

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Nicole E. Hinde for the degree of Doctor of Education in Adult and Higher Education presented on May 26, 2026.

Title: Every Interaction is an Opportunity to Educate: Developmental Helping Approaches and Student Support in Basic Needs Contexts.

Abstract approved:

Jon, S., Iftikar

Executive Summary

At Oregon State University, college costs are growing for students, with more than 70% recently reporting significant financial stress. Student services staff are increasingly likely to receive requests for support from students who are experiencing basic needs challenges. The purpose of this study was to understand what skills and approaches staff perceive as most effective and dignifying when supporting students, and what training could better prepare staff for this work. My research questions included:

1. What do student services professionals perceive as their roles, responsibilities, preparedness and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?
2. In what ways do those perceptions shape an assets-based approach, building student capacity, and in what ways do those perceptions inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based approach, withholding developmental support?

3. What training could shift approaches from deficit-based to developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches when helping students with basic needs challenges?

Fourteen student-facing staff at Oregon State University (who are not employed at the Basic Needs Center) were recruited from throughout the campus environment.

Interviews included discussion of fictional scenarios of approaches to helping interactions, questions about current practices for supporting students with basic needs challenges, and inquiries into training and staff preparedness.

One key finding was that common approaches to support often overemphasized referrals to material aid while overlooking opportunities for student skill-building and long-term development. Participants frequently perceived complex, developmentally informed helping approaches as outside their formal roles and responsibilities. Importantly, participants were also limited in their ability to identify systemic efforts to improve interpersonal helping skills among front-facing staff. Findings suggest that common approaches may unintentionally limit the effectiveness of helping interactions by under-investing in the educationally informed support that builds student efficacy and autonomy. Some helping approaches also reflected heavily involved staff actions that overlooked the impact of support interactions on students' dignity and sense of agency during vulnerable moments of help-seeking.

Implications from this study highlight the need for staff training and organizational investments in helping skills such as motivational interviewing, collaborative problem-solving, and approaches that scaffold students through difficult situations, including basic needs challenges. Findings suggest that institutions should

more intentionally support autonomy-promoting and developmentally oriented helping practices across student services. I recommend that managers use these findings to design professional development opportunities, and that administrators integrate dignity- and autonomy-oriented measures into assessment and quality improvement processes.

Basic needs support is an emerging functional area in higher education. Existing literature and research largely emphasize material and tangible resources for students while giving less attention to how helping interactions themselves shape student dignity, agency, and help-seeking behavior. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that practitioner skills and the quality of helping interactions meaningfully influence student experiences and may affect outcomes beyond immediate resource access.

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Every Interaction is an Opportunity to Educate: Developmental Helping Approaches
and Student Support in Basic Needs Contexts

by
Nicole E. Hindes

A DISSERTATION

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

Presented May 26, 2026
Commencement June 2026

Doctor of Education dissertation of Nicole E. Hindes presented on May 26, 2026

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Adult and Higher Education

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Dean of Graduate Education

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Nicole E. Hindes, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation for every student who has been a part of the Basic Needs Center community, particularly those who I have been lucky enough to get to know. Your stories have stayed with me, just as many of those I met at Larkin Street, Mile High, Northern Colorado, and Indiana. Many of you have been important teachers to me.

So too, I would like to appreciate those professors who have helped shape my doctoral journey. Dr. Iftikar, I am so glad you came to OSU and I got to have you as my major Advisor; thank you for all of your feedback, encouragement, and coaching. I am also grateful to have gotten to learn with and from Dr. Tevis, Dr. Nguyen, Dr. Crandall, Dr. Crisp and Dr. Boehme. Each of your courses were invaluable as I developed my ideas and engaged in various research and learning that informed pieces which all built toward this dissertation.

I am lucky to get to work and learn in a community of student affairs practitioners where so many others have been supportive and encouraging to this journey. In particular, I would like to thank the members of The Circle Collective, who had patience and extended curiosity as I developed early ideas and found new paradigmatic footing. I had the best doctoral program cohort, and I am especially grateful for my classmate and friend Dr. Christine Flores and her family, who let me stay in their home each visit to Portland. I also want to thank professional staff and collaborators of the Basic Needs Center, who have helped inform my thinking and the approach for our work, all in such important ways.

It is also important to me to thank other teachers who have been so important to my life. Dr. Danielle DeSewal, thank you for all that I have come to appreciate about the value of my experience in the IU HESA program and much of what I learned from classes you taught. I also want to thank the practitioners from whom I learned how to apply theory to student affairs praxis: Dr. Tiana Iruoje, Megan Ray, Whitney Newman, Dr. Jenna Finley, Tehanee Ratwatte, Rev. Rebecca Jiminez, John Lawler, and the late Bob Weith. Thank you too, Dr. George Kuh, for the way I benefited from so much of your research. I thrived within the rich learning environment that was purposefully designed, built, and stewarded by so many with great skills and character on the Bloomington campus.

I would also like to give thanks to God. I prayed, asked the ancestors for help, and my prayers were answered. I am grateful for and humbled by the partnership and cocreation of those who have gone before me: Bob, Tara, Howie, Granddad, Grandma Blough, the ones in my lineage who were immigrants, the ones who experienced the Great Famine, the ones who struggled, the ones who persevered, the ones whose names I know, and those whose names are lost to time. I am similarly grateful, humbled and inspired by those ancestors of epistemology who have come my way: Mary Parker Follett, Esther Lloyd-Jones, Helen Astin, Sandy Astin, and Dennis Saleebey.

Special thanks to Gwil Evans, Rick Foster, Steve Bosserman, Paul Axtel and the late Dr. Janice McMurray. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to learn from the records about the W. K. Kellogg-funded InterACTION project, “The Oregon Initiative for 21st Century Food Systems Education,” that aimed toward improving

systemic food security through conversation skills. This work that came before my research both inspired me and grounded me. The more things change, the more they stay the same. We have been here before. We will be here again. All we ever have is each other.

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DEDICATION

For Amy. Thank you for telling me to start this journey, your patience along the way,
and the light that is our love.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Because giving help as a subtle tactic to maintain inequality are clad with the bright robes of benevolence, they are more dangerous than direct and explicit means of maintaining inequality (e.g. discrimination).

--Arie Nadler, *Social Psychology of Helping Relations*

Between 2016 and the end of 2019, in my first four years leading a basic needs center (in what was then a coordinator-level role) at Oregon State University (OSU) I accepted any invitation to talk about the financial stress that today's college students were experiencing, and any invitation to share our campus' breadth of resources available to support students experiencing basic needs insecurity. OSU's programs have historically been innovative in the field; for example, as anthropology master's students, Dr. Sarah Cunningham and Dana Johnson created the second campus-based food pantry in the US and many colleges and universities modeled their food pantry and related basic needs programs on services innovated at OSU (2011). As the professional primarily responsible for the program's services and efforts and as outlined in my position description, I found myself talking about this work with various staff, faculty, and student groups throughout campus. I would bring statistics about national and local food insecurity, mixing in anecdotes like the family with two young children that spent at least a year living in a converted school bus, or the student who told me she went more than two weeks only eating potatoes and rice, what she had identified as the cheapest calories she could afford. My presentation often surprised or shocked colleagues who were unaware of how many of our students were experiencing poverty conditions. They were also reassured to learn of the variety of support options available through the campus support program I supervised: a textbook

lending program, assistance applying for government benefits, emergency housing placement (and up to 28 days of rent-free campus housing accommodations), campus food funds or other free meals, and a laptop loan program.

Later, I came to think about my (and the program's) organizational communication strategy and outputs as a particular television channel. Generally speaking, much of the attention our campus audience gave to these students, to this functional area, was met with a station tuned to stories of hardship and national economic contexts that thus required the just and supportive aid programs available. After one particularly tough day in our early COVID-19 pandemic response, I mentally replayed the tape, replayed the communication topics and frame I had been using throughout campus for years, and I was struck by the overwhelming deficit narrative I had been spouting as I framed the students of the community I was meant to be leading. The TV station of my communication had been tuned to what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) calls, "The Danger of the Single Story." Without intention (and with careless attention), I had been perpetuating a generalized story of difficulty, powerlessness, and need for rescue. This insight and consecutive reflection prompted subsequent transformative change, both in my own practice and in the design and approach of the program I lead (Hindes, in press).

Ethically, I came to understand that my role required an approach that centered on the dignity and fuller belonging of students navigating scarcity conditions. I began to observe how this same narrative was used (and has been used; Astin & Astin, 1996) as both justification for, and explanation of decreasing patterns of shared governance and general student involvement. Like many, I had been situating these students in an assumed narrative that they were too busy, too financially stressed, too overwhelmed to truly participate at various tables or in various efforts (1996). Most concerning, I began to worry that my common claims and recommendations

(emphasizing aid and the importance of other dependency-promoting instrumental support that attempted to solve a student's problem for them) minimized the importance and potential of the developmental and empowering mentorship conversations that could build a student's capacity to create or adopt a new strategy. For years at Oregon State, I contributed to and validated deficit narratives and a normalized support pattern that glossed over important considerations of student dignity, belonging, and student development. Eventually, I came to understand that our campus colleagues might also have a role to play in basic needs work through the educational interactions and empowering, autonomy-promoting strategies (approaches that help the student better help themselves) they might integrate into their own praxis. Given that for many years, the prevailing narrative from this functional area was one rooted in dependency-promoting solutions, there is a local opportunity to balance and contribute professional approaches to a practice that includes autonomy-promoting solutions for basic needs challenges.

Chapter 1 of this paper introduces the Problem of Practice, framed as an opportunity of practice, that grounds this study: identifying successful (dignifying and valued) strategies that student-facing professionals are utilizing (or would want training or preparation to utilize) when college students seek support with a basic needs challenge. This chapter outlines the significance of this problem within a broader context of escalating college costs and identifies how helping interactions may be reifying an inequitable status quo. Additionally, chapter 1 includes definitions of some key terms, the purpose of my research, a list of research questions, and a summary of this opportunity's significance to potentially affect current practice.

Background and Context

At Oregon State University, students are struggling to manage the rising cost of housing, food, and tuition; recent surveys have documented that about 25% of students are experiencing

food insecurity (Edwards et al., 2021; Norton et al., 2024), 73% report experiencing financial difficulties and 51% say these difficulties are having a negative impact on academics (Fletcher & Cornett, 2026). These are local reflections of both economic inequities and systemic failures to design higher education for affordability and access. At the national level, a combination of policy neglect and rising costs has deepened the scarcity conditions students are navigating; scarcity conditions can be understood both as an individual experience wherein one has fewer resources available than is needed, and a community-level assessment wherein data would document insufficient vital resources at population-levels. Federal supports for those navigating scarcity, such as SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as “food stamps”) have faced repeated underfunding or restrictive eligibility standards that leave many students ineligible for the very programs designed to mitigate food and housing insecurity (Freudenberg et al., 2019). While the cost of attending college has risen steadily, key supports like the Pell Grant have failed to keep pace with inflation, covering a smaller share of tuition and living costs than prior generations experienced (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). These structural constraints hit students of color especially hard, given the historical plunder and economic exclusion experienced by their communities (2016; Coates, 2014). Students with marginalized identities are disproportionately represented in poverty statistics and are more likely to rely on institutional and government aid support to persist through college (2016).

Communication norms connected to this work often include a focus on students’ status as food insecure, housing insecure, or otherwise arriving at the academy with inadequate financial resources relative to their more privileged peers. Deficit approaches and dependency-promoting support designs are common throughout campus and beyond OSU in the field of basic needs (Sackett et al., 2016; Halabi and Nadler, 2016). Often scholars, advocates, and leaders in this

work aim primarily to highlight systemic inequities contributing to these student-level realities, pleading to a moral framework that might compel just action from institutional actors, government leaders, or other wealthy elite. This kind of framing positions the student inside an identity of sorts: “basic needs insecure.”

Trabian Shorters explains the harmful impact of deficit-framing on the population meant to be supported, including in programs and contexts meant to address very real needs and inequities (Tippett, 2022). Shorters illustrates the cognitive-science-backed reasons why framing people by their ambitions and goals creates more investments than problem-based orientations to individuals and their communities and he validates the pressure and cultural expectations to stigmatize a group of people, “to define them by their ... greatest inequity” to attract resources (2022). This tradeoff, what Shorters describes as “denigration for dollars,” ascribes into the cultural consciousness a view of that same people as “inferior, ineffective, as pathological” (2022). This study integrates an awareness of the dominant framing for this population group--basic needs insecure--as one which positions these students in a low-status experience, which is functionally a deficit framing that the student has limited control to change.

Oregon State has historically positioned itself as a site for innovation aimed to support the state’s challenges with hunger, poverty, and food insecurity. For example, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, OSU was a recipient of a W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant intended to bolster food security infrastructure across almost a dozen land-grant institutions throughout the nation (Fugate, 1996). OSU leveraged this funding to enhance communication and collaboration not only across campus but also between education, government, and nonprofit sectors statewide, efforts that illuminated the potential for collaborative solutions for community-level food security (McMurray, 1997). OSU’s institutional commitment to addressing student basic needs is

also well-established and growing. In 2019, then-President Ed Ray established a university-wide taskforce to investigate and improve food security outcomes for students with high financial need (Ray). This was followed in 2021 by a Division of Student Affairs-led committee charged with advancing outcomes and infrastructure to better support financially vulnerable students (Larson, D, personal communication, December 8, 2020). In 2024, OSU adopted a new university-wide strategic plan titled *Prosperity Widely Shared*, which includes specific goals aimed at improving support for low-income and high-need students (Oregon State University). The Division of Student Affairs also recently launched a new strategic plan, one that, among other goals, prioritizes bridging theory to practice and expanding professional development resources for staff who support students' academic and personal success (Thriving Together, 2024). Additional indicators of the campus' values relative to basic needs work include ongoing initiatives such as one led by the Division of Finance and Administration, which convenes a standing committee focused specifically on improving food security through its departmental operations (DFA Food Security Committee, 2025). OSU also hosts an annual winter food drive and facilitates opportunities for employees to make recurring payroll contributions to the on-campus food pantry, a program of the campus' Basic Needs Center. These efforts reflect a campus culture where addressing basic needs is recognized as a shared institutional responsibility.

The university also demonstrates a strong culture of professional development, which further supports this study's relevance and feasibility. For example, OSU's Office of Human Resources hosts "FYI Friday" events that serve as venues for campus professionals to share practices, tools, and training with one another (2020). It is also common organizational culture for unit or departmental meetings to include invited speakers or facilitators sharing content

relevant to student services. These norms suggest an institutional openness to peer learning and knowledge sharing—precisely the types of capacity-building strategies this study aims to inform. While OSU has a Center for Teaching and Learning focused on faculty development, the campus is still evolving its infrastructure for supporting front-line student services professionals. The College Student Services Administration (CSSA) graduate program, situated in the recent past within the College of Liberal Arts, has in recent years, emphasized social identity theories and critical studies in its curriculum (Hextrum, K. personal communication April 14, 2023), an important factor shaping the professional landscape of staff participants likely to be engaged in this study. Some campus staff are alumni of this program and subsequently bring this critical analysis to their interpretation and analysis of various organizational and interpersonal campus actions. This emphasis highlights the potential importance of this study's theoretical goals to affect more equitable, status-responsive, and developmental helping practices throughout campus.

At OSU, it is becoming common for service offices to provide parallel and complementary group-level training experiences. The University Ombuds Office provides workshops about giving and receiving feedback; the Title IX advocacy office provides bystander intervention programming; and the campus library has staff that can serve as subject matter experts to consult on matters of digital privacy. As the director assigned to the Basic Needs Center, I am well-positioned to develop research-informed training and workshop opportunities for campus aimed at improving helping interactions that include basic needs challenges. Situating this opportunity of practice within goals to improve professional practice (professional development) and utilizing a culture-shifting method such as appreciative inquiry (more on this

in subsequent chapters) has potential to contribute to meaningful systems change as the social construct for basic needs support is affected.

Opportunity of Practice

My opportunity of practice is about improving the intergroup helping interaction when students engage in basic needs conversations throughout campus. Dominant approaches to supporting students with basic needs insecurities focus on instrumental support, providing goods and aid to students (Jones, 2016; Sackett et al., 2016), aiming to fill gaps attributable to systemic inequities at federal, state, local, and institutional levels. Campus food pantries, assistance signing up for SNAP, and programs like meal vouchers are important additions to higher education contexts: these programs communicate belonging to students who have grown up in families where these strategies and tools kept food on the table through hard times and impossible circumstances of inequality and oppression. Some students see these programs as important factors in their overall strategies to meet their basic needs. Other students might avoid dependency-promoting programs, preferring a helping interaction that is more educational in nature and improves their ability to engage future similar challenges more autonomously – in fact, the literature suggests that most people prefer this type of help (Nadler, 2020). Oregon State University’s Basic Needs Center integrates both approaches to support students with basic needs challenges because as the director, I have seen the value of helping students develop efficacy in scarcity conditions, finding creative solutions to every-day problems. I have learned, largely, from students who have lived experience surviving and navigating scarcity conditions, that it was my own privilege and dominance that obscured the importance and potential impact of autonomy-promoting solutions for many years of my own practice. My informal assessments of our campus context indicate that I am not alone in overlooking this potential; exploratory

conversations with colleagues indicate that mental models of basic need related support equates to material aid, like the provision of food and emergency money. So too am I unable to find intradepartmental training opportunities aimed toward employees who want to improve their job-relevant helping skills (particularly in the realm of basic needs challenges) and yet it is my professional experience that middle managers in roles like mine are expected to find a way to meet their team's need for training and development. The limited intradepartmental training available for student services professionals has recently focused on managerial leadership (in the Student Affairs Leadership Institute), integrating career development framing to workplace norms (a Career Champions program), or building skills regarding facility oversight and stewardship (a facilities management learning community). It is within this context that I see an opportunity to improve the skills of those providing help to students experiencing basic needs challenges throughout campus.

There is a research gap exploring the capacities, skills, and approaches of those who hold key roles and responsibilities when college students engage in help-seeking behavior around their basic needs challenges; given such, there is also an opportunity to integrate theory-informed practices to provide improved and more equitable professional practices by student services staff. Norms at Oregon State seem to suggest that campus professionals would value opportunities to learn how to support a basic needs challenge or financial stressors impacting students' economic lives just as they have valued opportunities to learn how to support students with improving study practices, developing social skills, and other holistic needs that arise as staff build relationships and connections with students (Keeling & Dungy, 2004). I believe staff will engage in opportunities to improve their support for students experiencing basic needs challenges because my professional practice has demonstrated the campus investment in supporting these

students: staff regularly onboard new colleagues with a tour of the OSU Basic Needs Center, many staff and faculty are monthly donors to the food pantry, and many instructors opt into a lengthy “basic needs statement” on their syllabus, indicating their support and commitment to these issues. The outcomes of this research would likely also be relevant to basic needs programs beyond Oregon State University. Absent this support and development, staff locally and beyond may be ignoring opportunities to develop autonomy-promoting strategies to support student’s economic lives, deferring to other professionals, minimizing challenges, or making assumptions that are informing outcomes in unhelpful ways. These actions stigmatize and they become signals for students, who internalize these messages, often in ways that affect their sense of self (Halabi & Nadler, 2017) and subsequently inform both help-seeking behavior and our collective narratives about students experiencing these issues.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify and elevate effective, dignity-affirming practices used by student-facing staff at Oregon State University when assisting students navigating basic needs challenges. This study sought to understand how student-facing professionals make sense of their roles and responsibilities in these helping interactions, what practices they value, where they feel most or least effective, and what forms of support or training they believe would improve their ability to assist students experiencing increasingly common basic needs challenges.

Specifically, this research served several purposes:

- To gather insight into the current landscape of interactional helping-related practice at Oregon State University, identifying both quality indicators (types of support offered, counseling skills utilized) and preparedness indicators

(confidence, perceived role responsibility, assumptions informing current practices, and adequacy of prior training).

- To document practitioner-recommended priorities for future investment in staff development and helping interactions that involve basic needs challenges.
- To interpret participant reflections, analysis, and recommendations through the lens of the Intergroup Helping as Status Relations model, creating opportunities for improved praxis (theory-informed practice) for student services professionals providing support for basic needs challenges.

Research Questions

This study's research questions include:

1. What do student services professionals perceive as their roles, responsibilities, preparedness and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?
2. In what ways do those perceptions shape an assets-based approach, building student capacity, and in what ways do those perceptions inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based approach, withholding developmental support?
3. What training could shift approaches from deficit-based to developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches when helping students with basic needs challenges?

Significance of the Study

Oregon State University is situated within a community that has recently seen the state's highest percentage of severe rent burdened individuals (Oregon.gov, 2022). These local housing pressures compound with other challenging economic realities impacting students: the state of

Oregon has one of the lowest per-student higher education appropriation rates in the nation, ranking 36th (Kunkle & Burns, 2025) and existing limited funding for campus-based basic needs work is precariously funded one biennium at a time; as recently as February 2025, this budget line was in question (Edge, 2025). Students are not the only ones affected; student services staff, while employed full-time, are generally living in, and navigating the same conditions of scarcity and inflation. Both groups exist within what Matthew Desmond (2023) explains as increasingly expensive conditions, where it costs more to stay in the same (social class) place. In this environment, student services staff are very likely to encounter basic needs challenges as they build relationships with students, learning more about student experiences of hardship and barriers they face. As explained above, scarcity conditions can be understood both as an individual experience and a community-level experience of insufficient vital resources. Both interpretations contribute to scarcity mindsets and narratives of lack that can impede effective intergroup interactions of support. The challenges of scarcity conditions are real and growing; students are experiencing challenges and they are bringing these concerns up in their conversations throughout campus.

