AN EVALUATION OF A MASTERS PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
AT SACRAMENTO STATE

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THESIS

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AT SACRAMENTO STATE

A Thesis

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I certify that these students have met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

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Abstract

of

AN EVALUATION OF A MASTERS PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
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Statement of Collaboration

This thesis, a mixed methods study, was a collaborative effort written by two
students from the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an
emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at California State University,
Sacramento (CSUS). The researchers worked together to provide the ME-HELSA
Program with feedback from its students and faculty. Both researchers created the student
survey questions, the faculty interview questions and the consent forms. Researcher 1
created the student survey using SurveyMonkey.com®, while Researcher 2 typed the
faculty interview questions, as well as the faculty consent form. Researcher 1 e-mailed
the student survey to ME-HELSA students from cohort 3 and 4. Researcher 2 invited
faculty from the ME-HELSA Program to participate in the interviews as well as
interviewed the faculty. Researcher 1 organized the results of the survey and created
tables using the data from the survey results. Researcher 2 organized the results of the
faculty interviews and coded each interview to reveal potential common themes. Both
researchers interpreted and analyzed the data from the student surveys and the faculty
interviews. The researchers worked collaboratively to compile each section by conducting research, composing each chapter, analyzing and interpreting data, and providing conclusions and recommendations for the ME-HELSA Program.

Brief Review of Literature

The review of the literature provides critical background information and research to support this mixed methods study. Research not only confirms the need for educational leadership programs in colleges and universities but also the need to improve existing educational leadership programs such as the ME-HELSA Program at CSUS. In order to properly assess this program, it is critical to research, address, and understand several key areas that are essential to evaluating and improving a graduate, cohort-based, educational leadership program for working professionals. After an extensive review of the literature, several topics were identified: adult students/learners, cohort programs, educational leadership programs, and program evaluation and assessment.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the ME-HELSA Program at CSUS by exploring both the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) as well as examining the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the program.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are students’ experiences and expectations of the ME-HELSA Program?
2. What are faculty members’ perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program?
3. What strengths and weaknesses exist in the ME-HELSA Program?

Methodology

The population used for this study consisted of graduate students and faculty members from the CSUS College of Education. The student sample for this study consisted of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) of the ME-HELSA Program within the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP) Department. The faculty sample for this study consisted of 5 faculty members from the EDLP Department within the College of Education. The researchers conducted a mixed methods study, using both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. Using a mixed methods approach enabled the researchers to explore the experiences and expectations of students through a series of closed-ended, quantitative survey questions and one open-ended, qualitative comment section as well as allowed them to examine the perceptions of faculty members through open-ended, qualitative interview questions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is evident that the quality of the ME-HELSA Program is good overall. The strength of the program lies with its students and the program’s ability to accept and implement changes to enhance the program. The EDLP Department solicits and listens to students’ feedback and suggestions and incorporates changes whenever possible and appropriate, which is apparent in its changes to the ME-HELSA Program’s course sequencing and course offerings. The feedback gained from student surveys and faculty interviews provided rich information to the researchers that will be shared with the EDLP
researchers that will be shared with the EDLP Department in order to strengthen the ME-HELSA Program. Although the ME-HELSA Program has many strengths, there are areas that could be improved such as with the orientation program, cohort cohesion, campus services, communication among faculty and students, clinical experience, faculty with expertise in student affairs, and program assessment.

Committee Chair
JoLynn Britt, Ph.D.

Date 5/5/09
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND DEDICATION

By Candace Gonzales McGee

I want to first thank my husband, Paul McGee, for always supporting my goals, giving me the freedom to accomplish them, and for being a wonderful father to our children. I love you.

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By Candice Melchor Palaspas

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The author would like to dedicate this thesis to her family, friends, and colleagues, all of whom have provided continuous support throughout the thesis writing process:

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Dad, for being my guardian angel. Hope I made you proud.

John, Kristine, Nate, and Shelly, my brothers and sisters, for your unconditional love and support.

Extended family, friends and colleagues, for your ears and encouragement.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Educational leadership programs are crucial to developing leaders in higher education, especially in the area of student affairs. Student affairs professionals are critical to the success of students as well as to the colleges and universities they serve. They essentially represent agents of change committed to solving issues in higher education that revolve around student achievement, access, retention, and graduation rates. One such program, the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program, offered at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), aims to produce such leaders. However, in order to prepare the next generation of transformational leaders, colleges and universities, such as CSUS, must continually assess, improve, and redesign their educational leadership programs to ensure that they provide their students with relevant and up to date knowledge, skills and values to solve current issues facing higher education.

History of the Student Affairs Leadership Program

Representing one of the largest and most culturally diverse campuses among the California State University’s 23 campuses, CSUS enrolls approximately 28,000 students and offers 60 undergraduate and 40 graduate programs that prepare graduates for careers
committed to public service and the improvement of the quality of life both regionally and statewide (California State University [CSU], Sacramento, 2008).

The College of Education offers some of the more popular graduate programs by providing professional development for teachers, administrators and counselors to address the needs of schools, families and communities throughout California (CSU, Sacramento, 2008).

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP) Department is one of several within the College of Education. It offers three options within its Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership Program – Student Affairs Leadership, Community College Leadership, and Policy Studies in Higher Education. Dr. Carlos Nevarez and Dr. Cirenio Rodriguez, two faculty members in the EDLP Department, proposed these options in 2001 as they recognized a need for options that focused on higher education. The Educational Leadership Program at that time primarily served individuals with an interest in leadership and administration in K-12 schools. The Department had received a number of requests from students over the years to offer options in higher education leadership since the current curriculum at the time did not satisfy their desired career goals to work in areas such as administration, community college or the state legislature. After several discussions with the Director of Student Activities Office and Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, the Department confirmed the demand for such options (C. Nevarez, personal communication, November 3, 2008).
More specifically, the ME-HELSA Program received full accreditation in 2002 from Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Since its inception, the program has had four cohorts with each ranging between 23-28 students: 23 students in the first cohort, 23 students in the second cohort, 27 students in the third cohort, and 28 students in the fourth cohort (C. Nevarez, personal communication, November 3, 2008).

In order to satisfy the requirements of the degree, students must complete a total of thirty units including the following courses:

- Foundations in Higher Education Leadership
- Diversity in Higher Education
- Law and Higher Education
- Program Development and Evaluation
- Ethical Decision Making
- Educational Research Methods
- Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning
- Educational Leadership
- Thesis/Project Seminar

Students enroll in one course at a time, with each course adhering to typically six Wednesday evenings and three full Saturdays for approximately a six week time period. The courses are taught by both tenured and adjunct faculty (CSU, Sacramento, 2008).
Mission, Vision, and Goals of the Student Affairs Leadership Program

The ME-HELSA Program aspires to cultivate change agents who possess the willingness and capacity to take risks in order to further institutions of higher education by increasing student achievement, access, retention, and graduation rates. The purpose of the ME-HELSA Program is to:

Develop aspiring leaders by providing opportunities to identify and practice leadership skills and competencies. Refining these attributes in an educational setting allows graduate students to reflect on different leadership styles in diverse environments. Knowledge in different leadership styles will prepare tomorrow’s change agent to adapt to the postsecondary educational setting in areas of academic preparation and enrichment initiatives, academic advising, peer support services, multicultural training, and residential living. (California State University, Sacramento, College of Education, Higher Education Leadership, n.d.)

Faculty contribute both their applied knowledge and scholarly experience to facilitate classroom teaching and learning while simultaneously encouraging students to critically examine issues and develop solutions to enhance institutions of higher education. Moreover, throughout their course of study in the ME-HELSA Program, students learn about different leadership styles, solve current and past issues within higher education, and gain knowledge and skills to assist in their problem solving, which will enable them to increase student achievement, access, retention, and graduation rates.
Needed for Student Affairs Professionals

Student affairs professionals play a vital role in student success. While students seek colleges and universities to obtain a four-year degree, they require more than just academics in order to succeed. Students need assistance with information regarding admissions, academic advising, housing, career goals, student organizations, financial aid, health concerns and athletics (Kleeman, 2003).

Since the need for leaders in student affairs is apparent, programs such as the ME-HELSA Program, help higher education institutions develop transformational leaders with the ability to produce change. According to Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), the need for leadership in higher education is two-fold: it arises from high attrition rates and loss of talent and training in the field. History has shown that student affairs professionals lack either the education to advance in their careers or insufficient professional development. While student affairs professionals can attend professional development institutes, they require much more in order to grow and advance into leadership roles (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).
Although formal development programs, such as those offered by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) (2008) fill part of this need, ongoing development, mentoring, and education of student affairs professionals is essential. Professional development is critical to ensuring that student affairs professionals receive adequate training to meet the challenges of the future (Kleeman, 2003).

Colleges and universities implemented educational leadership programs with the idea that they would prepare leaders in higher education. They believed that individuals could learn and acquire leadership skills. According to the guide, *The Leadership Challenge*, organizations spend millions of dollars on teaching people how to become managers; therefore, similar methods can be applied toward leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). The field of education needs to cultivate leaders in order to further develop and enhance institutions of higher education. Thus, institutions of higher education hold the responsibility of providing programs that will produce educational leaders to help shape the future of higher education.

Leadership would not only serve higher education institutions but also the community as a whole.

Leadership is not just about leaders. Nor is leadership about some position or place in an organization or community. In today’s world – of unrelenting changes in technology, marketplaces, organizational alliances, mergers, and partnerships; of increasing global competitiveness; of accelerating diversity of ideas along with
a rainbow coalition of individual backgrounds, beliefs, abilities, and experiences; of continuing reengineering of processes and right-sizing of organizations and flattening of organizational forms – leadership must be everyone’s business.

(Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 7)

The importance of higher education leadership plays a significant role not only in the community but also in how it can contribute to the nation and the world. The article, *A Test of Leadership*, states a need for a world-class higher education system that creates new knowledge, contributes to economic prosperity and global competitiveness, and empowers citizens (Spellings, 2006). Educational leadership programs need to keep up with changes in technology as well as adapt to a changing economy and the new demographics of our student populations. Embracing these kinds of changes will ultimately produce leaders of higher education that will benefit the educational system, society, the nation, and the world.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the ME-HELSA Program at CSUS by exploring both the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) as well as examining the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the program.

The study will address the following research questions:

1. What are students’ experiences and expectations of the ME-HELSA
2. What are faculty members’ perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program?

3. What strengths and weaknesses exist in the ME-HELSA Program?

Significance of the Study

This research will provide specific and valuable information that the CSUS EDLP Department can utilize to improve the ME-HELSA Program. Possible areas of discussion may include: the admissions process, orientation program, course relevance, course quality, thesis/project preparation, and overall program quality and student experience.

According to the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), there are over 125 masters programs in student affairs and higher educational leadership offered nationwide (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). As indicated by Arthur Levine’s (2005) study of educational leadership programs in the United States, “the majority of programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities” (p. 23). Failure to align curriculum with the profession, low admission standards, and lack of clinical education represent only some of the deficiencies in today’s educational leadership programs (Levine, 2005). With the surge of working professionals looking to advance in their careers in student affairs, colleges and universities should consistently and systematically assess their programs, especially in light of Levine’s latest study.
This study is also important because of the lack of research on adult students or learners 25 years of age and older in graduate school. Little research has been done on identifying the distinct needs, types of services, and accommodations for adult graduate students. Since many educational leadership programs are geared toward working adult professionals, higher education institutions must design and offer graduate school programs that fulfill the unique needs of adult learners (Evans & Miller, 1997). Thus, faculty should give special consideration to the individual needs of adult learners by establishing the most effective learning approaches.

In the end, the researchers hope that the EDLP Department will make use of both students' and faculty members' feedback to enhance course study, current activities and quality of services offered by the ME-HELSA Program.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study.

Adult Learner or Student

One who represents the status of age (typically defined as 25 years of age or older); the status of maturity and developmental complexity acquired through life responsibilities, perspectives, and financial independence; and the status of responsible and often-competing sets of adult roles reflecting work, family, community, and college student commitments. (Kasworm, 2003, p. 3)
Cohort

A grouping of students that involves “learning arrangements with required sequences of courses and with student groups that stay intact throughout all or most of their work toward an academic degree or program completion” (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998, p. 34).

EDLP Department

The CSUS Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department.

Educational Leadership Program

A graduate level program that prepares students to become visionary leaders in the field of higher education. Most follow a cohort model with classes being offered during the evenings and on weekends to accommodate working professionals. It is the hope that students graduate from these programs with the intention of advancing in their careers by becoming top level administrators.

Experiential Learning

A type of learning that can be achieved in the form of jobs, internships, or volunteerism. The purpose is to gain hands on experience and knowledge in any field. Knowledge and skills are acquired through life, work experience, and study, which have not been formally attested through any educational or professional certification.
ME-HELSA Program

The CSUS Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an emphasis in Student Affairs Program.

Student Affairs

The area that focuses on “provid[ing] services and develop[ing] programs that affect all aspects of students’ lives inside and outside of the classroom” (NASPA, 2008, ¶1).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the background, statement of the problem, significance of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 involves a review of related literature that discusses the following topics: adult students/learners, cohort programs, educational leadership programs, and program evaluation and assessment. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used for this study including the setting, population and sample, data collection, and instrumentation. Chapter 4 includes a presentation and analysis of the findings for this study. Chapter 5 contains the conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) by exploring both the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) as well as examining the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the program. This research will provide specific and valuable information that the CSUS Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP) Department can utilize to improve the ME-HELSA Program. To properly assess this program, it is critical to research, address, and understand several key areas that are essential to evaluating and improving a graduate, cohort-based, educational leadership program for working professionals. After an extensive review of the literature, several topics were identified: adult students/learners, cohort programs, educational leadership programs, and program evaluation and assessment.

Adult Students/Learners

Because of the lack of research on adult students or learners 25 years of age and older in graduate school, research related to undergraduate adult students or learners will
be used in the following literature review. The use of the terms “adult student” and “adult learner” will also be used interchangeably.

Changing Demographics of Adult Students/Learners

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), adults will outnumber youth for the first time in society as there are more adults than in the past, and the population continues to grow older. Many of these adults will return to school to obtain an advanced degree. Cross (1981) stated that adult students make up a significant proportion of the college student population, and they have considerable differences from traditional college-age students ages 18 to 24 years old. Such differences include: personal responsibilities, learning styles, value systems and stages of life development (Cross, 1981).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2007b) stated that although the number of traditional college-age students, ages 18 to 24 years old, had been growing faster than the number of adult students, 25 years of age or older, a shift in this pattern is anticipated. In the Digest of Education Statistics (2007a), NCES reported that from 1990 to 2005, the number of traditional college-age students enrolled in degree-granting institutions rose by 33% compared to merely 18% of older adult students. However, NCES expected the percentage of adult students enrolled in degree-granting institutions to increase by 21% from 2005 to 2016, compared to only 15% of traditional college-age students. This shift will result in a “more diverse and less traditional” as well as older student population than in previous years (Brus, 2006, p. 32).
Characteristics of Adult Students/Learners

The characteristics of older adult learners 25 years of age or older tend to differ than adult learners ages 18 to 24 years old. Many theorists have defined the characteristics of adult learners. One of the most highly regarded educators and influential figures on adult learning, Malcolm Knowles (1980), developed the following six assumptions of adult learning. Knowles referred to these assumptions as andragogy.

