances student learning and personal development (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Massis, 2010). “Campus facilities that support formal and informal learning do so through their capacity to connect peers to one another and to respected mentors and resources” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 35). It is for these reasons that creating SoC is the single most prominent element influencing building design of student life facilities (Treanor Architects, 2011).

In her dissertation research, Harrington (2014) used photo-elicitation and interviews to explore the influence of the campus physical space on student involvement and community. She found that interactions in outdoor spaces, student organization offices, academic facilities, and recreational areas all contributed to students developing meaningful connections with peers. Collaborative spaces that include tables, power outlets, and reliable wireless internet access all aid in facilitating strong connections among students and their peers. Additionally, places of campus pride, such as athletic facilities and campus-unique spaces of beauty, positively influence SoC among college students (Harrington, 2014).

In recent years, campus library administrators have begun to explore how students interact and learn in relation to these facilities. Library facilities are being reinvented through renovations, operational changes, and shifting staff responsibilities to become more active in the educational system. These re-envisioned learning commons allow for community building opportunities by offering students curriculum support, services designed to enhance the learning experience (i.e. writing centers, counseling and advising services, enhanced technology laboratory spaces, practice presentation areas, and individual and group work spaces), and flexible layout designs that can be rearranged (Lippincott & Greenwell, 2011; Massis, 2010; McMullen, 2008).

Curricular settings. At a more micro-level, curricular settings also influence SoC development among college students. Curricular settings that engage faculty and students in teaching and learning strongly influence the development of community (Cheng, 2004; Elkins et al., 2011). Support from faculty and the extent to which students engage in academically oriented activities (e.g., study groups, internships, and community service) have shown significant influence on SoC (Brown & Burdsal, 2012; Harris, 2007). Faculty that create classrooms with open environments where students and professors value each other’s opinions and are open to interactions also build SoC among students (Harris, 2007; O’Keeffe, 2013; Schussler & Fierros, 2008).

In the same sense, building relationships with classmates both in and out of the classroom creates greater opportunities for community development. Meeting people with common classes creates feelings

of comfort and helps students to build a network of peers that provide an academic support system (e.g., study partners, sources for class notes, and help with homework). Collaborative group work in the classroom often extends beyond (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Students engaged in cohort-based programs that involve group interactions and projects report a greater SoC (Harris, 2007). Similarly, students who engage with classmates living in the same residence hall indicate higher levels of SoC (Berger, 1997; Pretty, 1990; Schussler & Fierros, 2008).

Co-curricular settings. The more opportunities students have to engage in activities such as student government, co-curricular clubs and organizations, and fraternities and sororities, the more likely they are to connect to their campus community and to become productive contributors (Brazzell & Reisser, 1999). The co-curricular setting incorporates the most wide-range of SoC contexts researched in higher education, because of the unique differences associated with each context (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Participation in recreational sports, fine arts (Elkins et al., 2011), cultural (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006), and religious activities (Elkins et al., 2011; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006) are all co-curricular opportunities that have shown to positively influence students' SoC development.

Breunig, O'Connell, Todd, Anderson, and Young (2010) used a mixed-methods design with 98 students enrolled in a 13-day outdoor education practicum course in an upstate New York college to study the relationship between participation in the program and students' perceptions of SoC. Trip groups provided a sense of safety and fostered relationships through shared interests. The researchers found that group-oriented activities, preparing and eating group meals, trip challenges (both naturally evolving and intentionally presented), and debriefing activities all led to shared emotional connections and positively fostered SoC. Elements identified that negatively influenced SoC included not enough time spent on the trip, debriefing, nor post trip as well as unequal contributions from all group members and too much challenge.

Participation in student athletics has positively influenced students' SoC (Elkins et al., 2011; Warner & Dixon, 2011). Interested in understanding the elements that led collegiate athletes to experience SoC, Warner and Dixon (2011) identified five core findings. The first finding was administrative consideration, in which coaches and staff expressed sincere care and concern for the students well beyond their athletic experience. Leadership opportunities, both formal (i.e. team captains) and informal (i.e. mentoring underclassmen), created a sense of purpose for the students. Athletic department personnel who displayed equity in administrative decisions across all teams built trust among the athletes. Internal competition among the athletes, in which they shared challenges and struggles, fostered a collective support network. Social spaces provided a safe and common physical environment that strengthened the bonding among the student athletes. The researchers also found that athletes defined their SoC in terms of their team or athletic department and not the university as a whole.

Residence life is one of the most widely studied contexts that influence SoC development in higher education. Studies related to residence life can be divided between two categories: relationships and physical facilities. Residence hall communities establish and provide students with social and academic networks to support their educational experience; and the strength of the bonds students develop is directly related to the amount of time spent in the residence halls with their peers (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pretty, 1990; Schussler & Fierros, 2008). However, although residence halls serve as a bridge between students and the overall normative campus environment, students who spend too much time in the residence halls may isolate themselves from other campus groups and even the campus itself (Berger, 1997).

The physical structures of residence halls also influence students' SoC in terms of the quality of the facilities and their conduciveness to fostering student interactions. Flexibility and spatial abundance that provide programmatic opportunities that expose students to a variety of experiences positively influence student perceptions of the halls (Magnarella, 1979). Layout is another architectural element that influences SoC. Medium-sized and smaller halls are positive elements, while larger halls lower SoC development. Traditional corridor styles are more effective in SoC development than cluster styles that have less common space and create fewer opportunities for student interaction. Hominess, aesthetic appeal, and flexibility to alter the space are all positive influences on SoC (Devlin, Donovan, Nicolov, Nold, & Zandan, 2008).

The Association of College Unions International, the association that represents, supports, and promotes the work of college union professionals, claims that "traditionally considered the 'hearthstone' or 'living room' of the campus, today's union is the gathering place of the college. The union fosters a sense of community that cultivates enduring loyalty to the college" (ACUI, 2017b). The college union is the "heart of campus" and has historically encouraged campuses to create a small town feel in the facility to foster a greater SoC (Boren, 2008, p. A34). These are bold statements laying claim that the college union is the community center of the campus and a primary influencer of SoC among the students (Butts, 1951; Butts et al., 2012). Until recently, there was no research examining the impact of the college union on community building (DeSawal & Yakaboski, 2013).

Committed to changing that lack of research, using the 2012 Middle Atlantic region of the US (MAUS) Student Opinion Survey, Barrett (2014) examined the data from 15,000 undergraduate student respondents across 64 campuses. The Likert-style survey instrument included questions about student satisfaction with various institutional features, including several questions asking students to describe their satisfaction with specific campus facilities, including the college union. Comparing three constructs (sense of belonging, college social activities, and social support network) to the physical spaces identified, the study found the college union to be the strongest predictor of SoC of all the facilities in the

study. The college union was followed by classroom facilities (#2), general building and grounds (#3), and residence halls (#4). For the first time empirical evidence supported the relationship between the college union and SoC among college students (Barrett, 2014). This evidence provides a foundation for my study, in which I explore how specific campus environments influence college students' SoC development.

Campus Environments

Colleges and universities can intentionally design their campuses to entice prospective students and meet the needs of, and retain, current students. These designs have the capacity to purposely challenge students “to develop qualities of the educated person, including a capacity for complex critical reasoning, communication, leadership, a sense of identity and purpose, an appreciation for differences, and a commitment to lifelong learning” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 2). The arrangement of campus environments presents the most powerful mechanism for influencing and maximizing specific student behaviors intended to stimulate personal growth (Moos, 1986). An institution’s educational priorities and values are highlighted through their goals, and environments can be manipulated to meet those goals (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). Therefore, educators should “seek to understand and design environments that will maximize student learning” and other institutional goals (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 4). Environments can include such things as the physical facilities and campus grounds, programs and services provided policies and protocols that manage the campus activities, demographics of the campus population, and expectations and perceptions of priorities of the institutional leadership. However, from my professional experience, the physical environment and the organizational environment are the two that offer practitioners the greatest opportunities to intentionally design and influence, and therefore serve as the focal points for my study.

Physical Environments

Strange and Banning (2015) began their description of the physical environment by considering what its general influence is on human behavior, and specifically how the physical dimensions of a campus influence participants. They determined that “...the campus physical environment is an important feature that influences students’ attraction to and satisfaction with a particular institution” (p. 12). Campus designs offer functional spaces, influence people’s moods, and create an atmosphere that directs behaviors (Wicker, 1984).

Physical surroundings account for all the controllable tangible features of a space. Exploring the impact of physical surroundings on behaviors of customers and employees in a work environment, Bitner (1992) identified three dimensions of physical surroundings: (a) ambient conditions; (b) special layout and functionality; and (c) signs, symbols, and artifacts. Ambient conditions such as music, lighting, temperature, noise, and colors all influence satisfaction and performance. Spatial layout and functionality

account for ways in which equipment and furnishings are arranged, their sizes and shapes, and the special connections among them to create flow within a space. Signs, symbols, and artifacts serve as communicators to people within the space, provide information, convey symbolic meanings, and create aesthetic impressions. Taken together, these dimensions define a physical space and influence behaviors.

Campus facilities play a major role in students' decisions to attend an institution and in their retention (Cain & Reynolds, 2006a). Surveying 16,153 college students across 1,013 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, Cain and Reynolds (2006a) identified the impact of campus facilities on these student. The quality of campus facilities served as the sixth most important characteristic in choice of college to attend. Academic-oriented facilities were the most important type overall, and 20% or more also named each the student union, dining facilities, and performing arts center as important. More than 50% of incoming students agreed or strongly agreed that first impressions of campus facilities influenced their choices, and 26% stated they rejected an institution because of missing or inadequate facilities that they deemed important.

The physical environment includes “many components such as pathways, parking lots, activity fields, statuary, artwork, and buildings, which all present myriad designs that vary in size, color, and arrangement. It is the transactional...relationship between these elements...that shapes behavior” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 18). Physical features can be functional, that allow activities to take place, and/or symbolic that present messages of possibilities. As an example, if a student in a wheelchair approaches a temporary curb, they may believe that campus does not value students with disabilities. However, if the curb is correctly designed and erected, the feature is both functional and conveys the campus cares enough to provide appropriate services for disabled students (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Functionality influences behavior in physical spaces. For example, following a prominent video study examining the circumstances important to attracting people to city plazas, architects identified features that encourage flow and interaction among patrons. Designs that are large enough to avoid crowding and offer a variety of flexible places to sit, promote chance encounters and engagement (Whyte, 1980). These basic discoveries are still commonplace and important understandings in architectural designs of college campuses (D. Campbell, personal communication, January 23, 2017). Brick and mortar universities “need spaces designed to generate interaction, collaboration, physical movement and social engagement as primary elements of the student learning experience” (Jamieson, 2003, p. 121). To facilitate learning effectively, spaces need to offer students adaptable options, affording students responsibility for and ownership of how they use their environments. Functional designs should account for the arrangement and number of furnishings and the space between items to affect flow without determining who students can interact with (Jamieson, 2003).

Physical features that offer non-verbal and symbolic messages are equally important in influencing behaviors. Artifacts, including signage, art, landscaping, furnishings, and graffiti, all convey non-verbal messages about campus culture and expectations (Banning, Middleton, & Deniston, 2008; Strange & Banning, 2015). Signage can provide information, such as “restrooms,” and convey identity and belongingness (or not), such when restroom signs say ‘Ladies,’ indicating gendered facilities. Artwork is another symbolic feature that can send messages. For example, art associated with a religious holiday may represent inclusivity to some individuals and communities on campus, but not to others. Educational artifacts convey messages about who does or does not belong and are especially powerful in conveying messages of exclusion or exclusion based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or physical differences (Banning et al., 2008).

Facilities themselves can send messages and help students to feel more at home, more comfortable and connected at their institution. Many institutions are building facilities with green (sustainable) elements and students with prior experiences and interests in these features will have a greater appreciation and respect for that facility and ultimately that institution (Harrell, 2012).

Physical settings offer people opportunities to gather and enjoy each other’s company. Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) identify the third place as one that emphasizes a social component, one where people choose to gather to engage in conversation, fun, and emotional connections. The concept of the third place is the place outside of work and home where individuals adopt as “their own” (p. 270). The third place brings together functionality and symbolism where people can find comfort, retreat, and community (Banning, Clemons, McKelfresh, & Gibbs, 2010). The physical environments alone are not sufficient influencers of student behavior. The systems, regulations, and protocols that manage how individuals use these spaces also affect student actions.

Organizational Environments

The ability of colleges and universities to fulfill their purpose is contingent upon the decisions individuals make regarding how the campus organizes in order to get things done. Organizational structure and processes evolve with the intent to achieve certain goals by influencing the behaviors of individuals such as students in residence halls, student groups, and campus services (Strange & Banning, 2015). “Decisions made about the goals to be achieved and the resources to be allocated to them result in organizational infrastructures that significantly shape and influence the behaviors of individuals in their environments” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 81). The level of success of environmental design is measured by its effectiveness, which can be assessed by answering questions such as: Who is in charge? How will decisions regarding resources be made? What rules will govern the organization? How will work be distributed? What are the expectations for appropriate behavior? What types of reward system will we use? Answers to these questions, and others, drive the organizational structures, systems, and

norms within the environment, which in turn, affects how the setting appeals to an individual, as well as their experiences within a given setting (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Bolman and Deal (2008) described four frames (perspectives) people can use to understand how organizations function. The bureaucratic frame focuses on systems that rely on goals, roles, and the relationships that arise from the organization's environment. The human resource frame identifies how morale, due to person-environment fit, influences the organization. The political frame describes the use of power, conflict, and resource distribution within the organization. The symbolic frame focuses on the organization's culture (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Similarly, Strange and Banning (2015) described seven structural features of organizations that align with Bolman and Deal's (2008) organizational frames. Although these frames and structural features were written to help readers understand the relationships between employees and their work environments, the information can be used to understand how organizational environments influence individual behavior in higher education.

Organizational illustrations. The basic assumptions behind the bureaucratic frame are that organizations exist to achieve certain goals and objectives, are concerned with efficiency, enhance performance through labor distribution, and function based on rational decision-making. Individual behavior is a product of organizational decision making about allocating the workload (differentiation) and coordinating efforts after responsibilities are decided (integration). The cornerstone of the bureaucratic frame is the division of labor: job descriptions, procedures, routines, and rules that govern behaviors. Additionally, decisions regarding the level of formality in decision-making, either through formal mechanisms such as bosses or informal systems such as meetings and task forces, influences how individuals experience their settings (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

To explore this frame further, organizations can be understood by their level of complexity, which includes the number of units and subunits (structural complexity) and the extensity of employee knowledge (task complexity). Furthermore, the formalization of an organization's rules and regulations, either explicit (i.e. handbooks, manuals, and other documents) or implicit (i.e. verbal communication and general scope), and the strictness of these rules establish behavioral expectations. Another structural feature is the level of production and the decision on how to balance quantity versus quality. Similarly, the degree of repetitiveness or routinization can create comfortable or constraining environments for people (Strange & Banning, 2015).

The human resource frame allows individuals to understand the level of fit between people and their organization. People who find their experiences meaningful and satisfying are motivated to succeed and behave in ways to improve the organization's success. The key components of this frame are to hire people who align with the organization's values and goals, invest in and retain good employees through

training and rewards systems, empower employees to encourage participation, and promote diversity (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Two structural features to consider from the human resource perspective are stratification and morale. Stratification refers to the distribution of rewards, including levels of statuses, titles, benefits, recognition, and mobility. Highly stratified organizations with extreme differences in rewards among individuals tend to divide members. This leads to issue of morale, the level of member satisfaction and participation in the organization. Morale is a measurement tool, with highly satisfied people positively influencing the organization and working towards the goals, while dissatisfied members will hold the organization back from accomplishing its goals (Strange & Banning, 2015).

The allocation of resources can have a significant impact on how people behave. Organizations have limited resources and decisions regarding how they are invested and who makes those decisions, is the keystone behind the political frame. Individuals and coalitions with different values, beliefs, and interests within the organization vie for the same pool of resources. This creates a system of conflict, and those individuals and coalitions with the most power will have the greatest chances to receive those resources. This process of competition drives people's behavior with one another and with their organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Decision-making can be evaluated based on the level of centralization within the organization. Highly centralized organizations make decisions from a single individual or unit, whereas decentralized organizations distribute decision-making authority more broadly (Strange & Banning, 2015).

The symbolic frame describes the organization's culture. From this perspective, the meaning behind the events and processes of an organization are more important than the organization's products. Members connect to the organization's history through stories, rituals, ceremonies, metaphors, and other mechanisms that describe and bring to life organizational values (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Organizational dynamics. The frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and structural features (Strange & Banning, 2015) described above illustrate how the decisions individuals make affect their group's organizational environment. Taken as a collective, the final product of how individuals experience this organizational environment drives human behavior. Organizations can be characterized along a continuum from dynamic to static, which influence individual behaviors within and in association with the organization. Dynamic organizations are flexible and easily adaptable to change, whereas static organizations are more rigid and typically resist change (Strange & Banning, 2015). The extent of where an organization falls along this continuum can be assessed using the four frames and the seven structural features. I have illustrated this continuum in Figure 1, which is adapted from Strange and Banning (2015), that highlights how the four organizational frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and seven structural features influence an organization functions.

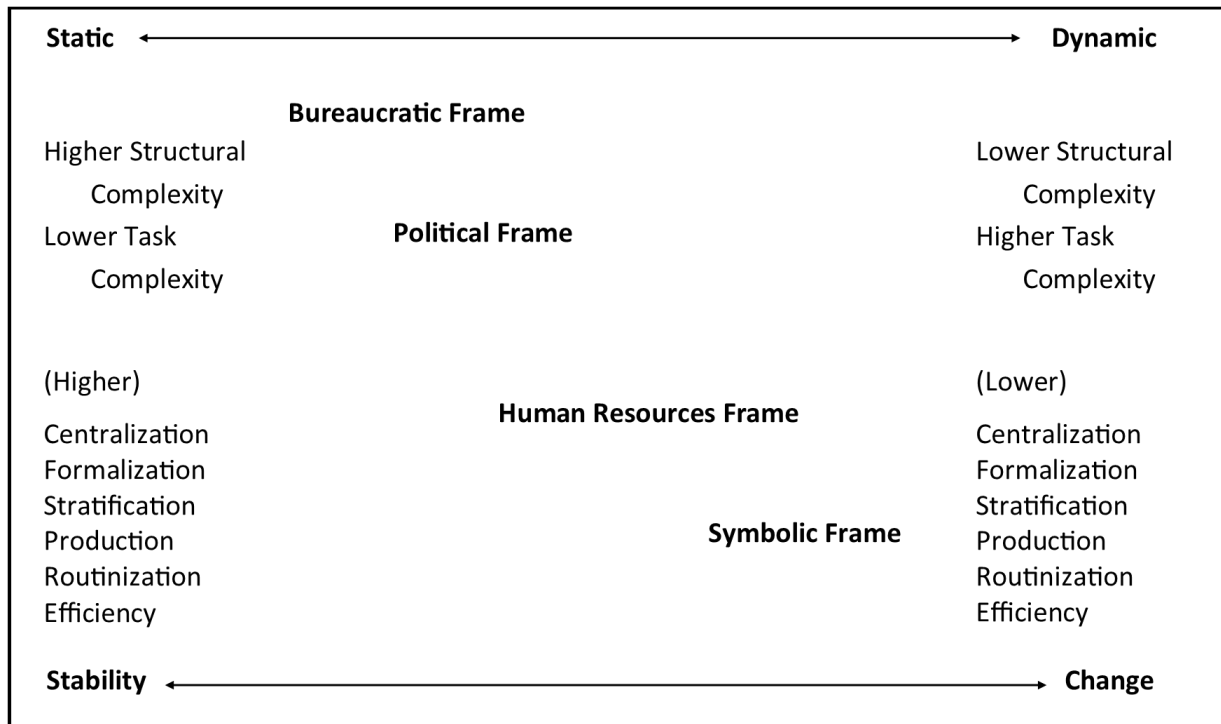


Figure 1. A Synthesis of Organizational Models: How frames and features influence the organizational environment. Adapted from Strange and Banning, 2015, p. 100.

By applying this template, campus personnel can understand where their organization falls along this continuum and help predict how student behavior may be influenced. This information provides knowledge about how to adapt the campus organizational environment towards a more dynamic state, which is typically associated with more positive and successful educational experiences and ultimately towards a higher SoC (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Berger (2001) offered ten recommendations of how the organizational environments of institutions can be designed to positively influence student satisfaction. Administrators should:

- Provide students with clear information about campus goals, values, policies and procedures.
- Provide opportunities for students to be involved in campus decisions.
- Create a campus atmosphere of fairness toward students.
- Identify balance between firm structures and quick responsiveness to student needs.
- Encourage students to engage in political activity.
- Be strong advocates for students.
- Convey the values of the institution through shared symbols.
- Recognize the structural and symbolic connections between the campus and external community.
- Assess student perceptions of the campus's organizational behavior.
- Understand the overall campus organizational environment (p. 14).

The last two recommendations directly relate to understanding where along the dynamic continuum the institution falls, while the first eight provide direct ways to shift the institution towards a more dynamic and student supportive environment.

In summary, this section provided a review of literature about the physical and organizational environments expressed in the campus ecology framework. “Student behavior, whether in the form of leaving a college or university or persisting and succeeding, must be examined in terms of characteristics of the person and characteristics of the environment” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. x). Both the physical and organizational environments of colleges and universities influence students’ behavior. Campus administrators can use this information to create optimal environments that engage students in their learning experience help them to create a SoC to the institution (Strange & Banning, 2015). Yet, campus personnel need more information about how these environments found within one particular setting, the college union, facilitates SoC development among students. The next section describes the history and role of the college union, and further examines the literature on the college union, the physical and organizational environments, and the influence on SoC.

College Unions

As an essential part of a campus’s educational mission, the college union “complements the academic experience through an extensive variety of cultural, educational, social, and recreational programs” (ACUI, 2017b). Becoming the first non-academic or non-residence hall on some college campuses, the college union is often the centerpiece of co-curricular life for the institution (Rouzer, DeSawal, & Yakaboski, 2014). College union professionals work closely with faculty to align the out-of-classroom experience with classroom learning (Lane & Perozzi, 2014). “A [college] union connects people of diverse academic departments, genders, race, creeds and political beliefs. Through student-centered or student-faculty interactions, the dynamics within a union offer opportunities that complement the academic experience and sometimes create transformational events” (Camputaro, Crabtree, & Chenard, 2011, p. 260).

History of the College Union

In 1812 -- a time when free speech was rising among college students in England – August Hare, a pioneer in the college union movement, founded the Attic Society at the University of Oxford. Later in 1823, the students founded the Oxford Union as a debate society, the original and precursor to the future of college unions worldwide (Butts, 1971). Along with the Cambridge Union, these societies provided training in leadership and statesmanship for the young men at the institutions, and provided opportunities of open dialogue outside the classroom (Knell & Latta, 2006).

The idea spread to the United States when students established the Harvard Union in 1832, leaving behind the debating focus in 1895 and shifting to a concern with promoting sociality and

“comradeship” (Butts et al., 2012, p. 24). The University of Pennsylvania opened the first physical facility, Houston Hall, as dedicated space for student programs and activities, much of which has shaped today’s college union. As more of these facilities and activities grew, the need to collaborate led to several students from Midwest unions to establish the National Association of Student Union (now the Association of College Unions International). The focus of the era in college unions was the promotion of extracurricular activities, leadership development, freedom of speech, and social time among fellow classmates (Knell & Latta, 2006).

Princeton President Woodrow Wilson, in 1909, said that the college “must become a community of scholars and pupils” (Butts, 1971, p. 12). Embracing this role as a community builder for institutions, the college union idea spread across the United States, taking many different forms. Following WWII and the influx of students from the G.I. Bill in 1944, college union facilities served the increased number of students interested in community service and social change on their campuses and as citizens. These interests grew to students demanding a voice at their institutions and gave rise to student governance organizations and the shared governance model in higher education (Knell & Latta, 2006).

Serving as the “town hall” and “downtown” marketplace of the campus, the college union has become a “veritable buffet of amenities, options, and functions (Hatton, Farley, Cook, & Porter, 2009, p. 14). Services have expanded as large dining areas, performing arts venues, art exhibitions, and student organization office space became common features in college unions. College unions embraced the latest technological advancements as televisions and later computers and Wi-Fi first appeared in spaces, creating community opportunities by driving traffic to the buildings (Knell & Latta, 2006). As institutions became more business-like in the 1980s, college unions were increasingly used as auxiliary enterprises, adding for-pay services and using external vendors beyond dining (Butts et al., 2012). Some of the most vital services has been one of comfort, counseling, discussion and reflection as a gathering place for students, staff, and faculty alike during times of national and global crises. Campus members gathered around televisions in the college unions across the country after President Kennedy’s assassination, the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion, the 9/11 attack, and the Virginia Tech tragedy (Knell & Latta, 2006).

Over the course of more than 200 years, since the first debate society in England was formed, the college union has remained a centerpiece for many institutions. The facilities and programs focus on providing “services and conveniences that members of the college community need in their daily lives and [creating] an environment for getting to know and understand others through formal and informal associations (ACUI, 2017b).

Research on College Unions

In a review of dissertations on college unions between 1981 – 2011, DeSawal and Yakaboski (2013) found 23 studies spanning five general topics: personnel, the facility, administration/management, student involvement, and organizational leadership at the senior-level. Secondary topics included student satisfaction, programming, governance, organizational culture, and change. Research during this time focused primarily on operational and management aspects of the college union. Since DeSawal and Yakaboski's (2013) review of the college union literature, and with a focus from ACUI to encourage a research agenda for the association (ACUI, 2017a), the number of studies focusing on the role of the college union across a variety of interests has increased. The following sections offer a review of the college union research conducted primarily over the last five years.

