

Knowing, Doing, and Becoming: Professional Identity Construction Among Public Affairs Doctoral Students

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ABSTRACT

Public administration scholars have long examined how doctoral students in public affairs are trained to become researchers. Our study adds to this body of knowledge by examining socialization and professional identity construction processes among doctoral students conducting public affairs research. We develop a multilevel model of the organizational, relational, and individual level tactics through which they learn to become researchers. In particular, our study offers insight into the interactions between students and **faculty** that contribute to their development, as well as into students' own proactivity. Our study uses interview data from doctoral students in multiple disciplines who are conducting research in public affairs. We conclude with a discussion of our model and recommendations for doctoral programs.

KEYWORDS

doctoral students, professional identity, socialization, mentoring

Expressing concern over the quality of public administration research, researchers have long studied how public affairs doctoral programs prepare students to conduct research (e.g., Brewer, Facer, O'Toole, & Douglas, 1998; Rethemeyer & Helbig, 2005; White, Adams, & Forrester, 1996).¹ Previous studies have offered programmatic suggestions such as structured research experiences (Brewer, Douglas, Facer, & O'Toole, 1999), examined the "importance" of the dissertation topic (Cleary, 2000), promoted theory development in dissertation research (White et al., 1996),

and recommended coursework in mathematics (Rethemeyer & Helbig, 2005). Scholars also acknowledge the importance of mentoring, socialization, and professional identity development for doctoral students in public affairs (Rethemeyer & Helbig, 2005; Schroeder, O'Leary, Jones, & Poocharoen, 2004), and a growing body of literature from other fields examines doctoral students' socialization experiences (e.g., Gardner, 2007, 2008, 2010; Green 1991). Increased knowledge of public affairs doctoral students' professional identity development is important because it can assist

faculty and programs in effectively preparing students to be productive scholars. As such, this study contributes toward understanding how doctoral students interested in public affairs develop their research professional identity. It also offers insights and recommendations for public affairs doctoral programs and faculty as they socialize students into the research profession.

Our study adds to the existing knowledge about the training of public affairs doctoral students in several ways. This paper develops a multilevel model of research professional identity development; we consider socialization efforts at the organizational, relational, and individual levels that contribute to different facets of a scholar's identity. Consistent with prior research, this study confirms the centrality of faculty relationships for PhD student professional identity development and socialization. This study also emphasizes that developing a research professional identity requires mentoring relationships with multiple faculty rather than a one-to-one mentor-protégé relationship. As called for by Green (1991, p. 404), we offer insight into understanding the actual behaviors that comprise the mentoring relationships between faculty and students. While existing research emphasizes the importance of relationships and mentoring in the doctoral student socialization process, it does not actually reveal the nature of the interactions between public affairs doctoral students and faculty. This paper goes beyond existing research by identifying student-faculty interactions that help students increase their visibility, obtain hands-on research experience, and bolster their research identity.

We also contribute to the call from Saks, Gruman, and Cooper-Thomas (2011, p. 45) for consideration of how newcomers execute proactive behaviors. This paper identifies specific tactics such as positioning and emulation of role models that doctoral students employ to obtain faculty support and construct their identity. It extends existing socialization research by describing these proactive behaviors, especially those in which students engage to

connect to faculty. In some cases, it appears that students may be expending a great deal of energy in strategizing about how to develop connections, and then in actually doing so.

Our study is based on data from interviews with doctoral students from a variety of disciplines who participated in a professional development forum and who are interested in or are conducting research in public affairs. In the next sections, we discuss the theoretical background that frames our study—socialization and professional identity. We then present our methods and data, followed by our findings. We conclude with a discussion of our model and recommendations for teaching and mentoring public affairs doctoral students.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Socialization involves developing the skills and acquiring the knowledge associated with being a member of an organization or profession, as well as adopting the values, norms, and culture of that profession or organization (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Van Maanen, 1977; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). When newcomers undergo this adaptation within the context of a particular organization, it is considered organizational socialization, while professional socialization transcends different organizational contexts (Lankau & Scandura, 2007). Professional socialization is “learning about the broader set of expectations, skills, behaviors, and performance demands associated with a particular profession” (Lankau & Scandura, 2007, p. 97). It involves not only learning about and developing one's identity within the profession, but doing so in the context of the work that one needs to accomplish (Becker et al., 1961; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Tactics such as mentoring, orientation sessions, training, and apprenticeships facilitate socialization; these methods are typically formal efforts by the organization to socialize newcomers (Jones, 1986; Louis, 1980; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). These tactics can be considered institutionalized tactics—socialization methods in which the organization controls the mechanisms

(Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Jones, 1986; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

However, such tactics only represent part of the socialization process. Newcomers also engage their own agency to obtain information and knowledge related to becoming a member of an organization or profession. This proactivity enables them to fill in gaps left by institutionalized tactics (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). For example, newcomers may establish connections to experienced members of an organization or profession to obtain emotional support, tacit information, and performance feedback they may not otherwise have if they relied solely on the organization's tactics (Chao, 2007; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). These efforts can also help them to fit in and understand behavioral and cultural norms and expectations (Chao, 2007; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Morrison, 1993).

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Professional identity can be defined as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (Ibarra, 1999, pp. 764–765; Schein, 1978). An individual's professional identity signals to others that he or she possesses unique, skilled, or scarce abilities (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). As Pratt et al. note, “Organizational membership is an indicator of *where you work* (i.e. an organization). Professionals, by contrast, are often defined by *what they do*” (2006, p. 236, emphasis in original).

Socialization can contribute to professional identity construction in several ways. Activities such as formal and on-the-job training can offer the skills, knowledge, abilities, and credentials that define someone as being a member of a profession. Such tactics provide newcomers with the tools they require to do the work that defines a professional. Socialization can also offer role models,

mentors, and opportunities for interaction with experienced members of the profession. These individuals can guide newcomers as they make sense of what it means to be a professional in a particular field.