- The need to know; this assumption refers to adults wanting to know why they need to learn something prior to them agreeing to learn (Knowles, 1990).
- The concept of the learner; this assumption acknowledges that adults possess a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and their own lives (Knowles, 1990).
- The role of learner’s experience; this assumption recognizes that adults participate in educational activities “with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youth” (Knowles, 1984, p. 10).
- The readiness to learn; this assumption maintains that adults become ready to learn when they need to know or do something in order to operate more effectively in real-life situations (Knowles, 1984).
- The orientation to learning; this assumption refers to adults’ motivation to learn when they encounter a need in their life situation. Adults participate in learning activities if they help to carry out a task, problem solve, or live a better life (Knowles, 1990).
• The motivation to learn; this assumption acknowledges that although adults respond to external motivators such as a better career opportunity, promotion or raise, internal motivators are more powerful, for example, greater self-esteem, improved self-confidence and recognition (Knowles, 1980).

Another theorist, Cyril O. Houle (1961), researched adults who were extremely involved in their continuing education pursuits and established a typology to describe three types of adult learners: goal-oriented, activity-oriented and learning-oriented. Adults that are goal-oriented pursue education to achieve specific objectives. Those that are learning-oriented return to school for the sake of learning. Those that are activity-oriented participate in continuing education “because they find in the circumstances of the learning a meaning which has no necessary connection, and often no connection at all, with the content of the announced purposes of the activity” (Houle, 1961, p. 16).

Lynch and Chickering (1984) discussed several characteristics that separate adult learners from traditional college-age students: increased demands and responsibilities; richer and more diverse experiences; desire for practical and immediate application; greater autonomy; and an increased need to deal with transitions. Similarly, Cross (1981) suggested that adult learners are often more achievement-oriented and independent than younger adults. Cross (1981) also indicated that adult learners require instruction suitable to their developmental level as well as more active learning approaches such as internships, cooperative education and experiential learning. Cross (1981), moreover,
stated that adult learners tend to value learning opportunities that they can incorporate into their life and work experiences.

Motivation for Participation in Adult Education

Adults return to school and seek advanced degrees for various reasons; however, most of the research suggests that adults return to school to enhance and expand their job and career opportunities (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Sewall, 1986). In 1965, at the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago, Johnstone and Rivera carried out the first national study of adult learners' motivation to return to school. The results of this study have since served as a baseline for subsequent studies. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, the study intended to explain adult learners' involvement in formal and informal educational pursuits, evaluate adult learners' attitudes and opinions pertaining to education, describe the various institutions delivering adult education, and examine both the educational and work experiences of adults aged 17 to 24 years old. The study revealed three major reasons for adults desire to learn: 1) individual aspiration; 2) new career; and 3) advancement in their present career (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965).

Sewall (1986) utilized existing data to explore why adults returned to school. The data, referring to adult degree seeking students, originated from a study conducted at six campuses of the University of Wisconsin System. Similar to Johnstone and Rivera's findings, the majority of the study's participants stated that they desired a new job or career, wished to advance in their current career, or wanted to attain independence (Sewall, 1986).
In 1980, Aslanian and Brickell conducted interviews of 2,000 Americans, 25 years of age and older, in an effort to understand their motivation for adult learning. Their research revealed adults desire to improve and expand their career opportunities. However, through their face-to-face interviews and telephone conversations, they also discovered that “triggers and transitions” led adults to return to school (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, p. 37). The events that triggered adults to enter degree programs varied (Sewall, 1986). As a result of their research, Aslanian and Brickell established a “triggers and transitions” theory. This theory discusses the decision-making process for adults who return to school. It is suggested that such decisions are related to “developmental issues and crises faced during midlife. According to this theory, most adult learners are motivated to return to school by a desire (or need) to move from one status or role to another” (Benshoff, 1991, p. 50).

Some transitions experienced by adults during midlife include changes associated with their career, marital status, family circumstances, leisure or other life roles. Often times these transitions involve adults needing to acquire new knowledge, improve their skills, or obtain credentials, which trigger them to return to school (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980).

According to Milheim (2005), “the consequences of a poor job market have [also] forced today’s workers to look for new ways of remaining marketable and competitive” (p. 120). Unlike the past, people no longer stay with one company or organization for the greater part of their career. Furthermore, fewer companies and organizations provide
opportunities to work up to management levels. Milheim (2005) stated that many adults depend on dual incomes to provide for their family. Consequently, the effects of the poor job market cause many adults to seek advanced degrees.

In addition to improving job or career opportunities, Cross (1981) identified other factors that adults commonly cite as motivations to participate in job-related educational activities:

- Job obsolescence
- Increased participation of women in the labor market
- Increased longevity
- Job competition
- Higher aspirations
- Social acceptability of career change
- The portability of pension plans (pp. 21-22)

*Barriers of Adult Students/Learners*

Adult learners encounter a number of barriers upon returning to school. Most of the research separates the barriers into three major categories, which Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs (as cited in Cross, 1981) first identified in 1974: situational, institutional and dispositional. Situational barriers refer to those that occur in an individual’s life at a particular time. Lynch and Chickering (1984) stated that situational barriers emerge from individuals’ real-life situations. Situational barriers include insufficient time, lack of transportation, job or family responsibilities, financial difficulty, inadequate space to
study, or need for childcare (Cross, 1981; Lynch & Chickering, 1984). Institutional barriers are systemic barriers that prohibit, discourage, or make it difficult for adults to successfully participate in educational pursuits, usually resulting from administrative, organizational or educational practices (Cross, 1981; Fairchild, 2003; Lynch & Chickering, 1984). Some examples of institutional barriers are constrained class schedules, limited locations of classes, bureaucratic red tape, inappropriate courses of study, time commitment required to finish a program, or rigorous attendance requirements (Cross, 1981; Lynch & Chickering, 1984). Dispositional barriers arise from the individuals' perception of themselves, attitudes or past experiences such as fear of being too old to return to school, lack of energy or stamina, or low self-confidence of ability to succeed based on poor grades in the past (Cross, 1981). Whether it is situational, institutional or dispositional, Sewall (1986) stated that a significant majority of adult students cite job and family responsibilities as the number one barrier when returning to school. Most adult students must contend with the responsibilities of working full- or part-time and managing the household, all while trying to attend classes, study, and complete class assignments (Sewall, 1986).

Needs of Adult Students/Learners

Upon completion of this review of literature, it is apparent that little research has been done on identifying the distinct needs, types of services, and accommodations for adult graduate students. According to Skouras (2001), most of the research done in the past four decades deals with the needs and support services for adult undergraduate
students. Skouras (2001) also maintained that research on adult graduate students is fairly recent.

Bash (2003) stated that adult students 25 years of age or older have different needs and are often more demanding than traditional college-age students as they perceive themselves as consumers or customers. Their neediness may arise from higher education institutions perceiving adult learners as less important compared to the traditional college-age students, which is demonstrated by their mission statements, policies, programs and outreach that often do not consider the unique needs of adult learners. Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm (2001) stated, "Whether it is policy, program, attitudes, classroom environment, or funding support, adult learners face institutional neglect, prejudice, and denial of opportunities" (p. 18).

Higher education institutions subsequently must design and offer graduate school programs that fulfill the distinct needs of adult learners (Evans & Miller, 1997). As indicated by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995), age does not interfere with the ability to learn. Instead, as people grow older, they learn differently; therefore, adults do learn differently than children. Glickman et al. (1995) stated that graduate programs must respond to students as changing adults in order for them to be successful. Consequently, faculty should give special consideration to the unique needs of adult learners by establishing the most effective learning approaches (Skouras, 2001).

Faculty can begin the graduate school experience by providing students with an orientation program prior to the beginning of coursework (Fairchild, 2003). Fairchild
maintained that orientation programs can help adults foresee problems that could arise from role conflict; gain perspective on managing family, school and job responsibilities; and engage with one another and begin to form social support networks. In creating effective orientation programs, faculty must also understand the distinct needs of adult students. For example, Poock (2002) discovered that adult students often need information on library services, how to conduct library searches, technical writing, and time management.

According to Brookfield (1998), "the fact that adults engage in an educational activity because of some innate desire for developing new skills, acquiring new knowledge, improving already assimilated competencies, or sharpening powers of self-insight has enormous implications for what facilitators can do" (p. 100). This suggests that facilitators can integrate participatory learning techniques in the classroom, for example, discussion, role-playing, group work and collaboration (Brookfield, 1998). As indicated by Norris and Barnett (1994), adult learners that encounter these learning approaches will gain greater knowledge, improve their ability to conceptualize, and exercise initiative in their practice. But at the same time,

The voluntary nature of participation by adult learners also means that such participation can easily be withdrawn if [adult] learners feel that the activity does not meet their needs, does not make any particular sense, or is conducted at a level that is incomprehensible to them. (Brookfield, 1998, p. 101)
Thus, facilitators have the overwhelming and grueling (although necessary) task of creating an environment in which adult learners can challenge one another yet feel comfortable with being challenged (Brookfield, 1998).

Not only must faculty be cognizant of the type of learning techniques they utilize in the classroom, but must also integrate adults' experiences and prior knowledge when developing curriculum to ensure that learning is meaningful (Brookfield, 1988; Merriam et al., 2007). For example, Barnett and Caffarella (1992) suggested that faculty should develop programs that promote individual learning and student ownership. They also stated that adult learners benefit from a supportive environment in which they can engage with one another. As stated by Evans and Miller (1997),

Students are motivated to learn when they are actively engaged in the learning process and the new knowledge has immediate application to their personal and work lives. Faculty improve the learning environment when students have the opportunity to test new ideas, communicate with others, and reflect. (p. 9)

Focusing on the affiliation need is important in cohort development, especially during the initial development activities in which learners begin to form collegial and personal relations with each other (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992).

Sissel et al. (2001) also stated that many higher education institutions assume that students in general “are able to transact business and engage in key learning experiences” (p. 20) by visiting the campus during the typical business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. However, most adult learners work full- or part-time and have other
responsibilities, which make it difficult for them to seek services during the day. Sissel et al., moreover, asserted that faculty, administrators, and staff frequently overlook the fact that they are dealing with older adult learners and may patronize them or not take into consideration their lifestyles or life complexities.

According to Polson (2003), higher education institutions often assume that adult graduate students are "mature, well-focused, goal oriented, and college graduates" (p. 59); therefore, they are self-motivated and capable of managing the responsibilities of graduate study on their own without special services. Furthermore, Polson stated that adult graduate students frequently return to school after a gap of several years and may find themselves without peers that they can connect with easily. Therefore, it is crucial that higher education institutions meet the diverse needs of adult graduate students by providing student services that extend beyond recruitment and orientation (Polson, 2003).

As stated by Skouras (2001), traditional graduate school programs that fail to adjust their educational delivery models and support services to accommodate the needs of adult students will likely experience a decrease in the numbers of adult students either enrolling or remaining in their programs. Skouras (2001) also said, "The long-term effects of reduced enrollment and retention will pose a threat to the viability of the graduate divisions of these higher education institutions" (p. 10). Powell (1997) conducted an explorative study of the relationship between adult graduate students' perception of program prestige and program access, as well as the degree of student satisfaction with regards to their selection of educational institution, degree program and
availability of student services. Powell discovered that adult graduate students encountered a number of limitations while attending graduate school in comparison to traditional college-age students. Some of these limitations include location and class schedule. As a result, these limitations discourage many potential students from enrolling in graduate programs (Powell, 1997).

Cohort Programs

*History of Cohort Programs*

According to Basom, Yerkes, Norris, and Barnett (1996), the cohort model began as early as the 1940s as part of educational leadership programs dedicated to reform. Since then colleges and universities have revitalized cohort programs with moderate success. Nevertheless, the early use of the cohort model was fairly limited. It conflicted with the autocratic management prevalent in many schools and districts. Educational leadership programs that utilized the cohort model supported a more uncompetitive and collaborative approach unlike the movement toward a more rational, systematic, and authoritative approach in schools and districts (Basom et al., 1996). In addition, the cohort model dwindled as funding disappeared. Many of these cohort programs relied on external funders for support. Thus, the use of the cohort model began to diminish (Achilles, 1994).

The cohort model then resurfaced in the 1980s due to the overwhelming demand for reform in educational leadership programs (Basom et al., 1996). It provided faculty
with a means for choosing candidates and presenting a curriculum that responded to students' needs at the time. Gradually, other colleges and universities began to incorporate the cohort model in their educational leadership programs (Basom et al., 1996).

_Cohort Programs and Collaboration_

More recently, faculty have designed curriculum in their educational leadership cohort programs to emulate administrative practice in many schools, which promote collaborative leadership. Faculty have purposely and successfully incorporated various approaches such as team presentations and projects, case studies, simulations, internships, panel discussions, interactive teaching techniques, and mentoring programs to enforce collaboration and mirror real life (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Hill, 1995). According to Twale and Kochan (2000), these methods “transform[ed] isolation into a more supportive, collaborative environment for faculty, as well as students” (p. 189). Collaborative teaching allowed for the active involvement of faculty and students in the learning process (Twale & Kochan, 2000).

These collaborative approaches created a sense of inclusiveness among students. Sooner or later, students not only began to communicate their successes and failures with each other but also learned from one another about other ways of displaying leadership (Basom et al., 1995). Students began to trust and bond with each other. The cohort model, moreover, allowed educational leadership programs to transform into adult learning communities for students. Students who participated in cohort programs realized how a
collaborative learning approach benefited them professionally as many school
administrators practiced collaborative leadership in their schools. As professionals, these
individuals recognized the importance of collaboration in achieving their goals (Milstein

Cohort programs also enhance the learning process for students. Research
conducted by Cockrell, Hughes Caplow, and Donaldson (2000) on collaborative groups
confirmed the notion that students learned and acquired knowledge through dialogue and
collaboration with each other rather than just through didactic approaches. They,
moreover, argued that “discourse, occurring in a group, enculturate[d] students into
communities of practice and develop[ed] ownership of knowledge linked to the language
of the discipline” (Cockrell et al., 2000, p. 360). Students began to learn through group
interaction. Group interaction not only involved students in the learning process but also
empowered and enabled them to take ownership of their own professional development
(Barnett & Caffarella, 1992). In essence, students took responsibility for their own
learning. Likewise, a collaborative community prompted students to engage in discourse
that extended beyond their class meetings. This inward and outward discussion
transcended into administrative practice as students evolved into collaborative leaders in
schools (Twale, Reed, & Kochan, 2001).

A collaborative community also requires active involvement and input from each
student in the cohort. According to Cockrell et al. (2000), students not only held
themselves accountable for accomplishing their individual and group learning goals but
also those of their cohort colleagues. The more students participated and contributed, the richer the discussions, and the more they learned (Cockrell et al., 2000).

An exploratory study by Bosch, Hester, MacEntee, MacKenzie, Morey, Nichols et al. (2008) of faculty, staff and student perceptions defined a collaborative community as one in which faculty, staff and students contributed to the learning process: “It consist[ed] of both disciplinary breadth and depth to ensure that the learning process allowed students to become critical thinkers and life-long learners who [could] use their knowledge in real life applications” (p. 90). Collaboration allowed students to engage with each other – to agree and disagree with each other’s thoughts on various issues (Bosch et al., 2008).

In 1998, Conrad, Duren, and Grant Haworth, explored students’ perspectives on their master’s degree experiences and discovered that students not only enriched their communication and team building skills through collaboration but also learned effective approaches with respect to inquiry, problem solving and leadership. These skills were helpful in being successful school administrators. Thus, each cohort member shared responsibility in creating meaningful learning (Conrad et al., 1998).

