STUDENT GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS: THE EXPERIENCES OF

CANDIDATES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS

OF POLITICAL EFFICACY

by

JENNIFER FOX

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2017

Acknowledgements

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to earn a doctoral degree. I am forever grateful for the support and encouragement I have received throughout this journey.

First, I would like to thank my supervising professor, Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, for her guidance through this process. Her commitment to challenging me, academically and professionally, has been a blessing. I am indebted to Dr. Tobolowsky for the time and energy she dedicated to my work. Her advice and suggestions have been invaluable.

I would like to thank my family for their support and understanding over the past three years. My parents, Gary and Teri Fox, have always believed in me and provided an environment in which I could thrive. As my first teachers, they inspired my passion for learning and educating others.

Finally, I would like to thank my soon-to-be husband, Ryan Taylor, who has been my number one cheerleader throughout this journey. His love and encouragement helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel on multiple occasions. I am ready to begin the next chapter in our lives, together.

April 21, 2017

Abstract

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS: THE EXPERIENCES OF

CANDIDATES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS

OF POLITICAL EFFICACY

Jennifer Fox, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2017

Supervising Professor: Barbara Tobolowsky

This qualitative study fills a void in the research on collegiate student government elections by examining the experiences of 10 candidates for president and vice president at large, public, four-year universities in Texas. Participation in student government has been shown to support students' learning and lead to future political engagement. However, until this study, little has been understood about the experiences of candidates in the student government elections process. Using political efficacy (Campbell et al., 1954) as a theoretical framework for the coding and analysis of the data, several themes emerged, including the students' motivations for running for president or vice president, the nature of the campaigning process, lessons learned throughout the election, and the candidates' perceptions of future political participation.

Each of the participants perceived their experience as a candidate in student government elections to be a valuable learning experience, which helped them gain an understanding of how politics works and their valued role in the American democracy. However, the campaigning process brought many challenges including feelings of vulnerability from public scrutiny, which had a physical and emotional toll on the participants. Overall, their candidacy influenced their perceptions of political efficacy and inspired their continued involvement in politics, whether highly engaged or more pragmatic.

Implications for practice include the need for student affairs practitioners to offer guidance and resources for candidates to provide them the support needed to meet the challenges of the election. In addition, the creation of an ombudsman position to oversee campaign behavior would be helpful to ensure the integrity of the election. In regard to theory, this is the first known study to apply the theory of political efficacy to student government elections at the university-level. Through adapting the assumptions of the theory to match the student government realm, political efficacy was able to help explain why students may choose to run for student leadership positions and how they perceive the power of their student government organization.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research on voter turnout in America shows stark differences between young adults and their older counterparts (Powell, 1986; Springer, 2014; Teixeira, 1992). A poll conducted by the *Huffington Post* and YouGov in November of 2014 found that young adults are less likely to vote than older generations and view voting as a choice instead of a civic duty (Edwards-Levy, 2014). According to the survey, the majority of Americans over the age of 45 believe everyone should vote, while adults under 30 believe only those who are well informed about the election should cast a ballot (Edwards-Levy, 2014). This generational shift in views on civic engagement and political participation is a popular topic for United States political science scholars who attempt to determine how good citizens are created and with whom this responsibility lies (Galston, 2001).

Many scholars would turn to higher education to meet this societal need, as universities and colleges have historically identified their "highest moral purpose" as the responsibility to produce an informed electorate (Buller, 2014, p. 3). However, a societal demand for career-focused education has pressured higher education institutions to become more vocational in nature, changing their mission and core values (Ferrall, 2011). While some researchers believe the civic mission of higher education has been neglected, institutions of higher education still provide various means of civic education (Galston, 2001). Through political

1

science courses, community volunteerism, and service learning, institutions help increase students' knowledge of democratic principles and encourage civic participation (Galston, 2001).

One of the primary means of encouraging college students to engage civically is through participation in student government, as it provides students an opportunity to learn about the democratic process (Saha & Print, 2010). In fact, participation as a candidate in student government elections at the collegiate level may be a student's first taste of political engagement or democratic involvement (Saha & Print, 2010). Research shows that students who run for political office in school elections feel empowered to make decisions in the school setting and begin to understand their power to affect change within their own political environments in the future (Saha & Print, 2010). This increases students' sense of political efficacy, the belief that their political participation is worthwhile (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). Through engaging in student government elections as candidates, students are more likely to actively participate in civic and political life as adults (Saha & Print, 2010).

Unfortunately, college student participation in self-governance often parallels the low level of young adult participation in local, state, and national elections. This minimal involvement has important implications for universities. Miles, Miller, and Nadler (2008) found that due to limited participation, some institutions have disbanded their student government organizations, while others

have had to increase incentives to run in student government elections by offering monetary stipends. According to a survey of more than 800 colleges and universities, 77% of schools across the nation offer some form of compensation to elected student government officers to incentivize running for the positions (American Student Government Association, 2013). Among state universities, over 85% of student government leaders earn stipends, hourly wages, or scholarships (American Student Government Association, 2013).