Mentoring offers two primary types of functions, career and psychosocial support, and one of its core purposes is to develop professional identity (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Hall & Burns, 2009; Kram, 1985). Although traditional mentoring is seen as a one-to-one mentor-protégé relationship, more recent conceptualizations focus on multiple developmental relationships (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Formal developmental relationships are those in which the organization facilitates the connection between the individual and mentor. Informal developmental relationships are those in which the participants initiate the connection, and they often develop between newcomers and the experienced members who can help them to adjust (Chao, 2007; Lankau & Scandura, 2007). Diverse networks of developmental relationships can offer a variety of support, information, and resources for professional identity construction (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Mentors can also act as role models who offer possible selves that professionals can “try out” to see how well a particular identity fits (Ibarra, 1999).

DOCTORAL STUDENT SOCIALIZATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

For doctoral students, socialization into the profession includes the process of learning to become an independent researcher (Gardner, 2007, 2008). The process of constructing this identity involves the transition from being a consumer of knowledge to a producer of knowledge through original research, a process that can be frustrating for students (Gardner, 2008). The socialization of doctoral students has received attention within the higher education, sociology, and organizations literature (e.g., Gardner, 2007, 2008, 2010; Green, 1991; Rosen & Bates, 1967; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman et al., 2001).

Some of this work examines socialization stages that doctoral students progress through as they become researchers (e.g., Gardner, 2008; Green, 1991; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman et al., 2001). For example, Gardner (2008) found that the history and chemistry doctoral students in her study were socialized through programmatic processes such as coursework; candidacy examinations and the dissertation; relationships with peers, faculty, and other academic professionals; and personal learning. She noted that they transition through phases of development marked by the first year of coursework, the time spent in coursework up to candidacy, and then the dissertation process.

Relationships with advisers and mentors can be important for professional socialization and identity development (Green, 1991; Hall & Burns, 2009; Gardner, 2007, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2004; Sweitzer, 2009). For example, Green (1991) found that when advisers were highly supportive of doctoral students, students were more likely to be more committed to and productive in their research. Gardner (2008) found that in the early stages of their socialization, the history and chemistry doctoral students in her study developed relationships with faculty and peers on whom they relied for guidance; but in the later stage of their programs, the dissertation stage, the students became less attached to peers and closer to faculty. She also found that the students began their transition to a more professional identity from a student identity during the mid and late socialization phases focused on approaching candidacy and the dissertation (Gardner, 2008). In her study of business doctoral students, Sweitzer (2009) found that the influence of faculty-student developmental relationships on professional identity varied based on whether the faculty reinforced institutional goals or focused more on individual development.

DATA AND METHODS

This paper is based on interviews with 27 students who participated in a professional development workshop for public affairs doctoral students. The authors co-chaired this

workshop in two consecutive years, and participants were recruited from both cohorts, which comprised a total of 59 students. The workshop was geared toward students interested in pursuing an academic career and included sessions on the academic job market, ethics in publishing, and an interactive session between faculty and students to provide input and feedback on the students' research. Study participants were enrolled in doctoral programs at 25 different universities in 6 countries located in North America, South America, and Europe; most participants were from North America. Seventeen students were attending programs in public administration, public management, policy, philanthropy and non-profit management, or political science. Ten students were enrolled in management and/or organizations (e.g., organizational behavior) doctoral programs but were conducting research in public affairs. Eighteen of the study participants were women.

At the time of the interviews, seven students had recently graduated. Most of the remaining students had entered candidacy and/or were working on their proposal or dissertation. Nearly all participants were collaborating with faculty on research projects in addition to working on their own dissertation research. Twenty-two participants had coauthored a conference paper or journal article with a faculty member. All students had attended at least one academic conference, and nearly all had presented at a conference.

The authors and one graduate assistant collected data through semi-structured phone interviews; the geographic dispersion of study participants and resource constraints prohibited in-person data collection. Interviews lasted about one hour and were audio-recorded. The interviews were professionally transcribed. The quality of the recording for one interview prohibited transcription, and we relied on notes taken during the interview.

Our interview questions focused on how participants were learning to become academic professionals. Although our interviews covered

each of the three dimensions that comprise a **faculty** or academic career—research, teaching, and service—this paper focuses specifically on their process of becoming a researcher. Similar to Pratt et al. (2006) in their study of professional identity construction among medical residents, we asked participants what being a researcher means to them. We also asked them about how they are learning to do research, covering topics such as working with **faculty**, their coursework, and conference presentations. We conducted interviews until we had reached theoretical saturation, in which no new or relevant data was emerging for our categories (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), resulting in a total of 27 interviews.

We employed a grounded theory approach for our analysis in which we iteratively used the literature and the data to inductively and systematically generate our constructs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, we read through each transcript in its entirety. Then, employing an open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we individually coded a subset of the interviews by assigning labels to sentences and paragraphs; this initial coding focused on how participants defined being a researcher and tactics and behaviors related to learning to become a researcher. For inter-coder reliability, we discussed our individual coding and agreed on first-order codes. We used these codes as a guideline for subsequent coding, and added new codes as they emerged through our analysis and discussion. We used the literature to inform our analysis. For example, Weidman and Stein (2003), Sweitzer (2009), and the work by Gardner (2007, 2008) offered insight into the importance of **relationships** for doctoral students. The organizational socialization literature (e.g., Morrison, 1993; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) guided our coding of institutionalized socialization tactics and the students' proactive efforts.