Examining three different campuses using photography and focus group interviews to study the positive and negative reactions students have of their college union, Hatton, Farley, and Costa (2013) identified ten timeless elements of college union designs:

- The Hearth - a focal point for socializing
- Exterior Transparency - union serves as a "billboard" of campus activity
- Entrances - a beacon that draws students into the building
- Interior Visibility - inviting and open atmosphere with abundant light
- Information Gathering - a vital function that will never go out of style
- Retail - a marketplace for students that also helps support the bottom line
- Community Dining - engage customers in dining process and with each other
- Flexibility - built in flexibility to accommodate ever-changing needs
- Sustainability - stewardship of energy and use of local materials
- Accessibility - equal access, regardless of ability (p. 14).

Although these elements have shown to evoke positive responses to the college union, the historical review in the previous section highlighted how the college union has evolved regularly over the last 200 years.

Indeed, Janisz (2014) conducted a study exploring the changing role of the college union and influences believed to shape the future of the college union in higher education. Surveying 22 administrators serving as college union directors (or equivalent title), Janisz (2014) found that the four core purposes of the college union were: a) building, creating or fostering community; b) supporting student success; c) serving as the welcome center of the campus; and d) serving as the living room of the campus. These purposes spanned across several populations served including many distinct categories of students; residential and traditional age undergraduates were the top two. Others included commuter and evening students, non-traditional age undergraduates, and graduate students as well as non-student

populations such as prospective students, campus staff, visitors, and alumni. To best meet these purposes across these populations, participants indicated that the most important amenities were: student activities office (along with the student government office, student programming board and student organization offices), a staffed information desk, room reservations and event planning services, and a variety of amenities and conveniences (i.e., Wi-Fi, convenience store, ATM, dining, lounge spaces, and artwork). Additionally, participants believed college unions should have a plethora of spaces such as large-scale formal and informal gathering spaces (i.e., lounges, ballrooms, and performance halls), small-scale formal and informal spaces (i.e., meeting rooms and nooks), open spaces, outdoor spaces, and quiet areas (Janisz, 2014).

Participants in this same study identified key attributes that enhanced the effectiveness of the college union. The location on campus should allow for high pedestrian traffic, in as central a space on campus as possible and close to residence halls. The exterior should attract visitors through signage and proper maintenance. The interior should be well maintained with appropriate technological capacity and infrastructure, include the amenities described earlier, be ADA accessible, and offer seating styles that encourage interaction. Finally, college union staff and community members should be student-focused, knowledgeable, well-trained, friendly, adequate in number, and diverse (Janisz, 2014).

A few studies have examined student satisfaction with the college union. The 2010 ACUI/Educational Benchmark Inc. (EBI) survey data indicated that students of color and involved students maintained the highest levels of overall satisfaction with the college union, while students with low levels of involvement showed the lowest levels of overall satisfaction (Turk-Fiecoat, 2011). A second study by Harrell (2012) found that many college unions undergoing renovations and constructions have focused on sustainable designs. Not only providing energy efficiency, the focus on sustainability also influenced student satisfaction. In particular, students with prior experiences with sustainability indicated a greater respect and appreciation for campuses with green college unions. Institutions with green college unions can also encourage financial investments from students and potential donors who have personal interests in green efforts (Harrell, 2012).

The college union plays a vital role student persistence by creating educationally purposeful and supportive environments. The college union creates opportunities for student, faculty, and staff interactions through organizational involvement, employment, lounge spaces for relaxation, and specialized programs and offices (i.e., dining facilities, conference rooms, Fraternity and Sorority Life offices, community service, and Veterans Affairs offices) (Tierno, 2013). Identifying a link to Boyer's (1990) principles of community, Tierno (2013) developed six principles of college union efficacy that support student retention efforts. According to Tierno (2013), effective college unions:

- Support the academic mission – contributing to the living and learning experiences.
- Enhance communication of community values – promoting inclusiveness through design, conversations, programs, and services that are open to all members.
- Are a diverse space on campus – providing a safe haven for all students.
- Are a community center – promoting connectedness between the people that visit the programs, use the services, and walk through and relax in the building.
- Are a welcoming place – supporting a core set of services and activities that create a positive experience for campus constituents.
- Celebrate traditions – instilling strong memories for alumni and other community members, fostering an affinity to the campus and results in both friend-raising and fundraising success (p. 76).

Collectively, these principles highlight how the college union is “an equalizer” where all students feel they belong, have a sense of security, and positively engage with other campus members (Tierno, 2013).

The college union is an integral part of the educational mission of the institution. Through the facilities, organization, services, and programs, the college union deepens the intellectual, social, and personal experiences of students. As a result of their college union interactions, students develop an understanding of citizenship, social responsibility, and service (Milani, Eakin, & Brattain, 1992).

The term 'College Union' implies an organization and a building. The organization, ordinarily composed of students, faculty and alumni, is an informal educational medium for individual and group self-discovery and expression through a broad program of social and cultural recreation adapted to the leisure-time interests and needs of the college community. The union building is the community center - the physical instrument of implementing the objectives of the organization and for facilitating a community life (Butts, 1971, p. 53).

The physical building is most apparent element of the college union, but it is the interplay between the space and organizational elements that define the college union experience to create community and foster engagement for the institution (Butts, 1971).

Research on Sense of Community and the College Union

With the findings from DeSawal and Yakaboski (2013) that research was lacking around community development and the college union, a few recent studies over the past five years have begun to explore this relationship. This section offers a review of these studies.

The college union provides value to the institution, not simply as a glorious recruiting tool, but also as a space for student engagement and community development (Rouzer et al., 2014). Students need to feel a part of the campus community to take full advantage of the higher education and learning

experience (Lane & Perozzi, 2014). Higher education in the United States continues to become more diverse, a significant shift from the historically white, male heterosexual, Christian, and financially affluent majority that dominated campuses (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Consequently, college unions need to pay attention and the need for the college union to be a gathering place for students who feel marginalized and to foster community development has become even more necessary (Milani et al., 1992).

Although Barrett (2014) offered what may be the first evidence supporting the role of the college union as a vital community builder on campus, there is still little research focused specifically on how the college union influences student engagement, contributes to student outcomes, and fosters SoC (NASPA, 2010). College unions offer ideal physical environments for all campus members to feel welcome and to engage in meaningful interactions and relationships. Knowledge of design and impact of spaces on community should drive how the college union physical and organizational environments are used as tools in the student learning experience (Lane & Perozzi, 2014), yet little relevant evidence exists.

ACUI (2014) identified six key elements for the college union to serve as a place for community building. The college union should be inclusive, showing through action how staff and students can be commitment to confront and transcend personal differences. Transformation, not conversion, should be the focus, respecting the rights of others to have their own opinions. Conflict and chaos are natural parts of the community-building process as individuals develop skills, mature, and gain new perspectives. Individuals understanding their own beliefs and limitations is a key component. Community building is an ongoing and evolving process (ACUI, 2014).

One study used a visual ethnography methodology to examine the role of the college union physical space on building community among community college transfer students. The findings identified the importance of the aesthetics, the types of activities that took place within the physical spaces, the openness and ability to overserve those activities without having to participate directly, and the convenience and access of resources and support functions within the college union. For this specific population of students who transferred from community colleges, the ability to casually connect during their transitions was important for building SoC (Reif, 2014).

Studying the impact of newly designed spaces within the college union at the University of Houston, Maxwell (2016) examined two questions: a) how and to what extent did the planning process of a college union impact notions of community and b) how does use of the college union impact community? Using a case study approach with staff and student participants who were involved in the renovation process, Maxwell concluded the process of designing and the design of physical space itself both influenced SoC. Two key conclusions from the study about the college union are that it served to provide a sense of place and served as a gathering space. First, the college union fostered belonging,

safety, and inclusion as a “home away from home” (p. 97). The act of participating in the design process was a community building experience, developing a sense of ownership in the space and providing students the opportunity to identify with a purpose of the space and a connection to their greater campus community. Second, a newly constructed gathering space provided an attractive place for activity that supported a welcoming and inclusive environment for all community members. The activities and events themselves hosted in the space created “an atmosphere where all students knew they were a part of the ‘Cougar Family’” (p. 101). The aesthetics, activities hosted, visible support of sustainability, access to supportive services, and the connection to the gathering space evoked pride among the students.

One final study directly focused on identifying common elements of newly renovated or constructed “highly rated” college unions that contribute to community development (Smyth, 2016, p. 5). After interviewing college union facility managers, reviewing construction documents, and conducting focus groups with students, five key themes emerged. These college unions are student-centered, in that they intentionally involved the students in the design process and in shaping the programs and services. The college unions offered dynamic spaces that were flexible and responsive to student needs. The facilities served as pathways to success, centralizing campus programs and services that supported student success. The fourth theme was that the college is a conversation where inclusive dialogue took place. Finally, the college union is a house of serendipity the offered opportunities for natural interactions to happen between students. One of the most overarching findings was that the college union provided a connectedness that students could not find elsewhere on campus (Smyth, 2016).

SoC and the College Union Environment: Missing Pieces

In summary, there is broad information about the physical and organizational environments of the campus ecology framework. Researchers and practitioners agree that these environments do influence individual and group behaviors and can be arranged to meet institutional goals (Banning & Kaiser, 1974; Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2015). Understanding the different dimensions and features of the physical environment (Bitner, 1992; Strange & Banning, 2015) is the first step in encouraging specific behaviors, such as when students are making their initial college choices (Cain & Reynolds, 2006a, 2006b). There is also research that examines the specific influences of the functionality of physical space (Jamieson, 2003; Strange & Banning, 2015; Whyte, 1980) and the non-verbal and symbolic messages of the physical space (Banning et al., 2008; Harrell, 2012; Strange & Banning, 2015) on behaviors. There is less research on the influence of the organizational environment on behaviors. The most significant literature describes different types of perspectives and features that organizations can use to accomplish their goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Strange & Banning, 2015) while some research identifies recommendations of action items to align the organizational environment with educational goals (Berger, 2001).

There is extensive research on SoC and the features that influence its development across various contexts. SoC has a few generally accepted elements found regardless of the setting (Gardner, 1996; McDonald, 2002; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Nowell & Boyd, 2010). SoC development in local neighborhoods is one of the most researched settings in the field (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Pretty et al., 1996; Prezza et al., 2001). Key influences on SoC in this setting include civic participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Dokecki, 1983), neighborhood relations (French et al., 2014; Pretty et al., 1996; Prezza et al., 2001; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981), life circumstances (Brodsky et al., 1999; Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Prezza et al., 2001; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981), and perceived cohesion among community members (Boessen et al., 2014; French et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2002). In the K-12 setting the two primary influences are relationships (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; J. H. McMillan & Reed, 1994; Osterman, 2000) and school engagement (Finn, 1989; Osterman, 2000; Voelkl, 1997). In higher education, influences considerably differ by sub-settings. Research has been done on the holistic campus setting (Brown & Burdsal, 2012; Cicognani et al., 2008; Elkins et al., 2011; Harrington, 2014; Henry, 2012; Locks et al., 2008), curricular settings (Cheng, 2004; Harris, 2007; O’Keeffe, 2013; Schussler & Fierros, 2008), and co-curricular settings (Berger, 1997; Brazzell & Reisser, 1999; Breunig et al., 2010; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Warner & Dixon, 2011).

The college union is one specific higher education setting that many researchers and practitioners agree plays a vital role in SoC development (ACUI, 2017b; Butts et al., 2012; Knell & Latta, 2006; Lane & Perozzi, 2014; Rouzer et al., 2014). A historical review shows the college union has served as the community center over last 100 years (Butts, 1951, 1971; Butts et al., 2012; Knell & Latta, 2006). Only limited research has provided evidence that the college union significantly influence SoC development (Barrett, 2014) and how it does so (Maxwell, 2016; Reif, 2014; Smyth, 2016).

Despite the plethora of information about the importance of SoC among college students and the elements that influence the development of SoC (Boyer, 1990; Gardner, 1996; Warner & Dixon, 2011), there is relatively little research on the role of the college union in building college students’ SoC to their institution. Although some studies have begun to explore the relationship between the physical environment and SoC (Barrett, 2014; Maxwell, 2016; Reif, 2014; Smyth, 2016), there is still much to learn about these influences beyond renovated and newly constructed facilities and none have incorporated the influence of the organizational environment on SoC. My study addresses these two gaps in the literature.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the role of the college union in building a sense of community (SoC) among college students with a high SoC to their institution. I anchored this study in a modified version of Strange and Banning's (2015) campus ecology framework. Specifically, the study focused on the two components of the framework that are most easily influenced by higher education professionals (the physical environment and the organizational environment). The study explored how these two environmental components of the college union influenced the community conditions necessary for supporting the educational purposes of student engagement and learning (Strange & Banning, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the physical environment encompassed the college union design, layout, wayfinding, furnishings, and other physical features of the facility, as well as the activities that take place inside the facility. In this study, the organizational environment was operationalized as the infrastructure of the facility, including degree of structural and task complexity, centralization of decision-making processes, formalization of policies, stratification of rewards, services offered, and organizational efficiencies.

The setting for this study was at one university with a comprehensive college union that included a wide variety of college union physical elements (e.g., lounge space, a games area, student organization offices, etc.) (ACUI, 2016). The target sample for this study included eight (and the actual sample included seven) undergraduate or recent alumni students who had spent at least one full year at their current institution, and who felt a high SoC to their institution. A high SoC was determined by participants' self-reports of a high SoC to their institution.

To understand the role of the physical and organizational environments of the college union more deeply, I initially used photo-elicitation methods in which participants took photographs associated with the college union and provided brief journal notes describing the meaning of these photographs (Close, 2007; Pain, 2012). Next, using narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013), I engaged in in-depth interviews with participants. This qualitative methodology allowed for a rich and multilayered understanding of the meanings behind students' personal experiences in relation to how the college union shaped their SoC. The primary research questions guiding my study were:

1. What is the role of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution?
 - a. What is the role of the physical environment of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution?
 - b. What is the role of the organizational environment of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution?

- c. What other environmental conditions of the college union play a role in building college students' SoC to their institution?

In this chapter, I explain the methodology of the study. I describe my philosophical worldview, the research design (including the research methods, sample selection, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures), and the steps I took to enhance the authenticity, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations of the study. Throughout the study, I intentionally considered how these components of the research approach intersected and related to one another (Creswell, 2014).

Worldview

A researcher's worldview accounts for their overarching philosophical viewpoints about the world and the purpose of research (Creswell, 2014). This study was grounded in a pragmatist worldview. Rooted in the work of Dewey, pragmatism emphasizes a process of inquiry that focuses on actions, consequences, and beliefs of the human experience (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2014). With the ultimate goal to understand the nature of the human experience, pragmatist research always occurs in social, historical, and political contexts (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism relies on the idea that the meaning of action cannot be determined before the experience takes place. Instead, pragmatists emphasize the consequences of the action within a specific social situation that results in an effect on beliefs (Denzin, 2012; Morgan, 2014).

Pragmatism and SoC

Pragmatists assert a "freedom of inquiry in which individuals and social communities are able to define the issues that matter most to them and pursue those issues in ways that are most meaningful to them" (Morgan, 2014, p. 1050). This perspective resonates with my interest in students' point of view of their SoC. The essence of SoC lies in members' feelings of belonging and mattering to one another and to a group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Human experiences are inevitably social in nature. Feelings provide direct connections between actions and beliefs, and can be both the cause and consequence of human experiences (Morgan, 2014). For these reasons, a pragmatist worldview is appropriate for studying SoC.

Pragmatism and Narrative Inquiry

Epistemology is one's stated belief about how knowledge is constructed (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). From an epistemological perspective, pragmatists believe that taking actions and experiencing the consequences results in new knowledge creation (Morgan, 2014). Findings from research conducted from a pragmatist worldview result in "conceivable practical consequences...[as the] basis for organizing future observations and experiences" (Cherryholmes, 1992, p. 14). Similarly, narrative inquiry "proceeds from an ontological position, a curiosity about how people are living and the constituents of their

experience” (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 575). Therefore, narrative inquiry is a methodological approach that is appropriate for studying the understanding of human experience.

Specifically, this approach is interested in “exploring the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which the individuals’ experiences were, and are...shaped. It’s about the storied lives of the people involved” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18). Narrative inquiry relies on a collaborative relationship between the researcher and participants within a specific context. Considering these descriptions, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) argued that narrative inquiry “is a quintessentially pragmatic methodology” (p. 42). Given this connection to the pragmatist worldview, this study used narrative inquiry methodology.

Using narrative inquiry methodology requires the researcher to justify their study from a personal perspective, in relation to what matters to the researcher as an individual. This justification allows the researcher to consider how they see themselves in the inquiry, describe the stories they are living and telling in the research relationship, and be aware of the ways in which they “attend to the experiences of the research participants” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36).

Autobiographical Narrative

Narrative inquirers start studies with describing their personal narrative beginnings, or autobiographical narratives, that describe their personal justifications regarding how they are situated in the study (Clandinin, 2013). My personal and professional interests directly influenced my interest in SoC, and specifically within the college union context. My first exposure to higher education was as a first-generation undergraduate student. I attended a small, private, liberal arts university to which I was not previously connected. As a former high school student active in planning events, I sought out and became directly involved in developing the programs and services offered through my institution’s college union. Most of my undergraduate experiences outside of the classroom directly link to my interactions with the college union. These experiences provided me a feeling of belonging and a sense of community to my closest friends, fellow students, and my institution. This led me to pursue a career in college union administration over the last 18 years, including 11 as a college union director. I currently serve as a college union director at the University of Washington – Seattle, and have served as the director at three other institutions.

The work of the college union has drawn me in my entire professional career because, as one of my mentors and former director of the Oglesby Union at Florida State University would say, the concept behind the college union is more than simply bricks and mortar...it is about the people coming together to create the experiences within the facility. I have witnessed this from first-hand experience that students involved with the college union have built strong social ties, have given back to the institution through their own financial and time efforts, and a number of students have shared with me that if it were not for

these types of experiences, they may not have made it through and graduated. This is rooted in the community focus of the college union and the role it plays in student persistence and ultimately graduation rates.

ACUI (2017b), the professional association for the college union field, states that the role of the college union is to serve as the community center for the institution and to “foster a sense of community that cultivates enduring loyalty to the college” (paragraph 1). As a professional, I have seen this role play out in action first-hand. At a previous institution, during a 75th anniversary celebration of the college union opening, students wrote stories about experiences with the facility. Many of these described situations where student met their future spouses through shared programs. At another institution, I interacted with alumni who continuously provide donations back to the college union as a way to show their long-term connection to the university and the facility. Through my personal experiences as an undergraduate student and the interactions with students as a professional, I do believe the college union creates an environment in which students are able to build a strong SoC to their institution.

Although I have experienced and witnessed situations such as these, I have questioned what evidence we have from our students’ lived experiences to make such a statement as ACUI does. Having been a student and professional at multiple institutions, I have also been curious of whether some aspects of the college union influence the building of SoC more than others. In particular, as a professional who focuses on organizational models, structure, and systems, I often like to explore how the interactions between physical and organizational environments influence my work and decisions in relation to the people who interact with the college union setting. These guiding questions led me to my interest in this research study. Throughout this study, especially when engaging with the participants’ stories, both during the interviews and during analysis, I remained cognizant of my role as a current practitioner and former college student in relation to the research.

Research Design

A researcher should develop a formal research design that shows their understanding of the historical context of their discipline and that which flows throughout their entire study (Creswell, 2014). A study’s research design “provides solid evidence that the researcher has entered into critical conversation about methodology” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 96). In this section, I describe the specific research design for my study. This includes my methodological approach of narrative inquiry, the sample selection process, data collection methods using photo-elicitation and narrative interviews, the interview protocol, and the data analysis procedures.

Methodological Approach

In this study, I employed a narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) to understand how college students’ lived experiences of the college

union influenced their SoC to their institution. At a basic level, narrative inquiry is a way to understand experience. “It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus....[which accounts for the] living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

John Dewey’s descriptions of experience serve as the origin of narrative inquiry. In particular, Dewey described two criteria for experience: interaction and continuity. These criteria provide the basis for the foundations of narrative inquiry and connect to the pragmatist perspective guiding this study. Dewey believed that experience was a transaction between a person and their environment that would result in new viewpoints for the future. Additionally, our understandings of the world are (re)validated with each new and continuous experience (Clandinin, 2013). "Framed within this view of experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007. p. 42). Since practitioners have some control over the college union physical and organizational environments, the intent of using narrative inquiry for this study is to discover findings that college union professionals can use to facilitate more opportunities for developing SoC.

Narrative inquiry can begin from one of two starting points: living stories, in which the researcher directly engages in the field over time alongside the participants; or telling stories, which are facilitated as conversations in which the participants tell stories of their experiences. Within both methods, narrative inquirers position themselves in relational ways with the participants. “Relationships are a central way of making sense of the temporal and contextual aspects of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). When the researcher and participant build a connection based on a common ground, there becomes a mutual understanding of the stories that unfold. Stories showcase how people interpret and make meaning about the world based on their experiences (Clandinin, 2013). This study was designed around the use of telling stories. With my professional background in the college union field, I was able to understand the descriptions and nuances students described in their stories. For example, I was able to understand the types of physical spaces, meetings and events, and services offered in the college union that contributed to students’ SoC.

Stories told during narrative inquiries always begin in the middle of experiences, and we can see these stories unfold over time through researchers’ and participants’ descriptions. Stories are not fixed, and they are not neat chronological frames; instead, they are often lumped together to describe the present experience (Caine et al., 2013). Participants in this study were all current undergraduate or recently graduated (within two months prior) students who were recruited directly through their current experiences with the college union. Therefore, the stories that were shared describe experiences up to the

present moment, but also acknowledge that even participation in the study itself aids in co-composing future stories for the students and their ever-changing perspectives of the college union.

As narrative inquirers, “we draw from our own personal and professional experience and knowledge to understand the context of the stories” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 107). As we do so, we are engaged alongside the participants and are able to consider our own stories simultaneously. These relationships allow us to world-travel with the participants to different times, places and through viewing other relationships (Caine et al., 2013). The idea of world-traveling is to attend to specific moments, events, and feelings of people. By traveling to someone else’s world, “we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (Lugones, 1987). This is the ultimate purpose of narrative inquiry research, to understand participants’ worlds, co-composing the meaning alongside them both from their own perspectives and those of the close, but removed researcher. The role of the narrative inquirer is not to be completely distanced and simply listen, but instead to be able to enter the participant’s world and engage, empathize, and understand their experiences and how those experiences have transformed their worldviews.

Three commonplaces of narrative inquiry methodology. The guiding tenet that distinguishes narrative inquiry from other narrative methodologies is that a researcher must think narratively about the phenomenon under study through three dimensions simultaneously. These dimensions, or commonplaces, are temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013). Temporality directs inquirers towards understanding how experiences unfold over time: past, present and future. We revisit our experiences, through stories, over and over again as we retell them. Experiences are continuous, in that they create new understandings of the world, which then become a part of future experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This continuity of experience is an essential tenet of the temporality commonplace. Experiences always include more than can be told at a given moment; therefore, no matter how committed an individual may be to representing their entire life, every story involves selective highlights of experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). By engaging participants in the telling of their stories connected to the college union, the temporality commonplace of narrative inquiry allowed me to chronicle how past experiences built upon each other and influenced the individual in the present. Specifically, I was able to consider how students’ experiences, and the meanings they interpreted from these experiences, played a role in developing SoC to their institution.

The sociality commonplace of narrative inquiry emphasizes that every individual’s experiences occur in particular contexts. This commonplace simultaneously focuses on both personal and social conditions (Clandinin, 2013). Personal conditions include the individual’s “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The social conditions account for “the milieu, the conditions under which people’s experiences and events are

unfolding...[through their] cultural, social, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). An essential element of SoC is shared emotional connections, which accounts for the belief that members have shared historical experiences in mutual places and from spending time together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This SoC element directly links to the sociality commonplace through the emphasis on personal emotions and conditions surrounding the participant’s experiences. By asking questions intended to trigger emotional responses, I was able to elicit stories focused on these emotions and their relation to the environmental conditions of the college union.

The commonplace of place in narrative inquiry acknowledges that all events happen somewhere. Place represents “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the...events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The influence of place on lived experiences is central to understanding the storied lives of individuals (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Place served as the core dimension throughout this entire study. This study focused on two shared places. First, because the primary phenomenon in this study was students’ SoC to their institution, this study foregrounded the institution. Second, the college union served as the central place under study. Although data collection focused on the college union, findings resulted in new information that was relevant to the institution as a whole.

Design considerations in narrative inquiry methodology. Since narrative inquirers are to build relationships with participants and co-compose the inquiry, “[we] must be attentive to thinking about stories in multiple ways, toward our stories, toward the other's stories, toward all the narratives in which we are embedded as well as toward what begins to emerge in our shared lives and told stories” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30). To do so, researchers should use several design considerations throughout the process. These considerations include developing research questions, acknowledging the temporality of entering relationships in the midst, describing field texts and research texts, and emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations in relationships.