While participation in student government elections may be low at some institutions, the election process is still one of the primary means for students to begin their political participation and gain an understanding of the democratic process. Yet, there are few studies examining the collegiate student government election process in detail. Most studies focus on various aspects of voter turnout (Lewis & Rice, 2005; Miles, Miller, & Nadler, 2012) or the benefits of student government involvement post-election (Carpenter, 1972; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman, Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Kuh, 1994). Little is understood as to why students choose to participate as candidates in student government elections or how their experiences impact their perceptions of future political engagement.

Problem Statement

Thus, while we know that political participation is essential to maintain the foundation of the American democracy (Macedo et al., 2005), there is growing concern about the low levels of young adult political engagement

3

(Galston, 2001; Yamamoto et al., 2016). Young adults have limited knowledge of the impact of civic engagement and less confidence in collective actions, such as voting (Galston, 2004). In order to reverse this trend, emphasis must be placed on increasing the civic knowledge of young adults. This can be partially accomplished through providing students opportunities to participate in shared governance where they may put civic education and democracy into action (Galston, 2004).

Involvement in shared governance at the collegiate level begins with participation in student government elections. Although we know that participation in school elections can be a positive indicator of future political involvement (Saha & Print, 2010), there is little known about the experiences of candidates in student government elections or the students' perceptions of the election process. If the goal is to create citizens who value civic duty and understand the importance of engaging in political activity, it is necessary to understand why students who participate in student government elections, as candidates, choose to do so and how they describe their experiences.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand why students choose to participate as candidates in student government elections, how they perceive their experiences, and how they describe their sense of political efficacy as a result of their candidacy. This study focused on the experiences of candidates

4

for student government president and vice president at four-year, public universities. Data were collected and analyzed by qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2013) and through the lens of political efficacy (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). By understanding how these students gained an interest in political participation and chose to participate as candidates in student government elections, this study contributes to future research, policy, practices, and theory on young adult political engagement.

Research Questions

In order to understand the unique experiences of candidates in student government elections, I conducted a qualitative study of former candidates for student government president or vice president at Texas public universities. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Why do students choose to run for a leadership position in student government elections?

2. How do candidates describe their experiences of running for a leadership position in student government elections?

3. How do candidates describe their sense of political efficacy after participation in student government elections?

Theoretical Framework

I utilized the concept of political efficacy (Campbell et al.,1954; Craig et al., 1990) to analyze the experiences of the candidates in student government

5

elections in this study. *Political efficacy*, as defined by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954), is the "feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e. that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties" (p. 187). If individuals believe that their participation in the democratic process is worthwhile, then they are more likely to politically engage in some manner. Craig, Niemi, and Silver (1990) describe two types of political efficacy: external and internal. *External political efficacy* refers to the belief that the political system is responsive to citizen demands, while *internal political efficacy* refers to how personally competent citizens feel in regard to their ability to participate in politics (Craig et al., 1990). In addition, research shows that positive experiences participating in a democratic process psychologically prepare individuals to participate again in the future (Pateman, 1970).

The concept of political efficacy is particularly useful to this study as it helps describe why students choose to participate in student government elections as candidates. In addition, if students have a positive experience participating in elections at the collegiate level, they may be better prepared to participate in a democratic process in the future. On the other hand, if students have a negative experience, they may be disinterested in engaging in politics as adults or have negative perceptions of the democratic process overall.

Personal Biography

To ensure trustworthy interpretations, it is important to describe personal experiences related to the research (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the following section is a brief biography that demonstrates my interest in this topic, while acknowledging personal beliefs and assumptions.

In 2007, I began my freshman year of college at The University of Texas at Arlington. During the first day of orientation, the student body president gave a short welcome address and encouraged the incoming class to get involved on campus through various organizations and extracurricular opportunities. While listening to this speech, I was enamored by the president's ability to engage such a large crowd and the level of confidence he portrayed, particularly because he was only a few years older than me. I thought that I would never be able to hold a position like his or leave such a lasting imprint on that campus. Little did I know that my collegiate journey would lead me down a very similar path and encourage my interest in a future dissertation topic.

As a college freshman, I became involved in an organization called Freshmen Leaders on Campus, which connected me with a diverse group of individuals who challenged me to develop my leadership skills. Through that organization, I also interacted with the leaders of Student Congress and became interested in the resolutions and initiatives of the student government. The members' passion of creating positive change on campus was intriguing to me.

Thus, when I was encouraged to run for Student Congress, I jumped at the opportunity. This required filing for office and running as a candidate in student government elections. Although I was intimidated by the process and fearful that I would not obtain enough votes to win, I was coached through the election by upperclassmen who saw the leadership potential within me. Fortunately, I was elected into the position and began my political career at UT Arlington. As my interest in student government grew, I was again encouraged by the staff advisors and upperclassmen to run for one of the executive board positions for Student Congress. I was given the opportunity to attend a conference on student government associations, which further inspired me to voice student opinions and leave my mark on the campus. As a result, I ran for an executive board position and served as the External Relations Director for Student Congress during my junior year. Through that role, I learned a lot about my institution and recognized areas needing improvement.