We then grouped codes into higher-level categories and used axial coding to establish connections between the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Relating the categories to

each other revealed how students linked, for example, formal research training, **faculty-student** interactions (such as the support offered through mentoring), and the consequences of the training and interactions (the students' perceptions of their development). Subsequent closer coding of the categories revealed additional nuances that led us to our multilevel model of socialization tactics at the organizational, relational, and individual level. Our coding also focused on students' definitions of what it means to be a researcher. (See Appendix I for the structure of our codes and categories, with data examples.) We used NVivo software to manage the data and electronically link transcript text to codes and categories.

THE PROTOTYPICAL RESEARCHER

In responding to our question about what it means to be a researcher, nearly all participants offered descriptions of what researchers do (Pratt et al., 2006). Participants' explanations of what it means to be a researcher described tasks and role expectations that typically are associated with being a researcher—a prototypical research identity (cf. Sluss, Ployhart, Cobb, & Ashforth, 2012; Sweitzer, 2009). As one participant stated, a researcher is one “who looks into whatever is going on in the real world and tries to make sense of it.”

Students discussed several dimensions of the prototypical research identity, as shown in Box 1. They indicated activities in which researchers engage and how they behave, covering ethics, theory building, research dissemination and publishing, and methodological rigor. A few participants who discussed ethics did so in terms of the nature of the research itself—as one participant stated, “It's advancing the field ethically, honestly with **academic** rigor”—as well as with respect to the treatment of research participants. Many participants described being a researcher as predicated upon using rigorous research methods.

Most students viewed theory building as a central part of a researcher's role. They discussed two types of theory building: the type that adds incrementally to existing scholarship

BOX 1. Participant Descriptions of a Researcher

“What Does it Mean to be a Researcher?”

I think the researcher has to be someone who is actively investigating questions that are relevant and haven't really been answered before, you know, trying to get their work published and having to, you know, the academic community to get, to start a dialog and to stand in front of others and to really kind of, you know, answer some tough questions.

I think being a researcher means being able to pose a provocative, relevant question, and then go about answering it. So to me, that's what research is about.

One is sort of creation of knowledge in the areas that I'm interested in and then dissemination of that knowledge and so, you know, doing research that's going to build on, on the foundations we have right now in my area and help to, you know, create better understanding of variety of phenomena.

I believe a researcher is somebody who saturates themselves in the knowledge of their field and then tries to expand upon that knowledge.

and the type that ventures into previously unexplored areas. For example, one participant articulated the nuances between these two types of contributions.

I see research as maybe one of two maybe various components. I think one component and I, and I actually heard this at a conference—that there are some researchers who are really great with coming up with new questions, new ways of looking at a phenomenon, new ways of analyzing something and then there are other researchers who concentrate on taking existing information and, and maybe challenging it or testing assumptions and things like that.

Several participants also recognized that the dissemination of findings is a researcher's role. These students discussed publishing as the primary vehicle through which research results would be shared with the academic and practitioner community. Even early in their careers, these students were keenly aware of the central role that publishing plays in the career of a researcher. For example, one participant stated, “I've really been trained in the publish or perish mindset.”

Another student articulated publishing's centrality in building a reputation as a contributor to a particular body of knowledge and in gaining name recognition.

Being a researcher at a university, as far as I'm concerned, means that you are able to publish in top journals. So, being a researcher means that you are a person that devotes the whole time into trying to publish in these top journals... kind of building your own research line so it's not just publishing 1 or 2 good pieces in good journals, but also trying to draw a line, a research line, that people can define that you are doing research in this area. And when they think in some area, they can think in your name, for example, or they can think of some of your work.

RESEARCH PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

As they discussed how they are becoming a researcher, our study participants described multiple mechanisms. These components represent a multilevel approach to becoming a researcher; they represent activities at the organizational, relational (interpersonal), and

individual level. We have categorized the tactics into three main groups: institutionalized socialization (organizational level), **faculty** mentoring (relational level), and student proactivity (individual level).

Institutionalized socialization is comprised of the formal activities initiated by the student's department or school and geared toward formal socialization into the profession. **Faculty** mentoring consists of the activities that **faculty** initiate to develop the students. Activities falling into the category of student proactivity are those in which the student initiates **relationships** that facilitate his or her transition, sometimes by strategically positioning themselves in order to connect with the "right" person. In addition, a few students stated that a certain amount of luck contributed to their development, particularly with respect to the **relationships** constructed with **faculty**; we have labeled this phenomenon *serendipity*. In the next sections, we discuss each of these mechanisms in more detail, along with the associated outcomes noted by the students.

Institutionalized Socialization Tactics

As discussed by the participants, a researcher's identity is rooted in inquiry, rigor, and the application of research methods to study social phenomena. Part of this identity is developed through institutionalized mechanisms that are established by departments, colleges, or universities to socialize students as researchers. These institutionalized tactics were comprised of three activities in which nearly every student participated: research methods courses, formal advising, and formal graduate assistantship assignments. Nearly all students were required to take at least two methods courses, and most participants completed on average two additional methods courses. All participants completed at least one quantitative methods course, and nearly all had a course covering qualitative methods.

Departments also assigned students to **faculty** for formal advising and for graduate assistantships. Twenty-four participants had assistant-

ships during graduate school; of that number, 16 held research assistantships. Nearly all participants with an assistantship described the **relationship** as one that grew in responsibility over time. In the next section on **faculty** mentoring and on-the-job training, we discuss in more detail the **relationships** between **faculty** and students in the context of these assignments.

Several participants described their methods courses and research assistantships as strongly complementary. Research assistantships provided a venue where the students could apply the techniques and skills learned in the methods courses, as one participant articulated.