Amid these growing affordability pressures, students are increasingly required to adapt to conditions of scarcity. As many students engage for the first time with poverty experiences, the context of student services staff and narratives of help-seeking inform choices they make about when and where to seek support with challenges connected to their basic needs and economic lives. These students benefit from interacting with staff who are not only empathetic, but also skilled in providing responsive, empowering, and relationally effective support that is mindful of the intergroup status dynamics at play. As scarcity conditions become increasingly likely given college costs continuing to outpace inflation, the local context suggests that increased attention

and professional development resources would benefit student success by equipping more campus professionals with practical tools, shared language, and improved confidence as they interact with students navigating expensive realities.

The research and findings from this study will directly inform the creation of professional development workshops or tools that will be delivered throughout campus to a wide range of audiences to enhance the university's collective ability to support students experiencing ongoing scarcity conditions. The research addresses the need for more consistent and effective intergroup helping interactions within a higher education context shaped by rising income inequality. As director of the Basic Needs Center, I have an opportunity to contribute to positive cultural change by drawing participants into reflective dialogue about helping practices, building increased shared language and values around student support, and sparking awareness of the norms that shape perceptions of both these challenges and the affected student population. Early student personnel texts documented that students had needs stemming from their economic lives and financial stress (Lloyd-Jones, 1929) and called for trained student services staff ready to assist students (Blaesser et al., 1939); these challenges are not novel in nature even as this functional area is itself still emerging in the field of higher education. This study aimed to both broaden the support resources for today's diverse student body to include both autonomy-promoting and dependency-promoting assistance and to explicitly improve the quality of intergroup helping interactions across inevitable lines of difference and power. Improving the helping interactions students experience throughout campus (particularly for those who are marginalized) not only promotes more dignity and belonging for these students and these situations, but such approaches also better align with educational goals of holistic learning and development for all students. Research and findings from this study will equip OSU's Basic

Needs Center team with strategies and tools to support campus teams with training that will better support practitioners *themselves* to autonomously assist students with common, every-day basic needs challenges. Broadening the narratives and cognitive frames associated with these students, beyond dependency-promoting support, closes an important gap in current practices associated with basic needs challenges, particularly given that the research effort engaged a cross-campus audience representing multiple functional areas and levels of professional training. This research has potential to positively improve helping interactions, creating a benefit for help-seeking students and practitioners throughout the campus landscape. Given the contexts of who experiences basic needs challenges, I believe that this will be of most benefit for students with marginalized identities, who face historic barriers that impact their success and efficacy navigating their academic experiences.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Stigma in any form is dangerous because what starts out as symbolic eventually leads to the building of real walls: border walls, sanatoriums, mental asylums, and prison-industrial complexes, to name a few.

--Rebecca de Souza, *Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege, and Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries*

This literature review will synthesize relevant research in help-seeking behavior, concerns and issues of stigma and perceptions of those who receive assistance, and some of the research relevant to campus-based basic needs programs. Other sections of this chapter will explain research relevant to how people experience and survive scarcity conditions and research that helps us understand successful strategies that have been used to build capacity, skill and/or strategies in those who are experiencing basic needs challenges, often with an explicit aim to provide more equitable outcomes. Finally, this chapter will identify research relevant to the practice of providing help, pulling from the fields of social work and higher education. I will begin first with a discussion of the theoretical framework I will be using for this study.

I am approaching this study interested in understanding how professional campus staff make meaning of helping interactions utilizing Halabi and Nadler's Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model (IHSR; 2017). This model examines helping relations as power relations; helping is seen as a mechanism groups use to maintain, assert, and challenge the power relations of the status quo (2017). This study is examining how student-facing staff, occupying a perceived position of authority (having status) and often holding valid informational and skillset

advantages, would want to support students experiencing a basic needs challenge (a position that may be seen as lower in status in that exchange). Halabi and Nadler's framework provides a tool to analyze perspectives staff are holding about dependency-promoting or autonomy-promoting responses to help-seeking. This model is relevant to the goals of this study because intergroup helping often reflects or reinforces status hierarchies, furthering systemic inequality at the micro level (2017). Halabi and Nadler (2016) identify three ways power negatively shapes helping interactions, identifying defensive helping (when the high-status helper exerts control to minimize what those of low-status gain in the interaction), strategic helping (when the high-status helper gives in a manner so as to gain esteem in the eyes of those being helped), and assumptive help (when the helper presumes to know and give, without sufficient consult and participation from the recipient). Importantly, this research-backed model integrates the perceptions of the participants in the analysis of helping interactions, illuminating how helping occurs when parties believe the status hierarchies to be stable and contrasting them with contexts when the parties believe the status quo is dynamic (Halabi & Nadler, 2017). Finally, Halabi and Nadler provide recommendations for those who wish to create more equity within helping interactions, illustrating the importance of both building trust with, and a sense of control and self-efficacy in, the help seeker (2017).

Staff Shape the Landscape of how Students Make Meaning of Help-Seeking

In a longitudinal ethnographic study of undergraduate students, Yee (2016) finds that one factor impacting success outcomes of middle-class students relative to first-generation students was not necessarily absolute effort, but rather because middle-class students were more likely to experience help-seeking interactions that added to their sets of strategies and tools. Students and campus employees co-construct each interaction and the broader campus environment both

participate within; given this, staff have an opportunity to create both narratives and evidentiary experiences where students from many backgrounds and cultures find dignity, learning, and a sense of control and efficacy as they seek assistance with their various challenges. Research shows that when students are in accomplishment-oriented environments (where narratives of effort connect to performance outcomes), students are more likely to engage in autonomy-promoting help-seeking behavior (Karabenick, 2004). Relatedly, when students perceive themselves to be unable to affect the sources of their stress, they are less resourceful; when they see pathways to control their stress, they seek assistance and utilize strategies that improve outcomes (Kennett et al, 2021). Other researchers have also identified the role staff play in building a sense of self-efficacy in students (Rivera et al., 2022) and the role staff and volunteers can play in creating a stigmatized experience (Pica-Smith & Veloria, 2012; Parsell & Clarke, 2022). Another study, a randomized control trial, found that when food pantry clients were supported with motivational interviewing-based approaches, they experienced a sense of self-efficacy and saw improvements to their food security (Martin et al., 2016). Further research identifies areas where staff interactions and support, particularly about matters beyond the classroom, are of meaningful importance to students, especially those navigating marginalization (Haley, 2023; Luedke, 2017). These studies indicate the significant potential for improved praxis if attention is paid to the quality of how students are experiencing helping interactions, narratives of help-seeking, and their perceptions of efficacy relevant to their challenges. Winston and Creamer found strong connections between the quality of intentional efforts to improve the skills of student services staff and the quality of outcomes for students (1997).

It is important to note that recent literature describing the praxis and efficacy of student-facing student services professionals as they assist students with basic needs challenges is

currently minimal. In one recent example, Broton et al. (2020) describe front line professionals circumnavigating institutional processes, seeking professional favors, and making judgement calls as they advocate on behalf of students with difficult financial challenges. These are examples that could be seen as strategic helping in the IHSR model (Halabi and Nadler, 2017), solving the student's challenge for them (Broton et al., 2020) by providing dependency-promoting support that maintains the status quo beyond the current challenge. Other staff in the study describe relating to student hardships as misfortune impacting the student as if by chance, or beyond the ability for local decision-making to affect, describing limited power or capability to impact the student's situation (2020) and contributing to narratives of powerlessness and deficit. Student services staff in the study were especially more likely to attribute blame to systemic forces beyond a student's locus of control than were faculty or administrators interviewed (2020). Additional analysis and research that understands how staff are relating to students and their experiences of poverty conditions could result in improved, designed helping interventions that better dignify all students within the academy landscape.

Sherraden et al (2017) recommends that training programs for helpers (in this research, future social workers) be sensitive to the financial stressors of the learners, likely proximal to the social class of their future clients. These authors posit that a successful training approach includes one that integrates meaningful real-world context and applicable relevance, utilizing relationship and trust to dignify real-world challenges (2017). Other researchers found similar outcomes and improved staff-efficacy when social work students received curricula designed to improve their capability to support clients with their economic lives and financial literacy (Horwitz and Briar-Lawson, 2017; Frey et al., 2017; Sherraden et al., 2019).

The Role of Stigma

Practitioners wanting to provide quality support to this population would do well to attend to qualities that may or may not convey a stigma to those experiencing basic needs challenges. For example, in a qualitative study of interactions at a food pantry, Jones (2019) found that the level of support impacted one's experience of stigma or othering. Parsell and Clarke (2022) found similar meaning making when charity recipients described staff and volunteers who withheld active engagement and relational reciprocity from help-seekers. In that study, both experiences of judgement and experiences of passively receiving contributed to shame and an experience of stigma (2022).

Helping exchanges can be complex; often a service of helping is provided between two individuals who may start an interaction as strangers (Kim, 2021) working across a line of difference and dominance (Halabi and Nadler, 2017), setting up various ways that status dynamics may be influencing outcomes or conveying a judgement. Individuals experiencing scarcity conditions describe an experience of stigma when others communicate narratives of the poor as lazy, opting for an easy life, ignoring of opportunities, or irresponsible (Reutter et al., 2009). Often and especially across lines of status difference, a stigma is conveyed by demeaning the other, for example, minimizing the psychological needs (autonomy, development, belonging, sense of purpose) that are central to our humanity, and instead focusing on physical and material needs as primary drivers of the other's behaviors or challenges (Schroeder & Epley, 2020).

Research studies have also explored stigma and food insecurity among college students. Villegas et. al (2024) found that on the campus of California State University San Bernardino, students described feeling stigma connected to their basic needs insecurity even when such challenges were normalized on campus. In this instance, such normalization was communicated alongside promotion of information about relevant campus and community resources (a campus

food pantry, SNAP sign-up assistance; 2024). El Zein et al. found evidence that social stigma (being seen as lower-in-status) is a key barrier to help-seeking behavior for food insecure college students (2018). In a later study, El Zein et al. (2022) recorded the impact of social stigma on help-seeking behavior, documenting student discomfort with perceptions of dependency, neediness or other threats to a positive, autonomous self-identity (Nadler, 1986). Peterson et al. (2022) connects this effect of stigma to the norms and expectations college students experience. Students with food insecurity experiences navigate this lower social status, understanding that they are at risk of being perceived as deficient—a threat to self that conveys a message of stigma—and subsequently prevents timely help-seeking behavior (2022). Educators who would have interest in supporting these students without also contributing to stigma will need to bring special attention to the relational experience staff bring to these students - or discussions of their issues and concerns.

The Human-to-Human Help that Makes the Difference

The role and relational, humanistic support of the professional is of vital importance to the success of a helping interaction (McKinney and Roberts, 2012). In student service work, this recognition is also historical. Bulger (1954) describes considerations a staff member may provide to a student with financial stressors or basic needs challenges in an early student services text, describing the helping interaction as problem-solving, strategy building, and a bit of counseling. Lloyd-Jones (1929) documents the importance of an intentional staff interaction of support in her dissertation work nearly a century ago. Efforts to improve helping skills through staff training have shown to improve outcomes, particularly with regard to student's comfort and readiness to engage in help-seeking (Martin et al., 1980). Insufficient staff training contributes to staff feeling unprepared to support underprepared students (Sachar et al., 2019), those experiencing basic

needs challenges (Moon Johnson, 2014), and marginalized students (Kilmartin et al., 2024). Current contexts and more modern experiences of basic needs challenges continue to illuminate the importance of interpersonal interactions and helping goals. A recent rigorous ten-campus evaluation of Single-Stop, a Basic Needs program wherein colleges host a case manager and a technology platform to support students as they sign up for benefits, was found to be ineffectual and unable to demonstrate a return, especially when students opted out of interacting with a professional staff trained to provide quality support (Daugherty et al., 2025). In a qualitative study involving ten homeless students at a Pacific Northwest university, researchers found that students were likely to name the importance of trained and knowledgeable staff as an important support factor that impacted their success (O'Neill & Bowers, 2020).

The Individual Navigating Scarcity

Research shows a dearth of financial literacy in today's students, leading to "a high proportion [of them being] financially vulnerable because they lack financial literacy, have no emergency savings, or are financially fragile" (Sackett et al., 2016 p.5). Within programs serving low-income and resource-constrained populations, there are mixed understandings regarding the value of financial literacy and related education or autonomy-promoting assistance as relevant strategies to support a student's economic life. McCormick (2009) provides a wide-reaching literature review that documents mixed success with regard to successful interventions of financial literacy. McCormick (2009) also highlights the importance of interventions which acknowledge that broader, unfair greed and extractive logics place some limits on an individual's capabilities within capitalism regardless of one's financial literacy knowledge (2009). This mirrors Halabi and Nadler's (2017) findings that acknowledging and apologizing for systemic contexts can build trust in populations seeking help.

Campus staff and others in helping roles often understand the interest in growing the help-seeker's financial capability and there may be some value to such efforts. One study interviewed faculty members at four historically black colleges or universities (HBCUs) that had recently adopted a financial capability asset-building curriculum within social work preparation programs. Faculty described how the material equipped students (and often their families) with useful strategies and knowledge (Rochelle, 2017). After experience with the financial capability asset building curricula, participants described that the increased knowledge and skill developed through the curricula improved the service they provided to help-seekers and clients (Sherraden et al., 2017). Importantly, the skill-gains resulted in approaches to support that were increasingly relational - or, client-centered and oriented toward the help-seekers holistic goals and needs (2017).

When individuals navigate scarcity conditions, they often adopt strategies and adjustments to find a way to make their lives work. For example, researchers surveying severely rent-burdened populations in Los Angeles found that renters survive unaffordability through *functional adjustments*, increasing the numbers of hours worked or number of renters in a given household, or by *consumption cutbacks*, often limiting consumer spending to needs only or delaying purchases whenever possible for as long as possible (Angst et al., 2023). Another study found similar evidence that contexts can change, meaning that individuals often experience food insecurity episodically; those with more education were less likely to find themselves chronically food insecure (Lee et al., 2022). In two different ethnographic studies of food insecure college students, researchers found students making functional adjustments by donating plasma, getting second jobs, eating cheaper quality food or repeating meals (Henry, 2017; Kim et al., 2022). Food insecure students were also known to make consumption cutbacks, limiting costs spent on

social activities, suppressing hunger by increasing fluid intake, downsizing meals, and skipping meals (2017; 2022). Stealing and payday loans were also reported coping strategies (2022). Both studies also indicated areas where help-seeking behavior and discovery of available resources could have resulted in new options or strategies for students who were unaware or unable to navigate relevant barriers, such as providing needed requirements to receive SNAP benefits (2017, 2022).

These studies illuminate that psychologically, financial stressors and related concerns contribute to a scarcity mindset wherein a focus on survival and one's stressors can subsequently limit both available time and mental and cognitive resources (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Shah et al., 2012). This impact to bandwidth can limit perceived solutions to only those that solve immediate concerns, often the dependency-promoting solutions that provide direct instrumental support to help seekers experiencing scarcity conditions (2013; Schilbach et al., 2016). Over time, this effect limits the help-seeker's ability and capacity to create sustainable change or to learn strategies that can decrease stressors (2013). Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) recommend helping services be designed for the psychological realities of scarcity conditions. Their recommendations include two primary strategies that functionally improve the quality of the helping interaction through sharing of new information, and assisting the help-seeker in thinking through new viable strategies that promote more autonomy with the current challenge in the future (2013). These recommendations, when implemented by a student services professional discussing a student's basic needs challenge, might look similar to other educational student development support conversations (Newton et al., 2010), interactions that integrate autonomy-promoting assistance as we see in the IHSR model (Halabi and Nadler, 2017). Related studies found that scarcity can focus attention on short-term needs and impede goal-oriented behavior

(Hausshofer & Fehr, 2014; Shah et al., 2012). This more complex way of understanding how to support people experiencing scarcity contexts undermines common understanding regarding Maslow's work on human needs, often presented as a hierarchy with basic needs creating a foundation. Important to this study is literature undermining the hierarchical understanding of Maslow's work and emphasizing the lack of empirical support for the model (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Training, tools, and choices student service staff utilize, shape an interaction and can deliver meaningful results for how help is experienced for college students navigating scarcity. Perceptions of basic needs challenges and people experiencing scarcity conditions inform what support looks like; if practitioners are presuming Maslow's hierarchy is grounded on strong science, this could complicate strategies for effective support.

Other Theories Relevant to this Study

Halabi and Nadler's Intergroup Helping as Status Relations model best illuminates the factors that impact an equitable helping interaction (2017). Other theories were considered for this study, though Halabi and Nadler's model best allowed for the integration of both power analysis and educational goals relevant to helping interactions inside campus contexts. Harris (1969) and Berne's work with transactional analysis (1964) can provide significant illumination of interactions that communicate messages of power relevant to paternalistic and protectionist norms common to today's college students and low-income communities; Yeager's mentor model is a modern application of similar ideas, ripe for today's educational contexts and equipped with status analysis framing (2024). Brickman's model of helping and coping (1982) is compelling, particularly given that the framework can illuminate the over-use of the medical model when practitioners are supporting students experiencing food and housing insecurities by doing-for-students what they can be equipped to do for themselves in the model's compensatory

frame. Alternatively, a conceptual framework (beyond the scope of this study) integrating discussion of the impact of critical theories common to third-wave student development, deficit framing, and a revisiting of Bandura's studies of efficacy could illuminate important mental models preventing educational outcomes in this functional area (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Bandura, 1977; Lange & Duran, 2021; Torres et al., 2019; McKay & Devlin, 2016; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). Sanford's challenge and support model (1967) similarly mirrors the goals of this study (and the support approaches students may be best served by) though it fails to speak to or acknowledge systemic inequities that contribute to financial stressors and experiences of food and housing insecurities. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model (2005) and scholars contributing to Asset-Based Community Development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Eade, 2007) both illuminate the potential when individuals and communities are valued for their strengths and assets, a more dignifying stance than the deficit framing common to marginalization. Kim's analysis, integrating human design framing and concepts of dignity, may also prove relevant to future examinations of services and interactions meant to help others (2021).

The literature reveals that there is significant potential for improved practice through attention to the helping interactions provided to students when they seek support for a basic needs challenge. At the interaction level, student services can seek to resource students with support that address both the student's current challenge and goals of more equitable outcomes. Attending to staffing practices and providing training aimed toward this type of challenge may broaden and deepen the support these students experience. This study is aimed to both build off this body of literature and to provide tools for developing the practice of equitable helping interactions throughout campus.

Chapter 3 Methods

Power-over is resorted to time without number because people will not wait for the slower process of education.

--Mary Parker Follett

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological framework and design for this study, including the rationale, procedures, and ethical considerations that informed decisions. This chapter describes how the research was conducted to learn how student services professionals at a large public university describe, reflect on, and integrate intentional choices in their praxis when a basic needs challenge is presented by a help-seeking student. The goal of this study was to identify and amplify valued, theory-informed helping approaches that can be promoted across campus through future training and capacity-building efforts to improve the organizational norms in support of students navigating conditions of scarcity and engaging in help-seeking behavior.

This chapter proceeds through a series of sections that build a clear and comprehensive picture of the research methods. First, the purpose and research questions of the study are revisited to anchor the chapter in the goals of the dissertation. A personal positionality statement follows, providing context about my professional background and relationship to the topic. Next, the research site is described, followed by a detailed explanation of the chosen research design and justification for its appropriateness. The theoretical framework underpinning the study is then revisited to illuminate how Halabi and Nadler's Intergroup Helping as Status Relations model informed data analysis due to its relevance to examining student-staff helping dynamics.

Subsequent sections detail participant selection and recruitment, the data collection tools and strategies, and the methods used for data analysis. The chapter then outlines steps taken to ensure trustworthiness, ethical considerations involved in protecting participant confidentiality and agency, and the limitations that may have affected the scope and interpretation of findings. Together, these sections outline the foundations for the study and demonstrate how the research was designed to contribute meaningfully to theory-informed praxis in the field of student services and basic needs support.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify and elevate effective, dignity-affirming practices used by student-facing staff at Oregon State University when assisting students navigating basic needs challenges. I sought to understand how student-facing professionals make sense of their roles and responsibilities in these helping interactions, what practices they value, and what support or training they believe would improve their ability to assist students experiencing increasingly common basic needs challenges.

This study's research questions were: What do student services professionals perceive as their roles, responsibilities, preparedness and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges? In what ways do those perceptions shape an assets-based approach, building student capacity and in what ways do those perceptions inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based approach, withholding developmental support? What training could shift approaches from deficit-based to developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches when helping students with basic needs challenges?

Positionality Statement

My orientation to developing students outside the classroom, and building their efficacy through life's challenges connects to my experiences as a first-generation student from rural Indiana who spent 6 years at Indiana University Bloomington, from 2003-2009. In addition to personally taking advantage of many high-impact practices built to support the success of first-generation students (Kuh, 2006) throughout the campus environment, I completed a master's degree in student development in a highly-regarded program with a strong legacy of impact to the field (*Expanded History*, 2023). I was privileged to apply what I was learning in my graduate classrooms with real-world experiences both at a practicum with the IU GROUPS program (a TRiO funded program) and a half-time position in a high-functioning and well-managed residence life team where I also learned about the value of community, intergroup collaboration, intentional organizational-development, and collective care. For many years I neglected to see how this education and these experiences developing students and developing positive communities through a strengths, or asset-based, lens equipped me with a view not only divergent from many campus professionals today, but also a skillset that some academic researchers or administrators could easily overlook. Given my background with strengths-based and appreciative frameworks, I recognize a potential bias toward interpreting participant narratives in ways that highlight resilience, efficacy, or potential, possibly at the expense of sufficiently acknowledging the role of structural limitations or impacts of systemic harm. My bias is rooted in this student development framework, oriented toward choices and actions within our mutual local control; while I have studied systemic inequalities and structural inequality, my bias is oriented away from personal and interpersonal stances that can reify a sense of powerlessness.