Thus, with the support of my family and close friends, I embarked upon one of the most stressful and yet rewarding experiences of my life – running for student body president. I formed a campaign team that supported me throughout the process, developed a platform of the goals I hoped to achieve if elected, and spoke in front of many student organizations asking for their votes. The election process consumed my life and was, at times, physically and emotionally draining. However, participating in that election was one of the most educational

experiences of my life. I gained the self-confidence to believe in myself and my platform, honed my communication and public speaking skills, engaged in thought-provoking conversations with other students and administrators, and realized my power to impact positive change within my campus community. Winning the election, and then being re-elected for a second term, was a relief and also one of the most rewarding accomplishments in my life.

As a participant in student government elections, I grew to understand the importance of the democratic process. I realized the passion and creativity that is needed to identify and solve problems within a community. As a candidate soliciting votes, I gained an appreciation for engaged voters, who took the time to learn about my platform and make an informed decision. Although I would not have been able to articulate this as coherently at the time, I definitely gained a positive perception of political efficacy, believing that students could make a difference on the campus and that I had the skills necessary to lead that effort. It was my first taste of the political arena but that experience shaped and inspired my desire to be a politically active citizen within my community.

The other part of my interest in this topic stems from my professional role as a student affairs professional at The University of Texas at Arlington. I currently serve as the advisor to the Student Congress and the Graduate Student Senate, which function as the representative voice of the student body. I also coordinate the student government elections process, which includes facilitating

the candidate filing process, advising candidates on the election guidelines, and coordinating the on-campus polling location. Through these experiences I have witnessed the nuances of student elections and have been able to observe students positively engaging in this democratic process.

Through my own experience as a candidate in student government elections and through my work with student government leaders, I have often reflected on the experiences of candidates in student government elections. I seek to understand how other students are motivated to run for office, what their experiences entail, and how their experiences influence their views of future political participation. The findings from this study will hopefully enable me and other student affairs professionals to create a positive political experience for college students, which will encourage their democratic engagement for years to come.

Significance of the Study

While most studies have examined student government elections through voter turnout or focusing on student government participation post-election, this qualitative study explored the unique experiences of students participating as candidates in student government elections at Texas universities. This research helps to fill a considerable void in the literature. The insights gained from it have implications for institutional practices and theory.

Findings from this study benefit institution administrators as they establish policies for student government elections in order to aid in the students' experiential learning through the election process. In addition, the findings benefit policy makers and interest groups that seek to understand the political views and participation habits of this population. Lastly, the understanding of political efficacy (Campbell et al., 1954; Craig et al., 1990) was extended through the utilization of this lens on the experiences of student government candidates.

Summary

The generational shift in views on political participation has policy makers and researchers concerned with the future of the democratic process. Student involvement in student government elections has the potential to give young adults a positive outlook on political participation, which could encourage their continued engagement in the future. Thus, there is a growing need to understand the experiences of students who participate in student government elections and how their experiences impact their views of future political participation.

Although the field is saturated with quantitative examinations of young adult participation in local, state, and national elections, there is a limited amount of research on student government elections at the collegiate level. Thus, the purpose of this research was to conduct a qualitative study examining the experiences of students participating in student government elections as candidates for president or vice president. By examining the students' experiences

11

and their perceived sense of political efficacy after engaging in this form of

democratic involvement, a deeper understanding of the benefits of candidacy in

student government elections was gained.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the relevant research regarding the impact of student government elections on future political participation. For purposes of clarity, this chapter is presented in four sections. The first section reviews the literature on student government organizations, including the evolution of student involvement in institutional governance and the role of student government on college and university campuses. The second section reviews the previous research on student government elections, including voter turnout, the impact of technology on elections, and the implications of campaign expenditure limits. The third section focuses on how students participating in civic activities, through student government or even campaign simulations, may influence students' future political participation. Finally, the literature review concludes with a brief rationale for using political efficacy (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990) as the theoretical framework for this study.

Student Government

Student participation in shared governance activities has evolved greatly over the years. As a result, extensive research exists on the nature of student government at American universities and colleges. This section of the literature review will focus on the evolution of student involvement in institutional

decision-making, the value of participation in student government, the challenges faced by student government organizations, and strategies for increasing student involvement.