So in those courses, we looked at everything from textbooks on how to do research and the practice both on the quantitative and qualitative way of doing it with social science to cases and examples where research has been... but I really think it was strongly, strongly augmented by my experience with my advisor, as I've worked two research projects with her, so the two research design classes are great starting points but it all exists in this hypothetical situation and that's not the way the world operates and you learn so much through the process of doing it.

Participants built foundational knowledge through classroom training, but the on-the-job experiences working with **faculty** members enabled the students to apply the knowledge gained in the classroom to actual research projects. In the next section, we discuss the on-the-job training related to honing research skills as well as other dimensions of **faculty** mentoring.

Faculty Mentoring

It's something... I think that if a top professor can devote some time with a PhD student, I think that's, in my opinion, that's probably the key of a **successful** PhD, is having someone with experience

and with success and that this person devotes time to you. In this case, if I send him a paper, doesn't matter the week, doesn't matter the time, he will read it and comment on it and we will have a meeting and he will go point by point. And really for me, that makes a difference, more than the courses and more than everything.

The above quote from one of our students speaks to the centrality of faculty's role in shaping the students' professional identity as a researcher. In particular, this student recognized that faculty availability and willingness to provide detailed feedback is a cornerstone of a doctoral student's success. All of the students in our study described how their relationships and interactions with faculty offered either instrumental or social support or both. Many of the students discussed the underlying trust in these relationships, and nearly all talked about supportive ties to faculty other than the formally assigned advisor. These informal relationships offer advice and guidance beyond the "bureaucratic" processes of being a doctoral student, and can emerge "organically" or as a result of a "natural" affinity in a particular topic area, as two students described.

I mean mentoring and advising I see as very differently. Advising is much more physical, filling out the paperwork that needs to be done through the university bureaucracy, which is important to get that all done. Otherwise, you can't progress. But I think of mentoring as much more informal and almost something that has to happen organically; at least it has been in my experience.

I mean, yeah, I have an advisor, one that's obviously a little bit more formal but the other ones I think like any, probably in any setting, it's... there's people that you connect with more naturally than others and so I would definitely say that there's three other professors that it's

more of the informal relationship. You know, I trust them and if I know I have questions, I'll make sure that I'm shooting them an e-mail.

Such mentoring by faculty contributes toward developing the students' sense of themselves as researchers, offering them confidence as well as the skills needed to be a researcher. Most students referred to the faculty with whom they work closely as mentors even if the faculty were not assigned as formal mentors or advisors. This mentoring consists of on-the-job training, emotional labor, and visibility enhancement.

On-the-job training. Nearly all of the students discussed learning how to conduct research through on-the-job training while working with faculty. For some participants, collaborating with faculty began with being given responsibility for a relatively small portion of a research project, with the parts growing incrementally over time along with increased responsibility. The following two participants describe their increasing responsibilities as they learned more about how to conduct research through their work with faculty.

I have one project that I would say is probably like a classic PhD student project whereby my supervisor and his colleague developed the research study initially and then I became involved as a research assistant right at the stage where they were designing the questionnaire and so I had some input there, did a bunch of the data collection, and now have been on the, I am the third author on a manuscript that's under review... yeah, it's sort of classic, you know, learning the ropes and helping to do bits and pieces, so that's one project.

Well, it changed over the course of, as I grew. Initially, it was mostly involved in writing the methods part of course, as I was the main one doing the data analysis. So writing the methods, but also

brainstorming with the ideas. And then also just kind of in reviewing and adding to the manuscript that my advisor was taking the lead on. But over time too, I came to play more of a role in the theory development. And though I was never the one doing the lead writing, I was contributing as much as my advisor on the theory development and writing.

Some students likened their initial experiences to being “thrown into the fire” and conducting research with a **faculty** member immediately upon entering graduate school.

And so I actually dove sort of head first into this project, you know, the first day of starting grad school . . . And it ended up being a multimethod study. We did a series of focus groups and then I designed and implemented a survey. So it was a, you know, a pretty hands on, thrown in the fire introduction to, to research.

Bolstering identity. Several students discussed how **faculty** interactions served to bolster their professional identity. For example, several students in our study noted that interactions with **faculty** helped them to gain self-confidence and enhance their own sense of efficacy as a researcher. Several students indicated that one outcome of responsibility growing incrementally is increased confidence. One participant reflected that as **faculty-student collaboration** progressed, confidence increased, and she became more of a peer to the **faculty** researcher rather than just a student.

I don't think . . . I think it's just something that kind of happened naturally because as my foundation grew, I had a lot more to offer. And so I just . . . And whereas, in my first couple of years, I was very hesitant, lacked the confidence to kind of push my ideas out there, that changed the more I learned, the more that I gained confidence, and it became more of a peer **relationship** rather than kind of advisor/student.

Although on-the-job training assists the students in developing their research skills, **faculty** do not just focus on the technical aspects of training in the mentoring **relationships**. The research profession can be challenging on several fronts, and **faculty** mentors also offer the psychosocial support that is a part of mentoring and that can assist students in overcoming emotional hurdles. A few students explained how this psychosocial support helped them weather the emotional peaks and valleys associated with the **successes** and failures of learning to do (and actually doing) research, and helped them to overcome stumbling blocks they may have faced.

For example, in the next quotation, one student described the self-doubt that accompanies many students as they begin their professional development, and how the **faculty** support is both reassuring and a reaffirmation of their identity as a researcher. At the same time, the student noted that the **faculty** recommended that she learn to develop the tough skin often required to persevere in this profession.

. . . she was very supportive and reassuring and, you know, but also not afraid to say you need to be able to do this so you might not enjoy it but toughen up, you'll get through it, I have total faith in you . . . we come into this with enough self-doubt, I think, that having that, that moral support, saying that you can do this is, helps keep us in it, helps keep, get us through it.