It is also important to unpack more explicitly how I benefited as a white student engaging in these intentional experiences of student engagement and student leadership. During this era, mentors, professors, and many decision makers were integrating practices, activities, and facilitation choices informed by the Social Change Model (Astin & Astin, 1996) and goals of more intentional leadership development and diversity-related goals in the intercollegiate environment (Harrell et al, 2009). I arrived at college with stereotypes, norms, and relational patterns that would prove to be insufficient for the diversity of individuals I worked and learned alongside. Various aspects of this collaborative, relational culture, woven throughout the campus landscape, contributed to my development regarding productive intergroup relations, conflict skills, and connecting to others across lines of power and difference. These skills served me well after graduation, when I was on construction sites in Denver, talking with GED students as they prepared to enroll in the local community college. So too, my experiences equipped me with the confidence and trust-building skills to connect with (and support effectively) college students navigating homelessness in San Francisco, including those with complicated histories of incarceration, family trauma, and systemic, generational oppression.

Some years, my financial reality situated me within the struggling working class I now support. Some years, I have seen more stability; today, I have discretionary income to pay discounted tuition for an advanced degree and my partner and I are privileged to be making mortgage payments as first-time homeowners. Throughout my career, I have maintained connections and relationships with those from marginalized communities and these relationships, and these experiences, often contrast with many conversations and meetings in the academy where groups of elite actors discuss these students and their needs (who are too rarely in the room, too rarely meaningfully included in the facilitation choices; Arnstein, 1969).

I come to this opportunity of practice after nearly two decades of work supporting marginalized students. I have written two book chapters about this functional area, presented about the work at national conferences, and trained other professional staff with approaches to integrate student learning into basic needs support. I recognize this subject matter expertise means that my research participants were aware that I have high levels of related knowledge status relative to the subject; this informed my utilization of an appreciative inquiry frame regarding both the interview questions and framing choices I used when documenting results from the interviews as detailed in below sections. I carry a deeply held belief, informed by my own college and professional experiences, that reflective and affirming dialogue can be a catalyst for individual and collective transformation. While this belief grounded my choice of methodology, I acknowledge it as a bias that may not be universally shared or experienced across participants. I also carry an assumption that this study—and the dialogues it may have initiated—may have positively influenced campus culture given social constructivist theory realities of interdependence and co-construction of shared narratives. While this aligns with Appreciative Inquiry principles, I also recognize the risk of overestimating the study's immediate influence or underestimating systemic challenges to systems change.

Research Site

This study was conducted at Oregon State University, a public, land-grant research institution located in Corvallis, Oregon. As a land-grant university, OSU is committed to serving the people of Oregon through education, research, and outreach (Oregon State University, 2023). This mission, rooted in improving the material and lived realities of the state's residents, was especially relevant to this study's goal of improving staff skill and capacity to assist students facing basic needs challenges.

Key stakeholders for this research include the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Kevin Dougherty who gave permission to name Oregon State University in the final dissertation and any subsequent dissemination of the study's findings. While direct data collection occurred with professional staff participants, collaboration with managers and unit leads helped facilitate participation, particularly for those whose roles were heavily scheduled or where hierarchical approval was a typical departmental norm. Ultimately, Oregon State University was selected as the research site due to its unique convergence of institutional investment in student basic needs (often leading to innovation in practice), its presence within an economically stressed community, and its culture of professional reflection and improvement. These characteristics position OSU as a valuable site for conducting research that both explores current helping practices and contributes to the development of improved, more equitable support systems for students navigating scarcity conditions while they pursue their academic ambitions.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore how student-facing professionals interpreted and evaluated helping interactions related to basic needs challenges in higher education. A qualitative approach was well-suited to this opportunity of practice because it allowed for rich, context-sensitive insights (Creswell, 2008) into how staff members construct meaning, navigate institutional norms, and understand opportunities for professional growth in complex, real-world-relevant contexts (Stravakou & Lozgka, 2018). This research sought to deepen understanding of how professionals made sense of their responsibilities and what forms of support and training they believed would enhance their capacity to assist students experiencing a basic needs challenge.

The design of this study was based on a qualitative interview within which text-based vignettes were used alongside structured prompts within semi-structured interviews. This approach aligned with the literature on the use of vignettes in social work and educational research, where they have proven to be effective tools for eliciting professionals' values, judgments, and reasoning processes, particularly when direct discussion of personal cases may be ethically or practically constrained (Bain, 2024; Törrönen, 2018; Stravakou & Lozgka, 2018). Vignettes created a controlled but realistic scenario for participants to engage with, prompting reflection on practice without requiring disclosure of specific past experiences (2023). In this study, vignette prompts were paired with open-ended, appreciative interview questions that guided participants to identify and discuss effective helping strategies, perceived gaps in training, and the social or structural factors that might have been influencing their decision-making in student support contexts (2023). One of the earliest texts in student personnel work was Lloyd-Jones' dissertation at Northwestern University; there we see the use of brief descriptions of example situations presented as vignettes, illustrating various challenges students encountered, including financial difficulties and other basic needs relevant issues (1929). I utilized vignettes inspired by her work within this research project as a through line illustrating how these kinds of challenges are not novel, rather discourse about the role of staff support is likely as old as the field itself. Vignettes are common examples of how this field has documented the work historically, and they provided the opportunity to make visible effective staff praxis in this study as well.

Appreciative-inquiry informed the interview questions to draw out valued skills and outcomes (Bushe, 2012) in the data; these skills and outcomes will then be highlighted in forthcoming professional development and campus norming. Appreciative inquiry is a common

organizational development tool that builds generative potential; it is commonly recommended as a counter-practice for groups that are unhelpfully affected by communication patterns focusing on problems, deficits, critical negativity, and limited thinking (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2024). I used appreciative inquiry framing to situate the study design outside of the deficit approaches commonly brought to affect change in basic needs work. In this research, interview questions were semi-structured around the vignettes (Bain, 2024) and framed to elicit strengths-based reflections and highlight moments of professional efficacy, dignity-affirming practices, or opportunities for meaningful capacity-building (2012). This framing supported the study's purpose of contributing actionable insights that can improve professional development and help to foster a more cohesive and effective culture of support for students navigating scarcity-related challenges. The unit of analysis in this study was the individual professional and their interpretations of helping interactions, specifically, their reasoning, values, and professional aims in relation to the hypothetical scenarios and professional development needs presented in the interviews. By focusing on the level of the staff member and their reactions to interactions, the data showed significant potential to illuminate the perspectives that were informing in workplace norms. I was able to capture nuanced relational, contextual, and cultural dynamics that shape how help is offered, received, assumed, or withheld in moments of basic needs challenge.

Theoretical Framework

Much of the explanation of the theoretical framework of this study, Halabi and Nadler's Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model, can be found in chapter 2; this section provides an overview of how the model informed study design and interpretation of findings.

Utilizing this theoretical framework allowed for the integration of a power analysis overtop the ways a helping interaction was valued by student services staff, a group generally of

high-status relative to the students seeking assistance with basic needs challenges. This model supported my analysis of the type of help staff value or idealize, for example, categorizing choices and actions as either dependency-promoting or autonomy-promoting (Halabi and Nadler, 2017). Vignettes were written to create conversation relevant to the research goals (Bain, 2024). For example, they included subtle status cues and created opportunities to explore how status perceptions shape professional judgements. Because they were asked to reflect on fictional scenarios, some participants shared judgements or assumptions, surfacing information about power dynamics that might have been difficult to pull out of descriptions of real interactions (2023). Participant responses to the vignettes demonstrated when staff valued a goal of empowering and educating, and where they appreciated staff who asserted power in the interaction, choices could also be contributing to stigma, inequity, and possibly impacting help-seeking behaviors on campus (2017; Jenkins et al., 2010).

Appreciative inquiry framed questions allowed me to identify what types of help staff value or want to replicate, which was coded through the IHSR lens. I analyzed the responses to the vignettes for IHSR themes, for example, identifying where staff shared concerns about a dependency-promoting action and where they admired a staff member's actions to build a student's skills. By using a theory that explicitly addressed status, power, and social norms, the research can contribute to change efforts that are not only practical but also grounded in deeper understanding of how inequality is likely being reproduced (Halabi & Nadler, 2017) within these common helping interactions. Ultimately, Halabi and Nadler's Intergroup Helping as Status Relations model provided a powerful tool for advancing the dual goals of this dissertation: understanding current staff helping practices and gathering data that will be used to inform more

equitable, dignifying, and empowering professional approaches to student support beyond the campus' Basic Needs Center.

Participants

This study involved a recruited sample of fourteen professional staff members in a purposeful, maximal variation sampling method (Creswell, 2008). These professional staff were employed in student-facing or student support roles throughout Oregon State University and selected based on their ongoing engagement with students, either through their function directly providing student services or through high-contact supervisory relationships. These participants represented a diverse range of professional experiences and work environments within the university and given this, illuminated the broader social context informing student support and basic needs challenges (2008). Participants were entered into a drawing for a gift card (\$50) for a local grocery store chain. The selected sample size successfully contributed to data saturation, the point at which the results generated from the interviews and perspectives no longer resulted in meaningfully different perspectives or contributions to the data (Creswell, 2008).

To ensure participants had sufficient time to establish trusting and meaningful relationships with students, critical for generating relevant, experience-based responses and narratives in the research interviews, eligibility was limited to staff who have worked in their roles on campus for at least 18 months. Based on my experience and knowledge, this ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to OSU students' help-seeking behaviors, had gained awareness of some campus programs, and potentially had opportunity to adapt their professional practices to respond to current student needs. This experience base avoided some new-hire onboarding dynamics and thus provided the most relevant information to address the study's research questions, which center on staff efficacy, valued practices, and training needs when supporting students facing common basic needs challenges.

Participants were drawn from roles characterized by frequent and meaningful interaction with students. This included (1) staff whose primary job functions involved responding to students engaging in help-seeking behavior (defined as willfully seeking support, guidance, or services), and (2) staff who regularly mentored or supervised student employees or student leaders as part of their primary role, professionals that, based on my knowledge and experience, were more likely to have a relationship context with students that would support basic needs challenges arising in student support interactions. An intake question in initial email communication screened participants to identify those that spend approximately 40% or more of their time directly interfacing with students and/or student employees and had more than 18 months of experience working on campus. I chose to focus on campus staff in these roles and with this experience level because they were able to provide valuable insight into the opportunity to improve intergroup helping interactions, particularly in a campus community where financial instability often intersects with academic and personal stressors. Staff in these positions were well-situated to offer perspectives on the types of support they are offering, what they believed was effective when supporting students, and where they experienced limitations in practice or resources and believed they would benefit from more support.

I utilized a designed approach to this study, creating a participant-level “activity meaning system” that captured a broad spectrum of perspectives and institutional contexts (Daiute, 2014). An Activity Meaning System is useful because it recognizes that study participants participate, directly and indirectly, in the creation of meaning of a given topic or issue (in this case, basic needs challenges and professional praxis of support for such; 2014). An Activity Meaning System pulls together perspectives that collectively demonstrate the relational contexts and impacts on the partially shared object of focus (2014). Because a goal of this study involved

affecting the campus social norms and narratives around help and this type of student challenge, an Activity Meaning System was helpful to map the current social constructs (2014). Participants were drawn from a range of departments and functional areas throughout campus environments. The participants included: academic advisors, a supervisor in new student onboarding, a director of a cultural center, a manager from a dining concept, a financial aid advisor, a student supervisor at the library, a nurse from the student health center, student success staff in the academic colleges, and a hall director. Additional participants included staff with special expertise in student veterans' services, graduate advising, career programming, and crisis support. This sampling approach created a web that built a picture of the narratives and roles that inform not just individual practices, but also the broader organizational and cultural contexts (2014) that shape how basic needs support is conceptualized and enacted across campus. Including participants from diverse roles ensured that the study surfaced both shared patterns and divergent strategies across functional areas, role-type, and other institutional boundaries, pulling from stakeholders who all may have an interest in the outcome (2014). Participants were recruited through targeted email outreach to unit heads and department leaders who were asked to forward the research invitation to eligible participants on their teams (appendices D & E). Some participants were recruited through direct outreach. I also reached out to the coordinator of the campus CSSA program described in Chapter 1 and asked that individual to nominate program alumni who were working on campus.

Using an Activity Meaning System for the inspiration of this sampling design was especially appropriate for addressing the research questions, which explore professional experiences (i.e., how staff want to be helping students, what strategies they find meaningful, what their goals are when providing support to students, and what kinds of professional

development might enhance their capacity for intentional intergroup helping with basic needs challenges). By drawing from a wide range of roles, this study captured varied interpretations of effective support, along with the underlying beliefs, values, and structural realities that inform those perspectives and that made visible system and relational dynamics (Daiute, 2014) relevant to these types of helping interactions. This diverse sample, drawing from multiple divisions of campus staff, helped to identify gaps between current practices and potential enhancements drawn from the literature on intergroup helping and student development. The breadth of perspectives from these participants revealed meaningful potential for improved praxis with regard to autonomy-promoting, developmental and educational approaches to assistance with basic needs challenges.

Because this was a qualitative study aimed to understand professional practices campus-wide, collection continued until thematic saturation was reached (Creswell, 2008). The target sample size of fourteen participants completed a meaningful representation of various components of the OSU campus, producing a rich body of data through the intentionally designed Activity Meaning System that spoke directly to both the complexities of the research questions and today's campus professionals (Daiute, 2014).

Data Collection

The primary mode of data collection was one semi-structured interview with fourteen student-facing professional staff at Oregon State University involving the use of and discussion of vignettes with appreciative inquiry informed questions. The vignette discussion and interview format and protocols were also been piloted with five colleagues to refine clarity, pacing, and alignment with the study's research questions and ensure value for analysis within the theoretical framework. Following approval from Oregon State's Internal Review Board, I began recruiting

candidates. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and elicited participants' reflections on helping interactions with students experiencing basic needs challenges and perspectives on future training opportunities relevant to this student need. Zoom interviews created a live transcription of participant comments (Gray et al, 2020). This transcript was later cleaned and prepared for later data analysis.

Interview Protocol, Part 1 Intro and Vignette Exploration (approximately first 60 minutes)

The interview began with discussion of the consent form and agreement. Next, the interview progressed to an overview of the study and a brief discussion of the participant's professional background, role, and typical relationships with students. After this period of rapport building and background gathering, the interview moved on to the vignette portion. I explained what participants can expect from the interview, how the vignettes would be displayed (using the share screen functionality) and then asked if they wanted me to read the vignette to them, or let them read it to themselves. Next, I presented the participants with each of a series of three vignettes (one at a time) and asked them to focus their attention primarily on the choices and actions of the professional staff member depicted in the scenarios; each fictionalized vignette depicted a helping scenario involving a student experiencing a basic needs challenge.

Participants were first presented with either the "Getting Groceries" or the "On the Struggle Bus" vignette, both of which depict a negative interaction that conveys stigma about basic needs challenges. After the participant had time to read the vignette, I moved through a series of interview questions, prompting them to remark and reflect on the professional praxis depicted and areas of appreciation or difference regarding their own approach to helping students. The open-ended prompts elicited their interpretations, assumptions, values, and preferred professional responses (Törrönen, 2018). Additional questions probed at training and professional

preparedness to support students with similar challenges. After about 15 minutes of discussion, I next presented the second vignette, “Time to Shake the Tree,” which depicted a dependency-promoting approach to supporting a student with a basic needs challenge. The interview questions repeated from the prior vignette.

Finally, participants were presented with a third and final vignette, “Roll up some sleeves” in which the helping interaction involved an autonomy-promoting approach to assisting the student and again, the same set of interview questions were repeated. Because the discussions of the vignettes were not focused on their own professional praxis, but on their reactions to the fictionalized professional in the scenario, I hoped it would reduce the risk of defensiveness and encourage honest reflection from the participants (Möller et al., 20205). Vignettes are presented in Appendix A. Other data collection tools (interview questions and a handout) are available in Appendix B.

Interview Protocol, Part 2 Professional Development Inquiries (approximately last 30 minutes)

During this portion of the interview participants were invited to reflect more broadly on their professional development needs, perceived training opportunities or gaps, and further explanations about their typical approaches to supporting students with basic needs challenges. After the first few interviews, I dropped a portion of the interview protocol where participants were asked to explain their helping approach and hyper-specific approaches to basic needs challenges. This portion created confusion and was not providing much value to the research questions; none of this data was used to inform the findings or analysis. Adapting the interview protocol and being flexible to prioritize discussion in other areas of the interview helped meet the goals of the study (Lareau, 2022). Within this part of this post-vignette interview protocol, participants were also asked about recommendations for training a new colleague on these kinds

of student support interactions and training that was helpful to their own learning (Conklin et al., 2002; Hammons & Wallace, 1977). These questions helped participants co-construct part of the research agenda and surfaced potential areas for capacity-building and future campus training initiatives (Creswell, 2008). Integrating this collaborative frame situated me and the interview participants in a shared group identity, collectively working to improve campus norms, a design choice that I hope will contribute to more trust in tools and activities built from the research data (Halabi & Nadler, 2017).

The full interview protocol (Appendices A and B) promoted generative, strengths-oriented dialogue (Bushe, 2012). Interview questions drew on the core principles of appreciative inquiry, including an emphasis on valued and effective practices and motivations for aspirational change and improved outcomes (2012). Table 3.1 explains the various literature informing the research design.

Table 3.1
Overview of Literature Informing Key Research Elements

Research Element	Research Goal	Informing Literature
Participant Selection	Map the locally relevant socially-constructed ideas informing helping approaches to basic needs challenges.	Activity-Meaning System (Daiute, 2014)
Vignettes	Invite practitioner perspectives on designed examples of praxis that reflect helping interactions aligned with key ideas of theoretical framework.	Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model (Halabi & Nadler, 2017), Vignettes in research protocols (Bain, 2024; Stravakou & Lozgka, 2018; Törrönen, 2018; Jenkins et al., 2010)
Interview Questions	Prompt honest reflection, critique, and recommendations, avoid defensiveness and social desirability bias	Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2024; Bushe, 2012)

Handout: Training Interests, Capacity, and Modality Input	Situate participants as cocreators of professional learning opportunities. Reflect goals to build practitioner efficacy to autonomously support students with common basic needs challenges.	(Winston & Creamer, 1997; Conklin et al., 2002; Hammons & Wallace, 1977)
Coding Work	Identify relevant themes and concepts informing current praxis. Explore participant meaning-making through close examination of communication from practitioners describing their praxis and valued approaches for providing help with basic needs challenges.	Significance Analysis (Daiute, 2014), In Vivo (Creswell, 2008)

Phases of Data Collection

The data collection process proceeded through the following phases:

1. Recruitment and Scheduling (Weeks 1–4): Participants were recruited through departmental outreach and professional networks. Interviews were scheduled based on participant availability.
2. Interview (Weeks 2–9): Participants completed a 90-minute Zoom interview. After informed consent was obtained and a pseudonym was confirmed, participants were asked to respond to three of four selected fictionalized vignettes, each followed by semi-structured interview prompts (Törrönen, 2018). Part two of the interview collected broader professional insights, training needs, and areas of uncertainty or complexity in supporting students with basic needs concerns. The session was audio recorded, transcribed, and supplemented by researcher field notes (Creswell, 2008).
3. Post-Interview Processing (Weeks 4–10): Transcripts were reviewed, and key ideas were annotated (Creswell, 2008). Initial coding occurred using Dedoose. Analytic memos were written after each interview to record reflections and notable themes (2008).

Challenges included some complexity recruiting a dining manager, scheduling conflicts, and some unexpected health challenges. Four interviews occurred while I was recovering from a mild concussion. I mitigated the impact of these issues by:

- Maintaining strong communication with my participants, rescheduling when necessary.
- Visiting a campus dining center to make a personal connection with a manager and subsequently discussed the project verbally with the future participant.
- Managing other commitments in my life to preserve capacity to move the project forward.

Data Analysis

This study was guided by an appreciative inquiry frame so as to emphasize strengths, values, and areas of notable or admirable praxis known to be working well that could be scaled or shared (Bushe, 2012). This approach fostered a climate of trust during the interviews and aligned with the study's ultimate goal: to inform future training or interventions that enhance staff efficacy and institutional culture around supporting students' basic needs. Importantly, this appreciative lens was not uncritical in this research study, a common concern regarding appreciative inquiry informed methods (2012). The study design explicitly invited and incorporated critique from participants, especially where they identified gaps in training, surfaced problematic norms, or noticed underdeveloped approaches to helping. Such critiques were not viewed as deviations from the appreciative frame but rather as additional assets, or insights that helped to surface the institution's implicit values and point toward areas for improvement (2012). These critical perspectives were coded and analyzed as meaningful contributions to the broader picture of campus helping culture but not connected to any one

research participant in the chapters below so as to further protect that practitioner's professional reputation.

Data analysis in this study followed a qualitative approach supported by tools from significance analysis (Daiute, 2014). This analysis helped to identify patterns in how student-facing professionals interpret, describe, and evaluate helping interactions with students navigating basic needs challenges, and to surface their recommendations for improving professional development and institutional practices and assumptions that may be preventing effective practice. The process considered both the referential content (what is said) and the evaluative meaning (how it was said and why) and helped to capture the nuance of professional approaches (2014). Table 3.2 explains the data sources, theoretical lens and analysis methods for each of the research questions.