The Evolution of Student Government

The origins of student government date back to the student-run literary societies of the 1700s and 1800s (Coates & Coates, 1985; Horowitz, 1987; Otten, 1970). Literary societies provided students an opportunity to express themselves and discuss their frustrations regarding the curriculum, the lack of extracurricular activities, and the lack of authority over their own lives at colleges in colonial America (May, 2010; Rudolph, 1990). In addition to enabling students to engage educationally and socially, literary societies also resulted in significant changes to the colleges in order to meet student needs. These organizations encouraged the opening of the first university libraries, the formation of student honor systems, and provided students a path toward self-governance (Eller, 1949; Harding, 1971). The decline of literary societies came in the 1830s as other organizations such as athletics, fraternities, clubs, and honorary societies came into existence (Harding, 1971).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, student assemblies emerged as the governing body of the student population (Somers, 2003). The small enrollment on each campus made it possible for the entire student body of each university to assemble in order to debate and discuss issues of concern

14

(Somers, 2003). However, as institutions began to group students based on their class rank (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), students began to subdivide themselves according to their classifications (Horowitz, 1987; Otten, 1970). Therefore, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, student assemblies evolved into a more representative form of governance called class councils. These class councils had elected officers to coordinate activities, represent student needs, and make recommendations to institutional administrators (Somers, 2003). As more extracurricular opportunities formed, students began identifying themselves by their Greek affiliation, club memberships, or residential status instead of their class rank (Otten, 1970).

The decline of class councils gave rise to student councils by the early 1900s. Students were elected to represent the student body as a whole instead of representing each class (Coates & Coates, 1985). The student councils continued to be agents of change on university campuses and continued to progress by broadening their representation (Eller, 1949). In the 1960s, student involvement in institutional decision-making expanded to become part of the shared governance structure at most post-secondary institutions. Together with the administration, faculty, staff, and trustees, students have the potential to share in the daily decision-making processes of their institutions (Botzek, 1972). Student participation on university committees and forums has resulted in student

15

government organizations continuing to create change at colleges and universities in order to voice student concerns (Dias, 2009).

Today's student government organizations are often described as the "official voice" (p. 74) of the student body and serve as formal structures for students to provide input in decision-making at the collegiate level (Cuyjet, 1994). The stated responsibilities and purposes of student governments vary depending on the type of institution and the philosophy of the administration, but student government associations are typically entrusted with responsibilities falling into four categories: (a) responsibilities outlined in the student government's constitution, (b) responsibilities delegated to them by institutional leaders, (c) responsibilities deferred to them by other decision-making bodies, and (d) responsibilities to appoint students to serve as representatives on committees and boards (Torok, 1999).

Value of Participation in Student Government

The benefits of student involvement during college have been well documented. Research shows that students who devote time and energy into their college experience through active engagement in their academic pursuits and participation in extra-curricular activities tend to persist at their college or university and enjoy higher levels of achievement (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Research on the impact of extra-curricular engagement cites its positive influence on college persistence (Astin, 1977, 1993), bachelor's degree

16

attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), educational aspirations (Kocher &

Pascarella, 1988), graduate school attendance (Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wolfe,

1988), and satisfaction with one's college experience (Abrahamowicz, 1988).

The value of student participation in institutional governance at the

collegiate level is typically described from three perspectives: functional,

developmental, and social. First, the *functional* perspective speaks to how student

government benefits the university. Sabin and Daniels (2001) cite enhanced

accountability and evident consideration of stakeholder views as advantages of a

participative process. Therefore, by allowing students to participate in

institutional decision-making processes, the university can benefit from an

improved quality of decisions that reflect student views (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009).

Second, the *developmental* perspective focuses on the many benefits students gain

from being involved in student government. Astin (1984) states, "Students who

become actively involved in student government interact frequently with their

peers, and this interaction seems to accentuate the changes normally resulting

from the college experience" (p. 304). Quality participation can provide students

with essential opportunities for learning and skill development in areas such as

teamwork, critical thinking, and academic performance (Cress, Astin,

Zimmerman, Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Kuh, 1994). Finally, the *social*

perspective focuses on how student government involvement benefits society.

Historically, universities have been a place of education for democracy and

17

citizenship (Tuene, 2001). If students have a positive experience through student government and feel they have influence on decision-making at the college level, they can gain a positive attitude toward citizenship; on the other hand, a negative experience could result in a pessimistic view of civic life (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009).

In a quantitative study of 91 student government leaders at California State College - Long Beach, Carpenter (1972) found that students who were active in student government viewed their experiences as educational in nature and felt their involvement was related to their future career goals. In addition, the students reported they joined student government to have the opportunity to be involved in collegiate activities, to learn and grow through their experiences, and to make changes on the campus. These findings show that students understand the value of their participation in student government and are having positive experiences.

Challenges of Student Government

While numerous benefits come from student government involvement, participants also face many challenges in their role as the representative voice of the student body. Critics of student government have issues with the age and maturity level of student representatives (Miles, Miller, & Nadler, 2008). Students may not be very informed about institutional goals or politics, and they are not on the campus long enough to make informed decisions (Miller & Nadler, 2006).

18

Others believe the students' self-interests in short-term outcomes will prevent them from long-term thinking that is crucial for the success of the institution (Miles et al., 2008).

In addition, there is the possibility that student government officers do not represent the populations they serve. In a study of 30 student government leaders from 30 institutions across the nation, Miles (1997) found most students who participate in student government are full-time students who live on-campus, which can lead to a lack of representation for students who attend part-time, commute from off-campus, or take classes online.