**Development of Cohort Programs**

As indicated by Basom et al. (1996), faculty should consider the following factors when developing a cohort program: establishing a common purpose, fostering social interaction, allowing for individual and group development, utilizing a skilled facilitator, and selecting an effective program structure. The development of a common purpose
actually began prior to the start of the educational leadership program during the selection and admissions process. Students explained their motivation for participating in a cohort program either in their application or interview. This increased the likelihood of faculty developing an interconnected and interdependent group by screening and choosing students who have expressed similar aspirations (Basom et al., 1996). Once students began the formal educational leadership program, they could define the purpose of their cohort with the assistance of their facilitator. By creating their own goals and establishing which activities would enable them to achieve those goals, students could then take ownership of their cohort’s purpose. Establishing a common purpose from the onset would hopefully create a more cohesive cohort (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1996/1997).

The cohort program, moreover, encourages social interaction among individuals within the group, which enhances the learning process. According to Basom et al. (1996), the more active individuals were in a group, the more likely they learned. Faculty also promoted social interaction in the early stages of cohort development by introducing activities that enabled students to share common reactions, insights and emotions. Team building activities such as outdoor adventures/challenge programs provided opportunities to develop greater work-group cohesion and a foundation of trust within the cohort. Activities such as these evoked a sense of accomplishment, self-worth, courage and the realization that students could overcome seemingly impossible challenges by working together (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1995).
Faculty should also consider both individual and group development when establishing cohort programs. According to Zander (1982), individual cohort members must have experienced a sense of belonging, felt significant to the group, and be accepted for their knowledge and input. They must not have felt excluded. Likewise, cohesion within a group occurred when individual cohort members had the opportunity to reflect on their shared experiences, assess their own learning process, and depend on each other for encouragement and support. As students began to form relationships with each other, cohesion occurred (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1999).

Cohort programs, moreover, should incorporate opportunities for both individual and group development in order to create interdependence among cohort members (Forsyth, 1999). According to Basom et al. (1996), "individual growth [was] nurtured through activities that encourage[d] self-evaluation, self-initiation, confidence, risk taking and experimentation.... Group development [was] characterized by common understanding among group members, networking and mutual learning, empowerment, and collective ownership in the program's outcomes" (p. 103). Therefore, faculty must introduce activities that encourage both individual growth and collaboration (Basom et al., 1996).

Cohort programs should also have an attentive and skilled facilitator. The facilitator does not need to act as the formal group leader. Nevertheless, in an analysis of journals of 51 students enrolled in educational leadership cohort programs at four universities in California, Colorado, Texas and Wyoming, Norris and Barnett (1994)
contended that the facilitator must have the respect of all cohort members and have the
ability to help the cohort process their learning. Students trusted the facilitator to create a
safe and comfortable atmosphere for them and encourage all cohort members to interact
and participate in the learning process (Basom et al., 1996). Students were more likely to
share if the facilitator created a supportive environment that involved mutual respect and
understanding. A supportive environment assisted in creating quality interaction within
the cohort (Basom et al., 1995).

Finally, faculty should consider program structure when developing a cohort
program. Many educational leadership programs limited the size of their cohorts to no
more than 25 students. The small size of the cohort not only allowed faculty to attend to
individual student needs but also enabled students to establish closer relationships with
each other (Barnett & Muse, 1993). The small size also created a more cohesive cohort
since students had a greater chance of getting to know one another. Faculty, moreover,
must select an appropriate framework for delivering the cohort program. They have their
choice of one of three cohort models: closed, open or fluid. As indicated by Barnett and
Muse (1993), in the closed model, students enrolled in all of the same prearranged
courses. In the open model, students took the same core classes together but enrolled in
additional courses to satisfy their own personal agendas and/or university requirements.
In the fluid model, students may have entered the cohort at various times instead of at a
single entry point. Therefore, the size and model used are both important factors to
consider when developing a cohort program (Barnett & Muse, 1993).
Advantages of Cohort Programs for Faculty

The use of cohort programs in educational leadership programs can offer several advantages for faculty. To begin, cohort programs may lessen course-scheduling problems and guarantee that students enroll in courses and programs. For example, in a study of educational leadership faculty member’s perceptions of cohort programs conducted by Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, and Norris (2000), faculty reported that cohort programs simplified course sequencing, which ultimately created “a more efficiently delivered program” (p. 273). Barnett et al. (2000) also contended that cohort programs provided faculty reassurance that their educational leadership programs would have high and steady enrollment numbers. Cohort programs, moreover, fostered collaboration among faculty members, gave them a chance to develop closer relationships with their students, encouraged them to undertake new instructional techniques, and enabled them to provide better direction and guidance for their students. Thus, as faculty work more closely with each other and their students, they will significantly enhance the curriculum, thereby creating a program that is more applicable to the needs of today’s school administrators (Yerkes, Norris, Basom, & Barnett, 1995).

Advantages of Cohort Programs for Students

Cohort programs can provide students with a number of advantages compared to traditional programs. They can provide students with opportunities to establish professional and social networks that extend beyond the classroom and continue after graduation (Basom et al., 1996). According to Milstein and Associates (1993),
Cohorts encourage[d] long-term support systems, as graduates helped each other to identify and seek administrative positions and provide a sympathetic ear and a source of suggestions for leadership behavior in difficult situations once positions were obtained. Many close lifetime friendships were also forged as a result of these intensive interactions. (p. 200)

Students of cohort programs have a connection with each other unlike traditional programs. The shared experience created by cohort programs enables students to bond quickly, which may carry on after graduation as they look to each other for assistance as they enter their professional careers (Milstein & Associates, 1993).

Cohort programs also evoke a sense of belonging and reduce isolation for students as they share a similar experience (Basom et al., 1995). In a study conducted by Hill (1995), in which she examined the effects of graduate cohort programs by surveying and interviewing students enrolled in the Danforth Educational Leadership Program at the University of Central Florida during a two-year period, students reported that the cohort program decreased the loneliness commonly experienced in colleges and universities. Because students shared a similar bond, they no longer felt alone. This bond also created a sense of accountability. Students in Hill’s (1995) study, moreover, stated that the support and understanding they received from each other compelled them to remain in the program. Students in cohort programs essentially shared similar experiences and, therefore, could relate to each other (Basom et al., 1995).
Students in cohort programs not only began to focus on their individual needs but also those of others. The cohort model allowed students to experience the unique talents, knowledge and diversity that each member brought to the group (Hill, 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994). This enabled students to “develop their own capacity to support, promote and inspire others in their development.... The qualities of a transformational leader were exercised as the future leader’s part in the group’s success be[came] more important” (Norris & Barnett, 1994, p. 32). Students in cohort programs appreciate each other’s differences, which will make them better leaders (Norris & Barnett, 1994).

Cohort programs also provide students with a safer, more intimate, and supportive learning environment since the same group of students remain intact for most, if not all of their coursework. This assumes that as faculty and students continually meet, bond, and develop trust with one another, they will more likely share their personal experiences, opinions, frustrations and goals with one another (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992). As students begin to trust each other more and more, the cohort also becomes more cohesive. A comparative study by Reynolds and Hebert (1995) of cohort and non-cohort groups revealed that cohort groups actually encountered greater group cohesiveness compared to those in non-cohort groups enrolled in the same degree program at the same university. Because students in cohort programs spend more time with each other than traditional graduate programs, they may develop deeper connections (Reynolds & Hebert, 1995).

As a result of students building greater group cohesiveness and developing deeper personal relationships, the cohort may have richer classroom discussions. In a study
conducted by Teitel (1997) in which students and faculty in the Leadership in Urban Schools' doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston completed a survey about the advantages and disadvantages resulting from the cohort model, students reported that the cohort model allowed for more quality classroom discussions and interchanges than they would have experienced in a traditional graduate program. Since students bond quicker in cohort programs, they may feel more comfortable sharing, which may result in richer discussions (Teitel, 1997).

Finally, cohort programs can enhance students' academic performance as individuals begin to develop high expectations of themselves as the cohort establishes higher group standards. Students view themselves more as scholars (Hill, 1995).

Disadvantages of Cohort Model for Faculty

The use of the cohort model in educational leadership programs can also present a few disadvantages for faculty. To begin, faculty that teach in cohort programs dedicate a significant amount of time in developing the curriculum, advising students, and team teaching, which often means diverting time and energy from conducting scholarly research (Basom et al., 1996). This especially holds true for faculty working at research universities, who are expected to consistently publish scholarly research. Despite the extra time and effort involved in creating an innovative cohort program, faculty customarily do not receive any added recognition or rewards (Hill, 1995). This may ultimately create a disadvantage for the cohort as faculty may become disillusioned with the lack of appreciation, incentives or resources from the college or university.
Furthermore, more often than traditional graduate programs, students require more from faculty and may challenge their instructional methods and curriculum content, which may create conflict between faculty and students. Because of the bond cohorts create, students may form a unified front against a particular issue, which may cause faculty to believe that their teaching methods are being attacked (Barnett & Muse, 1993).

Disadvantages of Cohort Model for Students

Despite the many advantages, the cohort model also poses several disadvantages for students. The cohort model may create competition among students. Students may experience the pressure of keeping up with each other (Basom et al., 1996). Essentially, an unhealthy competition may arise creating stress among students. Likewise, a pecking order may emerge as students begin to identify those with greater academic ability and those who put forth greater effort. In Teitel’s (1997) study, students stated that they tried to team up with these students in class and group projects. This often led to the forming of cliques or students being singled out. Some faculty, moreover, viewed students, who tried to influence the cohort program’s direction, as “presumptuous or threatening” (Basom et al., 1996, p. 107). As a result, faculty responded by “merging all students under one group label. An outspoken or difficult student [would] create an aura which [was] extended to everyone…. Individual talents and the strengths of many [would] be lost to an overriding negative impression created by one member” (Hill, 1995, p. 183). Thus, faculty may develop a perception of students that carries throughout the remainder of the program. Furthermore, although cohorts can build greater group cohesiveness, they
can also lead to deeper classroom discussions that involve sensitive issues or create conflict within the group (Teitel, 1997). Students may be reluctant to share their opinions as they do not want to feel singled out or be attacked. Finally, the cohort model may cause latecomers and non-cohort students to feel left out. The cohort model creates unique interpersonal dynamics within the group that may affect the cohesiveness when outsiders enter (Basom et al., 1996; Teitel, 1997).

Cohort Programs and Transformational Leadership

Many educational leadership programs utilize the cohort model because they enable students to become transformational leaders, which many schools desire. Cohort programs foster transformational leadership by encouraging self-awareness among students through purposeful activities (Basom et al., 1996). Students begin to grow as future leaders as they take risks in sharing their innermost thoughts and ideas with each other. Cohort programs also allow students to exchange ideas with each other that may help them cultivate their own personal values: “A clarification of one’s own personal platform for leadership can occur as these beliefs are articulated, clarified, and challenged by other cohort members” (Basom et al., 1995, p. 21). Students become critical thinkers as well as develop their moral compass. In addition, cohort programs foster collaboration with each other, especially in problem solving, questioning current practice, and contemplating ways to improve it. Educational leadership programs should embrace this new leadership model so that collaboration transcends into practice in school environments (Basom et al., 1996; Norris & Barnett, 1994).
Educational Leadership Programs

*Educational Leadership Programs and Student Affairs*

Educational leadership programs are crucial to developing leaders in higher education, especially in the area of student affairs. Student affairs professionals are critical to the success of students and the colleges and universities they serve. According to Allen and Cherrey (2003), "student affairs [professionals] have many capacities and insights to help transform colleges and universities. They have been actively influencing individuals, groups, and organizational culture for years" (p. 39).

The importance of student affairs professionals and the departments they lead are vital to the success of students since many of the services help students in other areas of their lives, in addition to academics. Student affairs divisions exist on college and university campuses because faculty prefer not to be involved in the lives of students beyond the classroom (Winston, Creamer, Miller, & Associates, 2001).

As the field of student affairs emerged, it was evident that there was a need for staff to help students with non-academic issues as well as activities (Nuss, 2003). Garland and Grace (1993) suggested that as the profession moves forward, student affairs professionals will need to act as integrators, where they will need to blend the traditional roles of educator and disciplinarian with new roles such as researcher, development officer, analyst and advisor.
Educational Leadership Programs in California

Educational leadership programs were created to develop leaders in higher education. These programs aim to develop leaders who will become visionary change agents, create collaborative learning communities, and engage in reflective practice (California Colleges, 2009). In addition to California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), there are 18 other universities in California that offer advanced degrees in educational leadership. These universities include Claremont Graduate University; San Diego State University; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Southern California; University of San Francisco; University of California, Riverside; California State University, Northridge; Notre Dame de Namur University; University of California, Santa Cruz; California State University, East Bay; Mills College; California State University, Chico; University of California, Irvine; University of California, Santa Barbara; California State University, Long Beach; Pepperdine University; University of San Diego; and the University of the Pacific (California Colleges, 2009). The typical curriculum in educational leadership programs includes the following courses:

- Foundations in Higher Education
- Research and Methodology
- Law in Higher Education
- Ethics
- Diversity in Higher Education
- Program Assessment
The University of Missouri also suggested that a course in group dynamics be added to the curriculum since it was discovered that tensions could arise amongst members in a cohort, thereby presenting an obstacle to higher levels of cognitive learning outcomes (Donaldson & Scribner, 2003). A majority of educational leadership programs at the masters and Ed.D. or Ph.D. levels also follow a cohort model.

Educational leadership programs across the country are undergoing major changes in curriculum content, instructional delivery, internships, and student assessment practices (Barnett et al., 2000). In 1999, there was only a brief history of educational leadership programs available and up to that point, major programmatic shifts had occurred (Milstein, 1999). There were major shifts in curriculum content, instructional approaches, connections with the field, and student and faculty demographics. According to Milstein (1999), many educational leadership programs had also been utilizing open admissions policies and procedures, which conceivably may have been triggered by the need to meet full-time equivalent (FTE) requirements. Many educational leadership programs, moreover, found themselves reacting to state and university initiatives for reform (Hudson & Williamson, 2000).
Experiential Learning and Educational Leadership Programs

A majority of educational leadership programs have also included experiential learning into their curriculum (Hudson & Williamson, 2000). Experiential learning theory was developed from the work of prominent 20th century scholars who gave experience a major role in their theories of human learning and development – notably John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and others – to develop a holistic model of experiential learning within adult development (Kolb, 1984). The theories of these scholars share six propositions:

- Learning is the best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes
- All learning is relearning
- Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world
- Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194)

According to Hart, internships represent one form of experiential learning. Hart (1999) defined internship as “the process and product that results from the application in a workplace environment of the strategic, instructional, organizational, and contextual leadership guidelines” (p. 332). Hart (1999) also stated that internships include a variety
of substantial concurrent or capstone experiences that should reflect increasing complexity and responsibility.