Table 3.2

Overview of Analysis by Research Question

Research Question	Data Source(s)	Analysis Method	Theoretical Lens
RQ1: What do student services professionals perceive as their roles, responsibilities, preparedness and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?	Participant Interview. Questions informed by Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2024)	Significance Analysis (Daiute, 2014), In Vivo coding (Creswell, 2008)	Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model (Halabi and Nadler, 2017)
RQ2: In what ways do those perceptions shape an assets-based approach, building student capacity and in what ways do those perceptions inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based approach, withholding developmental support?	Participant Interview shaped by Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2024)	Significance Analysis (Daiute, 2014) In Vivo coding (Creswell, 2008)	Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model (Halabi and Nadler, 2017)

RQ3: What training could shift approaches from deficit-based to developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches when helping students with basic needs challenges?	Participant Interview shaped by Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2024)	Significance Analysis (Daiute, 2014) In Vivo coding (Creswell, 2008)	Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model (Halabi and Nadler, 2017)
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Adapted from Ward (2026).

Coding and Thematic Development

Due to the volume of data collected and the research timeline, I utilized Dedoose to assist with data analysis. Analysis began with an initial round of open coding, using both in vivo codes (terms used by participants) and descriptive codes to capture key ideas, beliefs, and interpretations related to helping behaviors, professional identity, institutional norms, and student needs relevant to these interactions (Creswell, 2008). Codes were developed inductively and iteratively, informed by both the research questions and the emerging data (2008). Some codes, noted use of power in concepts from the IHSR model, for example a code that tracked examples of strategic helping and another that was applied to examples where participants were speaking about or with assumptions. Following open coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories and themes further informed by the IHSR model. When the data was within patterns of dependency promoting approaches, those themes were clustered as were data indicating patterns of more autonomy promoting approaches.

Significance Analysis

Drawing from Daiute's (2014) concept of significance analysis in qualitative research, the study attended not only to what participants said, but how they said it. This included identifying evaluative devices such as emotional qualifiers, intensifiers, negations, and causal connectors, which functioned to emphasize, minimize, humanize, or distance a participant from particular events or stances (2014), which are communication moves that can carry significant meaning at

the interaction level (2014; Suarez, 2018). Linguistic choices by participants, (for example, to use the verb “direct”) provided deeper cues to how participants understand and enact their role within helping interactions and the institutional context in which those occur. This focus supported the study’s aim of capturing how participants constructed meaning around basic needs support and how they understood the significance of certain practices, norms, or dilemmas in their professional narratives (Stravakou & Lozgka, 2018), which is crucial to understanding how professionals may be contributing to or reducing stigma (Halabi & Nadler, 2017). In keeping with the applied goals of the study, data was also analyzed for recommendations, priorities, and insights regarding future professional development efforts. This data was extracted from cues embedded in reflections and responses to the vignettes and responses to the inquiries about professional development and training opportunities (2008). Interview data that revealed discomfort, ambiguity, or perceived gaps in staff preparedness were coded to surface desired areas of growth that will inform the design of future training.

Efforts to Promote Trustworthiness

Multiple considerations have been integrated into this study to promote trustworthiness in the data and results. Trustworthiness was supported by selecting participants who did not have a significant prior professional relationship with me as the researcher (Creswell, 2008). This helped reduce power dynamics and potential bias, and encouraged participants to speak candidly (2008). Another core decision that supported trustworthiness from the participants was the use of fictionalized case studies as the basis for discussion during interviews (Möller et al., 20205). Asking participants to recount or evaluate their own past actions could have provoked self-censorship or defensiveness and so I used shared, neutral scenarios to invite reflection that was both less personally risky and more generative (2025). This strategy minimized social

desirability bias while allowing participants to share insights, critique practices, and articulate preferred helping approaches with greater openness (2025). Additionally, participants were asked general questions about approaches they take to supporting students with basic needs challenges. These other inquiries into practice provided opportunities to triangulate the data and further promote credibility. In addition to video recording participant interviews, I also recorded field notes after each interview and a journal as I engaged in data clean up and coding steps. I utilized peer debriefing to review my efforts with coding, the codebook, transcripts, and findings with my major advisor to further promote credibility (Burkeholder, 2020).

While this study resulted in local and internally valid results, the results cannot be expected to be transferable to other campus landscapes where training practices and professional norms might be meaningfully divergent from the OSU context (Burkholder et al., 2020). To promote credibility of results to this study, I asked colleagues and coworkers to review the vignettes, interview questions and related handout materials to provide feedback in order to help the study lead to the most useful data. My tests of these measurement tools helped me solidify an order to present vignettes and refine questions to surface descriptions of current practices relevant to the research questions. To promote dependability, I created a detailed codebook, integrating both significance analysis tools (Daiute, 2014) and in vivo coding. Across the fourteen interviews, I generated 1442 excerpts, 145 codes, and 3544 applications of codes. I connected some portions of the coding work to key research in this subject area and built on existing work to draw throughlines relevant to this functional area while limiting some amount of researcher subjectivity (Burkeholder, 2020). I also acknowledge reflexively that my subject matter expertise and positionality contributed some amount to how I analyzed and interpreted the

data; I have transparently included a positionality statement to speak to biases that may be informing this study.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in alignment with the ethical standards required by Oregon State University and was subject to review and approval by the OSU Institutional Review Board prior to any data collection activities. The study design was informed by ethical research codes (“AERA Code of Ethics,” 2011). Informed, signed consent was obtained from each participant electronically before any interviews took place (Burkholder, 2020; 2011). Participants received a consent form outlining the study’s purpose, procedures, anticipated risks and benefits, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality protections (2020; 2011). The form clarified that the participant was free to withdraw at any time and also described how data was used, stored, and shared (2020; 2011).

Due to the nature of qualitative research and the small, campus-based participant pool, full anonymity was not able to be guaranteed (Creswell, 2008). However, strict confidentiality protocols were in place. All participants had an opportunity to choose a pseudonym of their choice, and identifying details such as specific department names, job titles, or distinctive anecdotes were altered or generalized during transcription and data reporting (2008). No identifying data has been nor will be shared in any written or verbal dissemination of findings (2008; “AERA Code of Ethics,” 2011). All research data, including interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and coding documents, have been securely stored in OSU’s approved, password-protected Box drive as required by OSU’s IRB. They will be held for three years and deleted thereafter. Access to this data has been and will be limited to myself and my primary

advisor (2008). Any data that was downloaded or temporarily stored on local devices have been removed after transfer to the Box drive.

The anticipated risks to participants in this study were minimal. However, discussing professional experiences and opinions about institutional practices may have prompted some discomfort or concern about reputational risk (Burkholder et al., 2020). To mitigate this, all participants were clearly informed that their participation was voluntary, that they were able to skip any question or withdraw at any time without penalty, and that their responses would be kept confidential (2020; “AERA Code of Ethics,” 2011). The use of fictional vignettes in the interview process provided a layer of emotional safety and encouraged participants to respond to hypothetical scenarios rather than disclose personal or sensitive experiences with real students (Bain, 2024). Participants were selected only from staff with whom I had a limited or no professional relationship to eliminate potential power imbalances or perceived coercion (Creswell, 2008). Participants were also informed that their decision to participate or not participate would have no impact on their employment, or relationship with me (2020).

The findings from this study will be shared in several ways, including presentations to interested campus stakeholders, academic conferences, and peer-reviewed publications. Results may also be used to inform training, staff development programs, or discussions about institutional responses to student basic needs at OSU or other higher education settings. In all cases, participants’ identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and by redacting or modifying any potentially identifying information (Burkholder, 2020; “AERA Code of Ethics,” 2011). No data has been nor will be presented that could reasonably be traced back to a specific individual. These ethical considerations are meant to support participants’ dignity,

protect their privacy, and ensure that this research contributes constructively to the field of student support services.

Limitations

While this study was designed to provide meaningful insights into how student-facing staff understand, value, and approach intergroup helping in the context of basic needs challenges, there are several limitations that may impact the scope, transferability, and reach of the findings. One significant constraint was the limited timeframe available for data collection. The data collection occurred within a single academic term, which limited the possibility of building in longitudinal inquiries that could track evolving understandings or changes in staff practices over time; such could be especially compelling given the appreciative inquiry throughline (Bushe, 2012) and potential to observe system-change through the very nature of asking questions (2012). A longer-term design could offer deeper insight into how my research questions, presentation of vignettes, and experimental training tools might affect staff praxis and social constructs of intergroup helping behaviors.

Access to participants also presented a practical limitation. While recruitment efforts targeted a diverse group of student-facing staff, the final sample size (fourteen participants) was relatively small given the hundreds of staff situated throughout campus and who interact with students daily. Additionally, participation was voluntary and may have been influenced by availability or interest, which introduced a potential self-selection bias (Creswell, 2008). Staff who chose to participate may have been more reflective or motivated to improve in the areas under study, which may have resulted in a less representative picture of broader staff practices.

As with all qualitative research, transferability is inherently limited (Creswell, 2008). The insights developed through this study are context-bound, shaped by the specific institutional

culture and norms of Oregon State University. While themes and findings may offer useful guidance or hypotheses for other institutions, they would not be intended to be predictive or universally applicable. The sample size, while appropriate for in-depth qualitative inquiry, may not have allowed for thematic saturation across all role types or student service units.

Furthermore, the use of fictional case studies in the interviews (while helpful for eliciting discussion in a neutral, less self-disclosive way; Möller et al., 20205) meant that data is based on participants' reflections, assumptions, and perspectives rather than observations of their actual behavior. This design choice prioritized psychological safety and allowed for more candid critique, but it may not have always captured how participants would respond in real-life, often high-pressure interactions (2025) though participants were forthcoming in providing descriptions of how the vignettes mirrored or deviated from actual interactions in their practice.

Additionally, as with all self-reported data, findings relied on participant honesty and their ability to accurately articulate their thoughts and perspectives in the moment (Möller et al., 20205). One participant's responses were remarkably brief, of limited value, and lacking in depth – subsequently, this participant's data was coded but does not appear in the findings where other data was more illustrative of the themes that emerged. Although interview prompts were carefully constructed within an appreciative inquiry frame to reduce defensiveness or distortion, the risk of social desirability bias remained (Call-Cummings & Dazzo, 2023) and some participants acknowledged skill gaps and a lack of confidence in some of their perspectives. On the whole, the design led to rich, values-based reflection but the resulting data should be one part of many indicators that help administrators understand staff efficacy when they support helping interactions involving students with basic needs challenges.

Importantly, this study did not include the student perspective. While it explored how professionals think about, approach, and assess helping behaviors in the context of basic needs challenges, it did not gather data from students who navigate these kinds of interactions. Thus, it cannot speak to the lived experience of those engaging in help-seeking behavior nor can it indicate how staff behavior is received beyond the empirical research Nadler and his team have conducted regarding helping interactions (2020). The field would benefit from future studies that more closely apply and seek to understand the Intergroup Helping as Status Relations Model from the student perspective, particularly to draw connections to whether power dynamics or social identity considerations shape how help is experienced or avoided in this functional area.

Finally, as the researcher, I served as a key instrument in the study given my role both gathering and interpreting the data collected (Clandinin, 2013). While steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness and reduce bias, my own positionality, assumptions, and interpretations necessarily influenced the study. This was both a strength and a limitation of qualitative research and this study (Creswell, 2008).

Chapter 4 Results

Helping interactions minimally involve a helper or service provider who controls resources and a potential recipient who can benefit from those resources.

--Gross and McMullen, *The Help-Seeking Process*

After completing fourteen interviews with participants throughout the university, I have presented the results most relevant to my research questions in this chapter. My research questions were:

1. What do student services professionals perceive as their roles, responsibilities, preparedness and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?
2. In what ways do those perceptions shape an assets-based approach, building student capacity and in what ways do those perceptions inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based approach, withholding developmental support?
3. What training could shift approaches from deficit-based to developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches when helping students with basic needs challenges?

This chapter includes a description of the various backgrounds and roles of participants and a brief description of the analytic steps that resulted in the themes presented in this chapter. Each theme is presented as a section below. The first theme contextualizes how student service professionals described their roles inside familial language and explained times when they might act protectively toward a student, act or advocate on their behalf. Another theme unpacks a dynamic surfaced in most interviews; participants conceptualized their role as something like a

conduit, connecting students to other resources that best matched the needs a student might share in a conversation, often focusing on material and financial resource needs. The data also surfaced a theme wherein practitioners use their roles of authority to treat students as humans with complex developmental needs including when those students are in a particularly difficult challenge. Finally, because the purpose of my research was to inform subsequent opportunities to provide professional development that improves helping interactions, the last theme I explore unpacks the divergent perspectives student services staff utilize when describing the complexity of helping interactions. This theme also unpacks sparse references made by participants to organizational structures and functions intentionally developing the quality of help provided to students as well as the generative potential of vignettes when training staff. In this chapter, I will make a few notes connecting these findings to the research questions. Lengthier analysis about how these findings answer the research questions can be found in the next chapter.

Description of the Participants

The study participants represented perspectives, experiences, and roles throughout the Oregon State University campus landscape. Half of the participants were employed within the Division of Student Affairs. Of those that reported elsewhere, three held roles within the division of Enrollment Management and four held roles that were embedded within academic units. Their titles (de-identified) included the following: library manager, community director, food service manager, nurse, advisor, and career mentor. Three were counselors from different functional areas: one from the mental health counseling team, one from billing and financial aid, and another who provided academic counseling. Participants included staff with a special focus on graduate students, international students, veterans and students who are active service members, one involved with admissions programming, and four who were directly involved with diversity,

inclusion and belonging efforts for students who often experience marginalization on account of minoritized identities. Two were in their first student services role; one only 18 months into the experience and the other about three years in. Many had been providing support to students for 8 years or longer. Multiple had prior career experience informing their work, sometimes stemming from other student support roles at OSU, while others cited military service, customer service roles, time spent in the non-profit sector, or classroom teaching experiences as informing their perspectives and approaches.

Summary of Analytic Procedures

After conducting interviews and through my initial round of coding, I often utilized my research journal to highlight divergent perspectives present among the participants, noting emerging commonalities and reflections I was making about this broader window into student services interactions at Oregon State University. As I began to cluster my codes, I determined that the responses to the vignette portion of the interview were as relevant to the research questions as the questions that more directly addressed the practitioner's concept of their work and responsibilities. Within the vignette portion, practitioners readily framed their responses as opportunities to compare and contrast their own approach, often explaining their perspectives and reasoning in advance of the question prompting such. All sections of the interview provided rich content relevant to my research questions, and I let these questions inform my choices to focus, identify, and cluster codes and quotes relevant to my study purpose of improving campus norms around supporting students with basic needs challenges.

Presentation of Findings

Staff are Like Parents, there to Soothe and Wrap Students with Support

A recurrent theme in the interviews, relevant to RQ1 and RQ2, was a regular use of language and framing that sounded familial and sometimes parental. Some connected this perspective to student's youthfulness while others referenced the novelty of the college experience. In this theme, we see practitioners making choices on behalf of a student, directing students on what their next action ought to be and framing the student as youthful and in need of the knowledge, support, and protection of the professional. It was often the case that participants were seeing their actions as helpful and in the best interests of the students.

A few participants explained that the role they saw themselves having in student's lives was one that was more like family than not. Participants explained that, from their perspective, the student's youthfulness sometime created a need for staff to step in and provide. As one interviewee put it:

I call them the baby beavers, because they're just out new on their own, trying to figure out independence. And a lot of them just... They need a mom or auntie, or dad, or uncle, you know, someone to kind of just give them some solid, concrete direction.

This participant saw her role as providing the student's need for direction when they did not have family present to offer this type of support. Another participant, Christina--a younger professional--explains that as she builds relationships with students, she asks about more than academics, inquiring about how the student's home life is, checking in that they are able to afford food and are successfully transitioning to college life. Christina understands that she too, is in some ways, filling in for what might not be provided from family members, particularly as students are navigating their transition to the college environment:

It's mostly academics, trying to help with resources, but it's not really limited just to that, because we know students struggle through many things, right? A first-gen student or a low-income student, you don't necessarily have that support at home.

Other participants also spoke about their role as something important in the potential absence of effective social support. For example, Daisy spoke of resonance in her own experience as informing how she sees the importance of support from people in roles like hers:

I remember as a little freshman or sophomore in college, it was a long time ago... I was a first-gen student, and I didn't have anybody I could be, like, "Hey, what office do I go to this place for?" ... I had my friends in the dorm who were just as clueless as I was.

Daisy's own experience lacking support in college informs how she comes to understand current student needs.

For Christina, a successful helping interaction involving a student with basic needs challenges means that at the end, "the student feels relief... they feel security and a sense that they have their basic needs covered, that they're able to focus on other things. I feel like it takes some weight off their shoulders." Throughout the interviews, participants were often in similar reflection or discussion about the boundaries of their roles and responsibilities, and how such informed their efforts and experiences supporting students holistically. Daisy explained that she saw her job as one where her role was to "wrap ... support around the student to help them be successful and get through whatever's going on." Interviewees made regular connections to the ways that students' holistic needs might impact and impede their ability to be successful in college.

Doing it for Students, Filling in for Family.

A subtheme emerged, wherein practitioners spoke about taking action on a student's behalf, or making decisions for them as a parent or family might. The data in this theme indicated occasions where student services professionals might engage more directly with students and become more involved as they support students through their challenges. While some staff described these actions positively and benefitting the student, other professionals shared concerns about how this might impact their relationship with the student or their learning. Participants occasionally referenced a lack of clarity about where the boundary of professional support should end, and what is most appropriate in those cases.

One professional explained that she assesses students' capacities and "there's sometimes... when I'm a little bit more direct with students." These occasions mean that she may "be a little bit more pushy, like 'go do this, I promise that you need to do this to get the support you need.'" Other times, she explained that her choice to direct students on the actions they should take is responsive to the student's perceived emotional needs in a given moment.

It depends on their level of distress. If someone comes in and their world's falling apart, their apartment lease is coming up, or their roommates bailed, or something, I might be a little bit more directive in that kind of situation, because there's too many things happening, and they're struggling to manage, and so they're in distress, and that's going to impact their academics, and, you know, all of the realms of their world.

This professional indicated that from her perspective, certain contexts dictate this "more involved" approach. Christina also talked about this involved approach when she described a time working with a student who did not have money for groceries, explaining that she was able to provide non-perishable food items that would support the student through the next week.

Some participants did not see it as part of their role and responsibilities to be so involved with challenges that students were experiencing. Dave, who has been working with students for at least a decade longer than Christina, was one of those participants that shared concerns about some actions that staff might take with students. Dave explained that:

You want to provide as much help as you possibly can, but I mean, I can't pay someone's bills for them. There's only so much I can do myself, or that it's appropriate to do, and so, sometimes, I would like to do more, and maybe even in certain instances, I could do more, but then does that, you know... cross a professional line there?

Other participants also acknowledged the balance between what is appropriate support to provide students as a student services professional and what might be an overstep of the boundary into that which is the student's responsibility. For example, Astrid described a time when she was helping a student with a financial crisis, attempting to take care of the student's problems through her own efforts and connections as a staff member:

I made a call to student employment, and had a conversation with them, and they put me in touch with the International Student Office.... and I talked to other people, and, I mean, they were grateful that I was advocating for the student, but at the same time, they wanted to hear her voice.

Astrid's attempts to act on the student's behalf were ultimately unsuccessful when she encountered other staff who expected the student to be involved in efforts to solve their own issue.

This concept of doing something *for students*, to solve their problem *for them*, came up often in the interviews; sometimes participants endorsed the approach and sometimes they shared concerns. Each participant engaged with a vignette in which a student services professional

encounters a student who is two months away from her lease ending. In this vignette, the student is described as high achieving, goal-oriented, and generally exhibiting high-efficacy with regard to her transition to adulthood, meeting her basic needs, and paying her bills. In the vignette, the professional ignores evidence of her capabilities, provides no information about his next steps following his conversation with the student, and proceeds to then email the student's private information (without her permission) to other administrators, securing \$1,000 in additional, emergency-type aid funding without the student's involvement or awareness of his efforts on her behalf. Some participants experienced this vignette with confusion, sharing concerns and surprise about a process for student support about which they were unaware. "If there is funds lying around that can help students in financial need, I do feel like it's a great thing for people in student services to know about for situations like this, so that it can be utilized," said Josiah. The lack of clear process and transparency of decision making was similarly remarked on by other participants, but not everyone had those concerns. Astrid believed that this pathway of support was in strong alignment with the philosophies and approach present in her organization, one that provides community and belonging for marginalized students. The professional "should work for [this department]!" she said with particular enthusiasm. Kai's immediate response to this vignette was "good work... I think this is a perfect example" of help for a student with a basic needs challenge. Kai, another professional with extensive experience supporting marginalized students, explained that his professional experience advocating on behalf of financially stressed students was also in close alignment with the events within the vignette. He described a recent situation when he "advocated with the department and the college, and the college was like, 'yeah, at the end of the day, it's \$800, just give them the money.'" Kai described the purpose of his efforts to "advocate on behalf of the student and not put... additional labor on the student." As Kai saw it,

he wanted to protect the student from an experience that from his perspective, seemed like “okay, now you need to go and talk to this person. You need to go to a place that you have a huge power dynamic differential, and like, beg for money.”

Other times when the participants discussed this second vignette, they expressed concern and discomfort that the sharing of the student’s private information was a step to secure an emergency grant. Some participants framed this an oversight of the compliance expectations of FERPA (the Federal Educational Right to Privacy Act) while others were concerned about the professional’s lack of consideration that the student might want that information kept private given people’s propensity to stigmatize a person’s experience in the foster care system (which was the experience of the student in the vignette). Frank, spoke from perspective he has gained being in community with veterans:

I don't know that they needed to share the foster youth information. That's very personal to people. That was shared in relative confidence. It's like being a veteran--that has a stigma with it for a lot of people-- for folks that have come up through the foster program, that's not something they share with everybody, because that leads to “Oh, I've heard all these things about kids in the foster program.”