Potentially the largest criticism of student government, though, is the belief that student representatives only carry out the wishes of the administration instead of actually serving the needs of the students of their institutions (Freidson, 1955). Student leaders are under pressure by fellow students who accuse them of ineffective leadership and not representing the student voice. On the other hand, administrators are pressuring student leaders to support the institution's stance and denying them the need for student leadership (Giroux, 1974).

While these views may be dated, recent research also shows the impact of university administrators on student government leaders. For example, several studies found that the level of power that the administration gives the student government determines not only the success of the government, but also of its student leaders (May, 2010; Miller & Nadler, 2006; Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, &

19

Barnett, 2005). This can be a major challenge for student government organizations if the institution's philosophy on student involvement is not positive.

McKaig and Policelo (1999) identified five categories to describe institutional philosophies toward student government: managed control, parental "there-there," public relations, consumer relations, and collaboration. In the *managed control* approach, students are encouraged to voice their opinions if they are expressed in an environment established by university administrators. In the *parental "there-there"* perspective, students are allowed to voice their opinions only if they are in harmony with the institution's perspective. In the *public relations* approach, students are able to express their opinions as long as a positive image of the university is maintained at all times in order to deflect any negative exposure. By determining the manner in which students express their concerns, the institution maintains control in the governance process under these approaches. On the other hand, the *consumer relations* approach considers student input to be essential in order to keep the student (or customer) content. Finally, the *collaborative* perspective appreciates student government participation for its educational value and provides shared responsibility to students (McKaig & Policelo, 1999). These two perspectives focus on the benefits of student involvement in shared governance and create a positive experience for students.

Consequently, the philosophy held by the institution can have a significant impact on the experience of students involved in the governance process.

Institutional philosophy can also affect staff perceptions of student government organizations. Whether real or imagined, staff perceptions can greatly influence students' understanding and value of their place in institutional governance. In a qualitative study of 20 student representatives at an Australian university, Lizzio and Wilson (2009) identified a "hierarchy of engagement" (p. 76) to explain student representatives' perceptions of how university administrators and staff view the role of student government. At the lowest level of the hierarchy, students reported that they felt staff members questioned the legitimacy of student government, believing students to be too self-interested, adversarial, and immature. At the next level, students reported feeling that staff only involved students in decision-making to comply with institutional requirements. At the highest level, students made the distinction between being consulted on various issues and being seen as "partners or collaborators in the governance process" (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009, p. 76). From these findings, it is apparent that student perceptions of staff attitudes toward student government can positively or negatively influence students' sense of efficacy and legitimacy as representatives of student opinion.

Increasing Participation in Student Governance

Student government as a whole would not exist without students who are interested in providing input on institutional issues and serving as representatives of the student body. Therefore, some researchers have developed studies to examine variables that may increase participation in student governance.

In her doctoral dissertation, Miles (1997) utilized the Delphi survey technique to identify strategies for increasing participation in student government activities in higher education. The Carnegie classification was used to randomly select colleges and universities to participate in the study. The chief student affairs officer at each of the institutions was then asked to nominate student leaders who were knowledgeable of student government activities, and 30 of those students were selected to participate in the study. In the first round, the participants were asked to list up to five strategies or techniques that would increase student participation in self-governance. In round two, all unduplicated strategies submitted by the students were sent out to the participants, and they were asked to rate their agreement with each technique on a five-point Likert-scale. In round three, the participants were asked to review their responses in round two, compare to the group consensus, and revise their original responses if desired.

This exploration resulted in the creation of 57 statements regarding how student government participation could be increased (Miles, 1997). The strategies

22

that were identified as having high agreement among the student participants (i.e.

scoring 3.7 or higher on the Likert-scale) were then reviewed to identify themes.

The three thematic clusters that emerged include publicity, structure and process,

and attitudes. The strategies that align with each theme are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
*Thematic Clustering of Strategies for Increasing Student Involvement in
Governance*

Cluster Theme	Strategy/Technique
Publicity	Create a positive image on campus for the student leaders.
	Be visible to first-year students.
	Publicize student government meetings and activities.
	Keep the student media involved and interested.
Structure and Process	Create a student government structure which accomplishes its goals.
	Increase student representation on faculty and staff committees.
	Foster cooperation between the student government and the institution's administration.
	Establish a relationship between the student government and student organizations.
	Provide a consistent time and location for student government meetings.
Attitudes of Actors	Administrators should respect decisions of student government leaders.
	Give the students a feeling of ownership.
	Demonstrate student government effectiveness so others will want to

join.
Emphasize the importance of the
position each student holds.
Encourage new student involvement
through demonstrating past
accomplishments of the student
government.