Much of the literature focused on the importance of internships in educational leadership programs. Students not only need to gain theoretical knowledge but also experiential education in order to succeed in a graduate program. According to a study conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), students who participate in internships reap multiple benefits such as landing potential full-time positions (NACE, n.d.). The study also stated,

Employers responding to NACE's 2007 Recruiting Benchmarks Survey reported that they offered full-time jobs to nearly two out of three of their interns. More than 70 percent of those offers were accepted; nearly half of the interns came on board as full-time hires. Overall, employers reported that nearly 31 percent of all their new college graduate hires from the Class of 2006 came from their own internship program. (NACE, n.d., ¶2)

According to Hallinger, Leithwood, and Murphy (1993), internships provide students with hands-on experience, which makes them more competitive when seeking employment opportunities. They also stated that students would benefit from observing and participating in an experiential opportunity. Many programs use field experience to apply what is learned in the classroom rather than using class work to support learning that occurs in the field (Hallinger et al., 1993). According to Jackson and Kelley (2002),
Researchers examining cognitive approaches to leadership preparation [suggested] that field experiences should provide core learning experiences in programs to enable future leaders to observe, participate in, and dissect important cognitive processes associated with identifying and addressing problems in the leadership and management of organizations. (p. 197)

Several graduate educational leadership programs have incorporated internships as part of their curriculum. One of the challenges of incorporating an internship is that students found it difficult to find time to complete an internship (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Many graduate students work full-time and attend classes during evenings and weekends. Some students were required to leave or quit their jobs in order to complete an internship. In these cases, a paid internship would be ideal to allow students to gain experience without losing income. Jackson and Kelley (2002) suggested one way for working professionals to incorporate an internship is to require students to obtain at least half-time release to participate in an extensive internship. It is important that students are able to allow time to complete an internship (Jackson & Kelley, 2002).

Internship experiences have proven to be the most valuable experiences of a students’ educational experience (Krueger & Milstein, 1997). According to a study conducted by Krueger and Milstein (1997), even years after they completed their educational leadership program and practiced as administrators, alumni reported that their internships were the most powerful and influential part of their preparation in becoming practitioners.
Internships are critical to the success of students so that they can gain real world experience in their field of study (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Internships also provide the hands-on learning that cannot be gained if preparation is limited to theory and information giving. According to Jackson and Kelley (2002), Harvard University offers a six-month internship for its students. After completing twelve months of coursework, students begin an internship with the superintendent’s office in an urban school district. In addition, fellowships are provided and a substantial stipend is offered for the second-year internship (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Internships are unique, important, and irreplaceable aspects of effective educational leadership programs (Krueger & Milstein, 1997). It is equally important to be sure that internship programs have mentors who will dedicate time and attention to the intern (Krueger & Milstein, 1997).

Although students can gain a great deal of pre-professional experience from an internship, it can be a negative experience if the intern does not have a mentor who is willing to dedicate themselves to the intern (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). The University of Louisville has an educational leadership masters program that incorporates a heavy field work component. In this program, the student works closely with a mentor to establish a knowledge and experiential base related to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) (2002), the ISLLC standards require candidates in educational leadership programs to possess the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students through internships that “provide significant
opportunities to synthesize and apply the knowledge and practice and develop the skills through substantial, sustained, standards based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit” (NPBEA, 2000, p. 5).

Harvard University offers an internship in its doctoral program where students must complete a full-time six-month internship with a superintendent (Education, 2008). In most programs, students viewed the field experience as the primary vehicle for learning, with classroom work designed to support the learning that occurred in the field and not the other way around (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). According to Calabrese and Straut (1999), the failure of some internship programs may be associated with traditional approaches, an inability to define the process clearly, and failure to incorporate best practices into the experience.

It is evident from prior review of internship programs that of the nineteen universities previously mentioned, only 50% offer an internship component within their curriculum (California Colleges, 2009). Although some students report positively about their internship experiences, others feel more negatively. Such negative experiences were reported in Arthur Levine’s 2005 study of educational leadership programs in the United States. According to Levine (2005), students tended to squeeze in their internship experience along with their full-time jobs, both of which occurred at the same facility. In these cases, some students felt that the internship experience was too time consuming (Levine, 2005).
After redesigning their program to make experiential learning more valuable to their students, the University of North Carolina included these four experiential education components in its educational leadership program:

- **Shadowing**: spending a day or two with each of three or four practicing administrators to understand the demands that are made on practitioners and how they respond
- **Practicing in practice**: assuming administrative responsibility for a variety of leadership tasks and projects under the watchful supervision of a practicing administrator
- **Advocacy**: stimulating educational improvement and change by planning and implementing educational innovations in schools and districts
- **Critical reflection**: participating individually, with other students, and with faculty in critical discourse about the shadowing, practice, and advocacy experiences (Hudson & Williamson, 2000, pp. 12-13)

Hudson and Williamson (2000) also noted that the goal at University of Northern Carolina was to create habits of critical reflection and to cultivate school leaders for whom social activism is integral to educational practice.

*Faculty and Educational Leadership Programs*

Various studies noted that faculty also have a significant impact on both students and programs in the educational setting. The quality of the faculty who are responsible for redesigning and delivering educational leadership programs is a major factor for the
success of a program and requires attention (Milstein, 1999). Milstein noted that most programs are marginal at best when it comes to the number of quality faculty. One reason for the lack of quality faculty is that “the number of students per faculty is typically so large that it is questionable that sufficient focused attention and advisement can realistically occur” (Milstein, 1999, p. 540). Another reason is that many faculty are near retirement age and there is a huge need to replace them with quality faculty (Milstein, 1999).

Some may also argue that quality faculty should include practitioners in the current field. For instance, Levine (2005) noted that when alumni from the University of Wisconsin Madison, and the Peabody College of Vanderbilt University were asked to identify the most important concerns surrounding their academic programs, 56% recommended appointing faculty members who had experience as practitioners, and 40% called for faculty who could teach more relevant curriculum that they could apply in the workplace. Levine (2005) also reported that faculty in educational leadership programs are distressingly weak, and for reasons that may seem paradoxical. Levine (2005), moreover, stated that on one hand, the field depends too heavily on practitioners serving as part-time faculty, and on the other hand, it employs too many full-time professors who have minimal, if any, recent experience in the practice of educational leadership.

As stated by Hudson and Williamson (2000), “one of the most tangible ways in which a department demonstrates its belief in diverse points-of-view and articulates its belief in justice and humaneness is during the hiring process” (p. 11). For educational
leadership programs, faculty includes academics and practitioners – ideally the same individuals who are expert in school leadership, up to date in their field, intellectually productive, and firmly rooted in both the academy and the schools (Levine, 2005).

According to Milstein (1999), the average size of faculty in educational leadership programs has decreased since the 1970s. Many of the Division One universities, including those affiliated with the University Council for Educational Administration, have participated in this phenomenon (Milstein, 1999). Most of these universities offer programs that not only conduct some of the most pertinent research in the field but also carry out some of the most significant program redesign efforts, which call for: (1) universities to redesign their existing educational leadership programs; (2) the need to recruit more professors who are qualified; (3) the rapid shift from male to female groups; (4) the growing number of faculty who are former educational administrators (Milstein, 1999).

Another concern regarding the hiring of faculty has been the use of the term, ‘scholar,’ as some faculty describe themselves as scholars in a particular field (Hudson & Williamson, 2000). However, when referring to candidates with a wealth of practical experience in school leadership the term, ‘scholar’ was rarely used (Hudson & Williamson, 2000). The implication was that practice was not considered scholarly work (Hudson & Williamson, 2000).

Because faculty are only trained in research and teaching, many do not have the knowledge and skills needed to become managers of academic programs (McDade,
1988). As a result, faculty must adapt quickly, and as they grow as leaders, must also adjust to a constantly changing environment (McDade, 1988). Although faculty are required to adapt to changing environments, they are being held more accountable (McDade, 1988). The new paradigm is bringing in a new culture of accountability as evidenced by the spread of managerialism and an ethos of value for money throughout higher education systems internationally (Gibbons, 1998). As stated by Levine (2005), “the reform movement has put a spotlight on school leadership, highlighted its importance for school success, made student achievement the measure of school performance, and demanded accountability from leaders for results” (p. 17).

At the University of North Carolina, faculty were expected to lead schools, which excel in academic achievement, to help produce strong educational outcomes in the schools they administer, and understand and respond to their own accountability for school effectiveness (Hudson & Williamson, 2000). According to Hart (1999), “because cognitive perspectives applied to educational administration [required] that proponents accept the responsibility for developing expertise in students, questions about the same nature of administrative expertise and its acquisition have become more important during the past decade” (p. 324).

The era of accountability brought by No Child Left Behind accompanied with an ever-changing global economy has increased the need to ensure that school leaders possess the skills and knowledge in order to provide exemplary leadership to students, teachers, and the community for which they serve (Ringler & Rouse, 2007). Institutions
of higher education must ensure that their graduate and doctoral programs in educational leadership are being taught at a level that moves with the constant changes and demands of the program to promote its educated faculty (Ringler & Rouse, 2007).

Program Evaluation and Assessment

The Value of Assessments

Conducting assessments or program evaluations is critical to the success of any program. Within higher education, assessments allow programs to improve and increase student learning. According to Lori Varlotta (2007), Vice-President for the Division of Student Affairs at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), assessments should be driven by objectives, goals, and student learning outcomes. Criteria and high expectations need to be set so that information can be analyzed and used to further enhance programming. This information can also be used to broaden student learning outcomes (Varlotta, 2007).

Assessments of higher education programs should also allow faculty to focus on student learning to reach program objectives, curricular organization, pedagogy, and student development (Allen, 2004). Leaders of higher education must be able to assess and evaluate programs to determine if what they are doing is working. Assessments, moreover, allow leaders to ascertain if learning objectives are being met, to showcase strengths, to identify areas for improvement, to ensure that the program is in alignment
with the department and the institution, and to demonstrate accountability (Varlotta, 2007).

**Successful Assessments**

According to Bilder and Conrad (1996), there are two major purposes for outcomes assessment. The first is to identify and evaluate quality in order to maintain and enhance quality. The second is to justify the continued existence of programs, if warranted, that have been placed under the assessment microscope (Bilder & Conrad, 1996). Furthermore, as stated by Allen (2004) “while classroom assessment examines learning in the day-to-day classroom, program assessment systematically examines student attainment in the entire curriculum” (p. 1). Allen suggests six steps for successful assessment of student learning:

- Develop learning objectives
- Check for alignment between the curriculum and the objectives
- Develop an assessment plan
- Collect assessment data
- Use results to improve the program
- Routinely examine the assessment process and correct, as needed (Allen, 2004, p. 10)

In order for assessment to be successful, faculty must first realize the positive impact assessment can have on programming, buy into assessment strategy, and be willing to correct any problems that may come out of the assessment: “This is the goal,
and campus policies should promote faculty collegiality and involvement" (Allen, 2004, p. 15).

*Program Evaluation in Higher Education*

Program evaluation in higher education is a vital part of improving, keeping abreast of current trends, and enhancing existing programs (King, Vogel, & Whitaker, 2004). Although program evaluations are conducted, implementation to make improvements often goes undone (King et al., 2004). This issue within higher education is not new and has been an ongoing problem for many years. The reason most often cited for why program evaluation does not work well in institutional planning is “ineffective integration of planning with program review” (Barak & Sweeney, 1995, p. 8).

Conrad and Wilson (1985) stated, “considerable time and attention is being given to evaluation these days, yet a frequent criticism is that the results of such efforts really have no effect on decisions” (p. 56). Although programs may be assessed, many administrators and faculty members do not follow through with implementing changes as a result of these evaluations. Consequently, without changes, programs cannot improve (Conrad & Wilson, 1985).

The National Council on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) criticized educational leadership programs for a number of deficiencies. Despite these findings, many educational leadership programs have failed to make changes to their programs. Some of these deficiencies include a lack of:

- a definition of good educational leadership
• leader recruitment programs in the schools
• collaboration between school districts and universities
• minorities and women in the field
• systematic professional development for school administrators
• quality candidates for preparation programs
• preparation programs relevant to the job demands of school administrators
• sequence, modern content, and clinical experience in preparation programs
• licensure systems to promote excellence
• a national sense of cooperation in preparing school leaders (Jackson & Kelly, 2002, p. 193)

According to King et al. (2004), educational leadership programs across the United States have faced major criticisms over the past twenty years. Since many educational leadership programs conduct evaluations, it is important that the results of the assessments are used to make change to existing programs: “Evaluating the impact of higher learning and engaging continuous improvement matters” (Annulis, Gaudet, & Kmiec, 2008, p. 27).

Assessment utilizes empirical data on student learning to enhance programs and improve student learning (Allen, 2004). As stated by Bilder and Conrad (1996),

Anchored in the widely shared assumption that program outcomes are perhaps the most important consideration in evaluating and strengthening programs, a growing number of institutions are placing attention on the outcome of graduate
and professional programs, especially outcomes associated with student achievement. (p. 5)

The lack of implementing changes after program evaluation is ironic since stated objectives:

- Involve units in assessment of their current objectives and activities in relation to institutional goals
- Begin the process of collecting output information appropriate to each unit
- Begin the process of identifying the resources used (money, facilities, and personnel)
- Provide a basis for recommendations regarding internal allocations for annual operating budgets and reallocations
- Serve as a building block in an evolving planning process that will make planning and resource allocations an increasingly rational process (Barak & Sweeney, 1995, p. 4)

Many educational leadership programs attract students because entrance qualifications are not difficult, thus resulting in the hesitation of redesigning programs for fear of alienating students from applying. Redesigning existing educational leadership programs involves colleges and universities “re-examin[ing] their underlying assumptions” (Mountford, 2005, p. 213).

According to Stiggins (2002), “our current assessment systems are harming huge numbers of students for reasons that few understand” (p. 1). In order to improve existing
masters level educational leadership programs, assessment must occur to discover the
needs and experiences of graduate students. Modifying programs and services for
graduate and professional students requires colleges and universities to first and foremost
assess the needs and experiences of students on their campuses (Guentzel, Nesheim, Ross
& Turrentine, 2006). Information gathered from these assessments can help to frame their
programs that will meet the needs of their graduate students as well as increase attrition
rates. As stated by Krueger and Milstein (1997), “program evaluations must be at the
forefront of our thinking if program changes are to be implemented effectively and
programs are to stay at the cutting edge” (p. 104).

Redesigning Educational Leadership Programs

Currently, educational leadership programs are under pressure to change from the
traditional programs to more effective programs. Some issues concerning educational
leadership programs are shortage of leaders, accountability of improved leadership,
quantity and quality of more and better leaders, and poor marketing that has led to
decreased applicants (Ashby, Cibulka, & Glasman, 2002). Thus, institutions face
mounting pressure when it comes to assessment (Bilder & Conrad, 1996).

Educational leadership programs should offer graduate programs that enable
students to work full-time while they attend classes part-time, thereby allowing students
to move through the program (Mountford, 2005). This kind of information is gathered
from effective assessment of students’ needs. If colleges and universities truly want to
break the mold, they must listen to constructive criticism of their programs and
demonstrate the courage to model the very improvement principles they teach (Ashby et al., 2002).

Despite differences in the size and stage of development of their higher education sectors, many governments have decided that traditional academic controls are inadequate to today's challenges and that more explicit assurances about quality are needed (El-Khawas, 1998). Although circumstances vary among countries, a common trend is that there has been a growing interest by government to provide a quality education and accountability in higher education (El-Khawas, 1998).

In a study completed at Yankee State University, four processes occurred in their assessment of one of their programs:

- Individual interviews with sixty-one graduate program coordinators, faculty, administrators, and support staff members
- Benchmarking with nine peer institutions
- Focus group interviews with graduate students
- Development of recommendations by a twelve-member working group

(Guentzel et al., 2006, p. 9)

Conducting similar assessments will allow colleges and universities to effectively redesign their programs in order to better serve their students. Although the challenge can be overwhelming, educational leadership programs have taken on that challenge to increase the number of applicants to their programs (Guentzel et al., 2006).
Summary

The review of the literature provides critical background information and research to support this mixed methods study. Research not only confirms the need for educational leadership programs in colleges and universities but also the need to improve existing educational leadership programs such as the Masters of Arts in Education: Higher Education with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS).