Another student used the analogy of learning to ride a bike to articulate how his advisor enabled him to gain independence while still being there “to pick him up” from research “spills.”

And I just feel it's a huge advantage to have had that opportunity to, to see it in theory, to see it in practice, and I tend to use an analogy with several of the stages as we've moved through different parts of a research project to my research assistantship of kind of having training wheels

on a bike and then moving to my advisor, sort of walking along or running along behind the bike, making sure that I'm not going to take a big spill to getting me ready to do it on my own, which I think is the ideal; and if you just throw them out there without that experience, it's really easy to take a tumble and not be sure you want to get back up on the bike.

Increasing visibility. For researchers, professional identity is also rooted in their reputation and connections to other researchers. One component of the developmental relationships that emerged from our analysis was that **faculty** offered opportunities for students to become more visible to other **academics** within the profession. Many study participants explained how **faculty** connected them to researchers from other institutions and invited them to join panels at professional conferences. One participant described how being asked to participate in a panel led to writing a book chapter.

One of the things that [my advisor] did, for example, that is a lovely thing for a mentor to do, is she would ask to be part of the panel for the next [management] conference and she asked me if I wanted to be part of that panel and then that put me in touch with the, the person who is leading the panel or co-leading the panel who, after I submitted my paper for that purpose, asked me if I wanted to write a chapter in a book she was editing.²

Balancing. A few students in our study explained how **faculty** offered guidance that went beyond the framework of the profession; they identified support from **faculty** that focused on the challenges of balancing life outside of work with work demands (work-life balance). Although life as an **academic** researcher can offer many benefits in terms of autonomy and lifestyle, particularly through the dissertation and tenure years, it can also be quite a demanding profession.

For example, students and newly minted PhDs can find it difficult to determine how much time to spend on different activities that are expected of **academic** professionals. Similarly, Gardner (2007, 2008) found that balancing duties and issues of time were challenges for the history and chemistry students in her study. In the next quote, one participant described both the nature of the advisor **relationship** in terms of emotional closeness and formality, as well as the advisor's advice on balancing the competing priorities faced by **academic** researchers.

I have a very close **relationship** with my advisor. And because of our close **relationship** that's developed kind of beyond just work life and personal as well, there's a **relationship** there, he's helped me in kind of all aspects and how to balance it. And I feel that he's looked after me and offered advice on how not to get too overwhelmed, how to kind of limit how much time I spend on different projects or teaching different things that I'm required to do. ...So, and in some ways, it's been very formal, and in some ways, it's been more personal and informal.

Student Proactivity

Learning to become a researcher also involves individual agency on the student's part. All participants explained how they took initiative to connect with and learn from **faculty**. They emulated **faculty** advisors and mentors and positioned themselves in ways that enabled them to establish **relationships** with particular **faculty** that they deemed instrumental for their own advancement and research.

Participants used phrases like "personal initiative" and "I was the driver" to convey their proactivity. One participant remarked, "It's there for the taking, but you have to be able to take the initiative." These participant comments suggest that the connections with **faculty** through assistantships and advisor assignments are necessary, but not sufficient, for the learning

process. Rather, formal assignments allocated by the department are first steps. It is then up to students to be proactive in recognizing their needs and strategically developing and initiating relationships to fulfill those academic and emotional support needs.

Emulating faculty. Many students viewed faculty as role models, and they discussed emulating faculty. For students, advisors are their first examples of what it means to be a researcher and how research is actually done. Because faculty advisors are role models, they are heavily influential in the process of learning to become a researcher. One participant said of her advisor, “I kind of want to be her when I grow up.” As described in the quotes from two participants, doctoral students imitate faculty that they perceive as successful researchers.

I’m very grateful for her and I think that’s, that’s probably one of the things, one of the most tactical ways that I’ve learned how to be a researcher and how to be an academic and I really see her as someone that I can follow, follow in those footsteps.

...that would be the metaphor, you know, the master has developed his craft to, you know, to a degree that he is respected among the community within that trade and, you know, you enter as a mentee, you know, to, to understand how to develop the craft, how to become an expert yourself but first by mimicking, not necessarily mimicking but just by, yeah, mimicking, you know, the same routines and approaches that your mentor takes.

Positioning. Nearly all students engaged in activities to position themselves to be noticed by faculty and to initiate working relationships with them. We identified three specific positioning strategies in our coding: (a) reaching out, (b) initiating research projects and then engaging faculty in them, and (c) reputation building. In reaching out to faculty, students

strategically identified faculty and developed and executed a plan for initiating a connection to that person. For example, one participant described positioning himself to initiate contacts with several faculty members, each of whom offered expertise in differing areas of interest or need.

I just knocked on her door. I explained a little what was my background and what I wanted to do and we started working quite soon together. ...I wanted to work with someone that was actually an expert on quantitative methods because I think it’s important. So, I got in touch with this other professor from the quantitative department...then the first year, I attended also the [withheld] conference. I wanted to interact with a public [administration] faculty member and the first one on my list was [name withheld]. So, I just bumped into him at the conference and I explained what was my thesis about and where I was from, these kinds of things and we started work, little by little, together and as we were working more, the relationship was a bit closer.

In another example, a student sought out a faculty member by directly asking her to be the student’s advisor.

So I was attending a course with her, and this was a brilliant course. It really opened up my mind to lots of research questions and ideas, and I realized I really wanted to be with her. ... And then I requested her if she’d be willing to be my supervisor because I was looking for a change in supervisor, and she said yes right away.

In another case, a student described how he would reach out to those faculty whose work he admired, with whom he might have a natural connection or whose work is compelling.

Well, there are some other researchers and professors that I have more affinity and more dialogue possibilities, so those ones I would choose for advice, or people that I have a special admiration on their work. So I know they have a work that is particular interesting or they have developed a way that was really nice, so I would go for them. I would look for them.