Note. Adapted from "Student Leader Perceptions of Increasing Participation in Self-Governance" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), by J. M. Miles, 1997, p. 63. Copyright 1997 by the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

To further this research, Love and Miller (2003) utilized the 57-item survey created by Miles (1997) to explore strategies for increasing participation in student government organizations at an urban research university with a population of 30,000 students. They surveyed 31 undergraduate and 43 graduate students enrolled in a teacher training program. The survey instrument included statements regarding 57 potential strategies for increasing student involvement in governance and asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statements on a 5-point Likert-scale. Three of the strategies were strongly agreed with by both undergraduate and graduate students, including "make the activities enjoyable and rewarding" ($M = 4.37$; p. 103), "administrators should respect decisions of student governments" ($M = 4.35$; p. 104), and "have employers speak with students about the value of the self-governance experience" ($M = 4.13$; p. 105). Graduate students also noted the importance of publicizing student government meetings and activities ($M=4.38$), while undergraduate students agreed strongly with providing benefits to students who participate in student government, such as

24

tuition reimbursements, parking permits, or free copies (*M*=4.26). The two

strategies with the lowest agreement level mean score were "student leaders

should encourage friends to become involved" (*M* = 3.24; p. 106) and student

governments should "discuss controversial issues" (*M* = 3.00; p. 105).

While these results slightly differ from the work of Miles (1997), this may

be due to the specific sample targeted in the later study. Love and Miller (2003)

surveyed education students at a specific institution, while Miles' study was

broader in its reach. This suggests a potential discrepancy in what student leaders

perceive to be necessary for active participation and what the general student

population would like to see from their student representatives.

The current study extends the work of Miles (1997) by examining the

perceptions and experiences of students who participated in student government

elections as candidates at large, Texas, public universities. Further, it explores the

candidates' perceptions of the process and affect of running for high-level

positions in depth, unlike Love and Miller (2003) who focused on views from the

general student population.

Student Government Elections

Although there is a significant amount of research on the value of student

government and the benefits of student participation, research on the process

through which students gain membership into student government organizations

is limited. Most studies on student government elections tend to focus on the

voters or the process of the elections instead of the candidates running for office. The relevant literature discussed here includes research on student voter turnout, the impact of technology on student government elections, and the implications of campaign regulations.

Voter Turnout

Research on voter turnout in America is extensive, but most of the attention is focused on national and state elections. Few studies delve into the complexity of voter turnout in collegiate student government elections, although there are lessons to be learned from studying young adult voter rates on post-secondary campuses.

In a quantitative study of 94 colleges and universities, Lewis and Rice (2005) compared the voter turnout rates in student government presidential elections at different-sized institutions. Of the 94 schools who responded to the survey, 21 had enrollments under 2,000, 19 had enrollments between 2,001 and 5,000, 28 had enrollments between 5,001 and 10,000, and the remaining 26 had enrollments of greater than 10,000 students. The turnout rates were determined by dividing the total number of students who voted in the election by the total number of students who were eligible to vote at the particular institution. The distribution of turnout among all the institutions ranged from less than 1% to almost 70%, with a mean of 18.8% and a standard deviation of 14.7.

In the next phase of the study, Lewis and Rice (2005) examined the

contextual and election specific variables that could have influenced the voter

turnout on each campus. Contextual variables included institutional characteristics

(i.e. public/private school, admission rate, student-to-faculty ratio, and

geographical region), student demographics (i.e. percentage of women,

minorities, full-time students, and out-of-state students), and election rules (i.e. if

the presidential and vice presidential candidates ran as a ticket, if other races were

included on the ballot along with the presidential race, if online voting was

available, and how long the polls were open). The election specific variables

included factors such as the number of candidates running for the position, the

winner's voting percentage, and the type of campaign activity present on the

campus. Utilizing multiple regression, the researchers found that contextual

variables influenced voter turnout significantly more than election specific

variables. The significant contextual variables that were correlated to higher voter

turnout rates included being a private school, maintaining lower admission rates,

and having higher percentages of full-time students on the campus. The

researchers determined that these factors were possibly proxies for the socio-

economic status of the students and their families. The election specific variables

that significantly impacted voter turnout included holding the student government

presidential election along with races for other student positions and offering

27

online voting. In addition, encouraging more campaign advertising by the candidates showed a positive impact on voter turnout (Lewis & Rice, 2005).

In contrast, Miles, Miller, and Nadler (2012) found that institutional characteristics do not impact voter turnout in student government elections. The researchers collected data from the student government websites, institutional research websites, and the official election results from 50 doctoral institutions and 50 comprehensive institutions across the nation. For doctoral institutions, voter turnout averaged 17.17%, ranging from 3% of the student population to about 54%. For comprehensive institutions, voter turnout averaged 13.1%, ranging from 2.79% of the student body to just over 51%. A t-test between doctoral institutions and comprehensive institutions revealed no significant difference between the percentages of students voting in the elections. In addition, an analysis of variance identified no significant differences between public-doctoral, private-doctoral, public-comprehensive, and private-comprehensive institutions.

Institutional variables may or may not affect voter turnout, but no study has examined how institutional variables may impact participation in running for a leadership position. Thus a deeper investigation is needed to explore the influence of institutional characteristics on various aspects of student government elections.