In order to effectively evaluate this program, the researchers needed to focus on several key topics for the literature review. The researchers first wanted to understand the characteristics, motivations to learn, barriers, and needs of adult students/learners since the program is geared toward working adult professionals. Because of the lack of literature on adult graduate students, much of the literature review included research on adult undergraduate students.

Over the last several years, the United States has witnessed a surge in adults 25 years of age or older seeking advanced degrees. Much of the research cited job and career advancement as the number one reason for adults returning to school (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Sewall, 1986). Especially in today’s poor economy and job market, many adults are forced to obtain an advanced degree in order to remain marketable and competitive (Milheim, 2005).

Once these adults return to school, they encounter a number of barriers. Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (as cited in Cross, 1981) identified three types of barriers:
situational, institutional and dispositional. Whether it is situational, institutional or dispositional, Sewall (1986) reported that an overwhelming number of adults cite job and family responsibilities as the number one barrier when returning to school.

It is also important for those managing educational leadership programs to understand the distinct needs of adult students in comparison to traditional college-age students. Thus, higher education institutions must design their programs to accommodate the needs of adult students. For example, they must consider different learning approaches for adult students such as providing an orientation program or using participatory learning techniques in the classroom (Fairchild, 2003; Brookfield, 1988). Learning must also be meaningful for adult students (Brookfield, 1988).

In assessing the ME-HELSA Program, the researchers also found it necessary to understand the value of cohort programs. Many educational leadership programs, such as the ME-HELSA Program, utilize a cohort model to foster collaboration. This type of learning approach is used because many school administrators practice collaborative leadership in their schools (Milstein, 1993). Research also revealed that cohort programs enhance the learning process for students by enabling them to engage with each other, which led to richer discussions (Cockrell et al., 2000). Although the review of the literature included disadvantages of utilizing a cohort model for both faculty and students, much of the research embraces the use of the cohort model in educational leadership programs (Basom et al., 1996; Norris & Barnett, 1994).
The success of educational leadership programs also depends on a variety of factors. Much of the literature revealed that experiential learning, such as internships, is important for students to gain theoretical knowledge. Many educational leadership programs nationwide incorporate internships as part of their curriculum. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (n.d.) collected data that proves internships are a benefit to both students and employers. Although internships are beneficial, some research indicates that students find it challenging to complete an internship as many of them work full- or part-time (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Some educational leadership programs have added an additional semester in order to give students an opportunity to complete an internship. Only 50% of California colleges and universities that have an educational leadership program actually provide an internship component (California Colleges, 2009).

The quality of the faculty who are responsible for redesigning and delivering educational leadership programs represents another major factor for the success of a program and requires attention (Milstein, 1999). There are many reasons for the lack of quality faculty, for example, faculty members nearing retirement age or having too many students to teach and advise (Milstein, 1999). These faculty members are also being held more accountable for delivering quality educational leadership programs. This signifies a new paradigm in higher education (Gibbons, 1998). Conducting a program evaluation or assessment is one way to demonstrate accountability.
Assessments should be driven by objectives, goals, and student learning outcomes (Varlotta, 2007). Information gathered from assessing programs can be used to expand learning outcomes and bring the program up to a higher standard. Many colleges and universities are now utilizing assessment models to conduct successful program assessments in order to make improvements to existing programs. Bilder and Conrad (1996) suggested two major reasons of the importance of assessments. The first is to identify and evaluate quality in order to maintain and enhance quality. The second is to justify the continued existence of programs, if warranted, that have been placed under the assessment microscope.

Although assessments may be conducted, changes or improvements are not always made (Conrad & Wilson, 1985). Many administrators and faculty members do not follow through with implementing changes in their programs. However, without changes, programs cannot improve (Conrad & Wilson, 1985). Thus, not only is it important that formal assessments are done continually but also equally important that changes or improvements are incorporated into programs.

Rationale for the Study

This research provides specific and valuable information that the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP) Department can utilize to improve the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education with an emphasis in Students Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program. Possible areas of
discussion include: the admissions process, orientation program, course relevance, course quality, thesis/project preparation, and overall program quality and student experience. In the end, the researchers hope the EDLP Department will make use of both students’ and faculty members’ feedback to enhance course study, current activities and quality of services offered by the ME-HELSA Program.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) by exploring both the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008), as well as examining the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the program.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are students’ experiences and expectations of the ME-HELSA Program?
2. What are faculty members’ perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program?
3. What strengths and weaknesses exist in the ME-HELSA Program?

To answer the research questions, the researchers used a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. This chapter describes the setting, the population and sample, data collection, instrumentation and limitations of the study.

Research Design

The researchers conducted a mixed methods study, using both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. Using a mixed methods approach enabled the
researchers to explore the experiences and expectations of students through a series of closed-ended, quantitative survey questions and one open-ended, qualitative comment section. Additionally, the researchers examined the perceptions of faculty members through open-ended, qualitative interview questions.

Setting

The setting for this study was the campus of California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Representing one of the largest and most culturally diverse campuses among the California State University's 23 campuses, CSUS enrolls approximately 28,000 students and offers 60 undergraduate and 40 graduate programs that prepare graduates for careers committed to public service and the improvement of the quality of life both regionally and statewide (CSU, Sacramento Catalog, 2008).

CSUS is located in the metropolitan city of Sacramento. According to the American Community Survey's Demographic and Housing Estimates Report for 2005-2007, Sacramento boasts a population of 446,721 with an ethnic breakdown of 38.3% White, 24.8% Hispanic or Latino, 17.1% Asian, 14.2% Black, 1.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 0.8% American Indian and Alaskan Native, 0.4% some other race alone, and 3.2% two or more races. The diverse population of the city of Sacramento is reflected in the student population at CSUS.

Population and Sample

The population used for this study consisted of 48 graduate students and 5 faculty members from the CSUS College of Education. According to the Office of Institutional
Research (OIR), 4,932 graduate students enrolled at CSUS in fall 2008. Females represented 66% of the total CSUS graduate student population compared to only 34% of males. The ethnic breakdown of the total CSUS graduate student population consisted of 42% White, 18% Asian or Pacific Islander, 14% Latino, 7% African American, 1% American Indian, 2% Foreign, and 17% Other (Office of Institutional Research, California State University, Sacramento [OIR, CSUS], 2008).

In the CSUS College of Education, there were a total of 381 graduate students in fall 2007 with females accounting for 63% of the student population and males 37%. The ethnic breakdown was made up of 45.1% White, 8.9% Asian or Pacific Islander, 17.8% Latino, 11.5% African American, 1% American Indian, 0.5% Foreign, and 15% Other (OIR, CSUS, 2007).

The student sample for this study consisted of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) of the ME-HELSA Program within the EDLP Department. Since its inception in 2003, the ME-HELSA Program has had four cohorts. The third cohort began in spring 2006 with 27 students. The fourth cohort began in fall 2007 with 28 students. Four students in cohort 4 disenrolled from the program and one student graduated with a special major and, therefore, were not included in the sample. The two researchers are also members of cohort 4 and excluded themselves from this study. The target population for this study was 48 total students from cohorts 3 and 4.

At the time of this study, there were a total of 36 faculty members in the College of Education. Of the 36 faculty members, seven were full professors, five were associate
professors, and 24 were lecturers. Seventeen (47.2%) of the 36 faculty members were female and 19 (52.8%) were male. There were a total of 18 minority professors: eight African Americans (22.2%), one American Indian (2.8%), three Asians (8.3%), and six Latinos (16.7%). There were 16 White professors (44.4%) and two other or unreported (5.6%) (OIR, CSUS, 2007).

The faculty sample for this study consisted of five faculty members from the EDLP Department within the College of Education. Of the five faculty members, three were female and two were male. Three faculty members were minority and two were non-minority. Four of the professors were full-time and one was an adjunct professor. Three of the five professors were selected because the researchers felt that they could provide rich information regarding the history of the program and its path since inception of the program. One professor taught in the program beginning in 2005, while another started in the fall of 2002. The adjunct professor started in the spring of 2006 and taught two courses, one in cohort 3 and one in cohort 4. The adjunct professor was chosen so that the researchers could compare experiences of full-time faculty with adjunct faculty.

Data Collection

Student participants answered close-ended questions from a survey. The data will be displayed using descriptive statistics. Student participants also had a chance to answer an open-ended question that enabled them to provide additional feedback. These data were coded and analyzed to reveal any common themes.
The researchers developed a voluntary, anonymous, and confidential online survey questionnaire through SurveyMonkey.com®, a tool that allows individuals to create professional surveys online (see Appendix A). The researchers used SurveyMonkey.com® because of its cost effectiveness, user-friendliness, ability to disseminate the instrument via e-mail, and its ability for student participants to respond online. SurveyMonkey.com® also allowed participants to navigate through the survey fairly quickly and easily and collected results instantaneously using a secure website, which the researchers could access at any time.

Students were asked to respond to a series of statements using a 5-point Likert-scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Not Applicable). Students also had an opportunity to provide any additional comments at the end of the survey, which enabled them to give feedback on any section of the survey questionnaire. The online survey questionnaire inquired about students’ experiences and expectations with regards to the admissions process, orientation program, course relevance, course quality, thesis/project preparation process, and overall program quality and student experience.

Informed consent from the student participants was obtained through their voluntary return of the online survey questionnaire. The researchers obtained a list of e-mails from the ME-HELSA Program Coordinator. The researchers sent an e-mail (see Appendix B) to student participants, which included a brief explanation of the research and a link to the online survey questionnaire.
Question 1 of the online survey questionnaire asked for students' consent to participate in the research. Question 2 collected information regarding cohort year. Question 3 asked students to rate their experience with the admissions process. Question 4 asked students to rate their experience with the orientation program. Question 5 asked students to rate the relevancy of eight courses to developing skills and knowledge specific to the field of student affairs. Question 6 asked students to rate the quality of the eight courses and the degree to which they prepared students to be better leaders in the field of student affairs. Question 7 asked students to rate their experience with the thesis/project preparation process. Question 8 asked students to rate their experience with the overall program quality. The last section asked students to provide additional comments on any section of the survey questionnaire.

The goal of the survey questions was to explore the experiences and expectations of past and current cohort members with the hope that the results of the study would be beneficial in improving the ME-HELSA Program for future students. The results of the study will be shared with the EDLP Department in order to further assess the program and to determine if any modifications should be made based on students' feedback.

For the qualitative data collection process, five faculty members from the College of Education were interviewed one-on-one by the researchers. Faculty members were contacted by e-mail, phone, and in-person to set up an interview time. Once the faculty member agreed to participate in the study, a day and time was set up for the 30-minute confidential interview. Faculty members were provided with an identical set of open-
ended interview questions prior to the interview to give them sufficient time to prepare their answers if needed. They gave their consent by signing an informed consent form (see Appendix C). The interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

The questions covered the following topics: length of time the faculty members have taught in the program and the class subjects they have taught, overall impressions of the program, strengths of the program, areas for improvement, and the quality of students. There were a total of six open-ended questions. All five interviews were conducted in each of the faculty member's offices. With each faculty member's permission obtained, each interview session was tape recorded. Each faculty member taught at least one course in the ME-HELSA Program. Although appointments were set for 30 minutes, most of the professors offered more of their time to the interview session. The results of these data are discussed in Chapter 4.

Instrumentation

Student surveys were distributed via e-mail to 48 students from cohorts 3 and 4 in December 2008. The students had one month to complete the survey. The e-mail explained the purpose of the study and provided a link to begin the survey and served as the letter of consent. By clicking on the link, students could agree or disagree to participate in the study. The e-mail also provided the contact information for the researchers if students had any questions or concerns regarding the survey. Students did not have a time limit to complete the survey, although the researchers informed them in
the e-mail that the survey could take up to 15 minutes to complete. The researchers sent a reminder to non-respondents after one week and then again after three weeks.

After each student completed the survey, SurveyMonkey.com collected, recorded, and summarized the results online, which enabled the researchers to track respondents and view results during the survey period. The results were available to the researchers online. Qualitative data were then downloaded for analysis. The results are presented in Chapter 4 in the form of descriptive statistics. SurveyMonkey.com also presented the researchers with a summary of the additional comments provided by respondents. These qualitative data were downloaded for analysis.

The faculty portion of the study consisted of a researcher-developed set of six interview questions designed to glean qualitative data. After gathering information from the College of Education and the list of professors who have taught in the ME-HELSA Program, invitations were e-mailed to faculty asking for their voluntary participation in the study. The interview questions were approved by the Human Subjects Approval Committee through the College of Education prior to the interview sessions. The recorded interviews were used to gather qualitative information on faculty members' overall perception of the ME-HELSA Program. After the interviews were conducted they were professionally transcribed. Researchers were able to read and re-read faculty responses to reveal any common themes. Once the common themes were identified they were coded for preparation of the data analysis and findings presented in Chapter 4. See process below:
1. Interviews were professionally transcribed;
2. Transcribed interviews were read and re-read;
3. Transcriptions were coded and analyzed to reveal any common themes; and
4. Common themes were identified, from coding and analysis.

By using the above steps, the researchers were able to thoroughly examine the responses from faculty members, discover common themes, and provide a summary, which can be found in Chapter 4.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations to consider. To begin, this study focused on only two of the four student cohorts (2006-2008) and faculty members who have taught in the ME-HELSA Program at CSUS. Within a particular population, the researchers surveyed only 48 students. In addition, only 5 faculty members were surveyed and interviewed. Consequently, the analysis and conclusions will be limited to this program and to the students and faculty members who participated in this study and, therefore, may not be suitable for generalization to other similar populations.

The researchers also made every effort to collect data over a five-year period (since the inception of the ME-HELSA Program in 2003). These data would have included cohorts one through four; however, names and contact information for cohorts 1 and 2 were not available. The researchers made extensive efforts to acquire this
information, which could not be retrieved. Thus, only two cohorts were surveyed for this study.

The gathering of current e-mail addresses also represented another limitation of this study. As members of the fourth cohort, the researchers were able to collect current e-mail addresses from their fellow classmates. The researchers obtained e-mail addresses for the third cohort from the ME-HELSA Program Graduate Coordinator. However, some of the e-mail addresses were outdated, and, therefore, adversely affected the response rate of the online survey.

Potential biases of the researchers signified another limitation of the study. As members of the fourth cohort, the researchers needed to be aware of possible biases in their research and analysis.

Finally, the selection of the faculty sample represented another limitation of this study. Three of the five professors were selected because the researchers felt that they could provide rich information regarding the history of the program and its path since inception of the program.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) by exploring both the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008), as well as examining the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the program.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are students' experiences and expectations of the ME-HELSA Program?
2. What are faculty members' perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program?
3. What strengths and weaknesses exist in the ME-HELSA Program?

To answer the research questions, the researchers conducted a mixed-methods study that explored the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 as well as the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the ME-HELSA Program. This research will provide specific and valuable information that the CSUS Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP) Department can utilize to improve the ME-HELSA Program.