First, narrative inquiry considers research questions as puzzles that are continuously pieced together throughout the study. "The research question must be clearly stated, not as one that can be answered, but as one that calls for exploration. In narrative/qualitative projects, the question usually has a 'how' either explicit or embedded in it because 'how' points to dynamic processes that can be thickly described" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 265). This study took place at one institution, which is only one college union physical and organizational environment. The purpose was not to discover answers that will definitively translate to other institutions and college unions, but instead to provide further conversation points for others to explore at their own schools. Second, narrative inquirers enter research relationships in the midst of their own ongoing storied lives; institutional narratives; social, political, and cultural narratives; and participants’ lives. These all come together and must remain in consideration

throughout the research process. The researcher must keep their personal interests in mind but also create a setting that allows for meaningful stories to develop (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson & Lieblich, 2003).

The third design consideration is in moving from the field to field texts. In this study, the field were the one-on-one engaging conversations with (semi)structured interview questions and stories triggered by various artifacts. The idea of conversations as opposed to direct interviews, is to “create a space for stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). Field texts are the data in narrative inquiry and include field notes, transcripts, and artifacts. Artifacts are items such as photographs or objects that trigger memories from the past and represent metaphors of the stories participants tell. The researcher and the participant co-compose field texts that are reflective of experiences from both as an ongoing interpretation of the stories (Clandinin, 2013).

The next stage of the analytic process involves shifting from field texts to interim research texts. This process allows for all of the field texts to be considered from the three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) and to continue engaging with the participants in co-composing the multiple possible meanings behind the stories (Clandinin, 2013). This first level of analysis of research texts engages participants in their own individual stories, offering an opportunity for researchers to incorporate participants’ own understandings and as a form of member checking. The second level of analysis involves the researcher looking across all participants’ narrative accounts in search of resonant threads, or patterns that follow similar plotlines across time and place (Clandinin, 2013). This can involve creating fictionalized research texts that are composed from multiple field texts based on a wide array of research experience. This allows for greater complexity of understanding the three commonplaces and increases participant anonymity (Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, 2010; Connelly, F.M. and Clandinin, 2006).

The fifth design consideration involves shifting from interim research texts to final research texts. Within this consideration, the researcher returns to the personal and practical justifications for the research. The final research texts do not have answers; instead, they are “intended to engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51). Research texts are representations of the complexity of the storied experiences and lives of the participants. Although these are co-composed, the voice of the participants must dominate the writings; and not the researcher’s voice (Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, 2010). Instead, the researcher is the storyteller who describes how the narrative reflects social reality. The researcher determines the narrative components of the research text, including the plotlines and significant events, characters, and contextual focus, which allow the readers to shape their interpretations (Holley & Colyar, 2009).

The final design consideration is the reinforcement of the importance of relationships in narrative inquiry. In particular, the researcher must attend to the ethical considerations of the participants and their

storied lives. Narrative inquirers should provide due diligence to identify ways to be helpful to the participants, to not turn away from the participants lives, and to acknowledge the co-composing of the stories in which they are engaged together (Clandinin, 2013). These design considerations have been interwoven throughout the study, including sample selection.

Sample Selection

Qualitative inquiry requires researchers to purposefully select sample sites and participants who will provide rich and direct personal information to inform the study's purpose and research questions (Creswell, 2014). This study included two phases of sampling procedures: one to select the institution and another to select student participants within the institution. Before initiating the sampling process, I first received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from my (student) home institution. Copies of IRB approval(s) appear in Appendix A. Once I secured IRB approval, sample selection commenced.

Selection of institution. The goal of the first phase of the sampling process was to select one institution from which all individual participants were drawn. I selected this institution based on one criterion: the institution had to have a comprehensive college union with a wide variety of college union physical elements. Examples of physical elements could include lounge space, meeting rooms, gaming rooms, dining venues, student organization offices, event spaces, student organization programming spaces, and cultural centers (ACUI, 2016). These elements provide opportunities for students to interact with each other in different locations and manners. This criterion also accounted for the assumption that a facility with this many elements would have a sufficient level of complexity, policies, procedures, and other organizational environmental elements (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This criterion and the assumptions linked the institutional sample selection to the physical and organizational environments outlined by the campus ecology framework (Strange & Banning, 2015). I excluded both my home institution at which I am a student and my current professional institution as possible site samples.

To identify the institutional sample, I used my professional network of colleagues who currently work at institutions with a college union that met both criteria. I selected an institution and contacted their college union director (or equivalent title), and called that individual. I conceptualized the director as a gatekeeper who would approve or deny access to the site and the student participants (Creswell, 2014). During the call, I explained what the study was about and what assistance I would need, which included identifying potential participants, assisting me to gain access to meeting rooms for interviews, and providing floorplans of the facility. I used a prescreening questionnaire to confirm the institution met the criterion that it had at least 10 college union physical elements (Appendix B). Since this study used photographs of the college union, I was unable to guarantee anonymity of the site institution, which I also shared with the director. If the director understood and agreed in writing to meet the responsibilities of gatekeeper, I selected that institution as the site for the study. If the first director declined to participate, I

selected another potential institution, and called the director (or equivalent) at that institution. I repeated this process until I identified one institution to serve as the study site.

I worked with the director to identify dates that would be good for a campus visit. I also asked the director to assist in securing a room in the college union for the conversations. It was important to hold the conversations in the college union to remain connected to the context of the facility and to be flexible and allow for any spontaneous need that may arise to access the physical environment. Examples of this may include touring a specific room or visiting an art installation connected to the participants' experiences.

Prior to conducting participant selection, I obtained IRB approval from the study site. As part of this process, I identified if the college union was considered a public space and the institution's policies regarding the need for signed media releases from individuals who may appear in images as part of the photo-elicitation methods. Copies of IRB approval(s) appear in Appendix A. Once the institutional sample was secured and IRB approval was received, I used additional sampling procedures to identify individual student participants at the site institution.

Selection of student participants. I selected students based on two criteria. First, the students must have spent a minimum of one full academic year at the current institution. This criterion ensured a sufficient amount of temporal experiences to discuss, one of the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Second, the students had to self-identify as having a high SoC to their institution. This criterion represented the essential concern of this study since I was interested in the role of the college union in building SoC.

In collaboration with the director, I used these criteria to develop a purposive sample. A purposive sample is intentionally selected based on a set of criteria that will best help understand the problem and the research questions (Creswell, 2014). This selection method helped to focus on understanding the role of the college union in building SoC among students.

The director aided in identifying potential participants through two methods: direct invitations to students they had contact with (e.g., knew personally, through other college union staff, through college union listservs) (Appendix C) and posting advertisements within the college union (see Appendix D). I informed the director ahead of time that I would not provide any information to them about who participated in the study. All outreach to potential participants outlined the purpose of the study, explained the criteria to participate in the research, described what the participants would be expected to do (i.e., take photographs and participate in one 60-90 minute conversation), and told them selected participants would receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation. I included my contact information so that interested students could contact me directly, which allowed potential participants to otherwise remain anonymous.

I scheduled pre-screening Skype calls (phone calls for students unable to use Skype) with potential participants who contacted me. During the pre-screening calls I described the purpose of the study, provided an overview of what the selected participants would be asked to do, and verified the students met the basic criteria and that they would be good informants, with the ability to provide information related to answer my research questions. To verify the potential participants met the high SoC criterion, I asked the students to self-identify if they felt a high SoC to the institution.

Additionally, to serve as a primary sampling consideration, I asked four questions linked to McMillan & Chavis' (1986) multidimensional theory of SoC. The questions were selected and modified from language used in the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008). Empirical testing of the BSCS has shown strong correlations and congruency with the McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theory of SoC (Peterson et al., 2008). Therefore, the questions served as an appropriate means to enhance the selection process (Appendix E). Students with the highest cumulative scores (out of a possible 20 points), were considered first.

To further aid in the process, the pre-screening protocol also included questions that I used as sampling considerations to select a diverse participant pool. Because of my interest in SoC, I sought a wide range of college union users; therefore, the primary characteristics I considered were in relation to the participants' use of, and connection to, the college union. First, I asked about their average number of hours physically spent in the college union (with the goal of identifying students who spent at minimum 5-hours per week). This consideration increased opportunities for deep conversations directly about the student's experiences with the college union. Students with the highest hours were considered first. Second, I asked how they used the college union: student employee, member/officer of a student organization, and/or general user of programs/services in the college union. Responses to these questions allowed me to be purposeful in selecting a wide range of user types.

Finally, demographic information requested included age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, domestic/international status, college generational status, veteran status, NCAA athlete status, residential or off-campus living status, disability status, major, class year, and how many total hours per week they worked in paid positions both on- and off-campus. My goal in asking these questions was align my participants as closely as possible to the institution's demographic data. Therefore, I considered these characteristics in relation to the institution's demographic information. For example, if the institution's average undergraduate age range was 18-24, I selected participants within this age range. Similarly, through my selection, I attempted to diversify the sample across majors in an effort to gain as much of a holistic snapshot of the campus as possible within the sample size.

Conducting this process as a Skype call allowed me to begin building a comfortable relationship with the potential participants in preparation for the in-person conversations with the students ultimately

selected (Clandinin, 2013). As needed, I also used a snowball sampling process by asking the students to tell peers who met initial criteria and might also be interested in participating to contact me. This allowed me to increase sample size and to diversify the sample in relation to demographics and their engagement with different elements of the college union (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I conducted pre-screening interviews until I had eight students who met the criteria to be the final participants.

Once I had potential participants who met the criteria, I sent each selected student an e-mail to confirm their agreement to participate, provided a link to an online meeting schedule program with a list of potential dates and times to meet, and requested they sign-up for preferred dates and times from the list. If any of the first eight students declined to participate, I continued through the list until I secured agreement from a total of eight participants.

Some limitations to the sample emerged during the data collection process. First, two of the participants selected had recently graduated from the institution less than two months prior. I determined that their undergraduate experiences were so recent that they met the criteria for a purposive sample (Creswell, 2014) even though they were no longer technically undergraduate students. In addition, one day prior to data collection, one participant decided not to continue. I attempted to secure a replacement by contacting all of the students who had originally expressed interest in participating and had not been selected, but was unable within the short timeframe. I proceeded with data collection with the remaining seven participants. This number of participants is consistent with recent research literature published in peer-reviewed journals in which the author(s) used narrative inquiry methodology to the experiences of four to 10 college students (e.g., Berum & Silva, 2014; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Lange & Moore, 2017; Linder, 2015; Nunez & Foubert, 2016).

Data Collection

After each student agreed to participate and scheduled an interview, I sent them a follow-up e-mail that provided an electronic copy of the informed consent form and asked them to return it within 48 hours, acknowledging they could call or e-mail the IRB chair if they had any questions (Appendix F). I also provided electronic instructions, including a timeline and deadlines, for the photo-elicitation exercise they needed to complete (Appendix G). One week prior to the interviews I contacted the participants, reminding them to begin the photo-elicitation exercise and of the deadline to send photos and journal notes as described in the instructions I had sent them. I also reminded them of the date, time, and location of their interview.

Photo-elicitation. Reflexive photography is a photo-elicitation method that uses images taken by the participants themselves to convey the meanings of their experiences. By analyzing photographs taken by participants, the researcher is able to study people's feelings and perceptions, and to see the social dimensions of the experiences from the participant's point of view (Close, 2007; Harper, 1988; Schulze,

2007). This method allows the literal elements of the participant's environment to become topics for discussion, calling forth "associations, definitions, or ideas that would otherwise go unnoticed" during an interview (Harper, 1988, p. 65).

Photographs can be open to many interpretations, and exploring the thoughts and stories behind the images with the participant can reveal new perspectives and meanings (Close, 2007). Photo-elicitation is a tool that can reinforce and elaborate on findings through the research process. "Using reflexive photography to study...individual-environment interactions...[among] college student[s] can shed additional light on the development of meanings that individuals ascribe to symbols, things, and experiences through, and as a function of, their social interactions" (Harrington & Schibik, 2003, p. 36). This method provides specific concrete examples of what affects the participants, offered through their pictures and words, allowing them to be the experts in the subject matter and minimizing any misinterpretations (Harrington & Schibik, 2003; Pain, 2012).

Photo-elicitation is an appropriate tool in narrative inquiry research. The method alone has the opportunity to build a rapport between the researcher and the participant by allowing a way for the researcher to enter the participant's world (Pain, 2012). This is important in order for the researcher and participant to world-travel together in the relational journey (Caine et al., 2013; Lugones, 1987). Coupling the images themselves with a photo diary describing the photographs, the activities, and the feelings enables the participants to reflect and describe their practical knowledge of the experiences that may be challenging to express without visual clues (Pain, 2012). The photos serve as artifact field texts. Specifically, these memory box prompts are designed to trigger stories about the participant's experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Pain, 2012).

Over the course of a seven-day period, using their own cameras or phones, participants in this study were asked to take a series of photographs, that were representative of their experiences with the college union at their institution and that they believed influenced their SoC to their school. Participants were provided with instructions for taking photographs that included not taking photographs of illegal activities and protocols for acquiring permission from any individuals who appear in the images (Appendix G for complete instructions). Additionally, participants were asked to write a short one- to three-sentence journal note for each image, describing the reasons why the photograph illustrated their experiences with their college union and how those experiences influenced their SoC development. Each participant was instructed to electronically submit up to five photographs of their choosing with their journal notes by the Friday preceding their interview. Submissions were allowed to be sent to me via either phone text or e-mail.

Narrative interviews. On the interview day, I arrived early to set up the room and test the audio recording equipment. When the participant arrived, I greeted them and we briefly chatted about their

classes and plans for upcoming academic breaks in order to develop rapport in person. I then shared a copy of the informed consent form, offered them the printed copy, and reminded them of the details it described to verify that they still consented to participate. I asked the participant if they would like to choose a pseudonym or if they preferred that I choose one for them. I explained that the interview would be audio recorded using a digital recorder and a computer for backup. I also explained that I would at times make written notes during the interview. I then asked the participant's permission to begin the interview and the recording, after which I proceeded through the interview protocol.

During the interviews, I made hand-written notes of follow-up questions and quick field notes of my observations, noting thoughts and reflections about the meanings of these observations (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). At the end of each interview, I recapped major points and offered the participant an opportunity to clarify any statements. I paid them the \$25 Amazon gift card and had them sign a receipt. Immediately following each interview, I wrote memos about each participant's story in the context of narrative inquiry's three commonplaces. These memos represented one form of field texts (Clandinin, 2013). Subsequent to the interviews, I had the audio recordings transcribed. After these steps were complete, I had transcripts and notes for each interview.

Interview Protocol

One semi-structured interview protocol was developed to initiate the conversations for data collection (Clandinin, 2013). A copy of the interview protocol appears in Appendix H. The protocol was divided into four sections and included 13 total questions, along with follow-up questions when appropriate. I designed the questions with a focus on the three narrative inquiry commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013). My intention was to elicit participants' responses about the physical and organizational environments of the college union (Strange & Banning, 2015) as they relate to McMillan & Chavis's (1986) SoC components of membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections.

The first section, Sense of Community, was designed to engage in general conversations linked to my first research question: How do students with a high SoC to their institution define SoC? For example, I asked participants to share what the phrase "sense of community" meant to them. This question was designed to set the initial context for the entire conversation around their personal meaning making of community. A second question asked for their thoughts on what characteristics of the college union were important in building a SoC. This question directly connected the conversation to the Campus Ecology framework regarding environments and the narrative inquiry commonplace of place.

The second and third sections focused on my second research question and sub-questions: What is the role of the college union in building college students' SoC to their institution? The second section, Reflexive Photography, used the photographs as triggers for the students to tell personal stories. I began

by asking the students to arrange the images in an order that best illustrated the whole of their experiences and in a manner that they would be comfortable discussing during the interview. One question asked students about how they selected the spaces to photograph. This question was designed to gain an understanding of what is important to the students about community and the college union, remaining focused on the place. Using the order of the images the students selected, follow-up questions asked the students to tell a story behind the image. These questions shifted the focus to temporality in order to understand the student's relationship to the college union over time. Additional questions engaged the participant in deeper conversation about the specific physical and organizational environmental elements sparked by their initial responses.

The third section, College Union Memories, explored temporality along with sociality and place. For example, one question asked the students to share some of their most salient memories of their college union besides those already described in the photographs. Follow-up questions included asking about whether the participants spent most of their time in the college union alone or with friends, and to describe how those interactions affected their experiences. These questions were designed to elicit conversations about the social dimension of community.

The final section, Connecting the Dots, was intended to cross over both research questions and provide an opportunity for the participant to provide final thoughts on the context of SoC. In one example, I asked the participants to describe how, if at all, these stories about their experiences with the college union had influenced their connection to the institution. This question allowed all three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) described in earlier stories to link to the components of McMillan & Chavis's (1986) SoC model: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections.

The draft interview protocol was reviewed by a panel of people with expertise in qualitative research and college unions. I revised it based on their feedback. Additionally, once approved by my institution's IRB, I piloted the protocol with a small sample of students who met the participant criteria at an institution that met the institutional criteria but was not the study institution. These students offered feedback on the clarity and order of the questions. I further revised the protocol based on feedback from the pilot participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves managing the information in a manner that the researcher can simultaneously identify relationships and patterns within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The objective of a systematic analysis is to understand the text and image data by taking it apart and putting it back together in a small number of themes (Creswell, 2014). Using the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), I continuously analyzed data throughout every stage of

data collection and analysis. As I collected and analyzed the data, I wrote memos about concepts that emerged and how concepts related to one another (Clandinin, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For example, if several participants emphasized spending time with friends in a particular space was impactful to them, I wrote a memo about the details described by each participant about that specific location in order to deepen my understanding of participants' experiences with that phenomenon. I followed a systematic process to classify the photos, record the interviews, organize the data sources, and code the data with the goal of developing a narrative account of the role the college union plays in building SoC.

Photographs can have many different interpretations, some of which may not accurately reflect the participants' experiences (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008; Goin, 2001). Therefore, when analyzing the images, I classified them based on their composition and subject matter as they related to my research questions (Yamashita, 2002). First, prior to the interviews, I reviewed all of the photos and made notes about specific details of each image to address during the interviews with the participants. These notes included observations such as specific locations, individuals who appeared, and whether images were taken close-up or from a distance. Additionally, I used the images to develop individualized follow-up questions for each participant. Second, after the interviews, all of the photos were classified into categories that illustrated dimensions of the campus ecology model of physical environment and the organizational environment. I then began analysis of the written data.

When each transcript was complete, I shifted from field texts to interim research texts through two cycles of analysis (Clandinin, 2013). In the first cycle of analysis, for each participant, I began the process by listening to the recorded conversations and reading each journal, transcript, and field note twice, making notes throughout this process, to develop a general sense of the meaning behind the participant's experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Coding is a process in which the researcher breaks down the data into analytic pieces and identifies the meaning of the information (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I conducted a three-phase process of coding the data: structural coding, concept coding, and theming the data. During these phases I conducted line-by-line coding, in which the researcher names each line of the written data, which allows for the deconstruction of compelling comments to be looked at from a closer perspective (Charmaz, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). During this process, my unit of analysis was the comment, or a single sentence/phrase or series of sentences/phrases that focused on the same concept. I examined every line of the both participant journals and transcripts in order to identify these comments.

The first phase used structural coding analysis, which initially categorizes the data into comparable segments (Saldaña, 2016). I used a deductive approach for each participant, linking key elements of community (membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, shared emotional connections, and

miscellaneous) with the physical, organizational, and other environments as my starting point. Using qualitative research software, I identified coded comments from both the participant journals and transcripts, organizing the information based on my research questions. I also highlighted notable and compelling quotations.

The second phase was concept coding. “A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action” (Saldaña, 2016). I only reviewed the previously structurally coded segments. I again used line-by-line coding in which my unit of analysis was the comment. I developed codes that described the ideas about what was happening in each of the comments. For example, if a comment focused on the pleasant sounds created by music playing in the facility, I developed a code called “ambiance creates a positive setting.”

The third phase of coding was themeing the data, which involves organizing similar concept codes into conceptual hierarchical categories and developing definitions for each theme (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Saldaña, 2016). In narrative inquiry, these categories are referred to as initial resonant threads (Clandinin, 2013). During this phase, I re-coded the comments with the new codes. Direct participant quotations were used to illustrate personal experiences and to aid in identifying resonant threads and sub-threads. For example, I asked participants to talk about their most salient memories of the college union. I might receive responses such as “going to Halloween party with my friend,” “planning a comedy show with the program board,” and “working with the facility team to set-up for the Homecoming concert.” If I were to see these three comments in my organizational environment document, I would assign these to a thread of “Involvement with Events.” Additionally, the second two suggest a sub-thread of “Planning and Implementing Events.”

Once I developed resonant threads and sub-threads across a few of the participants, I reviewed those with a faculty member to discuss similarities and differences they identified from the data and revised accordingly. After identifying and defining the initial threads and sub-threads, I sent them to the participants and asked them if they believed these emerging stories reflected their experiences. Feedback from this review aided in finalizing the resonant threads and sub-threads in the data analysis (Clandinin, 2013).

The second cycle of analysis in shifting from field texts to interim research texts involved looking across all participants to identify patterns of shared resonant threads and sub-threads that reverberated across accounts (Clandinin, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). The intention was to offer a deeper and broader awareness of how college students define SoC and how the college union builds their SoC to their institution. By focusing on particular threads, I was able to follow “particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place” across all of the participants’ stories (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132).

Using these shared resonant threads as categories, I wrote out a narrative account of the role the college union plays in building SoC, carefully attending to the conversations, photograph classifications and journals, and my notes, while working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. A narrative account is “a representation of the unfolding lives of both participants and researchers, at least as they became visible in those times and places where [their] stories intersected and were shared” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132).

After data analysis was complete, the emergent threads and sub-threads enabled me to generate a narrative that answered the research questions posed in this study. I developed the findings into a conceptual model that illustrated the emergent role the college union plays in promoting SoC. Additionally, I developed a narrative of rich, thick descriptions using direct participant quotations that described the role the union plays in the lives of students with high SoC.

Authenticity and Trustworthiness

Authenticity in a qualitative study is a measure of the relevancy of the data collected in relation to the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2014). In my study, I took four steps to enhance authenticity. First, I developed an interview protocol matrix to map the interview questions to the research questions. This allowed me to identify potential gaps that may have existed between my interview questions and research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Second, I solicited feedback from a panel of faculty and college union professionals. I asked them to review the interview protocol to ensure the questions asked would produce data relevant to the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Patton, 2015). Third, I piloted the interview protocol with a small sample of students who met the participant criteria to refine the instrument and interview timing (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Finally, I selected participants based on criteria that closely resonated with my research questions. The pre-screening protocols provided for a comprehensive system to ensure the participants would be able to provide thorough reflections on SoC and the college union (Creswell, 2014)

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the credibility, accuracy, and transferability of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I established trustworthiness through five methods: member checks, triangulation, peer debriefing, rich descriptions, and reflexivity. First, member checking involves taking specific parts of the data back to the participants to verify if it is accurate from their perspectives (Creswell, 2014). I used member checking in two ways. At the end of each interview, I summarized the major points with the participants, allowing them to clarify any comments. Additionally, I sought feedback on individual resonant threads after initial axial coding. These member-checking steps ensured that I appropriately represented participants’ experiences. These steps also assisted me in developing the final threads and sub-threads (Clandinin, 2013).

Second, I used triangulation, defined as examining multiple data sources as evidence to build a coherent justification for resonant threads (Creswell, 2014). I triangulated the findings by comparing the data across the participant journals, transcripts, and my field notes. Third, the open coding schemes were reviewed with a faculty member to check for accuracy of connections and descriptions. This is a form of peer debriefing, which ensures the analyses are grounded in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Fourth, I used rich, thick descriptions of the college union setting to convey the findings and provide readers a manner of having shared experiences with the participants (Creswell, 2014). In alignment with narrative inquiry, I used direct quotations from the participants to describe their own lived experiences with SoC development through the college union (Clandinin, 2013).

Finally, throughout the entire research process I wrote in a reflexivity journal to reflect on how my personal experiences may have influenced each step of the study. Reflexivity is a process researchers use to understand how their background and worldview may shape their interpretations of the data and serves as an essential component of narrative inquiry research in developing shared experiences between the researcher and participants (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

In summary, I analyzed the participant journals, interview transcripts, and my field notes, first using a deductive approach beginning with the campus ecology framework, and then a follow-up emergent, inductive strategy to analyze the data. This information produced an understanding of students' experiences with the college union. Specifically, the findings provided a rich description of how the physical and organizational environments of the college union build SoC development among college students.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are an integral part of qualitative research and need to be anticipated and considered prior to and throughout the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014). "In a research approach that blurs the line between researcher and participant, ethics becomes a central issue," as is the case in narrative inquiry research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 13). I addressed two primary ethical issues in this study: protecting the identity of the participants and relational ethics.

Due to using photo-elicitation methods for this study, I could not guarantee anonymity of the site institution. However, I did take steps to limit identification. I used a pseudonym for the institution, identified in the narrative, and provided broad descriptions of the geographic location to limit any opportunity of identification. At times, to prevent the risk of deductive disclosure of participants' real identities, I changed the names and details of areas within the setting of the institution and college union setting.

I aimed more significantly to protect the confidentiality of each participant. This was important so that the participants would feel more comfortable with honest answers about their institution even if

they were negative. To protect participants' confidentiality, I asked each participant to choose a pseudonym or chose one for them, if they preferred. I used pseudonyms in all final research texts. The informed consent form provided to each participant noted that the images would possibly be used in future publications and that if they chose to take photographs of themselves, there was a chance that someone may recognize them. This gave the participants the knowledge ahead of time to make informed decisions regarding selfies.