Another way that participants positioned themselves to connect with **faculty** was by initiating their own research projects and asking **faculty** to participate. These projects included research outside of assignments from **faculty** supervisors, as one participant described.

So I identified a, a gap in the literature and what I thought was kind of interesting for an experiment in this case, a controlled experiment, and so I designed that and then brought in another student and, well, the fellow who was running the course that I, where I identified this as a, as a project, so the **faculty** member and that **faculty** member has, is like is the third author on this work and so he operated it as a, well, much as you would expect a third author, author to operate. He gave input to drafts and gave input to questionnaires and study design but it was mostly run by me.

Several students also focused on reputation building as a means to position themselves such that they could be noticed by or initiate a connection to **faculty**. Students indicated that projection of their skills, abilities, and knowledge assisted them in building a reputation within their department or area of expertise and then initiating a **relationship** with **faculty**. Students built their reputation in various ways: by doing well in their coursework, presenting at conferences, **collaboration**, and voicing interest in particular areas of research.

In one example, a student described a conference presentation and her reputation among other **faculty** as key factors in her ability to secure a postdoctoral fellowship and **collaborative** research projects with a **faculty** member at another institution.

I think the reason I earned [my fellowship] was they, that he saw me present, my new advisor at [my new school], saw me present at [a conference] and was impressed with the quality of the research I was doing and then he also knew colleagues of mine at [my former job] and learned further about some of the data collection methodology and knew my persistence was, how should I say, he said it was impressive so he and I have a lot of research projects already planned.

In sum, these comments by participants suggest that student proactivity is an important element in the process of learning to become a researcher. In particular, formal tactics initiated by the organization, such as classroom training and the assignment of advisors and assistantships, begin the process of learning to become a researcher, but they alone are not sufficient. Developmental **relationships** with **faculty** are a primary element in the socialization and identity development process, and students played an active role in developing these **relationships**.

Serendipity

In the course of coding the interviews, we noticed that a few students mentioned one other element that does not fit neatly into our multilevel categories: luck. In particular, they discussed the role that luck or good fortune played in making their connections to **faculty**. In this sense, the students seemed to indicate that although they recognized that they can steer their development, for example by establishing connections and doing well in coursework, to some extent the socialization process was eased or facilitated when the department or program happened to assign

them to a **faculty** who turned out to be a good fit. By starting off with the “right person,” they believed they were able to focus more on activities that contributed directly toward their own development rather than expending energy on searching for the “right” advisor or mentor. For example, some students talked about how they were lucky to be assigned to their advisor, or to a particular project, as these two participants articulated.

But in terms of actually getting the experience and translating that to like classroom learning, I think, I think I have it because luckily I was assigned to a great project and a great advisor.

I, I, like I said, I know I just kind of won the lottery with this one with who I was placed in that she’s tenured, that she’s recently enough into this that she’s still very aware of how do you the job market, how do you balance it all.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We found a great deal of consensus among our participants regarding what it means to be a researcher, the advantages they gain from **faculty** mentoring and **relationships**, and the effort they put into developing their identity. From our findings, we have constructed a model of the **relationship** between the multilevel components and the doctoral students’ notion of and construction of a research professional identity. This model is shown in Figure 1.

The model includes the categories of activities at each level—organizational, relational, and individual—as well as the professional identity dimensions related to these activities and the definition of what it means to be an academic researcher as noted by the students in our study. As shown by our findings, the students’ departments and programs engaged in institutionalized socialization tactics through coursework and by assigning students to advisors and research assistantships. These tactics helped students to develop research skills and

expertise in research methods as well as knowledge about a particular area of research. By exposing students to different **faculty** members, these tactics also facilitated students’ connections to and **relationships** with **faculty** mentors, as shown by the dotted line in the model from the organizational level activities to the relational level activities.

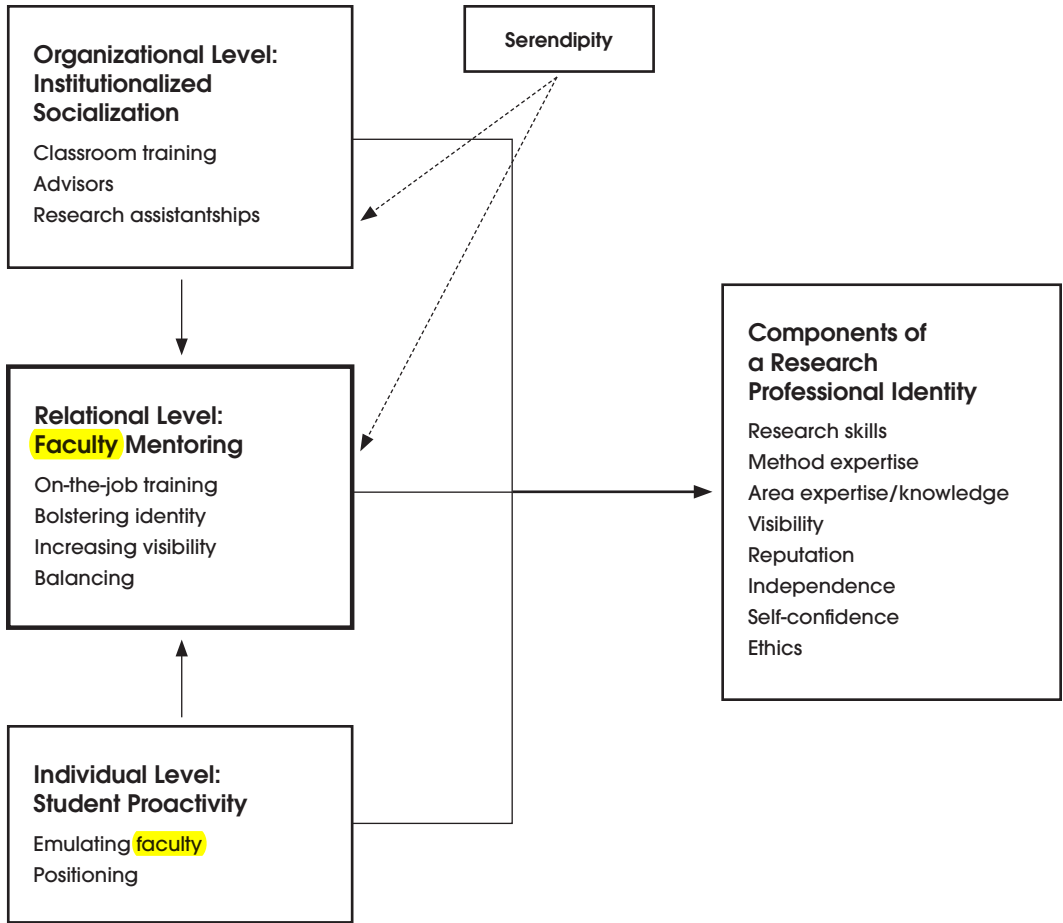
Two other factors also influenced students’ abilities to establish developmental **relationships** with **faculty**: student proactivity and serendipity. Students’ proactive behaviors helped them to connect with key **faculty** for mentoring beyond their assistantships and formal advisors, as represented by the dotted line in our model from the individual level to relational level activities. In addition, several students had noted that they felt lucky to be assigned to the advisor they had. We included serendipity in our model with dotted lines to both the institutionalized socialization and the **faculty** mentoring because it seems to be a moderating factor for both, at least from the students’ perspective.