Frank drew on his experience with stigma as a veteran to inform his opinion on the choices made by the student support professional in this vignette. Another participant in the study spoke of the student exactly as Frank cautioned, stating that from her point of view, she understood that the student is “coming from foster care, which means there's trauma, and there's things that have happened in her life that are... bigger barriers that other students might not face.” While he acknowledged that the financial support was likely helpful to the student in the vignette, Dave

shared similar concerns that Frank did, again, connecting his perspective to his personal, lived experience and why he saw it as important to protect student's privacy:

Having a daughter who was adopted, and went through foster care, for her, there's a lot of shame in the fact that she was in foster care and she doesn't really like people to know that. That is information that is kind of sensitive.

Like Dave, Josiah understood the new funds were likely of benefit to the student but felt the tension from the disclosure of personal information, explaining that it “hurts me on the inside.”

Mike also shared concerns that the student's private information was shared without her permission or consent, but Mike shared additional insight that the professional in the vignette took other choices and decisions away from the student. He shared the following, becoming emphatic and expressive as he described his point of view and strong opinions of this vignette:

He doesn't ask her what kind of help she would like, he just says, I'll see what I can do... It bothers me that he then went to the Director of Financial Aid, gave them all this personal information about the student. The student may not even want that extra money, especially in that way. He didn't leave it in her control, her choices to make what the next step might be. I mean, part of our job in supporting students is guiding them, but still letting them make their own decisions!

After describing what he did not like about the choices in the vignette, Mike spoke about his approach to supporting students, getting explicit that it is not his role to be “doing that work for” students. “Our job is to help provide that support but also help them develop into productive members of society who can make choices and safe choices. So, you're giving them some options, but you're not trying to steer their life.” Mike's clarity of role helps him identify what is his responsibility and what is the student's responsibility.

As a hall director, Lily explained that she is often in conversations with students about rules, policies, and institutional limits and sometimes her experience is one of an occasional sense of powerlessness when holding the professional lines expected of her. She shared a particular anecdote of a time when she wanted the ability to provide housing for a student whose stay exceeded the dates of her housing contract. After the resident was arrested on move-out day and after having to personally escort her out of the building, Lily was still experiencing:

dissonance and frustration when we have hundreds of rooms. We have all these policies and procedures in place for good reasons. Protective reasons for ourselves as an institution, and protective reasons for the individuals we serve, and when it comes down to it, there are hundreds of rooms here, and I'm looking at a non-traditional student who is a Black queer woman sitting on the ground wrapped in a blanket, [still outside the residence hall the morning after move-out].

Telling this anecdote brought out emotion for Lily, illustrating the affective weight this memory holds for her. “I might cry,” she warned, before telling this story of the time she was unable to wrap the student with the support that she had wanted to be able to give.

Within this theme, staff sometimes position themselves as providing a family-like support for students. In effect this means that the student services professional is taking on actions and choices to do things on behalf of students, though some participants shared concerns with this approach. Tensions exist for staff who often want to provide meaningful support for students and their holistic needs and also want to recognize where professional boundaries should be.

Resource Match-Makers: Diagnostic Listening and Resources that Resolve Challenges

The most dominant through line from participants involved the student services professional describing their role as something like a kind, responsive, more human version of a

switchboard, identifying and connecting students to other resources that match a student's needs, relevant to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. Staff listen to identify a need (a problem they have diagnosed the student as having), and then that matches a resource they are ready to prescribe. Within this theme, it was evident that preparedness hinged on the student service professional's own knowledge of resources. Participants spoke with awareness that student challenges can often be attributed to unmet needs, particularly unmet basic needs, which was understood to be particularly stressful. All participants saw their role as providing support for students to meet their needs, including those needs beyond the academic realm.

It was Tyler's goal to be "helping students with whatever needs or wants they have on campus, so we can be a resource and support, because ... I do feel that is important to provide resources and be knowledgeable." Daisy echoes these sentiments: "I think a big part of anybody's role on campus is supporting students. And a big part of that is making sure they have what they need to be successful. Food, shelter, you know, Maslow's basic hierarchy." Daisy sees the role of student services staff as one that helps identify resources that can meet any student's needs, with basic needs of particular importance.

The findings in this theme include the way that student services professionals understood the function of their roles as being important to how students came to learn about or discover resources. Kai described the value of even "casually mentioning, 'hey, here's a resource.' ... that mention of that resource can be very helpful in helping the student get connected with the right resources." Daisy explained that a strength she brings to her role is informed by the years she worked in the local community and the subsequent breadth of off-campus resources she knows relative to her colleagues. She explains how she hears student's challenges and surfaces resources that she perceives as being solutions to any number of needs. She said:

I'm kind of a problem solver, so if someone showed up and said they had a flat tire and can't pay for them, and now has to take (public) transportation, I'd be like, "did you know about this, you know, rideshare program," or "did you know about this," or, "do you have anybody you can carpool with? Like, there's several options around campus that might be available." Public transportation is fine, but there's other options just in case. (If) someone comes in and they don't have food tonight, I'm like, "okay, well, guess what?" There's... you know, there's stuff available, and... so when I know the resources, that makes me feel more confident that they're gonna be successful in navigating them.

For Daisy, this knowledge of resources informs both her confidence and how she understands successful outcomes in her work. Others equated preparedness to support students with knowledge of resources. Christina, one of the early career professionals I interviewed, explained that gaining resource knowledge is a way of improving her practice supporting students:

When I don't know things, I like to do research and gain more knowledge so that I'm able to better provide the student with even more information for next time, and later, feel more confident in my responses and being able to help students with their needs.

Christina's comments illustrate that inside of this view of successful student affairs practice, professional development and improving one's outcomes means growing awareness of resources available to students. This dynamic also emerged when professionals were asked about recommendations they would make to a new colleague or peer who wanted to improve how they provided support for students experiencing a basic needs challenge. Every participant, when asked this question, spoke about the importance of knowing about the services and resources available at the campus' Basic Needs Center. The Basic Needs Center was spoken about as a

place providing tangible resources that are important to be aware of when supporting a student experiencing a challenge with their basic needs.

While it was less salient when it comes to discussions focused on basic needs challenges, some participants made references to the skills of other professionals when they were self-aware of a skill gap or expertise that is beyond their professional scope. Lily described herself as “a warm resource referrals kind of character for student’s lives,” and explained that it is her job to “notice when a student is struggling or experiencing a hardship, and then try to make good, warm connections to the resources on campus that can help them. There's so many other experiences that students can navigate that I am not the expert in,” giving examples such as a program that supports students who are survivors of sexual violence. Tyler made a similar reference to expertise he may lack, acknowledging that “we're not gonna be experts in every field, but we can get folks to the people that are experts in the areas they're looking for.” Gillian explained that it is important for her to know “who helps with what. Kind of, like who to talk to, I guess. Like... a student asks about this, send them here. A student asks about this, send them here.” Within the data, participants almost always spoke as though every student need would have available a matching related resource ready to provide support.

All interviews included discussion of a vignette involving a supervisor who collaborates with a student to create two plans through a period of financial stress to maintain enrollment. Responses to this vignette indicated how participants viewed their roles and responsibilities and provided an explicit opportunity for participants to react to an example of a staff member supporting basic needs challenges with an empowering approach that goes beyond informing student of a resource. While most participants spoke appreciatively about the skills demonstrated within this approach, explored in a later theme, a few participants explained that from their

perspective, it is inappropriate to do anything beyond or in addition to being a resource matchmaker when supporting students in their roles. For example, Dave, who works in food service, explained that in his context:

rather than us helping them with those problems, we're supposed to guide them over to other people or resources that are actually trained in how to help them with their specific problems. We have to have some professional boundaries there.

Christina worried that such support might create future challenges for the student, explaining that from her perspective:

counseling students is not necessarily (the supervisor's) role, and doesn't necessarily mean that she's truly going to be able to help him out all the time as needed like his advisor (would), so, I feel like... (it is) perhaps, creating a relationship that might be difficult to follow through.

In her role, Christina often supports first generation students navigating the university and it may be her experience that the students she is in relationship with rarely receive this kind of holistic support. Importantly, the advisors who were interviewed for this study did not indicate that this level of support was characteristic of their official responsibilities. Bruce, who has been an advisor for many years, characterized the skillful and complex support in this vignette as beyond how the institution defines their role but within a personal view of their work and how they want to support students. They explained that if a student is bringing them a question or a challenge about their basic needs, then from their perspective it is within their job responsibilities to respond and yet they acknowledged that this would be “outside of the realm of what gets put on a job description. Certainly, that's not on a job evaluation.” Another advisor explained how this institutional oversight limits more than any one student's individual outcomes, impacting wider

institutional priorities as well. Gillian explained that from her perspective she saw this vignette as an example of:

a very supportive supervisor, probably connecting with more students than people think. And she's probably doing a lot of retention work that probably is not officially part of her (position description) and is probably underappreciated in that respect. If the university's goal is to reach 100% graduation rate, that requires a lot of this type of... labor, these unofficial, off-the-books things that are happening in small spaces like this- that people are not seeing.

Gillian illuminated why this kind of support is important to the broader institutional efforts, emphasizing that more staff supporting students in such a way would likely be essential to reaching organizational commitments detailed in the University's strategic plan. Gillian also explained that she believed this kind of approach to student support goes unseen and overlooked in the day to day work at the university. Rather, it is the more common view that student services staff are there to connect students to resources.

In this theme, student services professionals spoke about their awareness that student's basic needs are important to their academic success and retention. Participants described approaches to student support and resource referrals that were at times transactional, informing students about resources they were previously ignorant of. Outside of the contexts of financial stressors and basic needs challenges, staff identified that there are some resources from which students might access a skillset of support that was beyond the skills of the participant themselves. Of particular importance to this study, there were mixed perspectives about staff responsibilities to provide complex, empowering, and developmental support to students and their real-life challenges.

Treating Students as Humans First

In this theme, participants described the support and approach they bring to students, responding with humanistic and developmental values. This is relevant to RQ 1, as this informs how participants understood their roles, responsibilities, and experiences supporting students with basic needs challenges. This theme also reveals how the student services professional's preparedness is impacted and informed, often from prior experiences they had before their current role. A subtheme explores how these ideas come into play when participants are supporting students in particularly difficult moments.

This theme included a breadth of reactions that participants shared regarding their experiences working with students on being accountable to challenging behaviors, including repeated tardiness at work. One of the study vignettes described a common use of authority when professional staff supervise students, an exploration of role and responsibility connected to the goals for RQ1. In this vignette, the supervisor initiates a conversation with the student to address the third time the student has arrived late for work and, rather than experience a harsh reprimand or consequence, the professional shows care and curiosity about the student's personal life stressors, which are revealed to be about financial concerns. This surfaced a breadth of perspectives from research participants about workplace authority and intersections with student services experiences. Lily, for example, shared the approach she brings to her supervisory relationships with students,

I think a lot of times people overemphasize time in professional settings. If it's literally just because you said the shift should start at 9am? But that shift starting at 9am is just your own imposed construct then, can we make it more flexible?

Lily explained that she often wants to be understanding and flexible with students as a primary response to tardiness. Jill had similar perspectives about the often-harsh realities of employment settings, appreciating that in the vignette, she observed an example of a supervisor's action that from her view were,

not making him feel like he's bad, which I think is common in the workplace like, "oh, you made a mistake because you're wrong." I also just, as a person, kind of feel like people should be given slack in this world. We're so hardcore in this world about, like, "oh my god, you didn't do this right," "you didn't do that"... heaven forbid someone be a human being.

What Jill is appreciating is that the supervisor related to the student beyond their role as a worker, engaging with care for another person rather than making an admonishment about the rule violation. Josiah shared similar sentiments, appreciating that the supervisor:

didn't immediately get upset and after it happened a few times... [was] willing to actually take time to figure out what's going on and not immediately assume the worst... to really inquire and take the time to ask a lot of questions and to dig deep.

Just as Josiah points out, multiple perspectives from participants identified that the supervisor's inquiry created conversational space that surfaced a need for care and support, and they appreciated that the supervisor took the time to show that care and concern for the student. Bruce noted:

I think in many a workplace settings, it's just kind of like... "you're late, you're out." So, (it is) really nice... [to go] a step further.... that maybe we start with the challenges of "what might be causing you to run late, or causing you to not feel like you're on your A-game?"

Some participants disclosed that this is similar to patterns they observe in their work relationships with students; these conversations become a place to check in on holistic needs. Frank spoke about the patterns of non-traditional students who, like the student in the vignette, often delay help-seeking behavior. He sees the value in:

spending the time to go, okay, “Why have you been late? You know, what's going on there? ... what's the rest of the story behind it?” Because if they just would have addressed (the tardiness), it really wouldn't have got better. Wouldn't have had a chance.

Kai explained that he too recognized that the vignette showed how a professional's care and curiosity can “set the stage for a deeper conversation about something that is completely not work-related, where, I mean, tangentially related, it affects your ability to do well at work.”

Astrid explained that in her experience too, it's common for these supervisor inquiries to indicate a yet unspoken need for support, explaining that “when I see them, absent-minded or not doing their job, as they are supposed to, I check in with them, and that's when I use the open-ended questions, and they share with me.” These participants explained how their choices to attend to these conversations as part of their role benefited the student in the resulting opportunities to provide holistic student support.

All participants appreciated when professionals make time and effort to build a connection with students and establish rapport. There was high regard for choices to get to know students as whole and complex people. For example, Josiah explained that he tries to remember something about students he has met with before, to ask about progress on goals, or how their time on a recent school break was. As a general principle, he approaches each interaction “just trying to show that I do care about them as a person first, before we get into whatever they've come into my office to talk about today.” Mike explained the organizational norms on his team

wherein supervising staff members approach interactions with students from an intentionally humanistic frame. Mike personally – and in collaboration with other teammates-- aims to demonstrate “respect for students that... they are people first, are a student second, and then in our capacity, they are an employee.” For Mike’s team, a workplace policy violation centers the opportunity to develop the learner’s understanding of a new environment, to demonstrate compassion rather than focus on a punitive employment action. In his supervisory practice, when providing support to students, Mike is:

helping them build skills and knowledge that they can continue to build on as they grow and get older and become more responsible; we are helping students transition. Now they're in a totally different environment, and they're gonna need support along the way.

This “humans first” way of relating to students puts a humanistic approach first, followed closely by a developmental approach. Mike’s team would respond to employment-related concerns by holding the responsibilities to show care and to teach rather than center a set of supervisory priorities. Lily also spoke about the way she sees the importance of treating students with humanistic values, and the impact she experiences when she has to enforce rules or policies that feel removed, explaining that:

sometimes it doesn't feel like the processes, or the people making me enact the processes, remember that there are real humans on the other end of it, like “Why are you making this so hard for them, and... by proxy, me?”

Lily feels institutional processes are not responsive to human needs, and she experiences that added strain at the staff level.

Mike explains that he expects students to experience challenges, and he provides support to these real problems students experience. “Adulting is hard. No one just wakes up with, ‘I

know how to live my life' ... (It is my role to) always offer choices. Just being there, giving choices and guidance and support.” Before his current role on campus, Mike spent years as a classroom teacher, and he explained that he is often using skills, tools, and frameworks from that discipline to shape how he supports students. Mike points out that like the supervisor in the vignette:

I would do what she did and provide that scaffolding. You don't know how much support he's had, or if his support system understands what he needs to do, he just needs someone who understands and can help him develop some ideas. She's helping him develop a plan of action, strategies for how to make decisions, life decisions.

Mike uses his understanding both about human development and the students themselves to inform how he designs any given support interaction, including the conversations that involve a student's non-academic needs.

Astrid used the same vignette about the caring supervisor to speak about the value she places on an approach rooted in an ethic of care for the whole person:

She sat down and planned actions that both of them would make sure would happen. For him to succeed and graduate. So, I like that, I see value in that, because she doesn't (just) care about him as a student staff member, within the frame of the time he works in that place. But she cares about him outside that. She is stepping into the role of being a mentor. Because she's also trying to make sure that he succeeds as a human being.

Astrid sees the use of these complex helping skills as mentorship, approaching the relationship and interaction with students as opportunities to provide holistic, developmental support.

Fair and Honest Partners when Things are Difficult.

Most participants shared sentiments about how important it is to validate students when they are experiencing something difficult. This data is relevant to RQ 1 and RQ2 as it points to another way that participants are identifying their roles and responsibilities as it connects to supporting students in a manner that promotes autonomy and respects the student's agency. In this subtheme, participants explain how they preserve trusting relationships with students, including when sharing unwelcome news or helping a student with a particular hardship.

Bruce explained that when they are supporting a student, they find it important to speak directly and honestly about how challenging life can be. "Not sugarcoating, not trying to play devil's advocate to anything, no. Like, this is tough. Not shying away from it being difficult, I think is really important," Bruce said. Jill, who often talks with students about financial matters, explained that in her office "we say, like, 'Yeah, it sucks, this is hard...' 'You're right, it's expensive in Corvallis,' or like... 'I hear you... tuition is expensive,' ... 'you're not wrong for... feeling like it's expensive; it's expensive.'"

Some participants provided important data about additional considerations beyond validation that they make, relating to students inside developmental approaches, including when situations are particularly difficult. For example, Jill has had a few professional roles prior to her current student services role at OSU and approaches difficult conversations as opportunities to relate to students almost as a collaborator, a fellow human also capable of managing difficult decisions. From her point of view, "I'm just the employee who happened to have that person on my caseload. And it's important that they understand that, like, you're on their side... you're not the adversary in this conversation. You're the partner." Jill avoids taking ownership of the impact

of organizational policy that can leave students without important institutionally-provided financial resources:

Sometimes people see you as the gatekeeper, which is typically not the case, even if it is an OSU rule. These are oftentimes just, rules that every school has... I don't think it's ever happened, that I personally would make the choice to be like, “you don't get to have this money.” You know what I mean? I might be the one who identifies that as per the rules, this money has to get reduced, but if I didn't do it, someone else would.

Rather than focus on the impact of withholding material support, Jill focuses on the opportunity to inform the student about policies, people, and processes about which Jill has extensive knowledge, providing robust, non-material support:

I'm supposed to be serving them. And so, even if I'm giving them bad news, it's not bad news where I'm like, “haha, I took something from you.” I don't benefit from something negative happening to our students at all. It makes my day worse when I have to tell students something bad, so it's important, saying “I'm gonna be a thinking partner,” kind of like, “hey, I can help you with this”, or, “we can kind of figure this out together.”

Jill explained that when she is helping students, she wants to create an impact that leaves the student “feeling like their school is full of partners, as opposed to big scary, faceless drones or whatever. You can treat them like a human being, and you are also, I think, seen as a human being.” Jill's actions of supporting students with information, networking and contextual understanding, demonstrate ways she helps developmentally and relationally, beyond materialistic and financial outcomes; it's her hope that students experience this kind of partnering support throughout campus.

Skilled, Informally, and Lacking a Shared Language

This study revealed that student services staff at Oregon State University are often bringing skills to their work. The study found evidence that some staff are applying theory to their practice, and some staff are actively learning on the job, always improving their approach to student support. Participants also reported that efforts for skill development are informal and inconsistent. The data showed that some organizational pathways to improving skills are ineffective while others shape a transactional approach to practice. Furthermore, staff described their approaches often similarly in tactics but divergently in language. The data in this theme is relevant to RQ3, which seeks to understand what training can further move staff support praxis toward a developmental and empowering model.

All participants were able to speak to the importance of “knowing resources” as a way they provide successful support to students (as explained in an above theme). There was relatively sparse research data that spoke to intentional efforts aimed to improve the interpersonal skillsets relevant to helping interactions; instead, data revealed scattershot, one-off, professional development offerings. Bruce made mention of a nonspecific training workshop they have experienced in their role as an advisor that informs their practice and some intentionally “appreciative” frame they bring to the craft of their profession. In his first year, Josiah had a colleague recommend a text about Motivational Interviewing; after seeing a different colleague present about that approach during a team meeting, he engaged more purposefully with the book, which resulted in developing a skillset he referenced multiple times in his interview. Jill was the only participant who spoke about the value and development she gained from consulting with her supervisor about situations supporting students. When participants spoke about consulting with colleagues, it was usually framed as a method for

surfacing additional resources, such as Daisy who explained her experience on “the student care team, it's really impressive to me, because it's just all these different kinds of ideas from different folks in different parts (of campus) who have resources that the rest of us don't know about.” If helping skills are developed through participation in the Care Team, it was not described as such by Daisy.

When participants did speak about helping students beyond a transactional framing of providing resources, they often rooted the skill or approach as stemming from their backgrounds before working at OSU and they used different language to describe the similar behaviors and choices. Astrid made connections between *how* she supports students (see in a theme above, “being a mentor... so he succeeds as a human being”) and what she has learned in her cultural background:

How I do things here, comes from, honestly, the way I was raised, culturally. I think I probably... I'm not supposed to answer this this way, but... the culture I belong to is very warm. We care so much about how we talk with people and how much care we put in *how* we talk to them.

Astrid is supporting students in a manner that is consistent with the norms of her cultural upbringing, which leads to her describing this approach in a way that seems natural for her.

Frank came to his work with experience in the military; what Mike described in an above theme as “scaffolding” a student’s challenge, Frank described as simply “wargaming.” Asking him to break down what he means by this, I heard Frank describe his work with students to create structured plans:

Analyzing the situation, “what's... you know, our short-term, long-term goals?” Start backwards planning from that long-term goal. “Now... how do we get there?” That's

when we start putting those... those pieces into place to help the whole picture come together.