Ethics also plays a considerable role when using photo-elicitation methods, typically regarding how the photos will be used and what will happen to the images after the study (Close, 2007). In this study, the most significant consideration was whether individuals appeared in the images who were not participants in the study. I took several steps to prevent this concern. First, I identified the institution's policies regarding the taking of photographs in public spaces and whether or not signed media releases were required. Second, I provided a short script for the participants to hand to individuals after the photographs were taken (to not affect behavior). This script let the individuals know that the photos were part of a research study on community and that unless they objected, the images may be used in research publications. If the individuals did object, the participant noted this with the image and I did not use these photographs in any publications. None of the individuals objected.

Relational ethics are the central ethical consideration of narrative inquiry research (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquirers must engage with an "attitude of empathetic listening, of not being judgmental and of suspending their disbelief[s] as they attend to participants' stories" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 199). As a professional working within the college union field, I had to pay close attention to this consideration throughout the study because of my professional connection to the content. I used the trustworthiness methods described previously to ensure I remained cognizant of my role as the researcher, which was to explore my research questions. This differed from my professional role in which I serve to provide programs and services to the students and other guests of my college union.

In considering relational ethics, narrative inquirers must also recognize that participants' lived and told stories represent who they are at that moment and who they are becoming over time (Clandinin, 2013). I used the participants' own words throughout the research texts and provided them the opportunity to co-compose the final research texts by reviewing the resonant threads to ensure their stories were accurately reflected (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009).

In summary, I used a narrative inquiry methodology along with photo-elicitation methods to explore the role of the college union in building college students' SoC of to their institution, from a pragmatist epistemological worldview. I used purposeful sampling approaches for selecting both the site institution and the participants. Analysis of participant-taken photographs, short journal descriptions of each image, and transcripts of in-depth narrative interviews with the participants served as the data and

were coded in three phases: initial, open, and axial. Using a constant comparative method, shared resonant threads were identified across all of the participants and developed into a concept diagram of the conceptual categories. Strategies were taken to safeguard authenticity, trustworthiness, and account for ethical considerations. Chapter Four will present the findings of this study.

Chapter Four

Findings – A Narrative

This chapter provides findings from the analysis of participants' photographs, journals, and personal stories regarding their interactions with the college union and their own sense of community (SoC) experience. Only relevant data that addresses the research questions are shared. The following sections provide information on the host institution, the participants, and the findings. Analysis of the participants' individual stories revealed a story common to all participants: the development of SoC to their institution, supported by the college union. Displayed through an emergent model, the findings include a narrative about the process for building SoC through the college union along with four strategies that aid in advancing the process.

Research Site – The Setting

The research site, Hearthstone University (HU), a pseudonym, is a Midwestern institution founded in the late 1800's. HU is a large, high research university that sits on more than 1,500 acres just a few miles outside a major metropolitan city. The institution is known for a vibrant student experience, research excellence, and strong athletics. The HU Union, renovated within the last 15 years, provides more than 300,000 square feet of space for programs and services including meeting rooms, student life offices, student organization office space, university bookstore, dining, and lounge space.

Participants – The Characters

Five undergraduates and two recent undergraduate alumni participated in this study. All of the students met criteria for participation (i.e., having been at HU for a minimum of one full academic year and identifying as having a high SoC to the institution). All of the students were actively involved in a variety of student organizations, and four students had jobs housed in the Union.

Across all of the participants, the majors represented included Political Science, Finance, Communications New Media Technology, Sexuality Studies and Psychology, International Studies, Public Health, and Neuroscience. The class years included one second-year, one third-year, two fourth-years, one fifth-year, and two recent alumni (one of whom intended to begin graduate school at the same institution). Five participants identified as White, one African American, and one as an Asian American Muslim. Two students lived on-campus and five lived off-campus. Five identified as straight, one as gay, and one as pansexual and genderqueer. Two participants identified as having disabilities.

The participants are introduced amidst their own quotes throughout this chapter. All names are pseudonyms either provided by the participant or developed by me at their request and some of their information has been altered to protect their identities.

Emergent Narrative for Building SoC through the College Union

Narrative inquiry as a methodological approach provided an important backdrop for this study. The three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013) became very apparent throughout the students’ detailed stories. The study was intentionally designed around the Union as the primary setting for the discussion (place). Although all of the students referenced other settings of the institution that contributed to their community, each of them clearly identified the Union as their primary connection and described how this unique setting built their SoC. As the students’ stories unfolded, it became clear that SoC develops over time, and that no one experience or environmental feature results in SoC. Instead, SoC develops through a series of experiences and features (temporality). Additionally, although the students indicated clear needs for alone time to study and reflect, their SoC developed primarily through a multitude of experiences of engaging with others, including peers, administrators, and alumni (sociality). These three commonplaces are seen throughout the findings described in remainder of this chapter.

Across all of the students’ stories, a common narrative emerged detailing the process of how the college union influenced SoC development for these participants. Resonant threads and sub-threads (Clandinin, 2013) appeared, describing specifically how the college union’s physical and organizational environments aided in the process of SoC development. The following sections describe the findings as depicted in my emergent College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model (Figure 2).

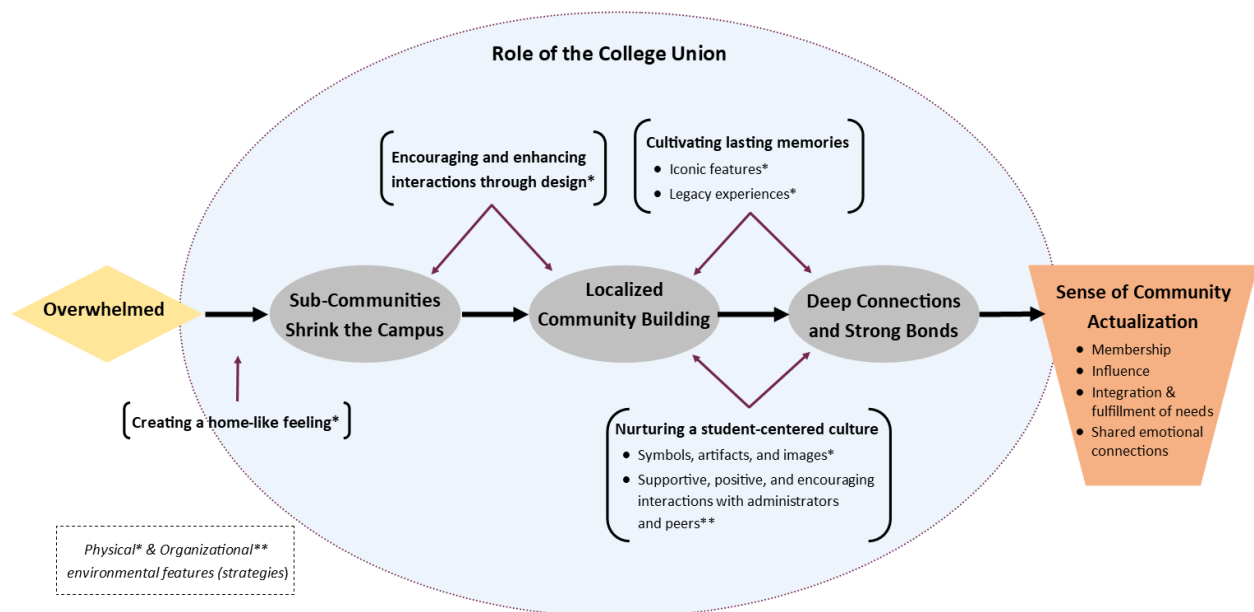


Figure 2. The College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model.

The Process

The following section details aspects of each stage within this process and indicates how the college union specifically facilitates progression for the students. Direct quotations from all of the students highlight how the elements within this process represent a narrative of their stories.

Overwhelmed. The large research institution was challenging for students to navigate initially. The size could intimidate and overwhelm students due to so many options of activities and opportunities for involvement, in addition to acclimating to college-level academics. Lynn described her initial feelings of being overwhelmed and lost when she attended orientation:

My orientation was before my high school graduation, which was just weird. I remember feeling really excited but also really overwhelmed and a little lost. Things were not familiar at all yet, I'm not someone who has [HU] blood forever and has been on campus a bazillion times. That was my second time on campus ever, I came on one tour before. Being in that space I was like, "This is kind of cool. It's kind of comfy." I remember seeing the wood and I was like, "It feels like a cabin." I was like, "This is nice, yeah." But I was also like, "Am I going to even remember how to get back here? I don't know." I remember feeling a little anxious but mostly excited and watching the Mount presentation really got me ready to come back to campus.

As a transfer student, Anne experienced a major cultural change from her previous institution: “. . . I was a transfer student and a commuter student and I didn't. . . I felt very alone here. I came from a very small college. I mean 200 people tops in my previous college. So I transferred here. It's a big change.”

The College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model shows the role of the college union overlapping with this feeling overwhelmed. For some students, such as Mycah, even the union itself could be intimidating:

I didn't want to come to the Union because I didn't know anyone. I felt like I needed to walk in with someone, which now saying it, it's like, "Okay. That doesn't make any sense." But it was. That was my reality of it when I was first starting off, freshman and sophomore year, that when you go to Union, you need to go be with friends. You need to know someone. It wasn't somewhere you could just walk in. Yeah, I think that's the biggest reason why I didn't come to the Union to hangout and just meet people or even people watch or anything. I was very disconnected from this part of campus.

Mycah later described how important connections are: “[Hearthstone University] in general was really intimidating, how big it was and that's why you need the make communities to make the university feel smaller. . .”

Sub-communities shrink the campus. For participants, finding one or several smaller sub-communities was the first step to shrinking the campus to a more manageable experience. The college

union offered opportunities to get involved with student organizations, to have an on-campus job, and to meet and spend time with friends at events and building services (such as the dining facilities and administrative offices). As Lynn shared:

I think since [Hearthstone University] is so large, finding your pocket of people is really important. I think that that starts with your first year experience. Mine in particular was a scholar's program and that was something that I applied for as I was applying for [Hearthstone University]. Since I was placed into that, it immediately shrunk the campus down a little bit. I think those organizations, those groups, those cohorts that [Hearthstone University] offers and encourages students to be a part of, I think that is especially during your first year the first way to develop a community here.

For Amelia, getting involved through student organizations helped to grow her network: "I have found a lot of my people on campus through the things that I'm involved in. I know I've created this broad social net of the things I'm involved in. . . ." Patrick further described how student organizations become like family: ". . . they're pretty much like little family sections A lot of things that go into making sure that their . . . new group members feel welcome, making sure that they understand what's happening."

In addition to student organizations, on-campus jobs, such as those offered through offices in the college union, provide another venue for connection to the institution. As Anne described:

...at the time, I was a personal tutor, so I didn't have an on-campus job. I remember coming from...I had a class and then I had to go tutor a student, and then coming back, I came through a storm to come back to campus and then meet. I think that was one of those things that then convinced me that I should have an on-campus job instead. Really it made me even more involved through a lot of things. I mean I made a friend that night. I joined an org that night, and I also had that inkling of maybe off-campus jobs aren't for me.

The college union also provides opportunities for friends to get together in a central location such as at events, administrative offices, the dining facilities, and other services. As Lynn shared, she often used the union as a meeting place for her and her friends:

Because of that it's just a really great meeting place, it's common for a lot of people, it's well-known, it's big on campus. There's lots of space, and so I think that having this area to go to makes it really easy to be like, "Hey, let's grab food at the Union," or, "I'll meet you there to do this project," or whatever it might be that has you interacting with your peers.

Offering a variety of opportunities for participants to make connections with peers through sub-communities was a key element provided by the college union. The participants described how important it was for that there was something for everyone within the college union.

Localized community building. Sub-communities provided many community-building elements such as helping students to navigate the campus, encouraging them to seek out opportunities, building trust and peer support, growing their personal networks, and opening up other sub-communities. For participants in this study, SoC first developed at these smaller levels through a conglomeration of multiple experiences engaged with others in which the students felt cared about and supported. Students developed connections with administrators and peers alike through these experiences, becoming more comfortable with their own abilities and place at the institution:

. . . We had a really really strong bond. I would consider them a little micro-community. Scott, my boss, he's also one of the advisors for student leadership advocates which I've referenced. I got this job before I joined [Union Programs Office (UPO)] so I think his encouragement to join [UPO] after starting to work for him really helped me connect because [UPO] as its own cohort is a community that I really, really enjoy being a part of. But it's also...we go out and facilitate workshops for student organizations on campus so that I've gotten to get my foot in a few other communities. Even if it's not as sustained, it's still interaction and learning with and from them so that's been really cool and I think it all goes back to his encouragement to get involved in [UPO].
(Lynn)

Similarly, as a second-year student, Amin's first few friends helped to quickly expand his network:

Definitely meeting people who connect me with other people, it's a chain reaction. All these connections, and that grows the networks that way in my sense of community that way. It's like, when I'm getting work done here at the union, I feel like I'm around the same students, but I meet them in different ways. I get connected with those people through people at the union and vice versa.

Gabriella's peers served as motivators who encouraged her to run for a leadership role in their student organization and who ultimately expressed their trust in her by selecting her for an officer position:

I had a lot of people who helped encourage and motivate me to take that step, and apply to be a vice president. I don't know, this room is just the culmination of me really feeling like I tried something out of my league that I felt ... You know? I felt that it was out of my league. That's why I did it, because I wanted to grow. Yeah.

Finally, Patrick shared that during stressful times, his sub-community provided support to him, helping him to navigate any hurdle that came his way:

I remember talking to them about...just if I was angry or if I was stressed about everything, and so they were just telling me, they're just like, "Calm down, everything will be fine, if you don't win you don't win, if you win, great." I think, that's not what I want to hear, you know what I mean? You don't want to hear, "what if you don't win". . . . Of course, we had no idea, you'll

never know if you're going to win. But it's nice to have them tell you that, even if you lose. It's nice to hear someone say, "You have this in the bag." You know what I mean?

Once established, sub-communities provided a foundation for participants to become more comfortable at the institution. Several SoC elements such as feeling a sense of belonging at this local level and fulfilling needs through support and encouragement became apparent and role modeled for the next steps in the process.

Deep connections and strong bonds. Over time, participants became more comfortable with and forged deeper connections within these sub-communities. Then, they gradually engaged with the institution at a larger scale and through their own voices. Participants took on and embraced leadership positions, made more connections with administrators, and became active in planning events. These activities led students to make influential contributions to the institution, leaving their legacy mark. As Gabriella explained:

Now I feel like that is...that truly is my circle, because the position I have requires me to know who everyone is. I make a point to say hi to people and make a point to know who they are. That tends to all congeal in the union with those people. Just making it a point to be known and to know people helps make the community stronger.

Amin capitalized on his relationships with administrators to make his voice heard:

I know I have some connections that make it easier to get my voice heard. One of the associate vice presidents of student life was really close to my brother, and then met me and really loves me too. I always feel like if I have a concern, like a major concern, about campus she's somebody I can go to. [Advisor's name], who's our advisor, I always feel I can talk to him about things like that, and I'm like heavily involved in a few different organizations. I have made a presence known for myself a little bit. I'm still working on that. Like I said, I'm only a sophomore, I still got a long way to go, but there's that. Then this upcoming fall I'll be working as a presidential host. I'll be at the President's events at his house, or at the football games. I'll have direct connection to the President too, which is awesome. That's why I personally felt like I have a say, at least. I can make my voice heard. If I have a huge concern about campus, I have the right people that I can voice that concern to.

For participants, the union provided leadership opportunities to know others and to become known. Associating the union with their ability to leave a legacy helped students to grow their SoC from localized within their own sub-communities to a slightly larger SoC toward the union itself. In Amelia's words, "I feel like the Union is my sense of community to [HU] . . . This is where I've made my mark at [Hearthstone University]."

Sense of community actualization. Over time, participants developed into who they were through their personal experiences through the college union. When these experiences were positive, leading to strong emotional responses and lasting memories, students' SoC to the college union evolved into a strong SoC toward the institution as a whole (actualization). Lynn described this process clearly:

I think that...when I think of community at [Hearthstone University] I'm going to think of the Union. I think my community didn't start here but it definitely grew here. I have, as we've talked about, so many different emotions connected to my time here and so many different relationships that I have built here that I think it's really hard for me to separate Lynn's sense of community from Lynn's experience at the Union. It's just really hard to explain it any other way, they just are so connected.

Mycah shared similar sentiments of growing up through these experiences:

You know, going back to our What's Your Story reference from the MCC. I started off this really shy, kept to myself person and through the different organizations, through the different jobs that I've had on campus and mainly, in the Union, like I've grown into the person that I think I meant to be, and I'm sure I want to still keep growing but when I think about who I was four years ago, I'm like wow, she had a lot of growing up she needs to do and they helped me grow up.

The initial feelings of being alone, intimidated, and overwhelmed were emotions that the participants experienced as they begin their college careers. For those participants who became connected to sub-community and took advantage of the opportunities provided through the college union, they made the campus more manageable. Strong social connections with administrators and peers helped participants to find their place within the institution and to make their own voices heard. This was the role of the college union in helping students toward the outcome of building SoC to their institution.

Physical and Organizational Environmental Strategies Advance SoC Development

Students' stories revealed four ways in which the physical and organizational environments of the college union contributed to their SoC development. Three of these strategies highlight the role of the physical environment, while one highlights how both the physical and organizational environments worked together. In this section, I include photos and direct quotes shared by participants that illustrate how the college union advanced the CU-SoC Actualization Model.

Creating a home-like feeling. As described through the narrative, the college union provided opportunities for participants to connect with a variety of sub-communities. In order to make these connections and shift away from feeling overwhelmed at the institution, students first needed a reason to engage with the union. The college union's architectural designs, furniture selections and layout, and ambiance all aided in drawing the students into the facility. These physical features generated positive

beliefs and emotions that created an atmosphere of comfort, welcome, and safety they often equated with their own homes. As Lynn explained:

I think it has a lot to do with the familiarity of the people and the places so when you start being in a space almost every day it tends to feel like home. I made a joke to my friends, I think it was this past year. I was sitting in the [Leadership] Center and I was like, "Oh, I need to change." I was going to go to the gym or something and in my head was like, "Oh, I should just change here." I was like, "No, that's a public space!" But it feels like home to me now, which is weird. But anyway, it's just I think the repetition of coming. I always see a familiar face and I have a . . . Any time I need to meet with someone I'm like, "This basically feels like my living room so I might as well meet here" sort of thing.

Several students described how their constant positive interactions with the college union helped them to feel safe and comfortable. This set the tone for them to let their guard down and move past feeling overwhelmed. As Amin shared, "[This is] where I continue to spend a lot of time because I feel comfortable there." Patrick also shared a story about how he felt safe in his office space:

I nap under my desk. I literally will take my pillow, I take a blanket and fall asleep under my desk for 20 minutes at a time, and I have and will continue to do that next year, because life just gets so exhausting sometimes. I will come in, lock my door, close my blinds, turn the lights off so people don't realize I'm there, and fall asleep under my desk for 20 minutes.

Students have different needs and the college union provides a physical environment that offers a variety of elements and styles to meet these needs, which becomes a different place for everyone.

There are a lot of little nooks and crannies here that people during their four years will discover. And I think when people start to look around the union they find that they find their little nook and cranny that they like and that's where they will go to study, or that's where they will go to hang out with friends or whatever it might be, eat, sometimes sleep, depending on the time of year. (Patrick)

Natural light was another feature of architectural design that affected participants' experiences. Specifically, the light affected their emotional states and served as a motivational metaphor. Mycah shared, "It's very bright. There are a lot of windows everywhere. I guess you could say you can see a bright future when you come in to the Union." Amelia expressed similar sentiments:

I also think we have a lot of natural light, which is really great. . . . I think it keeps people a little happier. It's not as gloomy, doomy. It's like this is a very light environment to be in, like anything is possible, sky is the limit, almost. It's like what I feel like when I'm in natural light.

In addition to the natural light, the union's open floor plan contributed to home-like experiences. For Amelia, this part of the union reminded her of her home:

. . . I think that my house is a very open floor plan . . . it's also like all one big room with a few different levels, but it's like feeling a place that you're alone. It's like in your room. I feel that way in the Great Hall area of the union. Yeah, you can be doing your own thing, but you're never alone. For me, I just connected with that, because it's a lot like what I grew up with.



Figure 3. The Great Hall at the Union.

Warmth was an expression many students used to compare the union to their own homes. This warmth was described through several features, including carpeting, fireplaces, and furniture. "So one, the make-up of it, it's all carpeted, which I think is a lot better than having the tiling out from out in the ... I think that makes it, one, a little more homey" (Patrick). Patrick also described how the fireplaces created a similar feeling:

We're right outside, walking right outside of our doors from our student office there's a fireplace, and so it really does feel like you're just like at home here. We have, I think, three fireplaces around in the student union. And so, really anywhere, especially during the winter you'll see people. Granted, they don't put off a lot of heat, but it's this sense that families gather around the fireplace at certain times of the year, I think a lot of people cling onto that, especially when they're here and they might not be close to their family. And so we really do, as students, become their family and so they will do things together like that.

Cozy and welcoming furniture was another connection students made with their homes:

Sometimes it's the Student Leadership Center, you can just kind of tell the lighting and the furniture just says, "You should relax here in the middle before you go meet or something." Sometimes it's just in the middle of that great hall, because they put out that furniture. That's a big empty space, they could've left it empty but they chose to put comfy furniture right there. They're saying, "Come into the union, take a minute to relax. You have to take yourself, so have a seat." I'll do that occasionally after class if I only have like 30 minutes between class I'll stop

by the union, sit down, take a minute, take a breather, and then head to my next class. That's where I would choose when relaxing. (Amin)



Figure 4. Lounge space depicting several physical features described, including the abundance of natural light, carpeting, the fireplace, and a variety of soft furniture.

A final physical feature that aided in creating a home-like feeling was the ambiance of the union. Anne shared how when people played the piano, it created a positive setting for her: "Also, we have the piano which is a nice ambience because at least once a day, typically between 1:00 and 3:00, someone is playing the piano, and it's just a nice ambience for me because I really appreciate the sound of the piano."

While not the only features that could aid in creating a home-like feeling within the college union, the students in this study identified all of these features. These physical environmental features were a first step towards helping students feel comfortable, welcome, and safe to seek out opportunities to engage with the variety of sub-communities available through the college union.

Encouraging and enhancing interactions through design. Once drawn into the union, students took advantage of all the programs, services, and opportunities to connect with others. Community was built through social connections with peers, administrators, alumni and other people across the campus (sub-communities shrink the campus). Physical features such as architectural designs and the arrangement of furniture encouraged and enhanced the ability for these interactions. Some interactions were intimate between a small group of students, while others were larger, more energizing gatherings. The more often students connected with others and the deeper these connections became over time, the stronger their SoC to the sub-communities and ultimately to the institution.

Students recognized the union as a place not just to hang out but also to connect and reconnect with friends, sometimes planned and other times serendipitously:

I think that I bump into a lot of people a lot of the times. I bump into friends just because they also come and go from the union, so a lot of the times we see each other and say, "Hey, I haven't seen you since that class last semester. Let's catch up for a moment." We'd pull over to the side where the main traffic flow isn't there and stop and have a conversation. (Amelia)

The openness of the building described earlier also created opportunities for large gatherings of students, which could lead to a sense of unity, as Amin described:

I think it's just that it's so open. When you walk in, it's open, you see everything, like I said earlier. I think that brings community together, because it's just like you're all a part of one room. You're all part of this one big building, right now. I think that layout is definitely purposeful, and it works. I think it does, whether people realize it or not, it does bring that sense of community, that sense of oneness.

The large, open spaces allowed many visible events to take place to bring people together. Patrick named some of these events:

So there's a huge tug of war between teams down there, so we were divided up into color sections. So the color teams will do tug of war, there's dance competitions and stuff down there. There's also so many events that happen in that area during the school year. African-American Heritage Fest does stuff down there, they do a dance competition. . . . During homecoming, we set up a stage in there, and football players and our football coach come in and talk and rally people up. So much happens in this area of the Union every single year, that people don't remember until it happens again. But so much of community building for the university happens there."

Large, annual events not only provided opportunities to bring large groups together, but also chances to meet new people who were sharing the same experiences. As Mycah described:

Well, I know from my experience I'll be standing there especially while the orchestra is playing. And some students came next to me and were looking over the rail with me and we were talking about the songs that they were playing because I think they started playing Viva la Vida and other pop songs, and I was like, "Oh, I remember this song. It's such a good song," and they're like, "Yeah. They're really good." So you have interactions with, I don't want to say random people because that's not the right word, but different people just by something, you're watching something that's going on in the Union and you're meeting someone every day.



Figure 5. An orchestra playing in the Great Hall with many community onlookers.

Furniture was another important physical element that encouraged and enhanced interactions. According to Mycah, using the open spaces appropriately by balancing the furniture and openness created the right environment for both traffic flow and interactions:

I would say the number of seats and places to sit in, talk and meet with people is a good amount. It's not a lot because the...Union is very open. When you walk in, there's a lot of space and a lot of place to maneuver but I think they did a good job placing a lot of places where you can sit in and interact with people.

Similarly, Lynn noted that the furniture was vital for bringing people together by allowing a variety of configurations for varying group sizes so people could face each other:

There's a bunch of tables with five or six seats, so it forces you in a way or encourages you in a way to engage with people around you. I spend most of my time in the Union in the [Leadership] Center...that there's couches and there's tables and chairs. The way that they're arranged is conducive to sitting next to someone new or your friends or picking that as a meeting spot. I think that is huge, even subconsciously to creating community. Because it forces you to sit in that circle and talk to the people around you.



Figure 6. A small corner lounge space with moveable chairs facing each other so that between two to four people can interact together.