This chapter begins with the demographics of the study participants. Student data is followed by faculty data.
Presentation of the Findings

Demographics of Participants

Although the target student sample for the study was 48 students from cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) of the ME-HELSA Program, six e-mails were returned during the administration of the survey. Table 1 provides the total possible number of students surveyed in each cohort, total number of respondents in each cohort, and response rate by cohort. A total of 30 students (71.4%) responded to the survey. The majority of the respondents were from cohort 4 with 20 students responding (95.2%) compared to 10 students responding from cohort 3 (47.6%).

Table 1
Response Rate of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Total Possible Number of Students</th>
<th>Total Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The faculty sample selected for the study consisted of five faculty members from the EDLP Department within the College of Education. Of the five faculty members, three were female and two were male. Three faculty members were minority and two were non-minority. Four of the professors were full-time and one was an adjunct
professor. Three of the five professors were selected because the researchers felt that they could provide rich information regarding the history of the program and its path since inception of the program. One professor taught in the program beginning in 2005, while another started in the fall of 2002. The adjunct professor started in the spring of 2006 and taught two courses, one in cohort 3 and one in cohort 4. The adjunct professor was chosen so that the researcher could compare experiences of full-time faculty versus adjunct faculty.

Student Data

In order to collect student data, the researchers asked students to respond to a series of statements using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and Not Applicable) as well as included a section at the end of the survey for additional comments. The online survey questionnaire inquired about students' experiences and expectations with regards to the admissions process, orientation program, course relevance, course quality, thesis/project preparation, and overall program quality and student experience. Not all respondents answered every question. The data reported are a percentage and number of respondents for that specific question.

Question 3 asked students to rate their experience with the admissions process, which are summarized in Table 2.
Table 2

The Admissions Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The application was clear and organized.</td>
<td>13% (4)</td>
<td>67% (20)</td>
<td>17% (5)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The status of my application was communicated to me by the</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
<td>40% (12)</td>
<td>33% (10)</td>
<td>17% (5)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department in a timely manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was notified by the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>47% (14)</td>
<td>23% (7)</td>
<td>17% (5)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of the details of the interview (e.g. date, time, location,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee members, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interview was well-planned and organized.</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>40% (12)</td>
<td>30% (6)</td>
<td>27% (8)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the majority of students (80%) “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the application was clear and organized. However, students had mixed feelings regarding the EDLP Department’s ability to communicate the status of their application in a timely manner. The results were split: 50% either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” and 50% either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed”. Similarly, the responses were nearly split regarding whether the EDLP Department notified students of the details of the interview process: 50% either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” and 40% either “disagreed” or “strongly agreed”. With regards to the interview being well-planned and organized, a slightly higher percentage (57%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that it was not whereas 43% either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that it was.

Question 4 asked students to rate their experience with the orientation program, which are summarized in Table 3.
### Table 3
The Orientation Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Percentage (number of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The orientation provided a welcoming environment for students.</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The orientation contained helpful information about campus services,</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resources, policies and procedures.</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The orientation enabled me to engage and connect with members of my</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohort.</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After attending the orientation, I felt that I had a better understanding</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the program’s expectations.</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More students (56%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the orientation provided a welcoming environment for students compared to those who “strongly agreed” or “agreed” (42%). The majority of students (77%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the orientation contained helpful information about campus services, resources, policies and procedures. Only 20% of students “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the orientation was valuable. A slightly higher percentage of students (54%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the orientation enabled them to engage and connect with members of their cohort compared to 43% of students that “strongly agreed” or “agreed.” Overall, 64% of students either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the orientation provided them with a better understanding of the ME-HELSA Program’s expectations. In contrast, only 33% of students felt that it did.

Question 5 asked students to rate the relevancy of eight courses to developing skills and knowledge specific to the field of student affairs. The results are summed up in Table 4.
### Course Relevance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage (number of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This course enabled me to develop skills and/or knowledge relevant to professionals in my field:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 221: Foundations in Higher Education Leadership</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 222: Diversity in Higher Education</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 223: Law and Higher Education</td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation</td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making</td>
<td>47% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 250: Educational Research Methods</td>
<td>34% (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage (number of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This course enabled me to develop skills and/or knowledge relevant to</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professionals in my field:</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 273: Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning</td>
<td>17% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 288: Educational Leadership</td>
<td>14% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every course, with the exception of two, had more than 50% of students responding with "strongly agree" or "agree" that it provided them with the skills and/or knowledge relevant to professionals in student affairs. Those courses considered most relevant to students included "strongly agree" and "agree" responses:

- EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making (90%)
- EDLP 250: Educational Research Methods (87%)
- EDLP 273: Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning (80%)
- EDLP 221: Foundations in Higher Education Leadership (66%)
- EDLP 222: Diversity in Higher Education (63%)
- EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation (52%)

The only two courses that scored below 50% of "strongly agree" or "agree" were:
The courses that scored the lowest in providing students with the skills and/or knowledge relevant to professionals in the field included “disagree” or “strongly disagree” responses:

- EDLP 288: Educational Leadership (48%)
- EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation (44%)

Question 6 asked students to rate the quality of each course based on the ability to prepare them to become better leaders in student affairs. The results are summed up in Table 5.
## Table 5

### Course Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage (number of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This course prepared me to be a better leader in student affairs:</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 221: Foundations in Higher Education Leadership</td>
<td>14% (4) 52% 17% (5) 10% (3) 7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 222: Diversity in Higher Education</td>
<td>7% (2) 55% 20% (6) 14% (4) 4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 223: Law and Higher Education</td>
<td>7% (2) 28% 34% 0% (0) 31% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation</td>
<td>10% (3) 38% 38% 10% (3) 4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making</td>
<td>41% (12) 55% 0% (0) 0% (0) 4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 250: Educational Research Methods</td>
<td>21% (6) 55% 17% (5) 7% (2) 0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 273: Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning</td>
<td>17% (5) 45% 31% (9) 7% (2) 0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 288: Educational Leadership</td>
<td>10% (3) 52% 24% (7) 10% (3) 4% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Every course, with the exception of two, had more than 60% of students responding with "strongly agree" or "agree" that it prepared them to become better leaders in student affairs. Those courses that prepared them the most included "strongly agree" and "agree" responses:

- EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making (96%)
- EDLP 250: Educational Research Methods (76%)
- EDLP 221: Foundations in Higher Education Leadership (66%)
- EDLP 222: Diversity in Higher Education (62%)
- EDLP 273: Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning (62%)
- EDLP 288: Educational Leadership (62%)

The only two courses that scored below 60% of "strongly agree" or "agree" were:

- EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation (48%)
- EDLP 223: Law and Higher Education (35%)

The courses that scored the lowest in preparing students to become better leaders in student affairs included "disagree" or "strongly disagree" responses:

- EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation (48%)
- EDLP 273: Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning (38%)

Question 7 asked students to rate their experience with the thesis/project preparation, which are summed in Table 6.
Table 6

Thesis/Project Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Percentage (number of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class assignments adequately prepared me to begin the thesis/project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication from the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department regarding the thesis/project was clear and consistent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of my thesis/project advisor was handled smoothly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I received/am receiving adequate support from my thesis/project advisor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40% (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of students (66%) either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the class assignments adequately prepared them to begin the thesis/project compared to 34% who “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” Overall, most students either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” (73%) that communication from the EDLP Department regarding the thesis/project was clear and consistent. A slightly higher percentage of students (53%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that the assignment of their thesis/project advisor was handled smoothly compared to 47% that “strongly agreed” or “agreed.” An overwhelmingly percentage of students (86%) felt that they were receiving adequate support from their thesis/project advisor.

Question 8 asked students to rate their experience with the overall program quality, which are summed up in Table 7.
Table 7

Overall Program Quality and Student Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Percentage (number of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cohort model was effective.</td>
<td>50% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program met my expectations.</td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program provided me with the knowledge, skills and values to become an effective leader in the field of student affairs.</td>
<td>7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this program to others.</td>
<td>10% (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the majority of students (90%) either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the ME-HELSA Program’s cohort model was effective. A slightly higher percentage of students (52%) either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" that the ME-HELSA Program
met their expectations in comparison to 48% of those that "strongly agreed" or "agreed." Sixty percent of students either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the ME-HELSA Program provided them with the knowledge, skills and values to become an effective leader in the field of student affairs compared with 40% that "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed". With regards to recommending the ME-HELSA Program to others, the responses were almost split with 43% of students either "strongly agreeing" or "agreeing" and 50% either "disagreeing" or "strongly disagreeing."

Question 9 asked students to add additional comments regarding any section of the survey questionnaire. The researchers identified three common themes that emerged from the 18 student comments: the effectiveness of the cohort model; the inconsistencies within the administration of the ME-HELSA Program; and the quality of the courses and instructors.

**Effectiveness of the cohort model.** The following are responses given by several respondents regarding the effectiveness of the cohort model.

- Were it not for the support and shared disappointment of my cohort colleagues, I likely would have quit the program long ago.
- In regards to the cohort model, I believe its effectiveness has come during the thesis writing process.
- The cohort model proved effective in developing skills necessary for the degree.
The cohort model helped pull me through this program. I got as much from my colleagues as I did from the faculty. I suspect that this is part of the cohort approach and was used to good advantage by the faculty.

Cohort 3 had a high retention and completion rate because there was effort, with some of us making it an overall goal, to ensure our cohort functioned as a team, and we were supportive of each other's success. Some of us were asked, and volunteered, to take on the role of ensuring there was active engagement in class; consciously including students that had limited experience in higher education or were recent graduates; and taking leadership roles in group projects and presentations.

One student offered a suggestion to improve the cohort model.

I understand that cohort bonding cannot be formed through a class and that it must happen somewhat naturally, but the program should have given us something to work with such as some sort of team strengthening or development of simple profiles of each student, which would have been helpful when folding in new professors to a cohort.

The inconsistencies of the ME-HELSA Program. The following are responses given by several respondents regarding the inconsistencies within the administration of the ME-HELSA Program.

The shoddy departmental practice and inconsistent policies impacted the quality of the program.
• The lack of coordination and communication between CSUS and the ME-HELSA Program is a huge issue.

• CSUS administration (e.g. Financial Aid Office, Office of Graduate Studies) caused frustration due to unnecessary errors.

• The ME-HELSA Program was unfairly hampered by poorly executed or unclear administrative procedures in place within the EDLP Department and the Office of Graduate Studies.

• The administration of the program has room for improvement in that change of leadership causes challenges in the administration of the program.

• A major frustration was the inconsistent information on graduation requirements, thesis requirements, enrollment status, fees and similar information. There existed different information from the School of Education, the CSUS website and the Office of Graduate Studies. It became taxing and frustrating, especially during thesis completion and submission when we were informed one thing from the School of Education and learned something different from the Office of Graduate Studies.

• The application process, course scheduling, and information regarding APA and the thesis/project requirements all seemed to be haphazard and contradictory. It did not help that dealing with the Office of Graduate Studies further exacerbated the situation.
Quality of the courses and instructors. The following are responses given by several respondents regarding the quality of the courses and instructors.

- Some of the classes were excellent, especially Ethical Decision Making. However, other classes left me wanting more.
- The instructors and curricula are not always of the highest standard. Unfortunately, the majority of the instructors were ineffective as faculty, and quality instructors were too few and far between.
- Some of the courses we took had the potential to be very useful and pertinent to the programs. However, the professors leading some of these courses were not effective at designing the assignments and the class discussions around those issues.
- In regards to the course offerings and quality of courses, there was so much lost potential. Given the course titles, we could have learned so much to be effective student affairs leaders and really developed skills to assist us in our current student affairs work. Instead, the classes were not engaging, the material was not always current, and the work was not practical in nature.
- The courses to which I felt did not prepare me had the potential, but the instructors did not prepare or know enough about the subject matter to teach.
- The value of such a course is not the question. However, the quality of instruction and content in the course was due to the professor’s ability to meet the needs of students and the course expectations.
• In a program such as this, the instructor does really matter when it comes to course material.

Faculty Data

To collect faculty data, the researchers asked faculty members to provide feedback on six interview questions. The faculty data has been organized by the following themes: program quality, quality of students, and quality of faculty within the ME-HELSA Program.

Program quality. A common theme that emerged during the interviews was the quality of the ME-HELSA Program. Most faculty members felt that the program is excellent but that it continues to evolve as it is “a work in progress,” “is developing,” is “finding its way in a new field,” is “a growing program,” and is “testing the waters.” One faculty member stated, “I think it has the potential to be incredibly dynamic” (Faculty Member 5).

Some strengths of the program are that it is flexible and open to change. Faculty members also welcome and solicit student feedback and often implement student’s suggestions. As a result, the program has undergone several changes in course sequencing. For example, one faculty member said,

And some of the students you’re bringing in, you’re using them as your pilot group in terms of finding out what’s working within the structure of the program from courses to faculty teaching, to the sequence of courses, to when the courses are taught (Faculty Member 4).
Another strength of the program is that it brings in a diverse student population and meets community needs. As stated by one faculty member, "I think it's clearly evolved into a program where people in the community are very interested in getting involved with it. So it meets a need for the whole area of student affairs" and "it provides opportunities that help people, I think, in their career development and career aspirations" (Faculty Member 2).

The cohort model also enriches the program and continuously increases the number of students who graduate from the program. According to one faculty member, the ME-HELSA Program is superior compared to other educational leadership programs (Faculty Member 3).

Overall, faculty members believe that the program is good but still has room for improvement. Faculty Member 4 expressed

"...there was a lot of room for improvement, but considering the limited resources, I think I made the best of it in terms of ensuring that the experiences of students were being enhanced and offering a program that was in process of evolving in a positive direction. And what I mean by positive direction is in a way that it continued to increase the success of students, retention of students, and ultimately the completion of students. (Faculty Member 4)

Data showed that another area in which the program can be improved is in the program assessment process. Although the program is strong in obtaining student
feedback through surveys, no official assessment of the program has ever been conducted. One faculty member said,

...to make sure that there’s an assessment process in place to monitor where you’ve been, where you’re at and where you need to go. I felt that was an area that needed improvement. What I try to do is obtain a very short one-page survey that would ask every cohort how they had experienced the program, from positive things they gained to areas that needed improvement. And I really took those evaluations seriously in terms of using them to inform changes that we needed to make. (Faculty Member 4)

Faculty members indicated a possible reason for the lack of a formal assessment process is that faculty members have many commitments in addition to teaching. One faculty member stated, “The program suffered because faculty are required to meet their commitments” (Faculty Member 4). Many faculty members serve on various committees, teach classes, and serve as advisors. The program could use more support due to insufficient staff and limited resources.

Data also indicated that budget constraints hinder the program, which make it difficult to implement new ideas and changes for improvement as well as the ability to hire more faculty members. Lack of a sufficient budget also affects the size of the cohort and the ability to offer summer sessions. One faculty member expressed that politics had interfered with program success, impacted the program in a negative way, and did not consider the needs of students (Faculty Member 5).
According to one faculty member, the program lacks passion and needs to have a presence (Faculty Member 5). This faculty member is concerned that the ME-HELSA Program does not actually produce leaders and feels that it should offer more courses in leadership: “I don’t think the program really produces explicitly, a lot of strong leaders in student affairs or anything else, and my experience is that we don’t provide much leadership” (Faculty Member 5).

Quality of faculty. Another theme that emerged from the faculty interviews was the quality of faculty. Some faculty members felt that the faculty in the ME-HELSA Program are committed and are of high quality. In contrast, others felt that the program could use more experienced faculty, both full-time and adjunct. Faculty Member 4 stressed that the program may have suffered due to the many requirements faculty members must meet and other commitments they have in addition to teaching (Faculty Member 4). However, one positive element is that the program is able to bring adjunct faculty who are alumni of the program, back to teach in the program.