Impact of Technology

Advances in technology have impacted student government elections on college and university campuses. The way candidates campaign has changed as students utilize social media to publish their platforms, and most campuses have moved away from paper ballots to online voting systems. Administrators and student leaders have utilized various means to attempt to automate the election process, including electronic voting machines, telephone balloting with voice response systems, and email voting (Oxendine, 1999).

Agboh (1994) analyzed the use of computer technology on political elections and noted one of the first institutions of higher education to utilize computers to conduct student government elections was Stanford University. In 1989, Stanford allowed students to vote on Macintosh computers connected to a network. Voter turnout increased by 20% compared to the previous election. Another benefit to computerized voting was the decrease in time to tally the votes. However, some individuals questioned the security of the system.

Dempsey (2000) examined the online student government election process used at Dickinson College, a small, private, residential, liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. Dempsey noted that voting via paper ballot allowed for seemingly more control over the voting process, as there was a single polling station on campus instead of electronic access to the ballot from anywhere with an internet connection. However, the benefits of electronic voting outweighed the potential

perceptions of security issues. This study showed that the efficient means of tallying the votes electronically reduced the likelihood of error when counting ballots by hand. He concluded that the ease of electronic voting for students has the potential to increase voter turnout for student elections. In fact, the switch from paper to online voting at Ohio State University, in 2001, increased voter turnout from 6% to 13% (Read, 2005). A similar increase was also seen for Ohio State's graduate school elections with voter turnout going from 1% to 7%.

To examine opinions on electronic voting, Weber and Hengartner (2009) created a mock student government election at the University of Waterloo in Canada. A mock ballot was designed that included various types of questions with two to five candidates for each race. In addition, one of the questions allowed voters to select multiple candidates for the position, which is common for student representative positions. A sample of students was asked to vote using an online voting system and complete an exit survey upon submitting their ballot. Student feedback was generally in favor of electronic voting, as students expressed confidence that their vote would be accurately recorded and kept secret. In addition, students felt more comfortable voting at their own pace, on their own time, and on their own computer, which they noted was easier than going to a polling site on campus.

The impact of technology on student government elections begins much earlier than voting day. Candidates are utilizing technology through their

campaigns with campaign websites, social media, and blogs (Shier, 2005). In the 2005 spring elections at George Mason University and the University of Minnesota, campaign websites and social media accounts were used to outline candidate platforms, promote campaign events, and take polls of student concerns. Electronic campaigning also provided an outlet for critics to spread their opinions to a wide audience without fact-checking or external editing (Shier, 2005).

Implications of Campaign Regulations

One of the areas of interest related to student government elections is the constitutionality of various election procedures. The right of free speech is protected under the first amendment to the United States Constitution, but this freedom can be limited. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that universities have the right to "control activity which may be detrimental to the sacred provision of higher education" (Willis, 1997, p. 171). Therefore, the courts are often asked to decide cases in which these rights are in conflict.

Powers (2009) reviewed the case law relevant to the implications of various student government election rules, especially in regard to expenditure limits in student campaigns. One of the first cases to review the constitutionality of student government election restrictions was Alabama Student Party v. Student Government Association of the University of Alabama. The plaintiffs claimed that some of the campaign rules violated their first amendment rights. The

31

students felt three specific restrictions were unconstitutional, including (1) the distribution of campaign materials was prohibited except within three days before the election, (2) the distribution of campaign materials was completely prohibited on election day, and (3) candidate debates and forums were limited and only allowed during the week of the election (Alabama Student Party, 1989). The university claimed that the student government and its elections were a "learning laboratory" (McClamrock, Meyer, Spencer, 1990, p. 649). The court held that the university should be given deference in this matter and held that the university was "entitled to place reasonable restrictions on this learning experience" (Alabama Student Party, 1989, p. 1347).

In 2001, a district court heard the facts of Welker v. Cicerone, where a student government candidate claimed that a limit on campaign expenditures violated his first amendment rights. The plaintiff referred to Buckley v. Valeo, where the court held that spending limits for candidates of federal offices were unconstitutional. Under this constitutional standard, the university was required to demonstrate that the expenditure restriction was enacted for a compelling state interest, and the limitations were narrowly tailored to meet its goal (Coder, 2005). The university gave four interests that it claimed were compelling, including (1) the restrictions evened the playing field for students of low socio-economic status; (2) the restrictions discouraged students from soliciting donations during class or study times; (3) the limits reduced the possibility of student government officers

being influenced by donors; and (4) the restrictions required candidates to be creative through campaigning with less money (Welker, 2001). The court rejected each of the university's claims, finding that they were not narrowly tailored to achieve the institution's goals. Therefore, the court found the expenditure limits to be unconstitutional and a violation of the students' right to free speech.

The Welker decision was later overturned by a similar case in 2007. In Flint v. Dennison, a student government candidate at the University of Montana claimed the campaign expenditure limits were a violation of the first amendment. The plaintiff again turned to Buckley as precedence. However, in Flint, the court found that the "educational interest [of the University of Montana] outweigh the free speech interests of the students who campaigned within that limited public forum" (Flint v. Dennison, 2007, p. 820). In addition, the court distinguished student government elections from elections to a federal office, holding that student government does not have the same impact on students' lives as a government has on citizens' lives. Therefore, student government officers are not equal to federal, state, county, or city-elected officials and the campaign expenditure limitation is a "legitimate exercise of government power in preserving the character of the forum" (Flint v. Dennison, 2007, p. 829).