Administrative and student organization office spaces constituted the final physical feature that emerged. Participants reported that, although not all student organizations have office space, of those that do, the size and layout of the spaces are designed to encourage and enhance interactions. Patrick described how large office spaces allowed more people to engage together in one private space, and in a more intimate setting than a meeting room:

Most of the offices, especially the office space in the Union, it's big enough for people to hang out in I think, and that's another reason the sense of community's so big is that, we've piled ten people into my boss's office for meetings. Which we didn't have to do but we did it anyway, because why not?

In Patrick's own student organization office, which he shared with the Vice President of the same group, transparency features enhanced their connections with each other. "We have glass panels that separate us, but obviously they're clear, so we look right into each other's office, our desk areas."

These physical environment features increased the opportunities for students to connect with sub-communities and for localized community building to develop. Architectural designs and furniture that provided interactions, as opposed to isolating environments, helped students build SoC to their institution.

Cultivating lasting memories. SoC was developed and maintained through lasting memories by enhancing the localized community building and helping to deepen the connections and bonds within the sub-communities so that the students broadened their reach to the institution as a whole. For Patrick, the college union was the physical space that brought back the most salient memories for him:

We just sat there and talked about life, because we had worked together all year, we knew each other really well so we were really close. I think emotionally it's a lot of different places, and it's built on memories. So like I said, the Oval. Definitely the Union as well. My residence halls that I lived in, or the houses that I've stayed at through summer leases and stuff like that.

Emotionally it's very different than physically. So physically to the Union, emotionally a lot of different places around campus.

Amin shared a story about a powerful personal memory that summarized the culmination of his leadership experiences up to this point:

. . . At the end of that I was sitting on the staircase and I'm like, "Wow I've been awake for 40 hours, I've never done this before. I'm ready to like see the number." They're going to do the reveal and they do and we raised \$1,500,000. That was our goal, we met it. Nobody thought we were going to meet the goal, we do that somehow. That scene, the staircase, it's like, "Wow. I remember when I stood there and I started crying tears of joy." I don't cry very often. I actually don't cry at all. That was only the second time I ever cried tears of joy in my life. It's definitely a special spot. I was surrounded by all the other closest members. All 140 of us, and we're all on the staircase, and we're all linked on each other's shoulders, and we all start crying as soon as we see the 1.5. We're like, "We did it." I definitely still see the staircase, which is good memories. We sang [the alma mater] . . . it's just we always sing and I love [it]. I couldn't even sing it because I was so emotional. I was like, "Man I love the school. We do great things." That's what the staircase means to me, without a doubt.



Figure 7. The Grand Staircase with the Union values engraved.

The students' stories revealed two primary sub-strategies regarding how lasting memories are cultivated: iconic features and legacy experiences. While both are physical environment strategies, the first relates to tangible features and the latter relates to how the spaces themselves are used.

Iconic features. Like Amin's story and how the Grand Staircase elicited powerful emotions every time he saw it, other meaningful and well-known artifacts and symbols served as iconic features, recognizable grounding points for students to connect with the college union and the institution.

Gabriella connected to the institution's song engraved in the walls of the main hall:

Definitely the alma mater etched into the walls in that grand hall. I've always really liked that. I think just seeing it etched out like that, and how many times you've sung it and how well you know the song. It's very personalized to us here, I think that reinforces that tradition a lot.

Amelia shared several memories of taking photos with the life-sized bronze statue of the institution's mascot that sits in the main hall of the college union:

Almost every future [HU student] since this...Union opened has taken a picture with the [statue] at the base of the stairs in the union. I have my picture from my junior year of high school and that was the first moment I thought "I think I might thrive here." Every time I pass the [statue], I reflect on my time as [Hearthstone University] and I am forever grateful that this is where I ended up.



Figure 8. Life-sized statue on the first floor of the Great Hall in the Union.

Some features were less grandiose, yet still elicited powerful emotions. These symbols were metaphors and represented memories much larger than themselves with which the students connected. Gabriella described a symbol she interacted with every time she enters the Union:

This thought always occurs to me. Every time I open the doors, I pull on these [HU] door knobs. I just always think, I really like it here. Because sometimes it's just you're either stepping into the air conditioning, or you're stepping into the heat. You're getting relief. It always just smells clean and it looks so new. . . . It motivates me when I step in there. . . . Whenever I step in there I feel very at peace for a second. You come off the street, come off from your day. Yeah. For those doors, I guess, for me that is a symbol that I didn't even realize there was there.

The institution's brand was another powerful iconic feature. Participants who instantaneously recognized branding features equated those with feelings of pride. Branding infused throughout the facility reminded students where they could have a sense of belonging. These features were subtle, as in the case of a meeting room described by Anne:

I think that one of the things I noticed with the union, and I don't know if they're just doing this for the [décor] but also it's convenient. A lot of the rooms when you first come into them unless

you ask for them to be set up otherwise or set up, the table is like in a[n] O[-shape] essentially. . . and so I think that's really great and is another thing that I think helps with the idea that the union is a place that builds communities.



Figure 9. The executive leadership room shows the tables arranged in a[n] O design.

Other times the features were much more obvious, such as when Mycah shared her thoughts on HU colors throughout the Union:

I honestly am so used to the [HU colors] by now, that it's kind of, it makes sense. . . . I'm like, yeah, there's a lot of [HU color] in this picture and the best part is a lot of people are wearing [HU colors] in this picture too. So, I mean talk about just having a community even down to the colors that you wear, it's incredible. I think whoever definitely designed the...Union did a lot of, I guess marketing when thinking about strategically placing things around the Union. They did a great job.



Figure 10. Leadership Center with HU symbols and colors throughout the space.

Legacy experiences. Another powerful way the college union advanced localized community building and deep connections and strong bonds was through the utilization of space to create student experiences. Experiences through which students made significant and positive contributions to the

institution, elicited strong and lasting emotions, and built deeper connections to the institution through their impact, resulted in students feeling they had left their mark.

I feel like the...Union is my sense of community to [HU]. Everyone that I see are on campus that I'm like, "Oh hey, how are you?" It's like somebody that I probably know something through in the union. I mean, this is what I've made. This is where I've made my mark at [Hearthstone University] . For me, going anywhere else on campus, I still feel very student lifey. . . This is my community. (Amelia)

The ability to make a difference at the institution was important to students. Amin reflected on how impactful his experiences with the college union were to him: "When I walk in there it's like, Wow. I'm making a difference. I'm at [HU]. I'm not just studying, I'm helping people."

These experiences brought a higher level of purpose to the time they spent throughout their higher education career. Patrick shared how through a fraternity event he became active in supporting sexual assault victims:

My fraternity has done a fundraiser three years. So along the sides there are usually just stands that people can rent out, student orgs usually rent out, talking about events that they might be having or stuff like that. My fraternity has had a space there where we fundraised for domestic and sexual assault prevention. That was great, we partnered with Sexual Civility and Empowerment. It's just really interesting to talk to them about resources for women on our campus, and men on our campus, and those in between for sexual assault survivors, and then also trying to figure out the best policies, best practices that [we] could push forward through the university to further that. That has been just a great experience to talk to people about why it's important to support survivors and stuff like that.

Some of the participant's legacy experiences connected to giving back in ways bigger than themselves and taught them different lessons. Mycah provided an example where she was humbled by the stories of city residents with whom she connected through the local foodbanks:

For the community, for my [service organization], we cooked food. While we're on campus, we learned different recipes and everyone brings something in but when we're off campus, we went to [the local] Foodbank and the one at McDonald House and helped bring food and care to the surrounding...area. As someone who really enjoys doing that type of work, that was probably the most humbling experience, just seeing everyone's face after you helped them out or you gave them food and interacting with people...and hearing their stories, yeah, it was a good experience.

Many of the participants described how important campus traditions were to them. These traditions created memories that, as they described, were shared across many other generations of students before them and yet to come. "The [HU] spirit, [HU] community is very, very strong and it's not just in

[Hearthstone University]. On campus, but off-campus as well across the country, across the world. I think a lot of it is our traditions that bind us together. . ." (Patrick).

Campus traditions were oftentimes annual events that many students attend together. Lynn described her participation in one of the largest events held on campus all year long:

The union specifically, I picture [Dance-a]-Thon I think that moment of seeing the reveal and seeing the excitement and seeing how successful that event was, it just reflects pretty much everything that students can do in [Hearthstone University]. If they can raise 1.3, \$1.5 million that's insane. That's so cool, and I think a lot of that comes from the fact that we are really tight-knit and we have. In general a lot of students have a really strong bond with the university. It was cool to just physically see it and feel it around you and all the energy and excitement that comes with that.

Cultivating lasting memories that participants could recall throughout their entire lives was a powerful tool to helping them build their SoC to the institution. Anne summarized this phenomenon:

Well, I think that the union and my relationship with the union, and especially as an employee are what really makes me [connected to HU] and then continues that feeling because...I know I'm responsible to live up to [HU] standards or what I perceive are the [HU] standards. Therefore, I am continuing in my way to foster community and helping that, and it's like a cycle there. It makes me feel more involved. It makes me feel more connected. It makes me really passionate about what I do and passionate about being here, and passionate about helping people.

Through iconic features and legacy experiences, participants found and made meaning of their time in college and connected to something bigger themselves, a higher standard.

Nurturing a student-centered culture. The fourth environmental strategy the college union capitalized on within the narrative to build localized community and deepening connections and strengthening bonds was by nurturing a student-centered culture. Students felt a sense of belonging and fulfilled needs through both visual representations and social engagements. Two sub-strategies for how this happened were (a) symbols, artifacts, and images highlighting the facility is student centered (physical environment) and (b) supportive, positive, and encouraging interactions with administrators and peers (organizational environment). This strategy highlighted how both the physical and organizational environments worked in conjunction with one another.

Symbols, artifacts, and images. These physical features emphasized that the facility was student-centered and students were respected at the institution. Displays of students' diversity provided visual evidence to participants the campus administration recognized each student's identity and that they mattered.

A basic feature the college union used was to display images of students throughout the facility. Amelia described her emotional response to a large art display of portraits in one of the lounges:

Then on the flip side of being connected to the [Hearthstone University] community, there is this wall right here that has all these different portraits on it. . . . There's even a dog that's on one of them. They're hand-painted and they're really sweet, but it just makes me remember that [Hearthstone University] means so much to me, it probably means so much to the 500,000 other people who have graduated from here who are still around, or the [thousands of] people who go here now. . . . It's humbling, because [Hearthstone University] is so big, and I feel so strongly about it. . . . It just puts everything into perspective.

Similarly, several participants, such as Amin, described how student art displayed in the college union showcased students throughout the facility:

Also, all the artwork is done by [HU] students, and so eventually, at some point, pretty much everybody will have been bored and looking at the little blurbs they put on them saying why they were made there, who they were made by, what the piece is supposed to represent, things like that. I think that's interesting for me at least. I mean I can't speak for everybody here, but it is a very, very gentle way of making you feel a part of the community because through artwork, at least I know about myself, that helps you connect with others members in the community even if they're graduates now, which they probably are because this artwork has been forever.

These visual reminders were front and center for all to see that the college union was a place committed to students and their success.

Embracing the diversity of the student population was another key element to help participants feel connected to the institution. Visual representations of the campus's diversity was very powerful as Mycah described:

...when it came down to it, I thought this wall that had all the different diversities around [Hearthstone University] was really what needed to be shown in the Union. I think as an African American female that then you definitely, I would say included me, was the most inclusive here in the Union and at [Hearthstone University] because of a lot of events that they held in the MCC.



Figure 11. “What’s Your Story” wall in the Multicultural Center.

Having programs and services that support student’s diversity was another manner in which the college union embraced and supported student diversity. Amin described how the college union gave him the opportunity to connect with his faith:

I mentioned earlier there's the interfaith room. I'm Muslim, I'm supposed to pray five times a day. I don't, but if I want to there's the interfaith room. I can always go there, it's quiet, there's always a Qur'an or a praying rug. I can always go there. I feel like if I need to reconnect with my faith I feel like I can come to the union and I can go to the interfaith room.

Embracing student identity and diversity through action was an essential message for the college union to help facilitate SoC development among the participants.

A final element that arose focused on proving to students that the institution takes them seriously. High-quality professional furnishings, fixtures, and equipment and beauty throughout the physical environment all sent the message that the students were important. Cognizant of his surroundings, Amin described how he noticed the care to quality and professionalism:

I was like, this is incredible because they've got the technology in it. It's well decorated. Personally I always notice the furniture. The furniture there is really high quality. It looks like it's completely handmade, custom made. I was blown away. I was like, “Wow. We’re students and the union values that, the university values that, and they want to give us the opportunity to be professional and experience that.

Gabriella expressed similar sentiments about the Sphinx Room:

I mean, it's beautiful. It's a beautiful room. It has a different feel, like you said. It has more of a, just a serious connotation to it, I guess. Not necessarily in a bad way. It just feels like it's less playful. It looks like a business space, with everyone having their own beautiful chair. . . . I think it does motivate you to feel like what you're doing is a job, in a way, or like a job you want to get done. . . . I think it's a good purpose for what it is that we're doing.

These visual elements were all vital physical environmental features the college union used to help participants build SoC to the institution by showing that students and their success were essential to the core purpose of higher education.

Supportive, positive, and encouraging interactions with administrators and peers. Beyond the physical environment of the college union, participants reported that interactions in the union helped to create a student-centered culture. Administrators (such as student organization advisors and workplace supervisors) and students' peers provided support networks for participants to face and overcome challenges while providing opportunities to learn and grow as individuals. Participants fed off the energy of this togetherness. Mycah shared about connections with others at her work office:

Well, for me, when I'm here, I'm really happy to be here. I love walking into my office. I love interacting with everyone that I work with. And when I talk to other people that work in other departments in the Union, they say the same thing. And I think that especially during the visitation times when you have the leaders, the orientation leaders like getting everyone hyped up to walk around the campus and see everything that makes [Hearthstone University] what it is and yelling and laughing and just getting everyone in this really positive, energetic, fun mood, it travels, it's vibrant.

The SoC Actualization Model shows how SoC development happens over time. When participants first arrived, they were searching for their own place. As they progressed through this process and neared SoC actualization, they were more able to be their authentic selves:

It was definitely, the most empowering messages I've heard were from the MCC and those dialogues especially I saw the disability one but also, the What's Your Color and Be Comfortable in Your Skin. I grew up in [city], which is a predominantly white neighborhood and city, and I didn't really see color in high school because maybe I didn't want to but I was like, "Oh, I'm just like everyone else." And when I came here, I found myself more attracted to joining black organizations and being with people that look like me, and I took a lot of sociology and psychology classes that did studies on race and different interactions people have just because of their race and that was really eye-opening to me. (Mycah)

When participants embraced their own identities and voices, they flourished at the institution. Amelia described how the opportunities within the college union allowed her to thrive as her own person:

It's a word I throw around. I'll be like, "Oh my God, I'm literally thriving right now," but it really is. I think, I don't know, [Hearthstone University] has all the opportunities. I'm definitely someone who will go and get the opportunities. If they're not there, I'll make them there. Then I'll just do something crazy with it. That's always been who I am as a person. I think where I feel like I'm thriving is where I feel like my resources are being met, and also, my expectations are

being exceeded, so then I can keep exceeding my own expectations of myself, if that makes sense.

Programs, services, and direct interactions with college union administrators further advanced this progression. As Amelia shared, support services to help students achieve their desired goals was a basic element to helping participants feel supported by the institution:

With the resources, if you have them, there is nothing you can't do. In the Resource Room, like, okay, you want to make buttons, and then hand them out on campus for whatever you're campaigning for? You can literally do that. You need balloons for whatever, whether it's a club or your best friend's birthday, you can get them there. That kind of thing, I think, is really great. Within the Office of Student Life, and this might just be a me thing, but I feel like I know enough people in enough different areas to make something happen.

Beyond resources, direct encouragement from administrators helped participants to achieve far more than they might have going it alone. Mycah provided an example of this phenomenon:

Well, I told you that that office challenges me more than anyone else challenges me and they know my strengths really well. They know my strengths really well. I think the biggest thing that they have done for me that I'm the most appreciative of is they were the people that talked to me into becoming an RA, a resident advisor. They said that I'd be really good at it and I was kind of like hesitant about it because with my experiences with my RA, I would interact but it wasn't anything where I was like, "Oh, I'm going to be friends with them."

Administrators who took the time to focus on the participants as individuals displayed care for the participants' success, which increased the participants' trust and willingness to approach them for help.

Lynn spoke about how her supervisor had become one of her closest supporters:

I think when I need support in decision-making which happens all the time in college, I typically would go to my boss. We have established a really, really great relationship and we've got really close. His office is where I would go to start, I would walk in and say, "Help." He'd be like, "All right, let's go chat." Then we find some other quiet space, usually in the [Leadership Center] but sometimes it's outside in the...Plaza, sometimes it's in a meeting space if they're open, whatever it might be. I think that's where I would beeline if I needed support or help in that sort of way.

Peer support was another influential manner for developing SoC. Administrators who role-modeled positive support and encouragement created a culture that showed students how to do the same for each other. Gabriella explained how encouragement from older peers helped her step outside her comfort zone:

At the beginning of all this, I think it hugely impacted it, because freshman year I wasn't super involved. I had good friends and good roommates, but I didn't step outside of that much. Then

sophomore year, after LeaderShape, I think being known by these student leaders on campus, not only were they leaders but they were older. Just gave me a lot of validation and made me feel. And they believed in me. They know what I'm capable of, or they held me to a certain standard, because they want to see me succeed. They want to see me carry out the things they talked about at LeaderShape.

Collectively, between administrator and peer support, participants faced and overcame challenges that arose through their college experiences. One of Lynn's stories highlighted how various conversations with administrators and peers changed her thought processes and views of the world:

I think having hard conversations, people don't always like to have that dialogue. I think [the group] started to get there but it was really with [the leadership program] and with [administrator] and with work that I was forced to have these difficult conversations and people ask you why and they really want to know why you think a certain way so that you can have a productive conversation about it. I think having that space was really helpful because I like to process externally a lot of times. When I speak something and then immediately I'm like, "Oh, I see why maybe I should think about it a different way." Those people were there to be like, "Okay, yeah. Let's continue to talk about why you think you should think differently." That was really great, and I think just exposure to different people. Like I mentioned earlier we try to get [the leadership program members] from a bunch of different backgrounds, bunch of different interests, majors, all sorts of stuff. Having that mixing pot of people, hearing their stories, hearing their experiences helped me to reflect on where I've come from and how those might be two different places but we're both here right now and what does that mean? How can you use that? I think those are probably the two biggest components of it that helped shape me and helped make me think through things and apply these different theories, these different tactics, these different things I've learned into who I am now.

Similarly, as Mycah described, communities helped participants to become who they are today:

I think when you join a community or when you experience certain events that helped you grow into who you are, those communities become a part of you. Your community as a student is going to shape your experience at [Hearthstone University], and with the communities that I chose like those are, I don't want to say actions, those are. I will just say experiences. Those are experience that make me who I am today.

Final Reflections

In this study, seven participants shared their personal stories about how their SoC grew from first entering college to becoming who they are today. Across all of their stories, a narrative developed that described the process in which the college union facilitated their growth towards a strong SoC to their

institution. This College Union Sense of Community Actualization Model depicts how the process began with the participants feeling challenged, sometimes overwhelmed. The college union, through creating a home-like feeling to help draw the participants into the facility, offered opportunities to connect with smaller sub-communities to shrink the campus. By encouraging and enhancing interactions among these sub-communities through architectural designs, the college union helped to build community at a localized level. Through iconic physical features and providing opportunities for legacy experiences, the college union cultivated lasting memories for the students. The college union combined this strategy with creating and nurturing a student-centered culture through symbols, artifacts, and images along with supportive, positive, and encouraging interactions with administrators and peers. These strategies helped to form deep connections and strong bonds for the participants, culminating into a SoC actualization in which the participants had a sense of belonging, made a difference, had their own needs met, and experienced shared emotional connections with others at the institution.

Limitations

While conducting the research, four limitations may have influenced the data. Analytical procedures were used that are consistent with grounded theory, but with only seven participants and a single institution, the CU-SoC Actualization Model is a very preliminary way of visualizing the process of students developing SoC. Although the process was supported by the findings across all of these participants, the model is tentative and provides opportunities for further research to more deeply explore this phenomenon with a more diverse sample.

Second, due to the timing of the study and recruiting methods through the college union director as a gatekeeper, all of the participants were relatively active within their college union. All were either active in student organizations housed in the college union, employment in an office within the facility, or both. Through these experiences, all of the students described being connected to various college union administrators, which showed in the findings related to creating a student-centered culture. The selection of these students was consistent with the purposive strategy guiding the sampling process (Creswell, 2014). Still, the experiences of some students, most notably those who are not overly active in student organizations or campus employment, are not reflected in this study and the findings would very likely be different if the interviews included participants who were not active in union activities.

Third, the initial purpose of this study was to explore the role of both the physical and organizational environments of the college union on students' SoC development, but the photo-elicitation methods and interview protocol used did not generate sufficient data to explicate the role of the organizational environment. Compounded by the discovery that none of the students were keenly aware of the organizational structure, nor many policies and procedures of the college union, it was more

difficult than I had originally hoped to answer the secondary research question focused on the organizational environment.

Finally, although SoC has shown to be context specific (Hill, 1996; Warner & Dixon, 2011), as much as the interview protocol attempted to keep the majority of conversations focused on the college union, all of the participants referenced at several times to other campus and student life experiences. True to narrative inquiry, people are always in the middle of their stories, which are influenced by all previous experiences, not just those in the college union (Clandinin, 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that the students were unable, nor should they have been able, to fully separate their college union experiences from other experiences. Still, the limitation of this phenomenon is that the findings reflect other influences and are thus not solely representative of the role of the college union in developing SoC toward the institution.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Institutions of higher education are interested in identifying ways to improve student success and persistence (Kuh et al., 2008; Malandra, 2005). Sense of community (SoC) is one influential method for accomplishing this goal (Cheng, 2004; Harris, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989) and past research has shown SoC development is context specific (Hill, 1996; Warner & Dixon, 2011). Barrett (2014) has provided evidence that the college union is one of the most influential facilities in fostering students' SoC to the institution. This study sought out to identify more specifically how SoC develops, asking the primary research question: What role does the college union play in developing SoC? In particular, guided by the campus ecology framework (Strange & Banning, 2015), this study explored the physical, organizational, and other environmental elements that influence SoC development.

While investigating these environmental features, the data in this study revealed an emergent model for students' SoC development that aligns with and expands upon prior literature. Through physical and organizational strategies, the college union advanced SoC development, contributing to an emergent College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model. This chapter discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical framework (Strange & Banning, 2015) and prior literature on SoC, student development, college unions, the travel and hospitality industry, and architecture. I conclude by offering implications for future practice, research, and policy.

Relationship of Findings to Prior Research

The major findings of this study, the emergent CU-SoC Actualization Model, directly align with Strange and Banning's (2015) hierarchy of environmental design, and further elaborate specifically on their model's engagement tier. The hierarchy of environmental design presents the conditions necessary for developing a learning community. In their model, the basic needs of providing an inclusive, safe, and secure environment must be met before students can progress towards more fulfilling educational experiences. Once the institution establishes these conditions, students are able to participate and engage in educationally purposeful experiences, taking on meaningful roles and responsibilities. As a final step, "goals, structures, values, people, and resources come together in a seamless experience for purposes of self-actualization and fulfillment" towards building communities of learning (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 141).



Figure 12. Strange and Banning’s Hierarchy of Environmental Design (2015).

In answering this study’s primary research question, the role of the college union in developing students SoC is described through a series of stages and specific environmental strategies that advance the process (Figure 2). The college union creating a home-like feeling facilitates students’ developmental process of forming SoC. The college union’s physical features help to create an environment of inclusion and safety. The stages of sub-communities shrink the campus, localized community building, and deep connections and strong bonds collectively describe in greater detail how students’ progress through Strange and Banning’s (2015) engagement tier. Finally, similar in both models, students who experience all of these elements together realize a SoC actualization towards their institution.

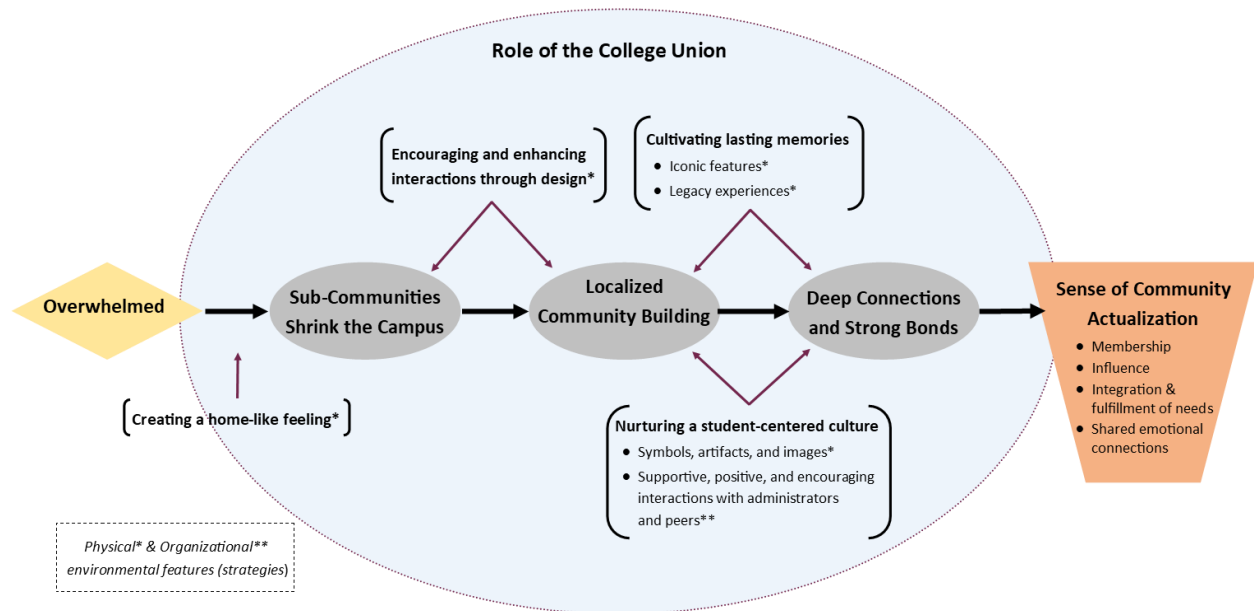


Figure 13. The College Union Sense of Community (CU-SoC) Actualization Model.