Frank is walking students through the short- and long-term steps surrounding their challenge in much the way Mike had described and appreciated. Other participants pulled from their own contexts, describing moments of mentorship, problem-solving, and engaging collaboratively with students around their concerns. Daisy explained a collaborative problem-solving training that she'd received when working for a community agency. These approaches were more developmental in nature, shaped by an approach to leave the student feeling a sense of empowerment and confidence and yet professionals in the study used different language to describe how they make personal meaning of experiences supporting students with complex basic needs challenges.

One participant described their experience engaging in formal training relevant to the topic of this study. This participant explained that they were compelled to take a graduate course with a focus on counseling skills for student services professionals but found it unhelpful to the kinds of interactions they saw as more common in their work. The course focused on long-term relationships with students where they had been hoping to gain skills to:

make the maximum impact in the short amount of time you get them... I would think a student affairs class on counseling would be more of... that quick triage of... let's figure out what those basic needs are, and ... yes, if I'm in a position... "let's meet again," do that follow-up, see if they're following through on the things that were discussed.

This student services professional explained that the counseling course taken by student affairs practitioners in roles like theirs provided insufficient material for the most common types of counseling interactions for the real-world challenges they saw as common for students.

After reviewing the vignettes but in advance of subsequent interview questions, participants were asked to reflect on their experience responding to the vignettes and reacting to examples of professional practice. In response, many shared that the vignette activity was an example of a potentially useful training opportunity. Gillian explained that “scenarios are much more helpful than... ‘hey, this is the Basic Needs Center,’ or ‘hey, this is Gillian this is what she does.’ I think giving people tangible examples probably... expands their awareness of what [support can look like].” Multiple participants vocalized a desire to read and discuss basic-needs focused helping examples with professional peers. Lily explained that:

we do stuff like this in... training. Um, we don't always hone in necessarily on, like, students navigating basic needs. Probably we should... It's more around, like, suicidal ideation or, sexual violence, bias stuff. I love a good... vignette tabletop role-playing experience.

One participant spoke about a new insight she'd gained resulting from a study vignette in which a new-to-campus international student's basic needs challenge was simply a need for information about where to find his cultural foods. She said, “the most tangible thing I'll leave with is expanding my basic needs definition around food. [Now it includes] access to familiar foods, go[ing] from food insecurity to food access.” Another participant, perhaps the one with the least structured or formal training, expanded further on the value she experienced through the vignettes:

I had never really read scenarios like that... it was good to kind of see it written out, because you can...see different points of, like, what's happening, and see... what are... some issues or, ...stuff that can be worked on... It does provide a lot of context ... and information of what is happening.

Presenting the helping interaction as a static, stable, text-based anecdote provided the participant with the novel opportunity to look closer at the helping interaction. “Sometimes we don't really think about it as much when we're talking, like, in the moment” she said, explaining that time for reflection is often rare amidst the pace of her workplace. Exposure and discussion of these vignettes expanded this professionals’ practice and awareness; learning and training occurred within the vignette portion of the research protocol:

It really helps to, like, dissect it, in a sense, and pick out points, like, what do you think about this? And, like, is this something similar that you... would do or not, right? ... It really helps it break down, like, oh, this is one scenario that could happen.

Providing the opportunity to notice details and different choice points seemed useful to this participant. Most participants spoke positively of the idea of interactive training workshops with colleagues, and many described that role plays are good ways to learn; a few participants acknowledged that sometimes the social dynamics can make role plays awkward with others. Discussion of text-based scenarios was generally positive, speaking to the value for learning and training purposes. None of the other interview inquiries into training, methods for training, or needs for training, surfaced the depth of possibility and potential as what came up when the participants reflected on their experiences with the vignettes.

There was meaningful evidence that participants of this study were engaging with students utilizing empowering and educational approaches. Efforts to develop these skills were informal and often due to the interest of the participant. As explained in an above theme, training is often focused on knowledge of resources rather than applied developmental praxis. Where participants were bringing an empowering approach to students, the language and verbiage they

used to describe this was inconsistent. Vignettes show great promise as a tool for creating shared understanding and common language of effective developmental practice.

Summary of Key Findings

Student services professionals I spoke with are focusing on material and financial support when they are assisting students with basic needs challenges. Sometimes they are acting as one imagines a parent might; other times they are integrating an educational approach into their work. Most understood complex approaches to supporting students with their basic needs as being more outside of their role than within. Participants demonstrated care and interest in supporting students with holistic needs, including treating students humanely when the student is navigating a particularly difficult challenge or conversation. The findings did not indicate significant institutional support or development efforts regarding the skills and language involved with complex helping skills; those with the skillsets often pointed to experiences prior to their roles as the source.

In chapter 5, I will analyze how this data relates to my research questions and can inform professional development and efforts to improve students' experiences of support when they are experiencing a challenge impacting their basic needs. I will illuminate how the dynamic of simply matching students to resources misses opportunities to help them build a sense of self-efficacy when moving through a challenge in life. I will make connections between my findings and the research on both equitable approaches to helping interactions and supporting students with basic needs challenges. In chapter 5, I will make recommendations for future research and potential impacts to practice as a result of these findings.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Oftentimes leaders or social change activists think that if they create and implement new structures, they can shift the way people in an organization interact. Focusing instead on creating collective understanding of how people are currently interacting and their desired ways of interaction can lead to exponential and immediate change.

—Cyndi Suarez, *Effective Interactions: Supremacist Power and Liberatory Power*

This chapter begins with a summary of key findings that are presented in a table, a discussion explaining the findings of this study, and the relevance of the data to my research questions. The next section unpacks the implications of this study's data and results, in connection with the theoretical framework informing the research and existing findings in the literature regarding support for student's basic needs. This is followed by a description of the limitations of the study, which largely speaks to the potential for additional perspectives to add nuance and important context. It then details the potential for impacting practice and offers suggestions that are based on the findings of the study. Possibilities for future research directions are also outlined before a chapter summary and conclusion.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify and elevate effective, dignity-affirming practices used by student-facing staff at Oregon State University when assisting students navigating basic needs challenges. Table 5.3, seen below organizes how the findings of my study answers research question 1, organized into the developmental skill levels as described by participants, which will be explained in greater detail in the section discussing the findings. I will

also interpret study results relevant to research question 2 and findings that were indicating haphazard efforts for staff training that answers my third research question.

Table 5.3

Results of Research Question 1

Student services professionals perceptions of their:	Foundational approaches that focus more on meeting immediate needs	Advanced approaches that build student capacity
...roles in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges	-Act as family might -Advocate -Direct students -Be a source of supportive relationship	-Be a partner. -Coach, cheering from the sidelines -Mentor -Educate -Be a source of supportive relationship
...responsibilities in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges	-Emotional support -Validate student's challenges -Inform about resources -Make warm connections to resources -Assert one's power and leverage social capital to the student's benefit	-Emotional support -Validate student's challenges -Appraisal support -Develop student's skills with utilizing resources -Support students with resolving their own challenges -Reduce student confusion by educating about systems -Support the student's informed decision making -Provide complex help with holistic needs
...preparedness in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?	-Outcomes rely on practitioner's own resource knowledge -Staff have what they need to meet student's needs with available resources or know the place to refer	-Training as an educator -Military service -Appreciative Advising workshop -Motivational Interviewing text and presentation -Collaborative Problem-Solving training

		-Personal and professional experience
... experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?	-provide non-perishable food items -Refer to campus basic needs resource	-Refer to campus basic needs resource -Scaffold complex challenges -“War-game,” work backward from desired outcome -Performance check-ins become opportunities to show care and give holistic support

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

This section includes detailed discussion of the findings of the study. The section first addresses findings relevant to the first two research questions and subsequently examines the results of the third research question.

Research Questions 1 and 2

The first two research questions are:

1. What do student services professionals perceive as their roles, responsibilities, preparedness and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges?
2. In what ways do those perceptions shape an assets-based approach, building student capacity, and in what ways do those perceptions inadvertently reinforce a deficit-based approach, withholding developmental support?

The discussion below addresses both research questions, explaining how student services staff conceptualize their role, responsibilities, preparedness, and experiences in help-seeking circumstances and basic needs challenges sometimes through a foundational approach that

focuses more on meeting immediate needs and sometimes using a more advanced approach that emphasizes the development of student capacity.

Some student services professionals demonstrate more advanced skills when they integrate asset-based approaches into their work with students and basic needs challenges. These professionals describe their roles as being a mentor and on the sidelines as a coach for students. They approach initial interactions with a student as opportunities to build a supportive relationship, taking the time to establish rapport. When students are experiencing challenges, they engage as a partner to the student, working collaboratively to identify steps and pathways forward. The data indicates that when staff view their purpose as building student capacity, they identify that their responsibilities to help students experiencing basic needs challenges include interpersonal and emotional actions, like validating student's challenges and affirming their abilities, and as though they were a teammate cheering the student along as they worked through tough times. These participants also described important responsibilities that they perceived as part of their work with students (even when these responsibilities were overlooked or undervalued within the institutional context). These included responsibilities like developing student's skills with utilizing resources, reducing student confusion to explain how systems and policies work, creating multi-phase plans, and supporting the student's informed decision making. On the whole, these contributions from participants characterized helping interactions that involve basic needs challenges as opportunities to provide complex help to students to support their holistic needs and indicate a more developed practice for student support. These are all actions from the practitioner that contribute to a student's capabilities to resolve challenges and difficulties using more of their own capacities. The study participants connected their preparedness to support students in this manner primarily to experiences they had gained prior to

their experience in their current roles. Participants described years as a classroom teacher, military service, a mentorship training series, and a framework for collaborative problem-solving learned about when working for a community nonprofit. Other participants gained initial exposure to frameworks like Appreciative Advising and Motivational Interviewing at workshops while employed at Oregon State University but sought out additional skill development as a personal professional development effort. These participants talked about including a referral to the campus Basic Needs Center when they supported students in helping interactions that involved basic needs challenges – but their support approach went beyond simple referrals. These staff reported experiences scaffolding complex challenges to ensure students would be more likely to experience success. Using terms like “war-gaming,” they described working backwards from a desired outcome and identifying steps and strategies to meet short and long-term needs. These staff also explained that their experiences helping students with basic needs challenges often occurred as they were checking in with students about other matters such as workplace performance issues. Collectively, these contributions provided evidence of a more developmental, asset-based approach being taken, supporting students through purposeful efforts to build their capacity inside of basic needs challenges. These findings also indicate that current preparedness is shaped more by prior experience and personalized approaches to professional development than formal institutional training or efforts to inform successful helping approaches through systematic or organizational efforts.

In contrast to participants who adopted an asset-based approach, other participants described their roles in a way that contrasted the educational and developmental approach described above, focusing their support on meeting the immediate scarcity-driven needs of the student. These participants often spoke about their roles as familial, taking the place of support

that a family member might provide. Staff also described their roles as *doing for* students by acting as an advocate or directing students on a course of action they should take. What may appear as minor differences in approach represent fundamentally different practitioner skill levels toward building student agency and capacities when staff are supporting students with basic needs challenges. Despite these participants displaying a different level of development toward their helping skills, this group had similarities with the asset-based approach when they identified their role as being a source of supportive relationship for students, also valuing the time and effort staff take to build rapport and connection with students. So too, did these participants identify the important responsibility they have to provide emotional support and validate students about the expensive costs of college and living expenses. Within this approach participants report enacting their responsibilities primarily by connecting students to resources and were less ready to speak toward efforts to utilize complex helping skills to help students build capacity or learn how to navigate difficult situations in a new environment. Participants reported using their power and social capital to the student's benefit, similar to one of the vignettes in the study tools. Participants talked about their responsibility to tell students about resources, indicating that raising student's awareness of resources was often seen as sufficient for resolving the student's challenges. Lily explicitly described her efforts to facilitate "warm connections" between students and resources that can support them. Participants who were utilizing a foundational approach to their work emphasized what the student did not have: material and financial resources they lacked, information about resources or the campus context about which they were unaware. One participant explained that this lack of information about the new collegiate environment justified the way they would use directive statements to support students in resolving their challenges. This approach to supporting students demands less use of

complex skills from participants and can often be quicker; in this approach, student services professionals are sufficiently well-prepared to support students when they have knowledge of resources that meet students' needs. In the context of students with basic needs challenges, knowing about the resources available at the campus Basic Needs Center was identified as sufficient training to support students with basic needs challenges.

Together, these findings indicate that student services professionals perceive their roles and responsibilities along a continuum ranging from advanced and aimed toward capacity building, to a foundational approach focused on meeting immediate needs. This developmental path is consequential because it shapes when helping interactions expand or constrain students' capacity to navigate future challenges independently. In this way, staff perceptions and use of various skillsets are not neutral; they actively structure the developmental opportunities available to students within helping interactions.

Research Question 3

The third research question is:

3. What training could shift approaches from deficit-based to developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches when helping students with basic needs challenges?

All participants described the importance of knowing about campus basic needs resources and, when staff have a familiarity with them, this is sufficient to be able to effectively respond to student need gaps. The data is clear that this is an important component to how student services professionals can support students with basic needs challenges. The data also indicated that without the kinds of preparedness or intentionality that some participants developed into their practice of helping skills, this alone is unlikely to result in autonomy-promoting approaches to supporting students with basic needs challenges. Some fruitful insights relevant to this research question are the responses where participants responded to the scenarios themselves. Meaning,

many spoke about how much they appreciated the opportunity to reflect on examples of helping interactions. One participant directly identified how she had learned something from one of the scenarios that complexified her understanding of food security. Another participant explained how helpful it was to look at a written narrative of a helping interaction; it gave her an opportunity to notice details and layers that are easily overlooked when she is in the day-to-day work. A hall director discussed how she and her colleagues use scenarios during training experiences; she explained that learning groups can tease apart the complexity and make these intentional approaches to student support visible to others, further developing other's skillsets. Mike shared an example of how he is using this approach to build the skills for complex support with his colleagues. They have regular meetings where they review real life examples of student situations and engage in dialogue about how a similar situation could be approached in the future with improved impact on student learning and support. This is a contrast to how a participant of the campus care team spoke about the function and approach of that group, which, from their experience, had been typically focused on ideas and resources relevant to the students discussed each week rather than the skills needed to support a student. Data relevant to this research question beyond what is included here was often simplistic and focused on the importance of staff knowledge of resources. This indicated significant opportunity and, likely, need for professional skill development relevant to complex helping skills. Such training might include structured reflection on helping interactions and collaborative sense-making to support shifts toward autonomy-promoting practice.

Also relevant to RQ3 is the fact that participants were not asked about training in applied theories, such as motivational interviewing, developmental mentoring, empowerment-based approaches to social work, and solution focused counseling and none volunteered these kinds of

frameworks as relevant topics that would improve their support for basic needs challenges. Neither did participants speak about how investments in learning financial literacy could improve their praxis. Nevertheless, the data was clear that staff value training that can improve their practice related to supporting students with basic needs challenges. All described a willingness to attend at least an hour's worth of training annually on the topic.

Connections to Research

This section includes areas where the study's findings and analysis expand upon previous studies relevant to this problem of practice. The study findings echo research relevant to scarcity experiences, conceptions of stigma, and major throughlines from the study's theoretical framework on equitable helping interactions. Importantly, the literature informs why some of the dependency-promoting approaches discussed by participants may be limiting the study's goals to promote dignifying helping interactions. My findings also indicate that there are student services professionals who are utilizing approaches that build student's capacity and that align with recommendations from prior studies. This section is organized by themes, drawing connections between both the results chapter and the organization of the literature review. Integrations with the theoretical model—the Intergroup Helping as Status Relations model (Halabi & Nadler, 2017)—are woven throughout.

Research Match-Makers in Contexts of Scarcity and Stigma

This study supports evidence from previous observations that the complex needs of people experiencing scarcity conditions are often overlooked and undervalued in favor of more immediate, material concerns (e.g. Schroeder & Epley, 2020) including by those who are trying to help (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). Similar to those studies, participants in this study tended to emphasize tangible forms of aid when asked to identify how to best support students with

basic needs challenges, often overlooking more holistic or long-term needs. These responses from participants were often inside inaccurate assumptions that Maslow's hierarchy is grounded in strong science (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976) and thus should inform the primary focus of student support, the primary interpretation of student struggle. The pattern from participants focusing almost solely on immediate basic needs also aligns with research on scarcity's effects on attention and decision making. Scholars have shown that scarcity conditions can narrow focus, leading individuals to prioritize immediate concerns while overlooking more complex or goal-oriented needs (Shah et al., 2012) and this study indicated that this may also be impacting how those providing help are shaped by this effect. As a result of this short-term focus, well-intended efforts to help may inadvertently narrow the scope of support students receive. In this study, this attention-focusing was present in staff approaches to student support that centered primarily on referrals to material resources. Participants generally discussed telling students about the campus food pantry, possibilities of emergency grants, and other material supports as primary interventions when they identified students with basic needs challenges.

This tendency was further illustrated in responses to an interview question in which staff were asked to give advice to a hypothetical colleague who might want to improve their support for students experiencing basic needs challenges. Most respondents emphasized the importance of visiting and becoming familiar with the campus Basic Needs Center in order to refer students to available resources. Of course, this may have been top of mind given that I was the director of the Basic Needs Center, but participants rarely spoke about the importance of their colleague knowing off-campus resources of a similar nature, did not similarly uplift the campus financial literacy education program, and it was only the career advisor who spoke of the role that the career center or campus jobs board might have in supporting students with basic needs

challenges. Within the IHSR model (Halabi & Nadler, 2017), these patterns suggest a reliance on dependency-promoting forms of assistance – those that address immediate needs but may not contribute toward financial stability or an improved plan more long-term. In contrast, the IHSR model would consider support such as financial literacy education or employment pathways as examples of autonomy promoting assistance. This study's predominance of resource referrals in participant responses reflects a focus on short-term solutions, echoing researchers' findings on scarcity's impacts to attention (Shah et al., 2012).

What was also curious about this study was that not one participant acknowledged that some students may not feel positively about a referral to the campus food pantry. These practitioners all assumed that a recommendation to utilize a stigmatized resource would be beneficial and welcomed by students – when in fact, this could be detrimental to building a trusting relationship with students who might have a self-perception that is incongruent with the types of resources and support they presume to be available at a campus food pantry. The IHSR explains a few ways to understand this phenomenon. Like this study, Halabi and Nadler found that it is common for groups holding high status to provide dependency-promoting support to help-seekers who are lower in status (2017). Participants in this study utilized dependency-promoting approaches when they acted as the student's family might, directing them on next courses of action, providing food, or securing financial resources on the student's behalf. The IHSR further explains that some groups may seek out dependency-promoting resources (2017); for example, at Oregon State University, some students grew up utilizing food pantries and it makes sense for them to seek out similar resources when they transition to college life. Some others may prefer to seek assistance that promotes autonomy and self-sufficiency; when these help-seekers are offered dependency-promoting assistance, this can have negative effects (2017).

In this study some participants were limited in how they described examples of providing support that builds the student's capacity to work through basic needs challenges beyond their focus on dependency-promoting approaches. Other researchers have identified that dependency-promoting approaches can threaten an individual's sense of self, preventing or delaying help-seeking behavior (Nadler & Fisher, 1986; Nadler & Halabi, 2006, 2015). In this study, Mike's concerns regarding the importance of supporting students to make their own decisions and be in their own decision making about sharing their story connect to this insight from the literature. Mike is investing in student's skills in "adulting" and learning to work through life challenges. Related research further illuminates the role of stigma in shaping help-seeking behavior, which may be a factor at Oregon State University. Even when basic needs challenges are normalized within campus environments, students may still experience stigma when accessing support (Villegas et al., 2024). This stigma can act as a barrier to utilizing resources such as food assistance (El Zein et al., 2022), as students may seek to avoid perceptions of dependency or deficiency (Peterson et al., 2022). This indicates why it is important for campus practitioners at Oregon State University to implement more autonomy-promoting approaches when supporting basic needs challenges than what was present in the findings of my study.

Taken together, these findings suggest that an overreliance on referrals to the Basic Needs Center may unintentionally limit the effectiveness of student support strategies, as well as staff members' ability to fully support students' long-term development. As evidenced by the prioritization of dependency-promoting referrals and limited purposeful integration of autonomy-building supports, the IHSR framework would characterize this pattern as a form of defensive helping (Halabi & Nadler, 2017). In this form of helping, higher-status individuals provide support in ways that maintain existing status dynamics, minimizing what is gained by those

receiving help. While no participants described these choices as intentional, the overall effect for students experiencing basic needs challenges may function similarly, reinforcing dependency and limiting opportunities for learning and empowerment. The significance of this pattern lies in its cumulative effect compounded throughout the campus environment: even well-intentioned actions can reinforce dependency and maintain existing inequities over time.

Status Dynamics, Staff Acting as Parents, and the Student's Locus of Control

Building on the previous finding that an overreliance on dependency-promoting referrals may reflect patterns of defensive helping, this study further illustrates how these dynamics extend into staff members' direct interactions with students. Consistent with Halabi and Nadler's (2017) findings that dependency-promoting assistance—solving a student's problems for them—can create negative help-seeking experiences, this study found additional evidence of unintended impacts when staff act on students' behalf and make decisions for them.