The relational level of socialization may be the most central to the students’ professional identity development. At this level, the activities and tactics were focused on the interactions between students and **faculty**, and were often distinguished by students’ descriptions of trust in the **faculty** and consideration of the **faculty** as a mentor. These activities comprised both the instrumental and psychosocial support that both formal and informal mentoring can provide, and students often referred to **faculty** as their mentors. Not all **faculty** viewed as mentors by the students were assigned as formal advisors. Some were informal mentors with whom the students established **relationships** on their own, or who may have taken an interest in a particular student and initiated an informal mentoring **relationship**.

Insights for **Faculty** and Doctoral Program Administrators

In this section, we offer insights and suggestions to **faculty** and doctoral programs that are

FIGURE 1.
Research Professional Identity Construction



training public affairs researchers. Before discussing our recommendations, we present a few caveats and limitations.³ First, the students in this study self-selected to participate in a professional development workshop. As such, this group may have higher levels of proactivity and motivation for professional development than do public affairs doctoral students as a whole. Although we leave it to future research to explore identity development among stu-

dents while measuring proactivity levels, here we take into account this possibility by offering insights for engaging students who may not be as proactive or have as much motivation to develop.

Second, our study focuses on the professional identity development and socialization that begins when the student enters a doctoral program and does not consider prior professional

experience or individual characteristics. We do not have the data to consider these additional factors. Although our study follows the socialization literature in viewing socialization as beginning once a newcomer crosses the threshold of an organization or profession (e.g., Louis, 1980), these factors certainly can influence the process; we recognize this as a limitation that should be addressed in future research.

A final caveat, as noted in our data and methods section: Our study is based on data from students who indicated an interest in pursuing an **academic** career. Therefore, the following insights focus primarily on this training.

Programs should consider offering a required professional development seminar for doctoral students. Students discussed both the value of connecting with varied **faculty** for a range of support and the strategies they used to develop these connections. One way that doctoral programs may alleviate some of this effort is to offer and require a seminar on doctoral research and professional development; for some programs, this requirement may be an addition to the curriculum.

For example, the doctoral program in Public Administration and Policy at the University at Albany, State University of New York requires a one-credit professional development seminar through the first two years of the doctoral program.⁴ The seminar meets every other week and covers core topics such as the **academic** job market, publishing in **academic** journals, teaching at the college level, developing **collaborative** working **relationships** with **faculty** members, selecting an area of specialization, organizing a dissertation committee, and participating in conferences. Multiple **faculty** members teach and present during the seminar, and students are required to make one conference-style presentation while registered for this course series. Such a seminar could also educate students about the culture of the **academic** research profession, beginning to socialize them to research norms. And although our study focused on **aca-**

ademic research preparation, the seminar could also cover **nonacademic** professional paths.

A professional development seminar offers a venue for both skill development and consistent messaging to the students. Students have the opportunity to showcase themselves and develop writing and presentation skills. They can present their own work to **faculty** and peers and receive feedback. A professional development seminar offers a good venue for doctoral students to practice conference presentations and/or **academic** job talks. It also can assist students with their writing skills by providing feedback on drafts of manuscripts.

Because not all students may realize at the beginning stages of their career that **success** can depend on the diversity of connections they develop, this seminar could also emphasize the importance of developing **relationships** with multiple **faculty** from within and outside the students' department or university. Not all students may recognize the value of assistantship work, and the seminar could also reinforce why this work is important. Highlighting how working with **faculty** builds a reputation, results in publications, and improves research skills may motivate students to take assistantships seriously. Overall, a seminar should offer a consistent message to all doctoral students regarding professional development and can provide them with materials they can refer to later.

Such a seminar serves multiple purposes from the perspective of relational socialization and identity development. It enables students to connect to **faculty** outside of the classroom or a course in more informal ways and exposes them to a broader range of **faculty** than they might otherwise encounter. They can also simply learn more about what different **faculty** members do. These factors can reduce the reliance on serendipity that some students discussed. These seminars also offer another reputation-building opportunity for students, and they may present different aspects of themselves and their interests to **faculty**. A

required professional development seminar serves to ensure that those students who may not be getting a great deal of advice or support in some areas, or know how to seek advice or support, receive at least some general guidance and advice in proscribed areas.