Sense of Community Actualization Stages

Table 1 describes each of the stages within the CU-SoC Actualization Model that students in this study experienced while developing SoC. Similar to Harrington’s (2014) study, as participants in this study developed feelings of physical and psychological safety, they sought out other “opportunities to

engage in campus activities. Once engaged and actively participating...full campus community membership developed” (p. 79). The next sections compare these stages to current literature.

Table 1. Sense of Community (SoC) Actualization Emergent Process: Stages and Descriptors.

Overwhelmed	The institution initially was challenging for students to navigate, even to the level of being intimidating and overwhelming by the size, with so many options of things to do and opportunities to get involved in, all in addition to acclimating to college-level academics.
Sub-Communities Shrink the Campus	Finding one or several, smaller sub-communities was the first step to shrinking the campus to a more manageable experience.
Localized Community Building	Sub-communities provided many community-building elements such as helping students to navigate the campus, providing encouragement to seek out opportunities, building trust and peer support, growing their personal networks, and opening up other sub-communities. SoC first developed at these smaller levels through a conglomeration of multiple experiences engaged with others in which the students felt supported and cared about.
Deep Connections & Strong Bonds	Over time, students felt more comfortable with and deeper connections within these sub-communities. They were then slowly able to engage with the institution at a larger scale and through their own voices. Students took on and embraced leadership positions, made more connections with administrators, and became active in planning events. These activities led students to make influential contributions to the institution, leaving their legacy mark.
Sense of Community Actualization	Students developed into who they were through their college union experiences, which they then associated with the institution as a whole. When these experiences were positive, with strong emotional responses and lasting memories, this ultimately evolved into a strong SoC toward the institution itself (actualization).

Overwhelmed. The concept of being initially challenged and even overwhelmed emerged in this study as the first stage of students’ SoC actualization development. Although this study site was a large research institution, which may have compounded students’ feelings, this finding is supported by previous literature. Researchers have extensively studied the transition period to college for students. Students have expressed feelings of disorientation and stress on their first days of school (Dias & Sá, 2014). Soares referred to this as the “early fog...when someone is exposed to a large number of stimuli, he/she does not get to...find, through an activity, an adequate and personal means of expression” (as cited in Dias & Sá, 2014, p. 295). If prolonged, this stress can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety (Petruzzello & Motle, 2006).

Students’ transitions to college represent the convergence of several critical stressors, including “academic demands, financial responsibilities, social activities, new ideas and temptations, and changes in relations with friends and family members” (Petruzzello & Motle, 2006, p. 41). Together, these stressors strain students’ well-being. Students who face a multiplicity of simultaneous changes and demands become temporarily overwhelmed. Without regular sources of support such as familiar family and friends, students rely on avoidance coping, removing themselves from their multiple stressors to minimize

emotional overload (Gall, Terry, Evan, & Bellerose, 2000). It is the institution's responsibility to help students in having realistic expectations of what their academic life will be like and to provide opportunities to relieve their feelings of isolation (Beyer, Davis-Unger, Elworth, Lowell, & Mcghee, 2015). One manner of doing so is facilitating the process for students to find sub-communities.

Sub-communities shrink the campus. In this study, many participants described ways they were able to make sense of their campus by connecting with a smaller sub-community around a similar interest or value they held. They found solace in being with peers who had experienced the same feelings and struggles. Prior research indicates this outlet is a common method for helping students acclimate to their new campus. Developing a smaller social support network and establishing positive peer relationships are both vital in students' transitions to college (Buote et al., 2007; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Meeting other students with common classes and personal interests allows students to create a small circle of friends who they see on a regular basis. In turn, this offers organized social opportunities, creating a feeling of comfort at a large institution (Cheng, 2004; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The size of the students' support network and their levels of satisfaction with these smaller circles of friends are important resources for students to adjust to their new surroundings over time and decrease mental health challenges in the short and long-term (Gall, et al., 2000).

Findings indicated that for these participants, the college union played a role in helping students to form sub-communities to shrink the campus. Prior research on college unions and other student affairs functional areas supports this finding. Indeed, co-curricular experiences play an essential role in fostering opportunities for sub-communities to form and for students to find outlets that they can connect with on a personal level. Out of class activities such as student organizations, campus employment positions, and peer-led social support programs bring groups together, promote community development, and help students make meaning of community among students with common interests (Lane & Perozzi, 2014; Mattanah et al., 2010; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Smyth, 2016). Prior research indicated that college union professionals "play a critical role in connecting students to their campus experience and helping them sort through the myriad options, choices, and decisions" (Lane & Perozzi, 2014, p. 31). Another study found that the college union can serve as a community center, promoting connections by increasing the visibility of student organizations, offering student employment opportunities, and extending opportunities for interactions to occur in lounges and over meals in dining facilities (Tierno, 2013). Overall, findings from this study confirmed prior research about student sub-communities and the role of student affairs and college unions.

Localized community building. Beyond helping students to navigate their initial transitions into college, sub-communities offered a multitude of long-term support resources. Students in the study identified several benefits they personally gained through their smaller group connections, including trust

and peer support, introductions to other networks and sub-communities, being a voice of guidance during challenging times, and providing encouragement and motivation to take on leadership positions both within the group and beyond. The current literature indicates similar findings that campus involvement plays a powerful role in students feeling included and cared about that help lead to increased leadership and personal development (Buote et al., 2007; Harrington, 2014). Smaller, intimate and caring relationships can be the most critical factors in providing friendship, support, affection, comradery, motivation, love, and wisdom (Harris, 2007). Additionally, the emotional support from sub-communities is especially important for students' mental health and identity exploration (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2013). Findings in this study and those in prior research indicate that students who first develop SoC within sub-communities acquire a foundation of resources, skills, and support networks necessary for their progression towards full SoC actualization to their institution.

Deep connections and strong bonds. For participants in this study, the sub-communities they formed became and remained their local “families,” playing a central role in their development as a whole person. Reaching this level of comfort with a sub-community takes considerable time and requires students to have numerous experiences together. Prior research indicates that frequent time spent engaged in meaningful interactions among peers creates a culture that builds and strengthens relationships, reinforces student perceptions within the group, and develops lasting communities (Harrington, 2014; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Schussler & Fierros, 2008).

Findings from this study suggested that with established sub-communities providing a backbone for support and guidance, participants were able to become involved on campus, either through these groups or beyond. Similarly, as Rullman & Kieboom (2012) identified, “individuals can find places of personal refuge before moving into larger group settings and spaces. This scaling of space allows individuals to move from safer and more personal space to larger and more civic space as comfort increases” (p. 19). Participants in this study took on higher-level leadership roles, participated in planning campus events, served as mentors to other students, managers at their campus jobs, and connected with administrators who sought student input and involvement in institutional-level endeavors. These experiences allowed the participants to make influential contributions to their institution. Prior studies support the finding that the more involved students become, the more likely they are to learn campus history and traditions and to become productive contributors to the campus. These experiences all contribute to greater SoC development toward the institution and a wider understanding of the larger society (Brazzell & Reisser, 1999; Elkins et al., 2011).

When the participants in this study became comfortable with who they are, experienced deep learning, and made meaningful contributions, they developed a SoC to the institution and became better prepared to be successful in the workforce after graduation. Several factors from previous literature that

align with this study's findings have shown to improve a graduate's workforce engagement. Examples include having a mentor that encourages the student to pursue their goals, working on a project that takes a semester or longer to complete, having an internship or job that allows them to apply classroom lessons, and being active in extracurricular activities and organizations (Gallup & Purdue University, 2014). These examples of active engagement between the students and the institution stresses the importance of how students develop deep connections and strong bonds with others across their communities.

Sense of community actualization. Findings suggested that participants' SoC developed over time and through a variety of experiences. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that no single experience defines a person's connection to their surroundings, but it is instead the total configuration of the environment (Bitner, 1992). Individual experiences play different roles in developing students' SoC, or "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). For the students in this study, their unique stories all told of some level of challenges, finding connections to smaller sub-communities, and having positive experiences with strong emotional responses that led to deeper connections to the institution as a whole.

The students' stories highlighted how sub-communities led them away from feeling overwhelmed, demonstrating how the SoC element of membership (i.e., a feeling of belonging and identification) is a key component of SoC actualization. Belonging and emotional safety led to students' self-investment in the group as a whole (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Localized community building is an example of the SoC element of integration and fulfillment of needs, in which the resources and support individuals receive as members of the group provided personal advantages. This further reinforced the individual-group associations, allowing for students to become deeply entrenched in their sub-communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Localized community building combined with deep connections and strong bonds together provide examples of the SoC element of shared emotional connections, in which members share history, common places, time, and experiences together. The more time they spent together, the more likely students and those they engaged with became close. The more important and positive their experiences were, the stronger the bonds were between the members. This finding aligns with the SoC element in which shared emotional connections are defined by the amount of direct contact and high-quality interactions (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Finally, the deep connections and strong bonds that led to higher-levels of campus involvement and contribution among the participants exemplifies the SoC element of influence. Members are far more connected with a community in which they matter and feel they are influential, creating senses of satisfaction, cohesion, and ownership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986),

all of which the students in this study described feeling toward their institution. These stages and SoC elements, when taken together, exemplify how students develop SoC through their collegiate careers. The SoC actualization process described answers the primary research question. The college union can advance this process through specific environmental strategies, which answers the secondary research questions in this study.

Role of College Union Environments in Advancing Sense of Community

The emergent process identified in this study of developing SoC is deeply connected to social interactions between students and their peers, campus administrators, and other people. As prior research has illustrated, campus facilities such as the college union provide the environmental conditions for social and intellectual encounters (Rouzer et al., 2014). One goal of college educators is “to understand and design environments that will maximize student learning” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 4). In keeping with this goal, the secondary research questions guiding this study (i.e., those exploring the roles of the college union’s physical, organizational and other environments in developing students’ SoC), four themes emerged that crossed over these environments. The following sections and Table 2 describe the physical and organizational environmental themes that act as strategies that advanced the process within the CU-SoC Actualization Model.

First, although several of the students’ stories made mention of other environmental features, none manifested into universal themes that would sufficiently answer what other college union environments influenced SoC development. For example, although some participants referred to diversity across campus, their stories involved more about feeling welcomed by the institution, rather than how specific demographics directly influenced their experiences. If the latter had manifested, it would have been an example of Strange and Banning's (2015) human aggregates dimension of the campus environment.

Creating a home-like feeling. The students in this study universally described how elements of the college union created an atmosphere that reminded them of the positive aspects of their own homes and attracted them to the facility on a regular basis. This finding supports two recent college union studies in which students described the facility with the same concepts of home, inclusiveness, and warmth that could not be found elsewhere on campus (Smyth, 2016) and as a place that fosters belonging as their “home away from home” (Maxwell, 2016, p. 97).

These home-like connections established feelings of safety and inclusion necessary for students to develop initial connections to the institution. This finding is supported by prior research (Cheng, 2005; Strange & Banning, 2015). When successful at creating feelings of safety and inclusion, the college union becomes “an equalizer. All students belong here; commuter, resident, traditional and non-traditional aged, veterans, LGBTQ, diverse populations, activities and pacifists, as well as may other

segments of the community population" (Tierno, 2013, p. 85). These are critical in the fulfillment of needs necessary for SoC development (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Table 2. College Union Physical and Organizational Environmental Strategies and Descriptors.

<p>Creating a home-like feeling</p>	<p>The college union’s architectural designs, furniture selections and layout, and ambiance all aid in drawing the students into the facility. These physical features generate positive beliefs and emotions that create an atmosphere of comfort, welcome, and safety often equated with their own homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural light • Open spaces • Carpeting, fireplaces, soft furniture, and other warm features • Comfortable ambiance
<p>Encouraging and enhancing interaction through design</p>	<p>Community is built through social connections with peers, administrators, alumni and other people across the campus. Physical features such as architectural designs and the arrangement of furniture can encourage and enhance the ability for these interactions to occur. Interactions can be intimate between a small group of students, or can be energizing through large gatherings. The more often students connect with others and the deeper these connections become over time, the stronger their SoC to the sub-communities and ultimately to the institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open spaces for large programming • Balance between furniture and open space • Flexible furniture arrangements and facing each other • Glass and other transparency features
<p>Cultivating lasting memories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iconic features • Legacy experiences 	<p>Lasting memories help deepen the connections and bonds within sub-communities and aid students in broadening their reach to the institution as a whole. Meaningful and well-known symbols serve as iconic features: recognizable grounding points for students to connect with the college union and the institution. Legacy experiences, those through which students are a part of making significant and positive contributions, elicit strong and lasting emotions and deeper connections to the institution through their impact, in which students feel they have left their mark.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus branding • Symbolic physical structures • Campus traditions
<p>Nurturing a student-centered culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbols, artifacts, and images • Supportive, positive, and encouraging interactions 	<p>Students feel a sense of belonging and that their needs are met through both visual representations and social engagements. Symbols, artifacts, and images highlighting that the facility is student-centered and students are respected. These display students and their diversity so that each student can visually see the campus administration recognizes each student's identity and that they matter. Supportive, positive, and encouraging interactions with administrators and peers enables students to face and overcome challenges, providing opportunities to learn and grow as individuals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student art • Quality and professional furnishings, fixtures, and equipment • Embracing diversity through artifacts • Administrative care and support

The participants identified specific physical features that prompted their home-like feelings, including the natural light; open spaces; warm features such as carpeting, fireplaces and soft furniture;

and the relaxed ambiance. Other studies have indicated that similar designs help establish the college union as the main street for campus, inviting active participation. Elements such as inviting exterior and interior entrances, natural light, open floor plans, a clean and well-maintained facility (Smyth, 2016), furniture with soothing textures and great warmth (Painter et al., 2013), and ambient conditions such as those from music playing, temperature, and color (Bitner, 1992) all help the college union to be favored as a “sticky space” for students (Janisz, 2014). These features create a space that is inviting and safe for all members of the campus community (Lane & Perozzi, 2014) and establish the college union as a third place where students spend their time other than class and their residences (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982).

Encouraging and enhancing interaction through design. Recognizing that SoC is associated with social connections (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), having physical features that encouraged and enhanced these interactions was another way the college union supported SoC development in this study. Physical features supported participants first in finding sub-communities and then in fostering opportunities for localized community building within those groups through spending time together. Several participants described meeting people and having conversations for the first time just because they were standing next to each other enjoying the same event. Other students shared they would come to the college union knowing they would bump into one or several of their friends because it was a regular hang-out spot.

These findings support and expand on prior literature. Jamieson (2003) noted that brick and mortar universities “need spaces designed to generate interaction, collaboration, physical movement and social engagement as primary elements of the student learning experience” (p. 121). Interactions can be intimate, between just two or a few people, or much more grandiose with dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people for students to connect. Further, studies of formal and informal learning environments identified similar physical features that fostered peer-to-peer interaction and student collaboration, including layouts in round formats, easily movable and comfortable furniture, natural light, and spacious rooms (Painter et al., 2013). Yet, Smyth (2016) found that open spaces alone are not enough; college unions must facilitate varied and exciting programs within those spaces to provide opportunities for serendipitous connections.

Participants shared that encouraging movement throughout the space was essential so that they did not feel confined. This required a balance of enough furniture for functional use with the open space for flow. Several participants took photographs of lounge furniture in which chairs were facing each other and of meeting rooms with table layouts in various round shapes. Students shared these were preferential places to be with friends and fellow student organization members over solo chairs and traditional classroom-style layouts. Prior literature supports that it is vital to pay attention to the spatial layout and functionality of a space to account for flow among the occupants (Bitner, 1992; Whyte, 1980).

Round layouts, which may also be rectangular, lozenge, or octagonal in shape also increase cooperative experiences (Painter et al., 2013). Students experience spaces differently and having a variety of options to meet all of their needs is important for the college union to encourage and enhance the interaction (Jamieson, 2003; Painter et al., 2013). All of these experiences, social in nature, add to enhancing shared emotional connections that foster SoC development (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Cultivating lasting memories. One of the ways the college union facilitated localized community building, and fostering deep connections and strong bonds in this study was by cultivating lasting memories that students expected to hang onto for years to come. Research from the hospitality and tourism industry aligned with this finding and serves as a prime indicator on the importance of sense of place, experiences, positive emotions, and memories on customer loyalty. Similar to the effects of SoC toward an institution, customer loyalty within the hospitality and tourism industry links positive experiences to emotional connections and repeat visits (Cole & Illum, 2006; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). As an example, theme park experiences stimulate guests' emotions, giving meaning to those situations. Positive experiences lead to vivid and enduring memories connected to visual, auditory, and olfactory sensory perceptions (Manthiou, Kang, Chiang, & Tang, 2016). People memorize information according to the sensory effects from their experiences (Smith, Siderelis, & Moore, 2010) and by creating unique and special experiences that stimulate these senses, lifelong memories can turn one-time visitors into loyal lifetime guests (Manthiou, Lee, Tang, & Chiang, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Students attending higher education institutions may experience similar transformational situations. The emotional power of physical spaces and the meaning students make from experiences in those spaces lead to long-term satisfaction, long-lasting memories, and institutional loyalty (Broussard, 2009, as cited in Harrington, 2014). The college union is a place that stimulates strong memories for students, alumni, and other community members (Tierno, 2013). In this study, two components of the physical environment emerged as influential to students' SoC development: iconic features and legacy experiences.

Iconic features. One manner in which the college union created lasting memories was through physical grounding points that participants recognized and were attracted to, equating those features with their positive experiences at the institution. All of the participants spoke of the campus pride they felt, and that the college union displaying branding elements such as school colors, logos, and other symbols associated with the campus brand, heightened that pride when inside the facility. They remarked how these markings were throughout the facility, which was representative of just how deep school spirit ran at their institution. Prior research has revealed similar findings that several spaces around the campus act as sources of pride for the students, including the college union (Harrington, 2014; Maxwell, 2016; Smyth, 2016).

Similar to branding, symbolic physical structures, typically grander in scale, that participants could easily reference and remember as notable elements of the college union served as other iconic features. Six of the students' stories and/or images incorporated these types of structures, including the grand staircase with the values imprinted along the steps, the school song etched along the wall, and the life-size school mascot that each of them have taken pictures with. Their stories did not simply point out existence of these structures; participants also spoke to the personal meaning of, connections to, and interactions with these features throughout their collegiate careers. These iconic features represented community to the students, creating a personal sense of place at their college union. Supporting prior literature, these findings suggest that college unions can facilitate an enduring sense of place that develops and strengthens over time through multiple interactions with the physical setting, evolving into deeper community connections (Maxwell, 2016; Okoli, 2013). Through their individual interactions with all of these iconic features, all of the participants described how they felt shared emotional connections to their fellow students and other community members at the institution (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Legacy experiences. The second way the college union cultivated lasting memories for students was through opportunities to make significant and positive contributions to the institution. Participants often spoke of the importance in leaving their mark, one that will last for years to come, if nothing else but in their own memories. Several of the students described speaking to alumni who told stories of their own about their collegiate experiences, remembering times when they made a difference. The students highlighted how being able to tell similar stories as alumni was important to them, that their time at the institution had impacts larger than themselves. As prior research has suggested, the importance of the physical environment is not just in how it is designed, but also in how that space is used by people to create experiences (Strange & Banning, 2015), and ones that showcase how they matter to the community as a whole (Schlossberg, 1989).

Students in this study all shared memories of being involved in multiple campus traditions that took place in the college union, either as planners or as active participants. As the students described, campus traditions span the institutional time-line, bringing together generations of students and alumni through shared stories of their own around the same event. Prior research supports that community building is promoted through the programs hosted by members in the college union, which enhances the welcoming and inclusivity of the space (Maxwell, 2016). Leadership opportunities, in which the students have a sense of purpose, ownership, and responsibility through their actions, further heighten SoC development (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Knell and Latta (2006) emphasize how campus traditions positively contribute to the college union's physical and programmatic atmosphere.

Beyond activities and events, several students shared stories of making a difference within their sub-communities, such as being mentors within their student organizations, or managers at their campus

jobs. These opportunities allowed for relationships in which they were vitally important to their peers and campus administrators, giving back to the campus in ways bigger than themselves. This finding illustrates another aspect of “mattering,” in which a person’s behavior is influenced by dependence on others and feelings of being appreciated for their contributions (Schlossberg, 1989), which in turn play a role in the student having influence within their community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Collectively, iconic features and legacy experiences create opportunities for students to cultivate lasting memories of their collegiate experiences, building SoC to the college union as well as to the institution through deep connections and strong bonds.

Nurturing a student-centered culture. The final environmental theme identified in this study focused on the college union nurturing a student-centered culture. Students felt a sense of belonging and that their needs were being met through both visual representations within the college union and social engagements with others. These findings align with previous research by Smyth (2016), who found that the college union provides opportunities for students to see themselves throughout the building and offers programs and services designed to engage students outside the classroom, actively practicing skills learned both formally and informally. When the campus climate includes a culture where students feel they belong and that their opinions and voices are important to the institution, they can comfortably interact with others (Lang & Lowell, 2006). Nurturing a student-centered culture is another way the college union facilitates localized community building and deep connections and strong bonds, by helping students experience direct membership at the institution (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This theme encompassed both the physical and organizational environments, answering two of the study’s secondary research questions.

Symbols, artifacts, and images. These physical features highlighted through visual representation that the college union was student-centered and that participants’ diversity and identities were truly embraced at the institution. As prior literature suggests, physical environments can be functional and symbolic, including “many components such as pathways, parking lots, activity fields, statuary, artwork, and buildings, which all present myriad designs that vary in size, color, and arrangement. It is the transactional (or mutually influential) relationship between these elements in the setting that shapes behavior” (Strange & Banning, 2015, p. 18). Signs and artifacts serve as both explicit communicators (e.g., wayfinding and rules) and symbolic communicators (e.g., artwork, quality floor coverings, and historical institutional objects) (Bitner, 1992). Artifacts, or the lack thereof, define the setting’s climate, serving as powerful non-verbal communicators that students either belong or do not belong (Banning et al., 2008).

Students identified several physical features that encompassed this sub-theme and which are supported by prior research. Displaying student art throughout the college union helped students to

connect with the facility. Knowing that their peers' work was showcased signified to students that the creativity and talents of the student community were valued. Having high quality furnishings, fixtures, and equipment throughout the college union (e.g., lounge furniture, state-of-the-art technology in the meeting rooms, and high-end chairs and tables in some conference rooms) sent the students messages that their success was important and the administration was willing to spend financial resources so students would feel a sense of professionalism in their work. A final concept the students brought up was the clear message that student diversity and inclusivity was important to the administration. Examples included having the multicultural center on the first floor next to a main entrance, offering an interfaith and prayer room, and encouraging multicultural events to be out in the open of the center courtyard.

Prior literature indicates that incorporating students' artwork in facility design increases their sense of ownership to the institution (Killeen et al., 2003). The intentionality and quality of physical designs directly influence students' SoC, especially when resources are distributed to areas the students agree are important to their success (Banning et al., 2008; Magnarella, 1979; Warner & Dixon, 2011). Further, physical environments that support authentic cultural behaviors contribute to a student's sense of belonging. As Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) argued, "support of diverse cultural and religious groups on college campuses has the potential to encourage individual students to develop fully as young adults belonging to multiple communities simultaneously and...to broader communities such as the universities and societies" (p. 27). Physical features of the college union serve as powerful symbols, giving meaning to students and their experiences with the institution.

Supportive, positive, and encouraging interactions with administrators and peers. Although the participants struggled to identify any specific organizational structures, policies, or procedures that directly influenced their SoC development, they all spoke extensively about the organizational culture embedded throughout the college union. This aligns with Bolman & Deal's (2008) symbolic frame in which organizational values are vividly apparent. The participants regularly used words such as "caring," "kindness," and "smiling" to describe the atmosphere the college union administrators and their peers created throughout the facility. Similarly to these findings, Knell and Latta (2006) describe that a caring community is the "glue" that makes all of the principles of SoC work together, "where every individual feels affirmed and where every activity of the community is humane" (p. 30). The creation of a caring and supportive environment is the essential component of developing a student's membership, sense of belonging, within their community. Having positive and encouraging relationships with other community members (O'Keeffe, 2013).

The two primary groups participants identified as having the most influence on their SoC development were campus administrators and their own peers. Stories included examples about how campus advisors and supervisors embraced an open-door policy, being readily accessible to the students,

and eager to engage in dialogues about any topics the students brought up. Several participants expressed how the “smiling faces” of the office staff would always brighten up their days and help them know they were welcome and appreciated in the college union. Other examples described how it was only through their advisor’s encouragements that the students took risks to try new experiences and take on additional leadership roles, which later became core memories of their collegiate experiences. Some of the students, especially the two alumni, spoke about how many campus administrators had become close friends that they hoped they would remain connected to for many years. Previous studies support these findings that having administrators who care about and value their students as individuals, showing authentic interest in their life stories, and being a foundation for support are key elements of SoC development (Berger, 2001; Cheng, 2004; Gallup & Purdue University, 2014; Janisz, 2014; Warner & Dixon, 2011).