Findings indicating that participants sometimes use their personal networks or institutional influence to secure resources for students—occasionally outside of formal policies or protocols—are consistent with prior research. Broton et al. (2020) similarly found that frontline staff often navigate around institutional processes or rely on professional relationships to obtain resources for students. Kai endorsed this approach as a method for securing emergency funds for students. Other participants described their roles as solving students' problems through advocacy or by directing their choices. In one case, a participant went so far as to refer to students as “baby beavers” and described themselves as filling familial roles through the support they provide. While some participants endorsed choices of engagement where student services staff were positioned as decision-makers or advocates acting in place of the student and their ability to take agentic action, multiple study participants expressed concern about staff securing

aid by disclosing students' private information. As noted by these participants, the pattern of staff *doing or deciding for* students has important implications for the student's locus of control, something that is often under-emphasized in existing literature around basic needs support where the focus is often on material resources and resolving student needs (Goldrick-Rab & Broton, 2016; Broton et al., 2020). When well-intended staff take action on a student's behalf or engage in relationships that are almost parental in nature, students' sense of agency and self-efficacy may be diminished.

This dynamic was also evident in discussion about the vignette involving a high-achieving student with two months remaining on her lease. Only one participant questioned whether the student would want an emergency grant, while most participants framed staff-secured emergency aid as a positive and appropriate response. In another example of how high-status groups assert power, the IHSR model identifies this pattern as assumptive helping (2017), in which the helper presumes to know what the help-seeker needs and acts without consultation. Nearly every participant in this study ignored the student's capacity and the length of time available for her to work toward her own solution before the end of her lease. This is form of helping, when analyzed through the IHSR model, reinforces existing power dynamics, as professional staff act predominantly from their position of status to convey authority over the student's decision-making and prescribing a solution rather than engaging them as an adult.

Participants most likely to speak from this perspective often operated within roles or professional frameworks where students are positioned with less institutional power or are more likely to experience marginalization. For example, Kai expressed concern that a student might experience seeking financial assistance as "begging" within a difficult power dynamic, something Kai wanted to protect the student from experiencing. Lily—who identified a breadth

of knowledge of critical social theory as an important preparedness factor when supporting students with basic needs—noted the marginalized identities of a student sleeping outside after move-out. These observations highlight the complexity of staff intentions: even when practitioners are attuned to power and stigma, their actions may still contribute to dynamics that the IHSR model indicates would limit student agency and situate students inside a more powerless narrative. These findings also align with the IHSR concept of strategic helping, in which higher-status individuals conceptualize helping and providing assistance from a stance of some superiority (having some amount of elevated power over the help-seeker) that shapes the interaction and meaning-making therein. When considered alongside earlier findings on defensive helping, a broader pattern emerges in which staff practices of support—while well-intended—may collectively reinforce dependency and sustain existing status hierarchies.

At the same time, and consistent with Mullainathan and Shafir's (2013) recommendations regarding conditions of scarcity, some participants also spoke to the value of supporting students through planning, collaborative problem-solving, and fostering a sense of efficacy and control. However, these approaches were not consistently top of mind and were often secondary to more immediate, resource-based interventions. Participants with more years of experience or who had gained professional development to advance their skillsets were more likely to describe why they found these efforts important, usually speaking toward goals of student learning and development. Comparison with existing literature further reinforces the importance of cultivating students' sense of control and efficacy (Karabenick, 2004; Kennett et al., 2021; Rivera et al., 2022), one of three factors the IHSR recommends for a successful, dignifying helping interaction. Given the historical emphasis within student services on developmental, holistic, efficacy-building approaches—particularly for more privileged student populations—it is notable

that some participants in this study frequently emphasized students' deficits and recommended more transactional forms of support while those with more experience and development went beyond such.

Taken together, these findings suggest that when dependency-promoting, assumptive, and strategic helping patterns converge, they may limit opportunities for students to build autonomy and maintain control over their own decision-making. When considered alongside much of the basic needs literature, which often prioritizes material assistance while giving less attention to holistic skill development, this study raises important questions about whether some groups of students are experiencing reduced access to autonomy-building supports. In this way, everyday helping practices—though well-intended—may contribute to reinforcing existing power dynamics and maintaining the status quo.

Humanistic Support Builds Trust and Student Efficacy

When student services staff look beyond students' immediate material deficits and instead respond to basic needs challenges more holistically, they create opportunities to understand scarcity as a set of conditions that students may move into and out of over time, or a set of conditions for which they may develop skills and strengths. This aligns with Lee's (2022) scoping review of food security dynamics, finding food insecurity as often episodic in nature in part because of adjustments individuals might make to increase resources or cut expenses. Framing scarcity as conditional rather than a fixed deficit status positions helping interactions as opportunities to support students in transitioning into new-to-them conditions, strategizing to create different circumstances for themselves, or resolve a particular financial stressor and ultimately move out of a sense of powerlessness. In this study, Mike saw his role supporting students through hardship as one in which he helps scaffold students through steps and decisions

to get through their difficult challenge. Frank helped students create a “wargame” through moments of particular difficulty. Within the IHSR model (Halabi & Nadler, 2017), these are examples of a more developed approach to integrate autonomy-promoting support into helping interactions. This pathway for supporting those in hardship is in line with findings from other studies where individuals decide to make functional adjustments and consumption cutbacks to get through experiences of scarcity (Angst et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2022).

Students navigating transitions, whether new experiences of scarce resources or new environments to navigate on a budget, require complex forms of support, including meaning-making, supported decision-making, and planning alongside the emotional components of validation and encouragement to adapt and learn from changing circumstances. This study found that experience in classroom environments proved especially valuable to staff preparedness for this autonomy promoting assistance; when participants had a history or context to situate themselves as educators, they are more likely to provide this type of holistic, efficacy-building support as Josiah and Mike did. This study reinforces a longstanding principle in student services: students are best supported when professionals view addressing financial and basic needs as part of a broader developmental role and intentionally engage in ways that build students’ skills, understanding, confidence, and capacity for future decision-making (Bulger, 1954; Lloyd-Jones, 1929). Campus student services professionals are usefully situated to integrate an educational, capacity-building approach for interactions with students with basic needs challenges.

Halabi and Nadler (2017) identify three factors that contribute to effective helping interactions within the IHSR model, all of which were reflected in this study. First, they recommend that practitioners explicitly acknowledge the inequitable conditions affecting the

help-seeker (2017). Participants in this study echoed this practice, emphasizing the importance of validating students' experiences, particularly in relation to the high cost of living and broader systemic inequities impacting both students and staff. Second, Halabi and Nadler suggest that helpers approach the interaction as though they are members of the same group (2017). This was evident in participant responses that framed helping as a collaborative and relational process where both parties are trusting each other's efforts to move toward a solution. For example, Jill described working with students as "partners," and others emphasized engaging students as capable individuals able to make informed decisions when given appropriate context and support as provided by the professional involved in the interaction. Finally, Halabi and Nadler emphasize the importance of building the help-seeker's sense of efficacy and control about their challenges when working inside the helping relationship (2017). This recommendation was strongly reflected in participant responses in this study, particularly in discussions of actions that could undermine the student's sense of efficacy, such as disclosing private information or making decisions on behalf of students without their consent. These behaviors align with earlier findings related to assumptive helping, reinforcing how certain forms of support may unintentionally diminish trust and subsequently impact student agency.

Taken together, these findings extend the earlier discussion of defensive, assumptive, and strategic helping by illustrating an alternative pathway for providing dignified support: humanistic, autonomy-promoting assistance that builds trust and reinforces students' sense of control and efficacy. If and when staff develop their skills in helping, to adopt an educator role, they are more likely to integrate and value long-term development of student's skills over immediate resolution, shifting from transactional support toward capacity-building practices.

Shaping helping interactions for dignity takes skill and intention

Partnership-oriented approaches, recommended by the IHSR, have potential to create a more dignifying pathway for sharing information, skills, and support with students navigating basic needs challenges. Rather than positioning staff as problem-solvers, these approaches emphasize actions of accompanying students through difficult situations and building skills that serve the student long-term. In this study, participants who most consistently utilized partnership-based approaches often drew on prior professional experiences, including backgrounds in teaching and military service. These participants had developed their practice of helping students to integrate more complex goals.

When provided an example of such, participants spoke with high regard for the outcomes of autonomy-promoting approaches to student support, reinforcing findings that helping strategies and interpersonal skills can meaningfully impact individuals experiencing basic needs challenges (Martin et al., 2016). While these approaches were highly valued by student services staff, there was also a concerning lack of clarity about whether such practices are formally part of staff roles and how widely this responsibility should be shared across campus. The data indicated that staff who had pedagogical training often found ways to integrate these approaches into their practice; these approaches were reported from participants who described their roles as mentor or coach. Staff operating from this orientation often extended beyond simply informing students about available resources to include developmental forms of support. For example, Bruce described first understanding what resources a student had already utilized and then integrating that knowledge into a broader coaching process—helping students identify new options, reconsider prior resources, or navigate reluctance toward certain supports. These

findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of relationally responsive support (Parsell & Clarke, 2022), including in basic needs contexts (Jones, 2019).

More broadly, these results are consistent with research demonstrating that staff responses to help-seeking are particularly impactful for students navigating marginalization (Haley, 2023; Luedke, 2017). Participants described a range of strategies that reflected intentional, developmental engagement, explaining how they might “wargame” with a student, or break down complicated policy rules into something more understandable for help-seekers. Although these approaches represent more complex and skillful forms of practice, some participants were less likely to describe them as readily or prominently as resource-based interventions. This contrast suggests that while autonomy-promoting strategies are valued and at times present, they may be less visible, less codified, or less consistently reinforced within professional practice particularly from staff who have not had opportunities to develop their own skillsets. Overall, these findings support existing research highlighting the importance of staff training in improving outcomes for students experiencing basic needs challenges (Daugherty et al., 2025; O’Neill & Bowers, 2020; Moon Johnson, 2014). These findings suggest that dignity in helping interactions is not incidental but is actively constructed through relational and developmental practices.

Taken together, the findings of this study affirm existing literature on helping interactions, scarcity, and student support. Consistent with data informing the IHSR model, some participants often relied on dependency-promoting, resource-oriented approaches shaped by scarcity-influenced thinking and institutional norms. At the same time, this study highlights how these patterns may unintentionally protect the status quo when staff shape the helping interaction in a way that reifies existing norms, finding examples of defensive, assumptive, and strategic

orientations to helping. Importantly, the findings also illuminate an alternative pathway: when staff engage students through relational, autonomy-promoting, and developmentally oriented practices, helping interactions can build trust, preserve dignity, and strengthen students' sense of agency and empowerment. However, these more complex approaches require skill, intentionality, and organizational support, and are not yet consistently defined or reinforced within professional roles; staff who are utilizing these approaches are arriving to their roles with pre-existing skillsets or engaging in personal professional development efforts. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that how help is offered—not simply what help is provided—is central to shaping student outcomes, equity, and a broader campus culture of support.

Implications for Professional Practice

This study illuminates multiple possibilities to improve professional practice at Oregon State University. This section will speak to opportunities that can be pursued at the program level (by the team staffing the campus Basic Needs Center) and potential recommendations that could be pursued campus-wide to affect the university's strategic goals. Because one of the potentially positive effects of experiencing a helping interaction is that people have a felt experience of interdependence that positively impacts their sense of community and belonging (Nadler, 2020), investments in improving how students experience helping interactions could affect retention and other important outcomes relevant to institutional goals. Findings from this study suggest that when staff view their role as developmental—supporting student learning and capacity, not solely resolving immediate needs—they are more likely to adopt autonomy-promoting approaches. Many participants of this study already value this orientation, indicating strong potential to build shared language and norms across the institution. However, these approaches

are not consistently supported, defined, or reinforced within current professional expectations or available professional development opportunities.

Given recent surveys indicating that a majority of students are experiencing financial stressors (Fletcher and Cornette, 2026), the Basic Needs Center team is situated to provide meaningful service to campus staff as a substantive partner in efforts to improve helping interactions throughout campus related to this type of student support need. For example, this could include trainings that integrate the findings of this study and scenarios relevant to a given office, making visible the complex and oft-overlooked approaches to holistic, autonomy-promoting helping interactions. One participant of the study, Kai, spoke about how he saw the unique potential that the basic needs functional area has to illuminate this “tangledness” to other audiences on campus, particularly those more removed from the day-to-day realities of student lives. “One of the best places to do that is basic needs, because that's more visceral, (people) can understand basic needs, and how that would affect someone. I think that's a good model to start that complexity conversation,” he said. This study revealed that dependency promoting approaches to supporting students can be top of mind and perhaps seem simpler to practitioners and administrators but may also be impeding healthy help-seeking behavior and preferences for autonomy promoting norms. This study data can be integrated into workshops and presentations, going beyond informing staff and faculty about the presence of basic needs insecurities to equipping these staff to both understand that effective support requires time and skill – and ideas about how they too can integrate empowering and autonomy promoting approaches to student support into their practice. Staff assigned to the Basic Needs Center can collaborate on training campus colleagues in development of dignifying, empowerment-based approaches for providing a robust referral to campus support resources while also promoting wider awareness about

organizations and programs that can provide more than material aid to include autonomy-promoting support to students with financial challenges. These staff can also promote investments in helping skills that could have widespread adoption and impact, for example: motivational interviewing, empowerment-based approaches to social work, solution-oriented counseling, and developmental mentoring.

Administrators throughout the university could revisit position descriptions and staff evaluations to explicitly include the complex, empowerment-based approaches to helping students as an expected duty of student services professionals. A regular organizational training rhythm, providing workshops on motivational interviewing and solution-building support approaches, could set and signal important organizational norms and provide opportunities for staff to develop their skills toward these goals. Improvements in the practice of helping interactions, setting more norms and expectations for developmental approaches might also have the effect of promoting more help-seeking behavior from students, potentially improving student's sense of control and self-efficacy. The findings point to the importance of creating organizational cultures that support ongoing learning and reflection. These learning environments are significant because they make complex helping skills visible and discussable. Rather than relying solely on formal training, they embed professional development within everyday work, allowing staff to continuously refine their practice. Expanding the use of case studies, vignettes, and scenario-based discussions across teams can promote multi-perspective dialogue and surface strategies that might otherwise remain tacit. Informal, practice-based learning structures—such as the weekly, situation-based discussions described by Mike—offer a promising model. In these meetings on Mike's team, staff collectively reflect on real scenarios, explore alternative approaches, and build shared understanding of effective practice, an

exemplary illustration of the possibility available in group discussions. Assessment strategies can complement these efforts by evaluating students' experiences of dignity, autonomy, learning, and skill-building, subsequently helping managers identify where staff could be overlooking developmental support. Such measures would shift goals from "Was the problem solved?" toward "Did the interaction build the student's capacity to navigate future challenges?" and "Did the interaction build trust that help-seeking is worthwhile?"

Importantly, findings from this study indicate that staff already value developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches. The primary challenge, therefore, is alignment. When institutional structures, training, and cultural norms do not support these practices, staff may revert to simpler, more transactional forms of help. Aligning systems with these values is essential to ensuring that autonomy-promoting, dignity-affirming support becomes consistent and sustainable across the institution. Collaborative partnerships with the Basic Needs Center can support and seed these efforts throughout campus.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several questions remain unanswered and point to important directions for future research. There is opportunity to better understand the burgeoning functional area of basic needs programs across higher education through similar studies conducted at other institutions. Comparative work could illuminate how institutional context or regional politics might shape the social construction of helping interactions and the extent to which findings from this study are reflected across different campus environments.

Future studies at Oregon State University or elsewhere could also explore how students and administrators respond to vignettes depicting various approaches to student support. Such research would provide additional insight into how different stakeholders interpret and evaluate

helping interactions, further informing understanding of how these practices are socially constructed. Given findings from Halabi and Nadler (2017) that identity salience can increase the likelihood that interactions are experienced as intergroup, further research could examine how participants make meaning of helping approaches when scenarios explicitly include markers of race, gender, or other salient identities. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of how ideas shaping basic needs support emerge and are sustained, future studies could examine the perspectives of influential scholars, practitioners, and training facilitators within the field. Such work could clarify how dominant frameworks are transmitted and reinforced through professional preparation, training, and institutional discourse.

Longitudinal research may also offer valuable insight into how student services as a field has historically integrated—or deprioritized—approaches that build student efficacy. For example, researchers could examine how empowerment-oriented practices have evolved or shifted alongside increasing attention to student basic needs insecurity or identity development. Document analysis studies could examine training schedules, facilitation tools, historical assessment efforts, and evolving position descriptions to see how these tasks and responsibilities have evolved over time. Additional lines of inquiry could focus on the narratives and structures embedded within basic needs programming itself. Narrative analyses of program materials, outreach strategies, and institutional messaging could examine the extent to which these efforts reflect developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches or reinforce dependency-promoting models of support as primacy.

Finally, future research could further explore the relationship between scarcity and staff practice. While other researchers have examined the psychological effects of scarcity on individuals, additional studies could investigate how financial stress, workload, or other forms of

scarcity experienced by staff may shape choices within helping behaviors, including tendencies toward attention-narrowing and (the often quicker) resource-focused support. Related work might also examine how burnout or overwhelm influences staff decision-making and the quality of helping interactions across different areas of student services.

Limitations

This study was designed to generate meaningful insight into how student-facing staff understand, value, and approach intergroup helping within the context of basic needs challenges; however, several limitations should be acknowledged when considering the scope, transferability, and application of the findings. One notable limitation was the timeframe for data collection. Data were collected within a single academic term, which constrained the ability to examine how participants' understandings, reflections, or helping approaches might evolve over time. Given the appreciative inquiry framework guiding this study (Bushe, 2012) and the potential for inquiry itself to catalyze reflection or system change, a longitudinal design may have provided deeper insight into how engagement with the vignettes or experimental training tools influenced staff praxis and social constructions of intergroup helping behaviors over time.

Access to participants also presented a limitation. While recruitment efforts sought to engage a diverse range of student-facing staff, the final sample included 14 participants—a size appropriate for in-depth qualitative inquiry, yet small relative to the number of staff members and departments across campus who regularly interact with students. Participation was voluntary and may have been influenced by availability, interest, or existing engagement with the topic, introducing the possibility of self-selection bias (Creswell, 2008). As a result, participants may have been more reflective or motivated to examine their helping practices than the broader staff population, which may limit how representative the findings are of campus-wide approaches to

helping interactions and students with basic needs challenges. Participants may also have been impacted by my position as both the researcher and the director of the campus basic needs program. For example, this factor seemed likely to have influenced participants to reference the Basic Needs Center as an important resource for students and one that was of particular importance for all student services staff to be aware; no participants shared critical perspectives or challenging limitations connected to the center.

As with all qualitative research, transferability was inherently limited (Creswell, 2008). Findings were shaped by the specific institutional culture, structures, and norms of Oregon State University and can be interpreted as context-bound. While emergent themes may offer conceptual insight or provocation for other institutions, these findings are not intended to be predictive or universally applicable. Additionally, although the sample size supported rich exploration of participant perspectives, it did not allow for thematic saturation across all staff role types or functional units involved in student support.

The study's use of fictional case studies during interviews represents another methodological limitation. While vignettes were intentionally selected to support psychological safety and to encourage open, less self-disclosive dialogue (Möller et al., 2020), the data generated reflect participants' interpretations, assumptions, and reflections of related examples of practice rather than direct observations of their behavior in real-world contexts. Reliance on self-reported data further limits the study. Participants' responses depended on their willingness and ability to articulate personal perspectives in the moment, which introduces the potential for recall error or social desirability bias (Call-Cummings & Dazzo, 2023; Möller et al., 2020). Although the appreciative inquiry approach was used to reduce defensiveness and encourage values-based

reflection, the study does not claim to assess the effectiveness or impact of specific helping behaviors or outcomes within the institutional setting.

Importantly, the study did not include student perspectives. While it examined how professionals conceptualize and assess their helping approaches related to basic needs challenges, it did not capture the lived experiences of students navigating these interactions. As a result, the findings cannot speak directly to how help-seeking behaviors are received or experienced by students beyond what has been documented in existing empirical research on intergroup helping dynamics (Nadler et al., 2020). Future research would benefit from incorporating student voices to more fully explore how power, status, and social identity shape the experience and impact of helping encounters in this functional area.

Finally, the researcher served as a primary instrument in the study, a common and acknowledged characteristic of qualitative research (Clandinin, 2013). While strategies were employed to support reflexivity, credibility, and trustworthiness, the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and interpretive lens inevitably influenced data analysis and meaning-making. This subjectivity represents both a limitation and a strength of the study, allowing for nuanced interpretation while requiring careful attention to bias (Creswell, 2008).

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter reviewed the findings from my study and their connections to my research questions. These findings were also examined in conversation with the theoretical framework and other literature relevant to my problem of practice. The chapter includes implications for practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

The purpose of my study was to identify and uplift dignity-promoting helping interactions when student services staff are supporting students who are experiencing basic needs

challenges. It has been a true joy to examine this problem of practice from so many facets; among other take-aways, I have rediscovered my field (college student development), returned to the discipline's roots, and found fruit as relevant to the problems of today as those ancestors in epistemology described generations ago. The literature review enriched my practice and my understanding of this problem of practice immeasurably, particularly what I discovered both regarding the psychology of scarcity and equity-informed approaches to helping relations backed by more than a decade of rich empirical data. I delighted in hearing 14 different perspectives on the scenarios from my participants and felt humbled as I reflected on the value of social constructivist approaches to educational practice and leadership in this area. It complexified my perspective when a participant recommended trauma-informed training as a pathway to learn the same complex helping skills that I found included in my (non-clinical) graduate studies, and that another participant identified as the natural result of her warm culture. So too was it illuminating and surprising to see a participant label his scaffolded and technical approach to helping students as "wargaming." I am grateful that this study gave me an opportunity to learn from my campus colleagues and get a peek into how they approach their work in a way that truly felt like a privilege. The data from this study will inform the basic needs work at OSU for years to come.