Faculty mentors can emphasize and facilitate multiple developmental relationships for doctoral students. The importance of developing ties to multiple faculty should be communicated in the formal seminar, but the faculty mentor also needs to reinforce and augment the message. Although the seminar can aptly convey general activities for professional development, the reality for doctoral students is that learning to become a productive researcher is a very individualized process. These specialized needs—such as expertise in a substantive area or analytic method, or advice on balancing professional demands with raising a family—may not always be fulfilled by a student’s primary advisor or mentor.

All of our participants discussed various ways that they initiated ties to faculty that provided them with access to different mentors and role models who served different purposes. But, as we acknowledge earlier, not all students may be as comfortable with this proactive approach, or even recognize the professional and personal need for or advantages in developing connections to multiple faculty. Faculty mentors should emphasize the value of multiple developmental relationships and assist students in both identifying and connecting to faculty who might be instrumental. They can encourage students to engage in activities that can increase visibility and enhance network and professional identity development. Such activities might include attending professional development seminars offered by professional associations, chairing conference paper sessions, or acting as a discussant for a conference panel session. This facilitation can reduce students’ need to expend energy strategizing on how to meet or “cold call” key people.

Programs can offer incentives and opportunities for professional development activities beyond program requirements and milestones. Programs can require students to complete an annual progress report that goes beyond reporting completion of program requirements (e.g., credits, required courses, comprehensive exams, etc.). Such a report can also ask for information on participation in conference presentations, professional development seminars connected to the student’s subfield, and joint research projects with faculty and other students. To further encourage student participation in such activities programs can provide financial support for conference presentations, offer paper contests, and reward coauthorship.⁵ An annual progress report and additional incentives signal to students what activities are important in the research profession and allow a program or advisor to identify areas where students need more development or guidance.

Programs should formally recognize and value mentoring, especially informal developmental relationships. Whether or not departments or programs formally recognize and reward faculty who offer developmental support, especially outside of formal advisor-advisee relationships, may influence the quality of such support and whether it is given at all. We recognize that many faculty, without prompting, offer both instrumental and psychosocial support to doctoral students on both a formal and informal basis. But our data suggest that this support is not always consistent, so some students feel lucky when they are paired with or are able to connect to a faculty member who offers it. With many competing priorities across research, teaching, and service expectations, faculty, especially those in the tenure track, may be less willing to offer support through informal developmental relationships if they believe it is not appreciated by the department or formally recognized. Yet our data supports the need for such ties between faculty and students. Offering recognition for informal mentoring, particularly for new

faculty, may help ensure that students receive consistent, continued, and widespread support (cf. Saks et al., 2011; Hatmaker & Park, 2013).

Overall, our suggestions for programs and faculty mentors are complementary. The implementation of each of them in concert with each other likely provides a greater benefit for students' professional identity development than just one dimension on its own. Enacting the suggestions described here may provide a more efficient relationship-building process for students and offer them a diversity of high-quality developmental relationships. Future research could also examine how peer relationships contribute to professional identity development, gender differences in socialization, and identity development as well as take into consideration students' prior professional experience and other characteristics to lend additional insights for faculty and public affairs doctoral programs.

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NOTES

1 Following Rethemeyer and Helbig (2005), we use the term *public affairs* to encompass public affairs, public administration, public management, public policy, and nonprofit management.

- 2 To protect the confidentiality of our participants, we have replaced any names of individuals, organizations, or institutions with a generic term in brackets in quotations.
- 3 We thank our anonymous reviewers for noting these limitations and drawing them to our attention.
- 4 We thank Dr. Karl Rethemeyer for the information about the seminar for public administration and policy doctoral students offered by the University at Albany, State University of New York.
- 5 We thank one of our anonymous reviewers for making these suggestions.

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APPENDIX I

Coding for Identity Development with Additional Data Examples

Level	Category	Activity	Data Examples
Organizational	Organizational Socialization Tactics (Institutionalized Tactics)	Classroom training	I mean I just feel like I had 100 methods classes, and I understand it. I think there's multiple techniques for data analysis, qualitatively and quantitatively. I have no question that I'm comfortable doing it.
		Formal assignments	So, I think it is important to have someone right away when you're a PhD student like a deer in the headlights, that you can have someone you know that formally is there to advise you.
Relational	Faculty Mentoring	On-the-job training	I also really enjoy the collaborative element with faculty, just because in any situation that I've been, even collaborating on a conference paper to a journal article or book chapter with a faculty member, I end up learning so much and so those are probably the two things that I really love about Grad school.
		Increasing visibility	One of the things that I appreciate the most is being looked out for in various situations like conferences and stuff because they're really intimidating, at least to me....So, you know, [my two advisors] have both made points of introducing me.
		Bolstering identity	The first person I usually go to with that is actually my advisor, who is very open to questions, doesn't act like it's a stupid question, doesn't say, oh, well you should know that, very receptive to kind of pointing me into the right place to go,...
		Balancing	And I think the other key is having conversations about, moving conversations to not just what are you working on but the larger picture issues for both career-wise and just sort of work-life-balance-wise.
Individual	Student Proactivity	Emulation	I share with her my fears about data analysis and she's even said "I didn't really get good at it until I did my thesis," which was enlightening to me because I see what she does now and I'm like, you know, it's something to look up to and admire. So that gives me hope.
		Positioning	So right now, I'm kind of going through this process of feeling people out for who might make good committee members for me. And so I've been setting up a lot of meetings with different faculty to try to get that sense.

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