Since many of the participants descriptions about their connections to the college union included active participation in student organizations and jobs in one of the offices housed in the facility, the students shared typical feelings of being deeply connected to their peers through those outlets. Stories included memories of event planning campus events together, late night meetings that often turned into philosophical and life discussions, and turning towards each other for emotional support during challenging personal and academic times. This finding supports previous literature. Peer group support is an important outlet for academic work and providing a positive social network (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). These peer networks become a pseudo-family for the students, that play major contributing factors in student success and persistence (Catharine Beyer, et al., 2014). Students turn to peers who are going through similar experiences for emotional empathy that they feel others may not be able to understand (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Support and encouragement from both administrators and peers established a vital organizational environment that allowed SoC to develop among the participants. Combined with the physical environment that included symbols, artifacts, and images displaying and embracing the student body of the institution, the college union developed a student-centered culture that advanced the CU-SoC Actualization Model.

Implications of the Study

Findings from this study have several implications for future practice, research, and policy. Higher education professionals can use these findings to develop methods for students to connect with sub-communities, in designing facilities that create safe and welcoming environments for attracting students, and as an assessment tool in evaluating how their own facilities facilitate SoC development. Future researchers could study SoC development at other institutional types and through quantitative methods to expand generalizability; explore implications of and manners for developing a home-like feeling within campus facilities; and examine the effects of policies and procedures on SoC development. Finally, this study’s findings stress the importance of evaluating policies and procedures on student

organization space and event-planning processes, emphasize creating a student-centered culture, and provide guidance for developing and reviewing best practices and standards for college union programs.

Implications for Practice

Just a few years ago, research on college unions was very limited (DeSawal & Yakaboski, 2013). As a result ACUI has made it a priority to develop and disseminate knowledge that directly supports the efforts of the college union and student activities profession (ACUI, 2017a). This study adds to the growing body of knowledge about the college union and offers recommendations for others throughout student affairs and beyond.

The CU-SoC Actualization Model emphasizes the importance of connecting students to sub-communities early in their transition to college. Especially on large campuses where connecting to every student individually is extremely challenging, members of the sub-communities can serve as ambassadors for the institution as a whole, helping new members to feel welcome and supported. Higher education professionals should develop new methods and strengthen existing methods for students to easily find sub-communities such as student organizations, resource support offices and community centers, and academic and social project groups. Professionals should work directly with these sub-communities to create the conditions necessary to support their members.

In order to help students navigate away from feeling overwhelmed, the college union and other campus facilities must first identify mechanisms for drawing students into the facility. Architects and higher education facility managers designing spaces should take special care to infuse artifacts, symbols, and images that students can connect with and realize they are welcome and valued as individuals at the institution. Creating a safe and welcoming environment through furniture and other warm features, having iconic emblems that make meaning to the student's experiences, and items such as hanging student artwork all help students feel comfortable, send the message that they belong and they matter, and help develop connections to the campus. Professionals should take care to infuse these physical features at a level in alignment with the institutional culture and not add too much.

This study can serve as a foundation for understanding how SoC develops and the specific types of strategies the college union can provide to advance that process. Institutions all offer their own unique features and therefore, short of conducting a full research study at their own institution, higher education professionals could use the interview protocol as an assessment tool for their own college unions and other campus facilities to understand the role those spaces play in building a wider range students' SoC to their institution. The more professionals can understand the impact of space on student's experiences, the better equipped they will be to provide the necessary facilities, programs, and services to serve their campus community.

Implications for Research

This study used a qualitative methodology at one large, public, high research institution, which does not support generalizing the findings. As shown above, the findings described through the emergent CU-SoC Actualization Model could have powerful implications on higher education practice if shown to be accurate in multiple settings. Recommendations for future research can include evaluating whether the CU-SoC Actualization Model is applicable to other institutions by conducting this study at other institution types such as private institutions, smaller liberal arts institutions, and minority serving institutions (MSIs). Additionally, to test if the model could be generalizable across institution type, future researchers could conduct a larger and more comprehensive quantitative study. Researchers could identify existing data sets that may provide information that further explores this topic. Further, future studies could explore the role of the college union in the experiences of students who do not self-identify as having a high SoC to their institution.

The physical environment theme of creating a home-like feeling has direct links to ACUI's (2017b) role of the college union statement, which associates the space to a "living room." This study found connections of the college union creating this feeling important to student transitions. Future research could further explore this notion to see how in other ways the college union fosters a home-like feeling and how the facility can enhance this setting. The use of photo-elicitation methods in the study provided a simple manner for participants to clearly display physical features they most connect. This visual method greatly enhanced the interview-based study and should be used more commonly in future studies on campus facilities. For participants in this study, a home-like feeling was very positive; however, it is possible that creating this atmosphere could possibly inhibit SoC for students who may not have had positive home experiences. Additionally, future studies could explore this phenomenon across social class identities and geographical regions.

It was unfortunate that the students were not familiar with the college union's policies and procedures, which made answering the secondary research question regarding the organizational environment limiting. This was not surprising since as Godwin and Markham (1996) noted, students do not typically notice bureaucratic organizational behaviors unless these behaviors create a problem for them. Still, findings did indicate that the organizational environment does affect students SoC development, as seen through the student-centered culture and two participant comments that mentioned policies regarding student organization space. Future research could explore more directly the impacts of facility policies, procedures, and organizational structures on the student experience.

Implications for Policy

The findings indicate how important the use of the physical spaces is to some college students and their experiences who find value in the college union facilitating SoC development. Several

participant comments mentioned policies regarding the use of their student organization spaces and the event space reservation process. Professionals should evaluate their policies and procedures to ensure students who have access to office space are able to take full advantage of it. Policies and procedures should also make it easy for student organizations to plan events, and in ways that encourage events to happen in large open spaces where the entire campus community can attend and participate.

College union professionals should be intentional in creating a student-centered culture throughout the facility. Professionals should build this into mission and vision statements, identify this as a core value for the organization, and build in training and development opportunities to help staff bring this philosophy to life through action. The more a student-centered culture is embraced by staff members throughout the facility, the more likely the students will engage with the college union.

Findings from this and previous studies provide evidence about the importance of SoC development on students and institutions, and offer specific and sound pedagogical practices to aid in facilitating this process. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education facilitates the development and dissemination of student affairs, student services, and student development program standards. These standards span 45 functional areas, providing effective management practices for higher education professionals (CAS, 2017). During future college union and student activities CAS revision processes, professionals should consider incorporating these findings into future editions for all functional areas with facility oversight. Similarly, professionals conducting systematic reviews of functional areas should incorporate these findings into best practice expectations for facility managers in college unions and other student affairs areas.

Conclusion

While the original intention was to explore the physical and organizational environments of the college union on SoC development among college students, this study's findings revealed so much more. In direct alignment with and expanding upon the study's campus ecology framework (Strange & Banning, 2015), the study revealed in greater depth how SoC develops, as depicted through the CU-SoC Actualization Model. Findings suggested that, although not the only facility on campus that can facilitate this process, the college union can play a role in helping students navigate away from feeling overwhelmed by finding sub-communities to connect, building community at a localized level, and then venturing out to making larger institutional contributions with the support of campus administrators and peers. For participants in this study, the college union expedited this process through intentional physical and organizational environments that help students feel welcome, cared about, and valued as individuals. The entire process led students toward SoC actualization, which plays a critical role in their success as students and persistence to graduation, potentially generating life-long loyalty to the institution.

THE END



References

- ACUI. (2016). ACUIInfo Reporting (2003 - 2009). Retrieved July 23, 2016, from <http://legacy.acui.org/legacy/member/resources/acuinfo/reporting/reporting.cfm>
- ACUI. (2017a). Research agenda. Retrieved August 4, 2017, from <http://www.acui.org/research#agenda>
- ACUI. (2017b). Role of the college union. Retrieved April 1, 2017, from <http://acui.org/about/role-of-the-college-union>
- American Institutes for Research. (2010). *Finishing the first lap: The cost of first-year student attrition in America's four-year colleges and universities*. Retrieved from <http://www.air.org/resource/finishing-first-lap-cost-first-year-student-attrition-america-s-four-year-colleges-and>
- Arnold, A. (1999). *Retention and persistence in postsecondary education: A summation of research studies*. Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college?: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Azmitia, M., Syed, M., & Radmacher, K. (2013). Finding your niche: Identity and emotional support in emerging adults' adjustment to the transition to college. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 23(4), 744–761. <http://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12037>
- Banning, J. H., Clemons, S., McKelfresh, D., & Gibbs, R. W. (2010). Special places for students: Third place and restorative place. *College Student Journal*.
- Banning, J. H., & Kaiser, L. (1974). An ecological perspective and model for campus design. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 52(6), 370–375. <http://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1974.tb04043.x>
- Banning, J. H., Middleton, V., & Deniston, T. L. (2008). Using photographs to assess equity climate: A taxonomy. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 10(1), 41–46. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15210960701869611>
- Barrett, L. A. (2014). *The college union and a sense of community for students in public higher education: Is there a relationship?* St. John Fisher College.
- Battistich, V., & Hom, A. (1997). The relationship between students' sense of their school as a community and their involvement in problem behaviors. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87(12), 1997–2001. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9431290>
- Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a causal model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, 12(2), 155–187. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/stable/40195329?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Bean, J. P. (1990). Why students leave: Insights from research. In *The strategic management of college*

- enrollments* (pp. 147–169). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. <http://doi.org/10.1002/sem3.20085>
- Berger, J. B. (1997). Students' sense of community in residence halls, social integration, and first-year persistence. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38(5), 441–452.
- Berger, J. B. (2001). Understanding the organizational nature of student persistence: Empirically-based recommendations for practice. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3(1), 3–21.
- Berger, J. B., & Milem, J. F. (2000). Organizational behavior in higher education and student outcomes. In J. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 268–338). New York: Agathon.
- Berum, F. C., & Silva, C. (2014). A journey with a refugee family: Raising culturally relevant teaching awareness. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2014(140), 51–67.
<http://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20114>
- Beyer, C., Davis-Unger, A., Elworth, J., Lowell, N., & Mcghee, D. (2015). *Undergraduate student work life at the University of Washington*. Retrieved from
<http://depts.washington.edu/assessmt/pdfs/reports/OEARReport1506.pdf>
- Beyer, C., Davis-Unger, A., Lowell, N., Mcghee, D., & Peterson, J. (2014). *University of Washington undergraduate retention and graduation study*. Retrieved from
<http://depts.washington.edu/assessmt/pdfs/reports/OEARReport1401.pdf>
- Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: the impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(2), 57–71. <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Boessen, A., Hipp, J. R., Smith, E. J., Butts, C. T., Nagle, N. N., & Almquist, Z. (2014). Networks, space, and residents' perception of cohesion. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 53(3–4), 447–461. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9639-1>
- Bollen, K. A., & Hoyle, R. H. (1990). Perceived Cohesion: A conceptual and empirical examination. *Social Forces*, 69(2), 479–504.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Boren, D. (2008). The campus as hometown. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(27), A34. Retrieved from
http://ic.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/ic/bic1/MagazinesDetailsPage/MagazinesDetailsWindow?disableHighlighting=&displayGroupName=Magazines&currPage=&dviSelectedPage=&scanId=&query=&source=&prodId=&search_within_results=&p=BIC1&mode=view&catId=&u=viva_
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Campus life: in search of community*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Boyer, E. L., & Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (1987). *College: The*

- undergraduate experience in America*. Harper & Row.
- Braskamp, L. A., Trautvetter, L. C., & Ward, K. (2006). *Putting students first: How colleges develop students purposefully*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company.
- Braxton, J. M., & Brier, E. M. (1989). Melding organizational and interactional theories of student attrition: A path analytic study. *The Review of Higher Education*, 13(1), 47–61. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/1308044316?pq-origsite=summon>
- Brazzell, J. C., & Reisser, L. (1999). Creating inclusive communities. In G. S. Blimling & E. J. Whitt (Eds.), *Good practice in student affairs principles to foster student learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Breunig, M. C., O’Connell, T. S., Todd, S., Anderson, L., & Young, A. (2010). The impact of outdoor pursuits on college students’ perceived sense of community. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 42(4), 551–572.
- Brodsky, A. E., O’Campo, P. J., & Aronson, R. E. (1999). PSOC in community context: Multi-Level correlates of a measure of psychological sense of community in low-income, urban neighborhoods. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 259–279.
- Brown, S. K., & Burdsal, C. A. (2012). An exploration of sense of community and student success using the national survey of student engagement. *The Journal of General Education*, 61(4), 433–460. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jge.2012.0039>
- Buote, V., Pancer, S., Pratt, M., Adams, G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Maxine, G. (2007). The importance of friends. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22(6), 665–689. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0743558407306344>
- Butts, P. (1951). The state of the college union. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 22(2), 75–84.
- Butts, P. (Ed.). (1971). *The college union idea*. Bloomington, IN: Association of College Unions International.
- Butts, P., Beltramini, E., Conelly, P., Meyer, R., Mitchell, S., Smith, J., & Willis, T. J. (Eds.). (2012). *The college union idea* (2nd ed.). Stanford, CA: The Association of College Unions International.
- Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., & Castaneda, M. B. (1992). The role of finances in the persistence process: A structural model. *Research in Higher Education*, 33(5), 571–593. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/stable/40196079?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Cain, D., & Reynolds, G. L. (2006a). The impact of facilities on recruitment and retention of students - Part I. *Facilities Manager*, 22(3), 46–53.
- Cain, D., & Reynolds, G. L. (2006b). The impact of facilities on recruitment and retention of students - Part II. *Facilities Manager*, 22(2), 54–60.

- Caine, V., Estefan, A., & Clandinin, D. (2013). A return to methodological commitment: Reflections on narrative inquiry. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(November 2013), 1–13. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2013.798833>
- Computaro, J., Crabtree, D., & Chenard, K. (2011). The student union. In A. Brooks & A. L. Vorreyer (Eds.), *Student affairs for all seasons and reasons: Leading by example* (pp. 260–268). Columbus, OH: The Administrators' Bookshelf.
- CAS. (2017). About CAS. Retrieved November 6, 2017, from <http://www.cas.edu/>
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). The qualitative report preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 811–831. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>
- Center for Postsecondary Research. (2016). *Engagement insights: survey findings on the quality of undergraduate education (Annual results 2016)*. Bloomington, IN. Retrieved from http://nsse.indiana.edu/NSSE_2016_Results/pdf/NSSE_2016_Annual_Results.pdf#page=14
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Chavis, D. M., & Wandersman, A. (1990). Sense of community in the urban environment: A catalyst for participation and community development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 55–81. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/1295907605?pq-origsite=summon>
- Chen, J., & Hossler, D. (2017). The effects of financial aid on college success of two-year beginning nontraditional students. *Research in Higher Education*, 58(1), 40–76. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-016-9416-0>
- Chen, R. (2008). Financial aid and student dropout in higher education: A heterogeneous research approach. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 23, pp. 209–239). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Netherlands. Retrieved from https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-6959-8_7.pdf
- Chen, R. (2012). Institutional characteristics and college student dropout risks: A multilevel event history. *Research in Higher Education*, 53(53). <http://doi.org/10.1007/sl>
- Cheng, D. X. (2004). Students' sense of campus community: What it means, and what to do about it. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 41(2), 216–234. <http://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1331>
- Cheng, D. X. (2005). *Assessing students' perceptions of campus community: A focus group approach*.
- Cherryholmes, C. H. (1992). Notes on pragmatism and scientific realism. *Educational Researcher*, 21(6), 13–17. <http://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X021006013>
- Chipuer, H. M., & Pretty, G. M. H. (1999). A review of the sense of community index: Current uses,

- factor structure, reliability, and further development. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 643–658. [http://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199911\)27:6<643::AID-JCOP2>3.0.CO;2-B](http://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199911)27:6<643::AID-JCOP2>3.0.CO;2-B)
- Cicognani, E., Pirini, C., Keyes, C., Joshanloo, M., Rostami, R., & Nosratabadi, M. (2008). Social participation, sense of community and social well being: A study on American, Italian and Iranian university students. *Social Indicators Research*, 89(89). <http://doi.org/10.1007/s>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (in press). (2010). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed., pp. 436–441). Oxford, UK: Elsevier Ltd.
- Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Orr, A. M. (2009). Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 81–90. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00220670903323404>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (pp. 35–77). Thousand Oaks, CA: Publications, Sage. <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552>
- Close, H. (2007). The use of photography as a qualitative research tool. *Nurse Researcher*, 15(1), 27–36. <http://doi.org/10.7748/nr2007.10.15.1.27.c6052>
- Cole, S. T., & Illum, S. F. (2006). Examining the mediating role of festival visitors' satisfaction in. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(2). Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/195821801/fulltextPDF/EC73525BA6B74298PQ/1?accountid=14826>
- Commission on the Future of Higher Education. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U.S. higher education*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/pre-pub-report.pdf>
- Connelly, F.M. and Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In P. Green, J., Camilli, G, and Elmore (Ed.), *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (3rd ed., pp. 477–487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In P. Green, J., Camilli, G, and Elmore (Ed.), *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (3rd ed., pp. 477–487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Croghan, R., Griffin, C., Hunter, J., & Phoenix, A. (2008). Young people's constructions of self: Notes on the use and analysis of the photo-elicitation methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *11*(4), 345–356. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701605707>
- Davidson, W. B., & Cotter, P. R. (1991). The relationship between sense of community and subjective well-being: A first look. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *19*(3), 246–253. [http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(199107\)19:3<246::AID-JCOP2290190308>3.0.CO;2-L](http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199107)19:3<246::AID-JCOP2290190308>3.0.CO;2-L)
- Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *6*(2011), 80–88. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437186>
- DeSawal, D. M., & Yakaboski, T. (2013). Exploring 30 years of college union dissertations. *ACUI Bulletin*, *81*(15), 26–31. Retrieved from http://www.acui.org/Publications/The_Bulletin/2013/2013-09/21791/?exchId=/exchange/index.aspx?itemId=21791
- DeSawal, D. M., & Yakaboski, T. (2014). Preparing college unions for the future through assessment, evaluation, and research. *New Directions for Student Services*, (145), 91–98. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ss>
- Devlin, A. S., Donovan, S., Nicolov, A., Nold, O., & Zandan, G. (2008). Residence hall architecture and sense of community everything old is new again. *Environment and Behavior*, *40*(4), 487–521. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0013916507301128>
- Dias, D., & Sá, M. J. (2014). The impact of the transition to HE: Emotions, feelings and sensations. *European Journal of Education*, *49*(2), 291–303. <http://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12058>
- Dokecki, P. R. (1983). The place of values in the world of psychology and public policy. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *60*(3), 108–125. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1492184>
- Elkins, D. J., Forrester, S. A., & Noel-Elkins, A. V. (2011). Students' perceived sense of community: The influence of out-of-class experiences. *College Student Journal*, *45*(1), 105.
- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research Review of Educational Research Summer*, *59*(2), 117–142. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170412>
- Foley, K., Gallipoli, G., & Green, D. A. (2014). Ability, parental valuation of education, and the high school dropout decision. *Journal of Human Resources*, *49*(4), 906–944.
- French, S., Wood, L., Foster, S. A., Giles-Corti, B., Frank, L., & Learnihan, V. (2014). Sense of community and its association with the neighborhood built environment. *Environment and Behavior*, *46*(6), 677–697. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0013916512469098>
- Friedlander, L. J., Reid, G. J., Shupak, N., & Cribbie, R. (2007). Social support, self-esteem, and stress as predictors of adjustment to university among first-year undergraduates. *Journal of College Student*

- Development*, 48(3), 259–274. <http://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0024>
- Gall, Terry, L., Evan, D., & Bellerose, S. (2000). Transition to first-year university: Patterns of change in adjustment across life domains and time. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19(4), 544–567. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/1292187010/fulltextPDF/F73E172C0724D3APQ/1?accountid=14826>
- Gallup, & Purdue University. (2014). *Great jobs great lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue index report*. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/gallupurdueindex-report-2014.pdf>
- Gardner, J. (1996). Building community. *Community Education Journal*, 23(3), 6–9. Retrieved from http://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&gathStatTab=true&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_ericEJ538724&indx=1&recIds=TN_ericEJ538724&recIdxs=0&elementId=0&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrV
- Godwin, G. J., & Markham, W. T. (1996). First encounters of the bureaucratic kind: Early freshman experiences with a campus bureaucracy. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 67(6), 660. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2943816>
- Goin, P. (2001). Visual literacy. *Geographical Review*, 91(1/2), 363. <http://doi.org/10.2307/3250838>
- Goodenow, C. (1993a). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13(1), 21–43. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0272431693013001002>
- Goodenow, C. (1993b). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, 30, 79–90.
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(621), 60–71. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20152398>
- Hamrick, F. A., Evans, N. J., & Schuh, J. H. (2002). *Foundations of student affairs practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Harper, D. (1988). Visual sociology: Expanding sociological vision. *The American Sociologist*, 19(1), 54–70. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF02692374>
- Harrell, K. (2012). *Green student ceters' influence on the campus environment*. Old Dominion University.
- Harrington, C. E., & Schibik, T. J. (2003). Reflexive photography as an alternative method for the study of the freshman year experience. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 41(1), 37–41.

<http://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1303>

- Harrington, K. D. (2014). *Community on campus: The role of physical space*. Georgia State University.
- Harris, B. A. (2007). The importance of creating a “sense of community.” *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1), 83–105.
- Hatton, D., Farley, C., & Costa, C. (2013). Timeless elements of union design. *The Bulletin*, 81(1), 36–43.
- Hatton, D., Farley, C. E., Cook, J., & Porter, D. (2009). Trends: How demographics, technology, and sustainability are shaping future college unions. *The Bulletin*, 77(3), 14–22.
- Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among african american and white first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(7), 803–839.
- Heisserer, D. L., & Parette, P. (2002). Advising at-risk students in college and university settings. *College Student Journal*, 36(1), 69–83. Retrieved from http://su8bj7jh4j.search.serialssolutions.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info%3Aofi%2Fenc%3AUTF-8&rft_id=info%3Aid%2Fsummon.serialssolutions.com&rft_val_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Ajournal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=Advising
- Henry, S. K. (2012). On social connection in university life. *About Campus*, 16(6), 18–24. <http://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20083>
- Hill, J. L. (1996). Psychological sense of community: Suggestions for future research. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 431–438. [http://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199610\)24:4<431::AID-JCOP10>3.0.CO;2-T](http://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199610)24:4<431::AID-JCOP10>3.0.CO;2-T)
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2003). Investigating sense of belonging in first year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(3), 227–256.
- Holley, K. A., & Colyar, J. (2009). Rethinking texts: Narrative and the construction of qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*, 38(9), 680–686. <http://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09351979>
- Hotchkins, B. K., & Dancy, T. E. (2015). Black male student leaders in predominantly white universities: Stories of power, preservation, and persistence. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 39(1), 30–44.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on latino college students’ sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324–345.
- Inkelas, K. K., & Weisman, J. L. (2003). Different by design: An examination of student outcomes among participants in three types of living-learning programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 335–368. <http://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0027>
- Jamieson, P. (2003). Designing more effective on-campus teaching and learning spaces: A role for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 8(1/2), 119–133.

- Janisz, M. A. (2014). *College student unions: A delphi study regarding purposes, amenities, barriers and future influences*. Illinois State University. <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (2003). A framework for narrative research proposals in psychology. In R. Josselson, A. Lieblich, & D. P. McAdams (Eds.), *Up close and personal: The teaching and learning of narrative research* (pp. 259–274). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Killeen, J. P., Evant, G. W., & Danko, S. (2003). The role of permanent student artwork in students' sense of ownership in an elementary school. *Environment and Behavior*, *35*(2), 250–263. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0013916502250133>
- Kirk, C. M., & Lewis, R. K. (2015). Sense of community on an urban, commuter campus. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *20*(1), 48–60. <http://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2013.763833>
- Klein, K. J., & D'Aunno, T. A. (1986). Psychological sense of community in the workplace. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *14*(4), 365–377. [http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198610\)14:4<365::AID-JCOP2290140405>3.0.CO;2-H](http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198610)14:4<365::AID-JCOP2290140405>3.0.CO;2-H)
- Knell, P., & Latta, S. (2006). *College union dynamic: Flexible solutions for successful facilities*. Bloomington, IN: Association of College Unions International and WTW Architects.
- Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *79*(5), 540–563.
- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lane, T., & Perozzi, B. (2014). Student engagement and college unions. *New Directions for Student Services*, (145), 27–37. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ss>
- Lang, S. E., & Lowell, N. (2006). *Study of attrition and retention*. Seattle, WA. Retrieved from <http://depts.washington.edu/assessmt/pdfs/reports/OEARReport0609.pdf>
- Lange, A. C., & Moore, C. M. (2017). Kaleidoscope views: Using the theoretical borderlands to understand the experiences of gay cis-men. *Journal of College Student Development*, *58*(6), 818–832.
- Linder, C. (2015). Navigating guilt, shame, and fear of appearing racist: A conceptual model of antiracist white feminist identity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, *56*(6), 535–550.
- Lippincott, J., & Greenwell, S. (2011). *7 things you should know about the modern learning commons*. Retrieved from <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2011/4/7-things-you-should-know-about-the-modern-learning-commons>
- Locks, A. M., Hurtado, S., Bowman, N. a, & Oseguera, L. (2008). Extending notions of campus climate and diversity to students' transition to college. *The Review of Higher Education*.