This is a study of how everyday helping practices in higher education reproduce or disrupt status dynamics—and how shifting toward developmental, autonomy-promoting approaches has the potential to reshape student experience. This study demonstrated that a successful helping interaction does often include a professional knowledgeable about resources, including immediate material aid – but an autonomy-promoting interaction goes further, to include a goal of building the student's capacity when facing difficult circumstances and conditions of scarcity. The data makes clear that dependency promoting approaches need to be in

the toolkit for many reasons – but without additional empowering approaches, practitioners may not be fully contributing to retention efforts and a prosperity widely shared. If institutions are committed to student success and equity, then transforming how help is offered—not simply what help is provided—must become a central priority of student support practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Data Collection Tools--Vignettes

Cabbage Vignette: Getting Groceries

It's week one of winter term. Rajesh is an international student and has not lived away from home before; while he speaks English, he speaks with an accent and is still learning some specialized vocabulary (i.e. course reserves). He did not get to start classes in September with his cohort due to a delay at the state department with approving his visa, and so he is new to OSU (and new to Corvallis). The situation below takes place on his first day on campus and only his second day in the US.

With some extra time before his first shift in Dr. McNeil's electrical engineering lab, Rajesh walks past a sandwich board for the STEM Success Center in a nearby building. He goes inside and is greeted by an undergraduate student employee at the front desk who asks him to tap his ID but is otherwise distracted by something on their computer screen. Raj grabs a granola bar from the basket marked "free" and asks the student worker "what is this place" and the student explains that there are various areas to study or meet for a group project and sometimes they have different events, like a resume workshop occurring next week. As the student staff explains this, an advisor has left her office (adjacent to the space) and is now standing near the desk but oriented facing the student worker. Raj next asks a more personal question, trying to explain that he is new here and wants to know where he can find foods like dal, rice, and fresh chilis. The student staff has a confused look on her face (some of the foods Raj named were not the English names for the food; his accent may also have been a contributing factor). The advisor, seeing and sensing the student staff member's discomfort and uncertainty, answers for the student staff member: "Oh, you're looking for food? The Basic Needs Center is about a ten-minute walk

down this path. They can help you out. Or, if you need a job; I hear Bombay Palace hires people under the table.” The advisor then turns to the student staff and begins to discuss a forthcoming departmental meeting.

Feeling dismissed, Raj walks away and heads to the lab. Later, on some down-time between onboarding tasks, he does a google search for the OSU Basic Needs Center and learns that this is not the ethnic grocery store he had hoped to learn about.

Carrot Vignette: Time to shake the tree

Kelley is a third-year transfer student on a pre-medicine path. She works hard to maintain a high GPA (crucial to get into medical schools) and has successfully secured a few scholarships that significantly help her afford her undergraduate studies, which is a good thing because as a former-foster youth, she has no family to rely on. Another strategy she uses to afford college is working as many hours as she can each summer at her two jobs: waitressing at a four-star dining restaurant and spending the early mornings picking fruit at a local organic farm. It’s August and she’s just learned that her month-to-month lease will be ending in two months. Finding an apartment this time of year in Corvallis is very difficult and any time she spends looking for places or vetting potential roommates will cut into her hours and the amount of money she can save, directly increasing the amount of loans she’ll have to take out this upcoming academic year. This is causing significant stress and one day, as she vents about the impossibility of the task ahead of her to a coworker, they mention that Kelley should talk to Shane, the program director for the Rising Tide mentorship program at OSU. “He’s really good at helping people find housing,” her coworker said. “Like, he literally gave my cousin the number of a couple in town with an apartment above their garage that she could rent. Trust me, just talk to him.”

Later that week, Kelley is meeting with Shane in his office catching him up on her situation. Shane asks open-ended questions that lead to Kelley unloading much of what she has been carrying. Kelley is surprised, she doesn't usually like to share this much with strangers, but in the course of the hour, Shane hears about Kelley's history with foster care, how busy she is trying to make ends meet, and—through tears—just how much she feels at a breaking point now that her lease will be ending soon. Shane validates Kelley, affirming how difficult it is to afford living in Corvallis and expresses admiration and compassion for all that she has gone through to this point. Before they both know it, an hour has passed and Shane has to be getting to his next meeting. He takes down Kelley's information and says "I'll see what I can do." They make a plan to meet again, same time next week.

Later that day, Shane sends an email to the director of Financial Aid and the Associate Dean for the College of Health. He explains that he just met with an excellent student worthy of additional support. He provides Kelley's ID number, explains that she is a foster youth and names her GPA as evidence that she is worthy of this emergency funding from the university. He details her housing stress and explains that these additional funds will be vital to her success in this period of financial strain. The Associate Dean determines that the student can receive \$500 in additional support from the college and the Office of Financial Aid matches that award.

Tomato Vignette: On the Struggle Bus

Kaleb works at a campus grab and go food store, including Friday afternoon shifts when their manager, Joyce, often drinks a large boba tea and chit chats with the students behind the counter before the team meeting at 4 pm each week; sometimes Joyce gets Kaleb a boba tea too. Kaleb is a sophomore ethnic studies major and took this job to begin building resume experience. Joyce is a younger professional staff member who is new to Corvallis and took this job while her

partner finishes a PhD in Urban Studies. Kaleb really likes Joyce; they often connect about shared political values and Joyce knows a lot about things like the history of redlining in Oregon and global income inequality, topics that Kaleb has been studying in classes this term. Both have shared frustrations about the cost of living in Corvallis (they are both from more affordable, medium size towns in neighboring states).

One Friday, Kaleb arrives late and on foot; they'd gotten a flat tire earlier that day and until Kaleb can pay for a new set of tires, they needed to use public transportation or other alternatives. After apologizing for being late, Kaleb explains that they have to take the bus now, and that the local bus can be unreliable. Joyce is bummed for Kaleb, "That sucks about the bus, man. It always has weirdos on it! I hope no one smelly sits next to you." The two continue to have a friendly conversation and Joyce begins to share her frustrations about needing to close early on the Wednesday and Thursday shifts for the rest of the term "because the bosses said we are losing money those hours. I really don't want to cut Karrena's hours, she really needs the money!" Kaleb and Joyce continue on with their conversation about how difficult it is to afford anything these days; Joyce shares that sometimes she worries if she'll find herself without a job after the school year ends. Later, in the last few minutes of the staff meeting, Joyce explains that the C store hours will be changing and this will affect hours and schedules for the team.

Corn Vignette: Roll up some sleeves

Bryce is a first generation student from Seattle. Being away from his family is a big deal for him and his family; he wants to make his family proud and set a positive example for his two younger sisters. For two quarters, he has been a work study employee with the Office of Financial Aid. After the third time arriving late (and not calling or sending a message explaining

the situation despite reminders of why this is important), his supervisor Heather speaks with him in her office to issue some corrective feedback.

Before diving into the feedback, Heather checks in on Bryce's understanding about the office expectations regarding lateness and communication of such. Bryce agrees that he was aware of the expectation and goes on to explain that he's had a lot on his mind and hasn't been on his A-game. Heather explains that she wants to see Bryce succeed in the role and explains that this behavior could not only impact his ability to maintain employment with the Office of Financial Aid, but also cause challenges in future employment settings. Bryce goes on to explain that when he's running late, waiting through the automated phone tree of the office's main phone line feels frustrating and raises his stress about already being late. Heather and Bryce make a plan that in the future Bryce can send Heather a text to her personal phone number when a class goes long and he'll be late because of that.

After resolving the workplace issue, Heather makes a soft inquiry into the stress Bryce referenced earlier in the conversation. "You don't have to share anything personal with me," she says "but I can also be a resource for support and problem solving if that's useful for you. I know a lot about OSU and I bet I can help with most things." Bryce takes a deep breath and explains that he's past-due on his rent, has no clue about how he's going to pay for next term's tuition, and he thinks he might fail two of his classes. He's so overwhelmed that he doesn't know what to do. As he explains his situation, he blames himself, admitting that he should have asked for help sooner.

After a few clarifying questions, Heather summarizes what she heard and reflects back to him the challenges she identified: "It sounds like you need to come up with some money to catch up on rent, make a plan for this term's academic stressors, and find a way to cut costs for future

terms. What seems most important to focus on first? Let's work together on this; I can be a thinking partner and help you come up with next steps you feel good about." With Heather's support and assistance, Bryce creates two plans: Plan A is optimistic and relies on both being successfully awarded emergency grants and his landlord accepting the idea of a payment plan for the next few months. Plan B is an actionable back-up that can keep Bryce enrolled and moving forward in his studies no matter what, but requires him to drop to half time, pick up another job for at least 6 months, and take more classes at the local community college to keep costs down. Bryce and Heather make a schedule to check in on the plan and Bryce's progress on action steps; Heather reminds Bryce that she's there to help and if something doesn't go according to plan or a new obstacle emerges, she is in Bryce's corner to help him problem-solve and adapt. Bryce leaves his shift that day feeling like a significant weight has come off his shoulders. He knows the road ahead will be challenging but because Heather helped him break it down into actionable steps and a realistic plan, he feels more confident than he has in weeks.

Appendix B: Data Collection Tool—Interview Protocol

Interview Script and Pre-Questions:

Thank you for participating in my study. Earlier today, I emailed a copy of the consent form. Did you have a chance to review it? Do you have any questions about the consent form? (*if the participant hasn't already done so, ask them to sign the form.*) This interview will have two parts – first, I will share some vignettes with you and after each one, I'll ask you some questions about that vignette. The second part of the interview will be about professional development and this content area. Do you have any questions about the process today?

Great. Before we get started, I want to let you know that my goal is to build some training that can help people in roles like yours, feel more prepared to support students with basic needs challenges. Over the years that I have been doing this work, my own approach has evolved and shifted many times as I have learned and grown, as I'm sure you have as well. Through the years, I've discovered that the field would benefit from more resources connected to training and students with basic needs challenges and so this conversation will help me help our campus get even better at supporting students. I appreciate you being a part of this research project.

Should we get started then? (*hit record*)

Initial questions:

1. Do you have a pseudonym in mind that I can use to refer to you in my study materials? If not, I can choose one for you.
2. First, can you tell me about your role on campus and how long you have worked at OSU.
Generally, what kinds of interactions do you have with students?
3. Can you tell me an example of time you've helped a student with a basic needs challenge? Possible probes: How did that go? How were you able to support? How do

you wish you'd been able to support? Can you explain why that kind of support seemed most appropriate?

Verbal Instructions:

Next, I will share-screen a vignette. You can read it silently to yourself, or, I can read it to you. Each scenario involves a student engaging in help-seeking on campus. As you read or hear the vignette, please focus your attention primarily on the behaviors and choices of the staff in the scenario. I will ask you questions that are primarily focused on the staff member's choices and your perspectives on those choices. The vignette will remain on the screen during the interview portion.

Present participant with first vignette for discussion.

Allow the participant to read the scenario or read it aloud to them.

Verbal instructions:

We will only discuss this scenario for about 15 minutes. The goal is to identify (from your perspective), what's most helpful from the vignette that could be utilized by student services staff throughout campus as they support basic needs challenges.

1. Before we start, do you have any clarifying questions about the scenario?

Questions to explore in vignette portion: (repeat for each vignette)

1. Are there immediate things from this vignette that jump out to you that you want to respond to?
2. What do you see in the professional's choices that you appreciate?
3. What would you like to see this professional do differently in the future?

4. In what ways does your approach parallel the choices from the professional in this scenario? Probes: What informs those choices vs alternatives? How is this scenario similar or different from basic needs related conversations that you've supported? Is there more you want to share about how your approach would be similar or different and why?
5. Do basic needs challenges like this feel like they are included in your role and responsibilities? Probe: Tell me more. (Why? Why not?)
6. What training or experiences have prepared you to support basic needs challenges such as this?
7. Are there any other points you'd like to make about the professional's practice in this scenario?

Interview Part 2 Questions:

1. How was it for you to engage with scenarios of professional practice like we did today?
Possible Probe: Do you have thoughts or reactions to the idea of using scenarios, like we did earlier in the interview, as a method to train student services staff?
2. When a student is coming to you for support, what clues you to the fact that they may be help-seeking? Probe: And what would indicate to you that they are experiencing a basic needs related problem? Probe: When and why might it feel tricky when students are seeking support with basic needs?
3. Earlier in today's conversation, you told me about a basic needs challenge you helped a student with. Are there other examples of basic needs conversations that feel common in your role or in your area of campus and that haven't already come up in this interview? Follow-up: Has your approach to supporting these challenges changed over time? How so?

4. When you are supporting a basic needs challenge in your role, what factors would be present in a successful interaction, from your perspective? Are there tensions that come up when you are supporting a basic needs challenge?
5. If a campus professional colleague wanted to improve their skills and practice with regard to supporting students with common basic needs challenges, where might you refer them? What would you hope that they learn? Have you received professional development that has improved your practice supporting basic needs challenges?
6. Next I have some questions to inform training structure and format:
Please identify what training you would have interest/capacity/follow-through to participate in? (See Handout)
7. Is there anything else relevant to the study that you'd like to share with me relevant to the study or the conversation or the study's goals we discussed today?
8. Can I follow up with you if I have more questions?
9. How was it for you to be talking with me in this way?

Handout: Training Interests, Capacity and Modality Input

Please identify what training you would have interest, capacity and follow-through to participate in. Please talk through your choices and reasons as you evaluate the following options:

- Video content, watching with full engagement, taking notes, on my own time at my pace
- Video content, following along but multi-tasking, being interrupted by colleagues on messaging platforms/responding to quick emails now and then as I watch, can pause content.
- Video-based workshops that are interactive and take my full engagement, cannot pause.
- In-person interactive workshops about this content. (*Learning with others, in public, but not necessarily my direct team*)
- Learning *with my direct work peers* in a departmentally organized professional learning session
- Learning with others in my same job function/role type but who work elsewhere throughout the university
- Role plays and communication practice relevant to student basic needs challenges
- Work peer colleagues discussing and dialoguing about scenarios of examples of helping students (similar to those reviewed in the first interview)
- Responsive and available **colleagues and subject matter experts I can call** or reach out to for timely consultation (response within 6 business hours or less) around related topics *such as suspected homeless student **sleeping on a couch in a lounge space** regularly, student who presents with homelessness-stemming **hygiene challenges**, student is*

sleeping in a car, student is skipping meals, student engages in theft behaviors to meet survival needs...

- How often would you want to experience training and development on this subject matter?
 - As situations arise, as needed
 - At least once in my first year working on campus
 - At least once a year
 - More than once a year

- How much time would you have available for training and development on this subject matter?
 - A few hours a year
 - A few hours, one time, as I was learning my role
 - An hour-or-so a year
 - Just enough to learn what I need for any given situation

Appendix C: Recruitment Materials

Email to professional's supervisor:

Hello [PERSON]

(Something relational that references prior connection with this professional and our shared context working at OSU/living in Corvallis.)

I'm writing you today not in my role as the Basic Needs Center Director, but as an OSU doctoral student – I'm in my last year in OSU's Adult and Higher Education EdD program. I'm emailing you specifically to ask for your assistance in identifying and suggesting a member of your team (specifically, a staff member in ROLE type) who might be interested in participating in my research study and has been in their role for longer than 18 months.

My dissertation research is looking to understand how professional staff throughout campus support students with basic needs challenges. Given how prevalent severe rent burdens and other financial stressors are in our community, I am hoping to understand the perspectives, experiences and approaches of student-facing staff when working with students with basic needs challenges. Participants will be presented with fictional scenarios to discuss and asked to complete a 90-minute interview. Participants would also get to help inform forthcoming professional development and training resources aimed to improve how student services staff support basic needs students throughout campus. I am looking for study participants who have worked in their role at OSU for longer than 18 months and spend about 40% or more of their average work week directly interacting with students.

Could you either suggest a staff member I would subsequently reach out to, or forward this message to them and encourage them to reach out to me if they have an interest in participating? I have included a participation blurb below that explains a bit more of the study

design and subsequent participant expectations. I also welcome questions about my study from yourself or your team member. Thank you in advance for your support with my project. I'm hopeful to have research participants identified this month – and interviews scheduled for the following weeks.

About Participation:

The study activities include one 90-minute Zoom interview with two parts to it. In the first part of the interview, participants will be presented with 2 or 3 fictional vignettes and asked to react to and answer questions about the scenario. In the second part of the interview, participants will be asked questions about their professional responsibilities and perspectives on professional development opportunities. The Zoom interview will result in a transcript of the study conversation that will be utilized to analyze the data. Participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used for their data and any quotes or other contributions to the study's findings.

About the Study:

This study is about approaches and tools professional staff utilize as they support students experiencing a basic needs challenge. The study is titled “Appreciated Approaches to Helping Interactions and Basic Needs Challenges.” Research data will inform forthcoming professional development workshops aimed to improve how campus staff support students in various relevant helping interactions. Interview questions are aimed to pull out appreciated and valued approaches or examples of professional practice that could have potential for more widespread adoption throughout campus. Participants will also have an opportunity to share input and discuss opportunities for professional development aimed to improve outcomes when students

engage in help-seeking around a basic needs challenge. This study has been approved by the IRB and is supported by my advisor, Dr. Jon Iftikar.

Email to participants:

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. I'm writing you today not in my role as the Basic Needs Center Director, but as an OSU doctoral student – I'm in my last year in OSU's Adult and Higher Education EdD program.

This study is about approaches and tools professional staff utilize as they support students experiencing a basic needs challenge. The study is titled "Appreciated Approaches to Helping Interactions and Basic Needs Challenges." Our conversations will be focused on professional staff approaches to helping interactions and related professional training. To participate in this research, you must:

Be employed at Oregon State University as a non-instructional staff member

Spend 40% or more of your average work week directly interacting with students

Have worked in your role at OSU for longer than 18 months.

Can you confirm you meet this criteria in your response to me?

The study activities include a 90-minute Zoom interview. In the first part of the interview, you will be presented with 2 or 3 fictional vignettes and asked to react to and answer questions about the scenario. I'll ask for your reaction and responses immediately following your reading of the vignette; as part of the study, I will ask to hear your top-of-mind thoughts and responses similar to the way that you may learn of a student with a basic needs challenge without much, if any, advance notice. In the second part of the interview, you will be asked more

questions about your role, professional responsibilities, and perspectives on professional development opportunities.

The Zoom interview will be recorded to create a transcript of our conversation that will be utilized in my research as data; in my notes and within any written materials, I'll refer to you using a pseudonym (and ask you to pick a name if you like) and keep your contributions anonymous to protect your privacy. Our interview times will be private appointments to preserve your privacy and participation in the study. I will also send a consent form to you in advance of our first interview. You can sign it before we meet, or we can walk through it together and you can sign it in the first interview. This study has been approved through OSU's IRB and I am happy to answer questions about any part of the study or your participation within it.

I would be happy to use Outlook scheduler to send you an appointment for the research interview (no sooner than at least two-weeks out). Alternatively, if you'd prefer, you can send me windows of availability within (TIME WINDOW) and I can use that availability to send you an interview time. Please let me know by (DATE) if you would prefer me to schedule the interview using your Outlook availability. Alternately, if your availability or interest in participating has changed, please let me know by end of day (DATE) so I can make alternate arrangements.

Study participants will be entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift card to the Corvallis Farmers Market as an appreciation for their participation in my research project. If you are selected from the drawing, you can also let me know if you would prefer a Winco gift card instead.

Thank you, in advance, for your participation and willingness. Your time and input will be a meaningful contribution to support students who are served by basic needs programs. I am grateful to get to collaborate with colleagues like you as part of my dissertation work.

Please reach out anytime if you have questions about the research study or your participation within it.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Research Consent Form

A Study of Appreciated Approaches to
Helping Interactions and Basic Needs Challenges

Principal Investigator: Nicole Hindes

Contact Information: nicole.hindes@oregonstate.edu

(541)-737-9127

Purpose: I am inviting you to take part in a research study. This study is about approaches and considerations professional staff utilize as they support students experiencing a basic needs challenge.

Activities: The study activities include one 90-minute Zoom interview. In the first part of the interview, you will be presented with 2 or 3 fictional vignettes and asked to react to and answer questions about the scenarios. In the second part of the interview, you will be asked questions about your role, professional responsibilities, and perspectives on professional development opportunities. The Zoom interview will be recorded and result in a transcript of our conversation that will be utilized to analyze the data. If you do not wish to be recorded, you should not participate in this research study.

Voluntary: You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may choose not to answer any question in the interview for any reason. At any point, you may choose not to continue with the interview or withdraw from the study entirely. You can also decide to be in the study now and change your mind later.

Risks: Risks and discomforts may include emotional discomfort or distress, either as a result of reading a fictional scenario involving a student in a difficult situation or as a result of reflection on your own professional experiences.

Benefits: Benefits of the research may include an opportunity to reflect on your professional practice and areas of alignment or divergence with other professional approaches. Participants will also have an opportunity to contribute to the development of future professional workshops or related training tools for staff of similar role types.

Confidentiality: I will protect the information you share by utilizing a pseudonym for any direct quote attributed to you. Other data will be de-identified or attributed to a generalizable role-type you hold. Only my major advisor and I will have access to your research data. Your data will be stored in a secure Box folder and labeled only with a number code. The number code will be kept separate from the Box folder, in a Microsoft Onedrive file that only myself and my advisor will have access to.

Data Storage: Research information you provide as part of this study will be kept for 7 years and then deleted or destroyed. De-identified research information you provide may be used for presentations and professional development tools.

Questions: If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Nicole Hinds at 541-737-9127.

Research Protections: The Oregon State University Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) has determined that this study is exempt. If you have concerns about your rights as a research participant their office can be reached at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

By continuing to the research procedures:

I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old [If applicable],

I have read the above information, and

I agree to participate.