Another common theme that emerged was that there are not enough experienced faculty members who are familiar with the subject of student affairs and higher education. Most of the faculty members teaching in the ME-HELSA Program have never worked in student affairs. One faculty member stated, “And the challenge for us, I think, is being able to find faculty with an expertise to be able to make it a more solid program…. We don’t have that many vacancies for full-time faculty and so we can only then hire part-time faculty, which we’ve done” (Faculty Member 2).
The adjunct faculty member felt that there was a lack of communication from the department. Because of the lack of communication, the adjunct faculty member felt unfamiliar with the program and "isolated" from other faculty members in the ME-HELSA Program. Another said, "...I didn't know in putting [the class] together what you had done previously building up to what this class was going to be" (Faculty Member 3).

One faculty member felt that there was minimal contact with other faculty members within the department (Faculty Member 1). Another faculty member expressed concerns that faculty are not passionate about the subjects they were teaching, that faculty members are not accountable, that it is difficult to hire people who have worked in student affairs, and that faculty members are not familiar with the higher education issues that exist in student affairs. This faculty member stressed,

I think it's necessary to have practitioners teaching. [However,] I don't think the fact that they're practitioners means they can teach. I think of the other places I see us, and this is department-wide, I think we have a big problem. We don't prepare our part-timers. We presume that if they applied to teach part time, they must know how to teach. We don't do anything to prepare them. (Faculty Member 5)

Quality of students. Another theme that emerged from the faculty interviews was quality of students. Overwhelmingly, a majority of the faculty members interviewed believe that the students are the strength of the program. Many were enthusiastic when
discussing overall impressions of students who had gone through the program. Comments made about the students included:

- Students are passionate.
- Students are of high quality.
- Students are a major strength of the program.
- Students are action-oriented.
- Students are impressive.
- The quality of students has increased.
- The range of student backgrounds is wonderful.
- The quality of students is top-notch.
- Good quality of work from students.
- Students are committed and dedicated.

One faculty member stated “...students were experiencing rich and positive experiences in getting their masters and truly preparing to become practitioners, leaders in the various areas of leadership within student affairs from producing directors or vice presidents, or even presidents of colleges and so forth” (Faculty Member 4). Another faculty member said, “Right now students are the strength of the program. Because I think people come to the program just like they come to any of our programs with a lot of dedication, a lot of commitment to getting the job done” (Faculty Member 5). Likewise, another faculty member commented when referring to advising students on their
thesis/projects, “I like the work, the quality of work. That’s one reason that I think the quality of the students is very good” (Faculty Member 3).

There were only two negative comments mentioned regarding students of the ME-HELSA Program. They were: “students don’t realize the need for some courses” and “students are not always focused or engaged, no potential for learning” (Faculty Member 3).

Other themes. The following are additional topics that were mentioned during the course of the interviews. Some faculty members mentioned suggestions to help improve the ME-HELSA Program. One faculty member thought that bringing all faculty members together at the end of each cohort to discuss positive and negative experiences would assist in improving the program. This faculty member felt that it would help with communication amongst faculty, including adjunct faculty, as a way to brainstorm possible solutions to any existing challenges. The following statement suggests the need for this type of communication, “Well, again, as someone who is not intimately familiar with how the program is organized, like I don’t even know who most of your other instructors have been…” (Faculty Member 3).

Two faculty members mentioned that one of the reasons that a student may drop from the ME-HELSA Program is because the student may come to the realization that the program is not a good fit. The researchers know that a student dropped from the ME-HELSA Program was due to a career change and so the student felt that the program was no longer a good fit.
One challenge mentioned was that if the program wants to introduce a new course, the process for approving courses is very time consuming. One faculty member stressed that bureaucracy within the department can be an obstacle when attempting to move the program forward.

Another area of concern is the lack of communication across the campus. One faculty member stated, “One of our biggest obstacles is communication across campus” (Faculty Member 5). The researchers realized that there was a lack in communication after receiving conflicting information between two departments. It is also the researchers’ experience that other students were frustrated with conflicting information they received regarding issues surrounding class registration, deadlines, forms, requirements, etc.

Interpretation

The findings presented revealed students’ experiences and expectations of the ME-HELSA Program, faculty’s perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program, and students’ and faculty’s views on the strengths and weaknesses of the ME-HELSA Program.

All of the student participants were students from cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) of the ME-HELSA Program. A total of 30 students responded from both cohorts: 10 students from cohort 3 and 20 students from cohort 4.

To assess students’ experience and expectations of the ME-HELSA Program, the researchers focused on several areas of the program: the admissions process, the
orientation program, course relevance, course quality, thesis/project preparation, and overall program quality and student experience.

With regard to the admissions process, a majority of students (80%) felt that the application was clear and organized. However, the responses were virtually split when it came to how students felt about how well the EDLP Department communicated with them about the status of their applications, following up with them regarding details of the interview, and organizing and planning the interview. As students in cohort 4, the researchers also felt that the application was clear and organized. However, poor communication within the EDLP Department and the notification of misplaced or lost student application materials by the EDLP Department, led the researchers to think that the EDLP Department was somewhat disorganized and dysfunctional. The researchers believe that the student responses were split because not all students experienced the disorganization and dysfunction of the Department.

When asked about the orientation program, most students did not benefit from it. The majority of students (77%) did not find it helpful, and 64% did not feel that it provided them with a better understanding of the ME-HELSA Program. Fifty-six percent did not feel that it was welcoming, and 54% did not think it enabled them to engage and connect with members of their cohort.

The researchers also attended an orientation program. The EDLP Department had planned an orientation on the Saturday before the first week of classes. However, students were later sent an e-mail stating that the orientation had been cancelled but did
not indicate why. Cohort 4 finally had their orientation during the third week of classes. The two-hour lecture-style orientation consisted primarily of graduate coordinators from the various cohorts introducing themselves and explaining their respective programs followed by a financial aid representative discussing and answering questions regarding financial aid. Despite the Department’s efforts, the orientation did not provide students with pertinent student information such as thesis/project requirements. Moreover, the orientation occurred during the third week of classes. Had the orientation taken place before the beginning of coursework, students would have had an opportunity to meet, engage, and connect with members of their cohort. Furthermore, the Department could have organized the orientation by providing a general overview of campus services, resources, policies, and procedures to all of the cohorts followed by a separation of students into their individual cohorts along with their cohort coordinator. This would have provided each cohort with an opportunity to engage with each other as well as learn about their individual program.

To summarize the data regarding course relevancy and quality, the majority of students felt that most of the courses provided them with the skills and/or knowledge relevant to professionals in student affairs and prepared them to become better leaders in student affairs. Students rated both EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making and EDLP 250: Educational Research Methods the highest in the areas of course relevance and quality. The researchers believe that both of these courses were rated high not only because of
their relevancy and quality but also because of the quality and likeability of both of the faculty members who taught these courses.

When assessing the thesis/project preparation process, most students (66%) felt the class assignments adequately prepared them to begin the thesis/project and that their thesis/project advisor provided them with ample support. However, 73% of students felt that communication from the EDLP Department was unclear and inconsistent. Likewise, 53% felt that the assignment of their thesis/project advisor was not handled smoothly. The researchers witnessed firsthand the poor communication of the EDLP Department. When cohort members had inquired about specific thesis/project requirements, there were often conflicting responses, for example, with regards to deadlines, thesis formatting, and thesis/project advisor assignments.

In terms of overall program quality and student experience, the majority of students (90%) felt that the cohort model was effective, and 60% felt that the ME-HELSA Program provided them with the knowledge, skills and values to become an effective leader in student affairs. On the other hand, the responses were mixed when students were asked about whether the ME-HELSA Program met their expectations and if they would recommend the program to others. Fifty-two percent felt that the ME-HELSA Program did not meet their expectations compared to 48% that felt that it did, and 50% would not recommend the program to others compared to 43% that would. The researchers believe that there may be a discrepancy due to the degree of expectations students had upon entering the program.
When asked to provide additional comments regarding any section of the survey questionnaire, 18 students responded. Three common, significant themes emerged in the analysis: the effectiveness of the cohort model; the inconsistencies within the administration of the ME-HELSA Program; and the quality of the courses and instructors.

The comments regarding the effectiveness of the cohort model coincides with students' responses in the areas of overall program quality and student experience in which 90% reported that the cohort model was effective. The researchers believe that cohort model was effective because it allowed students to develop trust with one other, engage with each other, and support each other. The researchers personally experienced the power of the cohort during the thesis writing process. Many of the cohort members continued to meet to write together. Other cohort members e-mailed or called others to check on their status and provide encouragement.

The comments that correspond to inconsistencies within the administration of the ME-HELSA Program are also reflected in students' responses in the admissions process and thesis/project preparation. Most students felt that the EDLP Department did not communicate effectively with students, which led to inconsistencies in their responses to student inquiries, for example, regarding departmental policies, requirements, etc. These inconsistencies often had a negative effect on the student experience. For example, inconsistencies sometimes led to students being withdrawn from their classes or being
assigned the incorrect thesis/project advisor. The researchers also believe that conflicting responses from the Department caused some students to distrust the Department.

With regards to the quality of the courses and instructors, students felt that the courses were relevant in terms of providing them with the skills and knowledge pertinent to the field of student affairs. However, they felt that the quality of the course was dependent upon the instructor teaching the course. Many students indicated that the quality of the course may have been better if they had a better instructor.

After completing all five of the faculty interviews, it was evident that all faculty members were very passionate about the program. It was also apparent that all faculty members were impressed with the quality of students in the ME-HELSA Program. Moreover, it was clear that faculty members felt that the program could use improvements, even though most felt that the program has been a success up to this point. Faculty members also expressed that although there are many excellent ideas about how to improve the program, it is riddled with a dwindling budget and not enough resources to move forward. Overall, the program is doing well, but again, has great potential to thrive and be extraordinary.

Because the ME-HELSA Program is considered a fairly new program, the pool of faculty members with experience in the subject of student affairs is minimal at best. Another observation was that politics plays a heavy role in the program and can possibly be detrimental to the ongoing success of the ME-HELSA Program. A faculty member expressed, “...I see us sacrificing the quality of our program in order to avoid some
political thing that we don’t want to get involved in or because of the politics or to hire people that we like instead” (Faculty Member 5).
Chapter 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education Leadership with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) by exploring both the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) as well as examining the perceptions of faculty members who have taught in the program. Three research questions were addressed:

1. What are students’ experiences and expectations of the ME-HELSA Program?
2. What are faculty members’ perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program?
3. What strengths and weaknesses exist in the ME-HELSA Program?

In reviewing the literature, it was necessary to research and address several key areas: adult students/learners, cohort programs, educational leadership programs, and program evaluation and assessment. Focusing on these four areas was crucial to understanding and properly assessing the ME-HELSA Program.

To evaluate the ME-HELSA Program, the researchers conducted a mixed methods study, using both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. Using a mixed methods approach enabled the researchers to explore the experiences and expectations of students through a series of closed-ended, quantitative survey questions, as well as
allowing them to examine the perceptions of faculty members through open-ended, qualitative interview questions.

Conclusions

It is evident that the quality of the ME-HELSA Program is good overall. The strength of the program lies with its students and the program’s ability to accept and implement changes to enhance the program. The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP) Department solicits and listens to students’ feedback and suggestions and incorporates changes whenever possible and appropriate, which is apparent in its changes to the ME-HELSA Program’s course sequencing and course offerings. Although the ME-HELSA Program has many strengths, there are areas that could be improved. The feedback gained from student surveys and faculty interviews provided rich information to the researchers that will be shared with the EDLP Department in order to strengthen the ME-HELSA Program.

As discussed in Chapter 2, higher education institutions must design and offer graduate school programs that fulfill the distinct needs of adult learners (Evans & Miller, 1997). Glickman et al. (1995) stated that graduate programs must respond to students as changing adults in order for them to be successful. Consequently, faculty should give special consideration to the unique needs of adult learners by establishing the most effective learning approaches (Skouras, 2001).
Fairchild (2003) maintained that orientation programs can help adults foresee problems that could arise from role conflict; gain perspective on managing family, school and job responsibilities; and engage with one another and begin to form social support networks. In creating effective orientation programs, faculty must also understand the distinct needs of adult students.

The research conducted in this thesis revealed useful information for program administrators:

- 77% of students did not find the orientation program helpful
- 64% of students did not feel that it provided them with a better understanding of the ME-HELSA Program
- 56% of students did not feel that it was welcoming
- 54% of students did not think it enabled them to engage and connect with members of their cohort

Graduate students vary from the young and inexperienced to the older, seasoned professional; however, many of them enter their graduate programs with a similar mindset, feeling just as intimated and mystified as they were as new undergraduate students. The literature clearly demonstrates the relation between an effective orientation program and the success of a cohort, both academically and socially. An orientation program can provide incoming students with a welcoming environment; support in their transition; acclimation to the campus, especially for older and delayed-entry graduate students, who may experience more apprehension depending on the length of time away
from the university; and an increase in persistence and retention as graduate students feel more connected to and supported by the university and academic department (Barker, Felstehausen, Couch, & Henry, 1997; Poock, 2004).

It is also crucial that the EDLP Department meets the diverse needs of ME-HELSA students by providing services that extend beyond recruitment and orientation. According to Polson (2003), higher education institutions often assume that adult graduate students are “mature, well-focused, goal oriented, and college graduates” (p. 59); therefore, they are self-motivated and capable of managing the responsibilities of graduate study on their own without special services. However, some ME-HELSA students have returned to school after a gap of several years. They may not be familiar with existing campus services or how to navigate their way through the campus. Therefore, some students may require some hand-holding, at least in the beginning of the program.

The researchers also believe that the use of the cohort model in the ME-HELSA Program has been effective. The research conducted in this study demonstrates that an overwhelming percentage of students (90%) felt that the cohort model was effective.

Cohort programs foster collaboration, which emulates administrative practice in many schools. Learning approaches such as group presentations and projects, case studies, panel discussions, interactive teaching techniques have definitely created a more supportive, collaborative environment for faculty and students in the ME-HELSA Program. Collaborative teaching allows for the active involvement of faculty and students
in the learning process (Twale & Kochan, 2000). In addition, cohort programs foster collaboration among students, especially in problem solving, questioning current practice, and contemplating ways to improve it (Basom et al., 1996; Norris & Barnett, 1994).

Cohort programs also allow students to learn and acquire knowledge through dialogue and collaboration with each other rather than just through didactic approaches (Cockrell et al., 2000). As students in the ME-HELSA Program began to bond and trust each other, discussions became richer and learning became more meaningful. Thus, students were able to discuss sensitive issues in a safe and supportive learning environment.

The researchers also believe that the cohort model was effective because it allowed students to develop trust with one another, engage with each other, and support each other. The researchers personally experienced the power of the cohort during the thesis writing process. Many of the cohort members continued to meet to write together. Other cohort members e-mailed or called others to check on their status and provide encouragement.