<http://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2008.0011>

- Lorion, R. P., & Newbrough, J. R. (1996). Psychological sense of community: The pursuit of a field's spirit. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 311–314. [http://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199610\)24:4<311::AID-JCOP1>3.0.CO;2-X](http://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199610)24:4<311::AID-JCOP1>3.0.CO;2-X)
- Lounsbury, J. W., & Neui, D. De. (1995). Psychological sense of community on campus. *College Student Journal*, 29(3), 270–277. Retrieved from http://su8bj7jh4j.search.serialssolutions.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info%3Aofi%2Fenc%3AUTF-8&rft_id=info%3Aasid%2Fsummon.serialssolutions.com&rft_val_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Ajournal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=Psycholo
- Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, “world”-traveling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3–19. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/stable/3810013?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- Magnarella, P. J. (1979). The continuing evaluation of a living-learning center. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 20(1), 4–9.
- Malandra, G. H. (2005). *Creating a higher education accountability system: The texas experience. National Commission on the Future of Higher Education.*
- Manthiou, A., Kang, J., Chiang, L., & Tang, L. (Rebecca). (2016). Investigating the effects of memorable experiences: An extended model of script theory. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 33(3), 362–379. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2015.1064055>
- Manthiou, A., Lee, S., Tang, L., & Chiang, L. (2014). The experience economy approach to festival marketing: Vivid memory and attendee loyalty. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 28(1), 22–35. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-06-2012-0105>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Martinez, M. L., Black, M., & Starr, R. H. (2002). Factorial structure of the perceived neighborhood scale (PNS): A test of longitudinal invariance. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(1), 23–43. <http://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.1048>
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *A psychology of being*. New York, NY: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc.
- Massis, B. E. (2010). The academic library becomes the academic learning commons. *New Library World*, 111(3/4), 161–163. <http://doi.org/10.1108/03074801011027664>
- Mattanah, J. F., Ayers, J. F., Brand, B. L., Brooks, L. J., Quimby, J. L., & McNary, S. W. (2010). A social support intervention to ease the college transition: Exploring main effects and moderators. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(1), 93–108. <http://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0116>

- Maxwell, D. (2016). *Student union transformation: A case study on creating purposeful space*. Indiana University.
- McDonald, W. (2002). *Creating campus community: in search of Ernest Boyer's legacy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved from <http://addison.vt.edu/record=b2135620#.WGWD4RsrJhE>
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *14*(1), 6–23. [http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I](http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I)
- McMillan, J. H., & Reed, D. F. (1994). At-risk students and resiliency: Factors contributing to academic success. *The Clearing House*, *67*(3), 137–140. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30188771>
- McMullen, S. (2008). US academic libraries: Today's learning commons model. *PEB Exchange*, (Paper 14). <http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/245354858154>
- Milani, T. E., Eakin, J. T., & Brattain, W. E. (1992). The role of the college union and the future. *New Directions for Student Services*, *1992*(58), 3–10. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ss.37119925804>
- Miller, C., & Malandra, G. (2008). *A national dialogue: The secretary of education's commission on the future of higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>
- Moos, R. H. (1986). *The human context: Environmental determinants of behavior*. Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company.
- Morgan, D. L. (2014). Pragmatism as a paradigm for social research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *20*(8), 1045–1053. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413513733>
- Morrow, J. a., & Ackermann, M. E. (2012). Intention to persist and retention of first-year students: The importance of motivation and sense of belonging. *College Student Journal*, *46*(1984), 483–491.
- Nasir, N., & Al-Amin, J. (2006). Creating identity safe spaces on college campuses for muslim students. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *38*(2), 22–27.
- NASPA. (2010). *Senior student affairs officer: 2010 executive report*. Washington, DC.
- Nowell, B., & Boyd, N. (2010). Viewing community as responsibility as well as resource: Deconstructing the theoretical roots of psychological sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *38*(7), 828–841.
- Nunez, R., & Foubert, J. D. (2016). Understanding the meaning making process of hispanic college students in their spiritual and religious development. *Religion and Education*, *43*(1), 19–40. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2015.1093880>
- O'Keeffe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging improving student retention. *College Student Journal*, *47*(4), 605–613.
- OECD. (2015). *United States. Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

- <http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-86-en>
- Okoli, D. (2013). *Sense of place and student engagement among undergraduate students at a major public research university - University of Washington*. Colorado State University. Retrieved from http://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&gathStatTab=true&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_proquest1501642536&indx=2&recIds=TN_proquest1501642536&recIdxs=1&elementId=1&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMod
- Oldenburg, R., & Brissett, D. (1982). The third place. *Qualitative Sociology*, 5(4), 265–284. Retrieved from <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.vu.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=10866218&site=ehost-live>
- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), 323–367. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170786>
- Pain, H. (2012). A literature review to evaluate the choice and use of visual methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(4), 303–319. <http://doi.org/10.1177/160940691201100401>
- Painter, S., Fournier, J., Grape, C., Grummon, P., Morelli, J., Whitmer, S., & Cevetello, J. (2013). *Research on learning space design: Present state, future directions*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Justin/Downloads/LearningSpaceDesign-L_0.pdf
- Palmer, R. T., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). A qualitative investigation of factors promoting the retention and persistence of students of color in STEM. *The Journal of Negro Education The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(804), 491–504. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41341155>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Paulsen, M. B., & St John, E. (2002). Social class and college costs: Examining the financial nexus between college choice and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(2), 189–236. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2002.0023>
- Perna, L. W. (1998). The contribution of financial aid to undergraduate persistence. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 28(3), 25–40. Retrieved from http://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=detailsTab&gathStatTab=true&ct=display&fn=search&doc=TN_ericEJ584135&indx=1&recIds=TN_ericEJ584135&recIdxs=0&elementId=0&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrV
- Peterson, N. A., Speer, P. W., & McMillan, D. W. (2008). Validation of a brief sense of community scale: confirmation of the principal theory of sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology*,

38(1), 61–73.

- Petruzzello, S. J., & Motle, R. W. (2006). Physical activity and mental health in college students. In M. V. Landow (Ed.), *College students: Mental health and coping strategies* (pp. 41–57). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-09656-002>
- Pretty, G. (1990). Relating psychological sense of community to social climate characteristics. *Journal of Community Psychology, 18*(1), 60–65. [http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(199001\)18:1<60::AID-JCOP2290180109>3.0.CO;2-J](http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199001)18:1<60::AID-JCOP2290180109>3.0.CO;2-J)
- Pretty, G. M. H., Andrewes, L., & Collett, C. (1994). Exploring adolescents' sense of community and its relationship to loneliness. *Journal of Community Psychology, 22*(4), 346–358. [http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(199410\)22:4<346::AID-JCOP2290220407>3.0.CO;2-J](http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199410)22:4<346::AID-JCOP2290220407>3.0.CO;2-J)
- Pretty, G. M. H., Conroy, C., Dugay, J., Fowler, K., & Williams, D. (1996). Sense of community and its relevance to adolescents of all ages. *Journal of Community Psychology, 24*(4), 365–379. [http://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6629\(199610\)24:4<365::AID-JCOP6>3.0.CO;2-T](http://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199610)24:4<365::AID-JCOP6>3.0.CO;2-T)
- Prezza, M., Amici, M., Roberti, T., & Tedeschi, G. (2001). Sense of community referred to the whole town: Its relations with neighboring, loneliness, life satisfaction, and area of residence. *Journal of Community Psychology, 29*(1), 29–52. [http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(200101\)29:1<29::AID-JCOP3>3.0.CO;2-C](http://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(200101)29:1<29::AID-JCOP3>3.0.CO;2-C)
- Quaye, S. J., & Harper, S. R. (2015). *Student engagement in higher education : Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2012). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Reif, Z. S. (2014). *Building community through physical space: A visual ethnography of college union utilization by community college transfer students*. Texas Tech University. Retrieved from <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/ttu-ir/handle/2346/60605>
- Riger, S., & Lavrakas, P. J. (1981). Community ties: Patterns of attachment and social interaction in urban neighborhoods. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 9*(1), 55–66. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/1295915078?pq-origsite=summon>
- Rouzer, R. M., DeSawal, D. M., & Yakaboski, T. (2014). Revisiting the role of the college union. *New Directions for Student Services, (145)*, 1–12. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ss>
- Rullman, L. J., & Kieboom, J. van den. (2012). *Physical place on campus: A report on the summit on building community*. Association of College Unions International. Retrieved from http://www.acui.org/uploadedFiles/_PUBLISHED_CONTENT/About_ACUI/Association_News/2012/SummitReport05172012.pdf

- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative research* (3rd editio). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Sarason, S. B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. Jossey-Bass.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services*, 1989(48), 5–15. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ss.37119894803>
- Schulze, S. (2007). The usefulness of reflexive photography for qualitative research: a case study in higher education. *Sajhe*, 21(5), 536–553. Retrieved from <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/196>
- Schussler, D. L., & Fierros, E. G. (2008). Students' perceptions of their academics, relationships, and sense of belonging: Comparisons across residential learning communities. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 20(1), 71–96.
- Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A., & Hwang, Y., A. (2017). *A national view of student attainment rates by race and ethnicity – Fall 2010 cohort (Signature Report No. 12b)*. Herndon, VA. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport12-supplement-2/>
- Smith, J. W., Siderelis, C., & Moore, R. L. (2010). The effects of place attachment, hypothetical site modifications and use levels on recreation behavior. *Journal of Leisure Research; Fourth Quarter*, 42(4), 621–640. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/816081198/fulltextPDF/53C4F4256B36488DPQ/1?accountid=14826>
- Smyth, C. J. (2016). *Where all may meet on common ground: Elements of college unions evident in campus community*. University of Minnesota. <http://doi.org/ProQuest10153280>
- Strange, C. C., & Banning, J. H. (2015). *Designing for learning: Creating campus environments for student success* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Strayhorn, L. T. (2008). Sentido de pertenencia: A hierarchical analysis predicting sense of belonging among Latino college students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 7(4), 301–320. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1538192708320474>
- Temple, P. (2008). Learning spaces in higher education: an under-researched topic. *London Review of Education*, 6(3), 229–241. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14748460802489363>
- Thomas, S. L. (2000). Ties that bind: A social network approach to understanding student integration and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(5), 591–615. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2649261>
- Tierno, S. (2013). *College union facilities and their perceived influence on institutional retention*. Franklin Pierce University.


- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89–125. <http://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 68(6), 599–623.
- Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1), 1–19.
- Tinto, V., & Goodsell-Love, A. (1993). Building community. *Liberal Education*, 79(4), 16.
- Tinto, V., & Pusser, B. (2006). *Moving from theory to action: Building a model of institutional action for student success*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/npec/papers.asp>
- Treanor Architects. (2011). *What to watch in 2012 and beyond: Results of Treanor Architects' survey on student life facility trends*. Retrieved from <http://www.treanorstudentlife.com/treanor-student-life>
- Tung, V. W. S., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2011). Exploring the essence of memorable tourism experiences. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(4), 1367–1386. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.03.009>
- Turk-Fiecoat, H. (2011). *Student satisfaction and perception of value with a new student union facility*. University of Nevada, Reno.
- Voelkl, K. E. (1997). Identification with school. *American Journal of Education*, 105(3), 294–318. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085508>
- Wallace, T. L., Ye, F., & Chhuon, V. (2012). Subdimensions of adolescent belonging in high school. *Applied Developmental Science*, 16(3), 122–139. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2012.695256>
- Warner, S., & Dixon, M. a. (2011). Understanding sense of community from the athlete's perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*, (25), 257–271.
- Wentzel, K. R. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 411–419. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.411>
- Whyte, W. H. (1980). *The social life of small urban spaces*. Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/111488563>
- Wicker, A. W. (1984). *An introduction to ecological psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wolf-Wendel, L., Kinzie, J., Kelly, L. W., & Jillian, W. (2009). A tangled web of terms: The overlap and unique contribution of involvement, engagement, and integration to understanding college student success. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(4), 407–428. <http://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0077>
- Yamashita, S. (2002). Perception and evaluation of water in landscape: Use of photo-projective method to compare child and adult residents' perceptions of a Japanese river environment. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 62(1), 3–17. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-2046\(02\)00093-2](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-2046(02)00093-2)

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 6, 2017 
TO: Claire Kathleen Robbins, Justin Camputaro
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Role of College Unions in Students' Sense of Community: A Narrative of Physical and Organizational Environments
IRB NUMBER: 17-501

Effective June 5, 2017, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7
Protocol Approval Date: June 5, 2017
Protocol Expiration Date: June 4, 2018
Continuing Review Due Date*: May 21, 2018

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT & SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Greetings *[insert college union director]*

My name is Justin Camputaro, and I am a doctoral candidate in Higher Education in the School of Education at Virginia Tech. I also serve as the Director of the Husky Union Building (HUB) at the University of Washington – Seattle. In this role, I am responsible for the management of both the facility operations and the student activities office. I have more than 18 years of experience in the college union field at six different institutions.

I am conducting dissertation research regarding the role of the college union in building students' sense of community to their institution. I am reaching out to you as the director to inquire if you would be interested in allowing the *[insert college union name]* to serve as the host site.

The intention is for this research project to add to the body of knowledge around college unions and community building. In particular, around the physical and organizational environmental factors that influence community building. The benefits to *[insert college union name and institution name]* are that, through sharing my findings directly back, you will have specific data from the students who engage with *[insert college union name]*.

This study will entail me being on-site for about a week to conduct eight interviews with students, approximately 1 to 1.5 hours each. I need to note that the participants would be taking photographs of the facility as part of the photo-elicitation methods I am using. By using these images in my final paper, I cannot guarantee anonymity for *[insert college union name nor institution name]*. The student's names would be anonymous if they choose, using pseudonyms.

If you agree to serve as the host site, I would request your assistance with recruiting these student participants through posting recruitment fliers in the *[insert college union name]*, sending a recruitment email to students you have access to, and nominating potential students for the study (to respect the student's confidentiality, at no time will you be notified if any students do or do not agree to participate). I would seek assistance securing a space in the *[insert college union name]*. I would also ask for a tour of the *[insert college union name]* and providing copies of floor plans of the facility.

Based on this information, are you interested in having *[insert college union name]* serve as the host site for this research?

[If no] Thank you for your time and consideration.

[If yes] Great, I will need to review and confirm the specific selection criteria with you at this time.

- Can you please identify at least 10 different physical elements of the *[insert college union name]* (for example, lounge space, a games area, student organization offices, etc.)?

Additionally, since I am using photography within my methods, do you know if the *[insert college union name]* is considered a public space in which photographs can be taken? Do you know if the institution requires signed medial releases from anyone in photographs taken? [If yes] Do you know where I can find a copy of the policy for this? If no, can you suggest another person on campus who may know the policy?

That completes my criteria information. Are you able to confirm at this time your agreement to serve as a host site or do you need additional time? [If needs more time] When can we reconnect to confirm your participation? [If confirms] Thank you, I will send you an e-mail with this script and request your written confirmation.

My next steps will be to contact the *[insert institution name]*'s IRB office. Once I have their permission, I will reconnect with you regarding the recruitment of participants, the need for space, and the additional next steps.

Do you have any questions at this time? If you have any questions in the future, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you and have a great day.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR GATEKEEPER USE

Greetings *[insert student name]*

My name is Justin Camputaro, and I am a doctoral candidate in Higher Education in the School of Education at Virginia Tech. I also serve as the Director of the Husky Union Building (HUB) at the University of Washington – Seattle. I have more than 18 years of experience in the college union field at six different institutions.

I am conducting dissertation research regarding the role of the college union in building students' sense of community to their institution. I am seeking students who identify as having a high sense of community to *[insert institution name]*, who regularly frequent the *[insert college union name]*, and who have spent at least one full academic year at *[insert institution name]*. Participants will be asked to take photographs of *[insert college union name]* to illustrate, from their perspective, how the *[insert college union name]* builds a sense of community on campus. Then, they will engage in an interview, approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation for participating.

Participants in this study will not have any more risks than they would in a normal day on campus. Participation in this study may not have any direct personal benefits, other than the token of appreciation. Overall, I hope to gain information about how college unions and their environments build a sense of community among college students.

For more information about this research study, please contact me at justinc7@vt.edu.

Thank you,

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT & SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Greetings *[insert student name]*

Thank you for your interest participating this research study. My name is Justin Camputaro, and I am a doctoral candidate in Higher Education in the School of Education at Virginia Tech. I also serve as the Director of the Husky Union Building (HUB) at the University of Washington – Seattle. I have more than 18 years of experience in the college union field at six different institutions.

I am conducting dissertation research regarding the role of the college union in building students' sense of community to their institution. I am seeking eight student participants with a high sense of community to *[insert institution name]* who have spent at least one full academic year at *[insert institution name]*. If you were selected, you will be asked to take photographs of *[insert college union name]* to illustrate, from your perspective, how the *[insert college union name]* builds a sense of community on campus. Then, you would engage in an interview, approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. I am looking to conduct these interviews during the week of *[insert date range]*. You would receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation for participating.

Based on this information, are you interested in participating in this research study?

[If no] Thank you for your time and consideration.

[If yes] Great, I will need to review and confirm the specific selection criteria and to collect some basic demographic information with you at this time. You can decline to respond to any of these questions, and although declining does not disqualify you as a possible participant, I cannot guarantee full consideration without all of the information.

- Are you a current student at *[insert institution name]*?
- Have you spent at least one full academic year at *[insert institution name]*?
- Do you feel you have a high sense of community to *[insert institution name]*?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree) please rate the following statements:
 - *[insert institution name]* helps me to fulfill my needs.
 - I feel I belong at *[insert institution name]*.
 - I have a say about what goes on at *[insert institution name]*.
 - I have a good bond with others at *[insert institution name]*.

- On average, approximately how many hours a week do you physically spend in the *[insert college union name]*?
- In what capacity are you associated with or do you use the *[insert college union name]*? For example, are you a student employee, are you a member or officer of a student organization, do you use the *[insert college union name]* to attend programs or use the services, etc.?
- Demographic information (these are optional and you can decline to respond to any):
 - What is your major?
 - What year are you in school?
 - How old are you?
 - Do you live on or off-campus?
 - What is your racial and ethnic identification?
 - What is your gender?
 - What is your sexual orientation?
 - What religion, if any, do you identify with?
 - Did either or both of your parents attend college?
 - Do you consider yourself:
 - An international student?
 - A veteran?
 - An NCAA Athlete?
 - A student with a disability?
 - Approximately how many total hours per week do you work in paid positions both on and off-campus?
 - What is the best e-mail I can contact you?
 - What is the best phone number I can contact you?
 - What is the best way to contact you – email, phone, or text?

That completes my criteria and demographic information collection. Once I have connected with enough interested students, I will be selecting the final eight students to invite as participants. If you are selected as a participant, I will contact you to confirm your continued interest and explain the next steps.

Do you have any questions at this time? If you have any questions in the future, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time and interest in participating in this research study.

APPENDIX F

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The Role of the College Union in Building Sense of Community

Investigator(s): Dr. Claire Robbins robbinsc@vt.edu / 540-231-2004
Mr. Justin Camputaro justinc7@vt.edu / 904-864-7677

I. Purpose of this Research Project

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of the college union in building students' sense of community to their institution. The study is being conducted at one institution and a total of eight students will participate. You are invited because you are a student who has spent at least one academic year at the institution and because you have identified as having a high sense of community to the institution. The purpose for conducting this research is for completion of a dissertation in Higher Education through the School of Education at Virginia Tech. Results may be used for future publications.

II. Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will engage in a two-phase process. In the first phase, you will be asked to, over a seven-day period, take a series of photographs (as many as you choose) that are representative of/illustrate your experiences with the *[insert college union name]* and that you believe have influenced your sense of community (SoC) to *[insert institution name]*. You will then submit five images that you feel best illustrate your experiences with the *[insert college union name]* and that you believe have influenced your sense of community (SoC) to *[insert institution name]*. For each image, you will write a short one to three sentence journal note, describing the reasons why the photograph illustrates your experiences and the personal meaning to you (identify each journal with its corresponding labeled image). Please label the images with your name and numbered 1 – 5. You will be asked to submit the five images and journals to Justin Camputaro via email or text message.

For any images that include other individuals, you will be asked to read a short script describing the purpose for the image and asking their permission to be used in future publications (script will be provided to you prior to commencement of phase 1). Do not intrude in the personal space of other individuals and do not take photographs of illegal or other compromising activities of others.

You can use your own personal camera (a smart phone camera is appropriate). The images will be used to trigger conversations during the interview in phase 2. The images will be used solely for the purposes outlined in this research project and may be used in future publications and presentations about the research.

In the second phase, you will be asked to partake in a 60 to 90-minute interview in which you will be asked a series of questions about the research topic and your photographs. The interview will be conducted on site in the *[insert college union name]* at a date and time convenient to you sometime between *[insert date range]*. The interview will be audio recorded, and a written transcription will be created following the interview. Recordings will be used solely for the purposes of properly capturing

participant's statements in the written transcription.

After identifying themes based on the interview, you will be provided a list of categories to review and provide feedback on whether or not they accurately capture your experiences.

III. Risks

There are virtually no risks to participating in this study beyond your normal daily activities.

IV. Benefits

Participation in this study may not provide any direct personal benefits to you. You will be able to tell your own stories as the “expert” of your experiences with the *[insert college union name]*.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

All images, audio recordings, and transcripts will be maintained in a secure, confidential file on a password-protected computer and only accessible to the researchers. Recordings will be destroyed following completion of the dissertation. No identifiable information will be used in the transcripts – you will be identified by a pseudonym. Identifiable information will be stored separately. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

If you choose to submit pictures of yourself as part of phase one, there is a chance someone will recognize you.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

As a participant in this research project, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation upon conclusion of the interview.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study’s conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____
Subject signature

Subject printed name

(Note: each subject must be provided a copy of this form. In addition, the IRB office may stamp its approval on the consent document(s) you submit and return the stamped version to you for use in consenting subjects; therefore, ensure each consent document you submit is ready to be read and signed by subjects.)

APPENDIX G

PHOTO-ELICITATION PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS

Greetings and thank you for participating in this research project about the role of the college union in building students' sense of community to their institution. The project includes two phases for you as a participant: 1) photo-elicitation and 2) interview. In the first phase, I ask that over a seven-day period, between *[insert date range]*, you take a series of photographs (as many as you choose) that are representative of/illustrate your experiences with the *[insert college union name]* and that you believe have influenced your sense of community (SoC) to *[insert institution name]*. You are the expert of your experiences and the photographs should represent your story.

Caution: Please be cognizant of the appropriateness of your images; do not intrude into another individual's personal space and do not take photographs of illegal or other compromising activities that would disclose embarrassing facts about other individuals.

Note: You can take photographs of with other people in the images. If you do, please use the script provided below after you have taken the photograph (to not compromise the authenticity of the context/action) to seek permission to use the photographs in possible future publications. If the individuals in the image do not agree, please make a note of such when submitting that particular image. These images can still be used for the research, but they will not be published.

Script to provide individuals in photographs:

I am taking pictures as part of a research study on building community at colleges and universities. The images will be used to illustrate my experiences with the *[insert college union name]* and photos may be used to illustrate "community" in future research or journal publications. Your name(s) will not be disclosed in the research or publications. However, there is a chance someone may recognize you. Would you agree to allow the researcher to use these photos for publication if they choose?

Submitting images and journals:

After you have taken the photographs, please select up to five (5) images that you feel best illustrate your experiences with the *[insert college union name]* and that you believe have influenced your sense of community (SoC) to *[insert institution name]*. For each image, please label them with your name and number them 1 – 5. Also, write a short one to three sentence journal note, describing the reasons why the photograph illustrates your experiences and the personal meaning to you (identify each journal with its

corresponding labeled image). You can also provide a caption for each if you choose. Email images directly to me (justinc7@vt.edu) or text message them (904-864-7677).

Due date: Images should be sent to me no later than midnight on *[insert date]*.

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Opening Statement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study regarding the role of the college union in influencing students' sense of community to their institution.

Creating SoC

1. What do you believe creates campus community?
2. What characteristics of the *[insert college union name]* are important to building a sense of community at *[insert institution name]*?

Reflexive Photography

3. How did you select the spaces you photographed?

Instructions to read to participant: Please arrange the images in an order that best illustrates the whole of your experiences and in a manner that you would be comfortable discussing during the interview?

Note to interviewer: begin with the first photograph and then progress to each subsequent one in the order the participant selected:

4. Please tell me a story behind this image.
5. Can you elaborate more about how *[identify specific physical and/or organizational elements sparked by the responses]* influences your sense of community to *[insert institution name]*?
 1. Possible follow-ups:
 1. What attracts you to this space?
 2. How do you spend your time in this place?
 3. What emotions does this space elicit for you?
 4. Do you typically spend time here with others or alone?
 5. How do the rules and availability of the space influence your experiences?

College union memories

6. Please share some of your most salient memories of the college union besides those already described in the photographs.
7. Do you spend most of your time in the CU alone or with others?
8. Please describe how those interactions affected your experiences.

9. What is it about the physical spaces in *[insert college union name]* that is important to building sense of community?
10. Please describe what you know about the policies/procedures/rules that exist for the *[insert college union name]*. How do you believe they have influenced the experiences you have shared?

Connecting the Dots

11. Reflecting on the whole of your experiences and the stories you have shared with me today, please describe how, if at all, these stories about your experiences with the *[insert college union name]* have influenced your sense of community to *[insert institution name]*?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about how sense of community is created on campus?