Cohort programs, moreover, foster social interaction, which enhances the learning process (Basom et al., 1995). This is one area in which the EDLP Department can make improvements. The EDLP Department could introduce team-building activities prior to the beginning of coursework to develop better work-group cohesion and a foundation of trust within the cohort.
The research conducted in this thesis also revealed a need for the EDLP Department to improve its communication with students. The responses were virtually split when it came to how students felt about how well the EDLP Department communicated with them about the status of their application, following up with them regarding details of the interview, and organizing and planning the interview. Poor communication within the EDLP Department and the notification of misplaced or lost student application materials by the EDLP Department, led the researchers to believe that the EDLP Department was somewhat disorganized and dysfunctional. Likewise, when assessing thesis/project preparation, 73% of students felt that communication from the EDLP Department was unclear and inconsistent. When cohort members had inquired about specific thesis/project requirements, there were often conflicting responses, for example, with regards to deadlines, thesis formatting, and thesis/project advisor assignments.

Some students also felt that the EDLP Department did not communicate effectively with students. This led to inconsistencies in the Department’s responses to student inquiries, for example, regarding Departmental policies, requirements, etc. These inconsistencies often had a negative effect on the student experience. For example, inconsistencies sometimes led to students being disenrolled from their classes or being assigned an incorrect thesis/project advisor.

Based on the findings of faculty interviews, a formal and ongoing assessment of the ME-HELSA Program is also necessary. Leaders of higher education must be able to
assess and evaluate programs to determine if what they are doing is working. Assessments, moreover, allow leaders to ascertain if learning objectives are being met, to showcase strengths, to identify areas for improvement, to ensure that the program is in alignment with the department and the institution, and to demonstrate accountability (Varlotta, 2007).

Currently, no formal assessment of the program has been conducted. Assessment is critical to the improvement of the ME-HELSA Program and should be conducted continuously to enhance it. Student learning can be broadened and enhanced following the outcome of assessments. Evaluating the ME-HELSA Program will help maintain and improve the quality of the program. It will also justify its existence and potentially increase funding. Assessment will allow for improving, refining, re-defining, improving student learning, and strengthening the program.

The researchers understand that politics also play a heavy and critical role. However, the program must rise above its political motivation and remember its passion for student learning. It is important and necessary to realize that CSUS is currently under pressure to demonstrate accountability within Academic Affairs and that the ME-HELSA Program is in alignment with the University’s mission.

Recommendations and Implications

There has been a growing concern to evaluate and improve existing educational leadership programs in the United States, especially in light of Arthur Levine’s 2005
study of educational leadership programs. Based on the findings in the current study, the researchers recommend the following to improve the ME-HELSA Program:

1. *Improve the existing orientation program.*

   It is clear from the data that the EDLP faculty can begin the ME-HELSA Program experience by providing students with an orientation program prior to the beginning of coursework. The EDLP Department could organize the orientation by providing a general overview of campus services, resources, policies, and procedures to all of the EDLP cohorts followed by a separation of students into their individual cohorts, for example, the ME-HELSA cohort, along with their graduate coordinator. This will provide each cohort with an opportunity to engage with each other as well as learn about their individual program.

   The EDLP Department, moreover, could invite former students to the orientation to share their perspectives and offer advice on how to succeed in the program. It is often helpful to hear from former students who have shared similar experiences.

2. *Introduce team-building activities prior to the beginning of coursework.*

   Although students attended an orientation program, there was not an opportunity for students to engage and connect with each other prior to the beginning of coursework. Introducing team-building activities will allow students to meet each other and bond. For example, the EDLP Department could utilize Peak Adventures, a challenge program that is offered through CSUS. Through the guidance of a skilled facilitation team, cohort members will experience a variety of planned initiatives and obstacles in order to
examine and share common reactions, insights and emotions. Activities are designed to evoke a sense of accomplishment, self-worth, courage and the realization that seemingly impossible challenges can be overcome by working together. Team building activities such as those at Peak Adventures allow for better cohesion. It is relatively inexpensive – two hour team building lab at $15 per person, three hours at $20 per person, and six hours at $25 per person (California State University, Sacramento, Associated Students, Inc., 2009).

3. Ensure campus services accommodate the needs of students.

An introduction to various campus services, such as library services, Office of Graduate Studies, the Writing Center, would be beneficial to the success of ME-HELSA students. However, the EDLP Department must realize that most ME-HELSA students work full- or part-time and have other responsibilities, which make it difficult for them to seek services during the day. Therefore, the EDLP Department must be creative in seeking alternative ways for students to utilize these services, such as asking a representative of the Office of Graduate Studies to visit during one of the classes and respond to students’ inquiries.

4. Improve communication among faculty as well as between faculty and students.

In order to establish a more cohesive faculty unit, it is strongly encouraged that a mandatory meeting at the beginning of each cohort be implemented so that faculty can get to know one another and find out which courses they are teaching. Each faculty
member can share their syllabi so that they can become familiar with what students are learning. In addition, the researchers propose that the faculty meet at the end of each cohort to discuss things that worked well, things that did not work so well, and brainstorm ideas for improvement. The meeting will allow full-time faculty to get to know adjunct faculty and also help adjunct faculty feel more connected to the program and not feel so isolated from the Department. The researchers also suggest that the Department hold workshops for enhancing teaching styles so that faculty can keep abreast of any new trends in teaching. The workshops would be especially beneficial to new faculty.

In order to improve communication between faculty and students, faculty must be consistent with their responses to students. The researchers suggest implementing a faculty/staff training to help faculty better understand departmental policies, practices and requirements. The EDLP website should also be continually maintained and updated to inform students of current policies, practices and requirements.

5. Add an experiential education component using internships.

In addition to academic learning, internships provide valuable and critical learning. Internships, moreover, provide hands-on learning where students can apply theory to practice. Internship experiences have proven to be the most valuable experiences of a students' educational experience (Krueger & Milstein, 1997).

There are many benefits to students who complete internships. Students are able to enhance learning by practicing what they have learned in the classroom and can make
a connection between learning and doing. By participating in an internship, students will be exposed to environments in relation to their field of study. Students will see how leaders in student affairs deal with issues affecting departments. In addition to the hands-on learning, students can network with other student affairs professionals, be seen as a potential employee, obtain letters of recommendation, and enhance their resumes with related experience.

After completing an internship, students will have a clearer understanding and be able to articulate their experiences and knowledge in the field. Internships also make students more competitive when seeking employment opportunities, which is extremely important considering today’s economy and unemployment rate. Likewise, internships can help to foster self-confidence, which is crucial in positions of leadership.

The ME-HELSA Program could implement a pilot internship component to its curriculum. The researchers are aware that most students in the program work full-time, which could make participation in an internship a challenge for some. However, in order to make this program stronger, it needs to add an internship component. To help with that challenge, the internship can be completed as the last “course” of the curriculum. Students can complete a semester long internship at a two- or four-year accredited institution of higher education. The internship can be completed during the evening hours since many student affairs services are now offering evening hours. Most high level administrators work beyond 5:00 p.m. and could provide guidance and mentorship to the
student intern, and in return an administrator could potentially get a project done by using a student intern.

6. *Hire more faculty with student affairs experience.*

Levine (2005) stated that on one hand, the field depends too heavily on practitioners serving as part-time faculty, and on the other hand, it employs too many full-time professors who have minimal, if any, recent experience in the practice of educational leadership. The ME-HELSA Program employs faculty who have experience in student affairs whenever possible. The researchers realize this is a challenge since full-time faculty members have priority when it comes to course assignments. Because this type of leadership program is fairly new, it is challenging to find faculty with the expertise the program needs.

The EDLP Department should hire adjunct faculty and alumni from the program who have experience working within student affairs programs. This will enhance the quality of the backgrounds of the faculty that are teaching in the ME-HELSA Program. It is also suggested that the program look to doctoral programs, such as the Independent Education Doctorate Program at CSUS, for potential faculty members. It is important that students hear from professionals in the field to gain first-hand knowledge of student affairs programs and learn about best practices used in the field. This will allow students to learn more about the inner workings of student affairs programs and the kinds of experiences they may encounter when working as student affairs professionals. Hiring
faculty with student affairs experience coupled with an internship will provide a rich learning experience for its students.

7. Conduct a formal assessment.

The EDLP Department should hire a faculty member to conduct a formal assessment of the ME-HELSA Program. If funding is not available, perhaps a faculty member could complete the assessment during the summer to give the faculty more free time to complete the assessment. In addition to conducting the assessment, changes should be implemented to further develop and enhance the program. Research has proven that often assessments are conducted, however implementation goes undone.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are many ways to complete an assessment. One way is to organize the process by using a matrix that lists learning objectives. In subsequent columns, discuss how each objective is aligned with the curriculum and how each one will be addressed, and who will be involved. Also, the model used at Yankee State University, mentioned in Chapter 2, can serve as a successful model (Guentzel et al., 2006).

In order for assessment to become a priority, the faculty members involved need to be publicly recognized and rewarded, and administration needs to express their support for those efforts. The assessment should be publicized so that the University is aware of the changes and progress the program has made. Because the ME-HELSA Program has already shown it is flexible to adopting change, it should not be an issue to implement changes as a result of a formal assessment.
8. Find creative ways to raise funds.

It is also no secret that the current budget situation in the United States is the worst it has been since the Great Depression. This is a time when creative ideas for additional funding need to be explored. Even though budgets in a variety of industries across the country have been slashed or dramatically reduced, it is important to prepare for the future of the ME-HELSA Program. There are many foundations whose sole mission is to help support institutions of higher education.

Again, assessments are essential because when budgets are being reduced, assessments are often looked at to see if the program that is being considered for a budget cut is meeting its program goals and objectives, as well as the University's. Programs that meet goals and objectives are more likely to escape a budget cut or suffer a lesser one.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings in the current study, the following recommendations for further research are suggested:

- Continue to seek feedback from students and faculty in order to improve the ME-HELSA Program.
- Conduct a study of alumni of the ME-HELSA Program and its impact to them professionally.
- Research other educational leadership programs for ways to improve the ME-HELSA Program.
• Conduct further research on assessment processes in higher education.

• Conduct further research on adult graduate students.

• Research the effectiveness of websites in marketing, recruiting and/or communicating effectively with students.

• Research how to overcome political strife within programs.

• Research team dynamics and how to overcome personal differences that inhibit departmental cohesiveness.

• Survey students to determine the value of internships once they are implemented into the curriculum.

It is the hope of the researchers that the EDLP Department will consider the proposed recommendations. Although the ME-HELSA Program has many strong suits, even the best programs have room for improvement. Implementing these changes will enhance this educational leadership program thereby cultivating change agents who possess the necessary knowledge and skills to solve issues in higher education.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Student Survey

**Question 1: Informed Consent**
I have read the letter of consent and agree to participate in the research.
_____ Agree   _____ Disagree

**Question 2: Demographics**
Which cohort were/are you in?
_____ Cohort 3 (Spring 2006 – Spring 2007)
_____ Cohort 4 (Fall 2007 – Fall 2008)

**Question 3: The Admissions Process**

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<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>3. The application process was clear and organized.</td>
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<td>Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department in a timely</td>
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<td>5. I was notified by the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies</td>
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<td>committee members, etc.).</td>
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<td>6. The interview was well-planned and organized.</td>
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**Question 4: The Orientation Program**

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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>7. The orientation provided a welcoming environment for students.</td>
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<td>8. The orientation contained helpful information about campus services,</td>
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<td>resources, policies and procedures.</td>
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Question 5: Course Relevance
11. For each course, please respond to the following statement: This course enabled me to develop skills and/or knowledge relevant to professionals in my field.

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<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>EDLP 221: Foundations in Higher Education Leadership</td>
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<td>EDLP 223: Law and Higher Education</td>
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<td>EDLP 224: Program Development and Evaluation</td>
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<td>EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making</td>
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<td>EDLP 250: Educational Research Methods</td>
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<td>EDLP 273: Grants, Proposals and Systemic Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDLP 288: Educational Leadership</td>
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Question 6: Course Quality
12. For each course, please respond to the following statement: This course prepared me to be a better leader in student affairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDLP 221: Foundations in Higher Education Leadership</td>
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<td>EDLP 222: Diversity in Higher Education</td>
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<td>EDLP 223: Law and Higher Education</td>
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<td>EDLP 225: Ethical Decision Making</td>
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</table>
Question 7: Thesis/Project Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. The class assignments adequately prepared me to begin the thesis/project.</td>
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<td>14. Communication from the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department regarding the thesis/project was clear and consistent.</td>
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<td>15. Assignment of my thesis/project advisor was handled smoothly.</td>
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<td>16. I received/am receiving adequate support from my thesis/project advisor.</td>
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Question 8: Overall Program Quality and Student Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. The cohort model was effective.</td>
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<td>18. The program met my expectations.</td>
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<td>19. The program provided me with the knowledge, skills and values to become an effective leader in the field of student affairs.</td>
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<td>20. I would recommend this program to others.</td>
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Additional Comments
Please feel free to add additional comments regarding any section of the survey questionnaire.
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Letter for Student Survey

Dear Student:

I am requesting your assistance to participate in a research study which will be conducted as part of my thesis for the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at Sacramento State. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the ME-HELSA Program by exploring the experiences and expectations of past and current students in cohorts 3 and 4 (2006-2008) of the ME-HELSA Program.

I am requesting that you complete a voluntary, online survey questionnaire through SurveyMonkey.com© about your experiences and expectations with regards to the admissions process, orientation program, course relevance, course quality, thesis/project preparation, and overall program quality and student experience. The survey may require up to 15 minutes of your time.

There are no risks to you for participating in this study. Sensitive areas that emerge from the surveys will be addressed thematically and will not be attributed to any specific individual. Your responses to the survey will be anonymous and confidential.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study. Although you may not personally benefit from participating in this research, it is hoped that the results of this study will be beneficial in improving the ME-HELSA Program for future students.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Candice Palaspas at (916) 278-2799 or by e-mail at palaspas@csus.edu.

Please click on the link below to begin the survey.
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Letter for Faculty Interview

Dear (insert faculty name):

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Candace McGee, a student in the Master of Arts in Education: Higher Education with an emphasis in Student Affairs (ME-HELSA) Program at Sacramento State. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of past and current faculty members of the ME-HELSA Program.

You will be interviewed and asked written questions about your perceptions of the ME-HELSA Program (e.g. strengths of the program, areas for improvement). The interview may require up to thirty minutes of your time.

Risks to you for participating in this study are none to minimal. Sensitive areas that emerge from the interviews will be addressed thematically and will not be attributed to any specific individual, unless given permission to do so by you.

It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial in improving the ME-HELSA Program for future students.

A variety of steps will be taken to ensure the integrity of the process and the research data including:

Being sensitive to you as an individual;

Allotting sufficient time for in-depth conversational interviews and paying careful attention to the setting;

Recording each interview; duplicate copies of each recording will be made for the sole purpose as back-up recordings in the unlikely event of damage or loss. The safety of data will be ensured through its storage in the researchers locked drawer in her office;

Transcribing the tapes through the commercial services of a transcription professional;

Keeping a journal with recorded notes of the procedures used, as well as reflections on the research process.
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Candace McGee at (916) 278-7207 or by e-mail at cmcgee@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

_________________________________________  _____________
Signature of Participant                       Date
APPENDIX D

Faculty Interview Questions

How long have you been teaching in this program?

Which class(es) did/do you teach for this program?

What is your overall impression of this program?

What do you feel are strengths of this program?

What areas of this program do you feel could use improvement?

What do you think about the program’s quality, relevance and sequencing of courses that are offered?

Has the quality of students met your expectations?

What has been your experience with student advisees?
REFERENCES


Kasworm, C. (2003). Setting the stage: Adults in higher education. *New Directions for Student Services, 102*, 3-10.