While campaign expenditure limits may be constitutional under the Flint decision, Powers (2009) asserted the restriction may have a disproportionate impact on some students. While one of the reasons for creating a cap on campaign

expenditures is to even the playing field for students from low socio-economic

backgrounds, the restriction may have the opposite effect by hurting the students

the policy was intended to help. Candidates with established bases of support on

campus, through Greek life or other establishments, need less money to run a

successful campaign because of their preexisting networks. While a candidate

without these established voting blocks, may need to raise and spend funds

without restriction in order to overcome lower name recognition. Therefore,

universities should carefully consider their goals before any election procedures

or spending limits are put in place. The university's interest must be weighed

against the students' rights of free speech and determine if rules to protect certain

populations are actually meeting those objectives (Powers, 2009).

Impact on Future Political Participation

Research shows that preparation for life in a democratic society can be

correlated to participation in student government organizations (Laosebikan-

Buggs, 2006). Three general perspectives are typically offered as explanations for

why involvement in student government is related to future political participation

as an adult: (1) structural (Putnam, 2000), (2) participation (Hahn, 1998; Print,

Ornstrom, & Nielsen, 2002), and (3) development (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates,

1997). Putnam (2000) defines the *structural* perspective in relation to social

capital – the value of individuals' connections with each other. According to

Putnam, the changes in the structures of today's society have resulted in the loss

of social networks and the loss of trust in collective action. By facilitating

opportunities through institutional structures for collective action to occur, an

appreciation for social networks and communal connections can be fostered.

Through participation in student government, students acquire the social capital

characteristics, such as connectedness, trust, and reciprocity, to engage politically

in the future (Putnam, 2000).

The second perspective, *participation*, refers to the belief that involvement

in student government increases a student's knowledge of how politics works and

increases the likelihood of the student participating in politics as an adult (Print et

al., 2002). Participation in extracurricular activities such as student government

helps students gain the leadership skills involved in influencing group decision

making (Niemi & Junn, 1998). This allows students to practice being part of a

political process to learn how democracy works (Hahn, 1998).

Finally, the *development* perspective refers to the process of creating a

civic identity, where an individual can differentiate his or her views from the

views of others. Through involvement in student government, students are able to

realize society is a social construct of which they are valued participants (Youniss

et al., 1997). Plutzer (2002) offered another aspect of this perspective by arguing

that the attainment of the legal voting age begins a process through which voting

becomes a habit. Even though, initially, young voters are apathetic toward voting

because of the steps required for political engagement, such as registering to vote,

identifying the correct polling location, and developing an understanding of key political issues, in time and with experience, it becomes a "gradually acquired habit" (Plutzer, 2002, p. 42). While Plutzer identified the legal voting age as the beginning of the habituation of voting, Saha and Print (2010) argued that participation in school elections may actually be the start of the process. The researchers analyzed data from the Youth Electoral Study, where 4,923 students were surveyed from 155 high schools in Australia. Voting in a student election was significantly related to four political engagement variables, including feeling prepared to vote, being committed to voting in the future, having political knowledge, and intending to engage in peaceful activism. In addition, running for a position in student elections was shown to add to the students' political socialization, over and above the act of voting (Saha & Print, 2010). Other studies have not looked at how running as a candidate in student government elections affects student attitudes in the United States. Therefore, the current study fills a gap in the research.

Another way that researchers have examined the impact of participation in elections is through campaign simulations. Kathlene and Choate (1999) described a campaign simulation in which undergraduate students in the United States participated as candidates, campaign staffers, or the media through a 10-week exercise. The candidates and their staffers were assigned a presidential candidate from the 1996 campaign (i.e. Jack Kemp, Diane Feinstein, or Ross Perot) to

36

research and understand their perspectives on a variety of political issues. Each week the students were assigned a "hands-on" experience and a written reflection. For example, during week 2, the students participated in a press conference for the candidates to announce their plans to run for office and answer questions from the media. Afterward, the candidates wrote a memo to their staff about their wishes for the next press conference, the staffers wrote a memo to their candidate regarding areas of improvement for the next event, and the journalists wrote a news article about the event. The role playing resulted in a positive experiential learning environment where the students gained knowledge of the campaign process, as demonstrated through mid-term and end-of-semester evaluations (Kathlene & Choate, 1999).

Mariani (2007) took the campaign simulation model a step further by not only focusing on how much the participants learned about campaigns but also how the experience impacted the students' perceptions of their future political involvement. In the spring of 2006, the students in two upper-level government courses participated in a campaign simulation by determining a candidate to represent a mock political party in a hypothetical state legislative election. Students in the first course, *Government 308: Politics, Persuasion, and Public Opinion (PPPO)*, were divided into two campaign teams and one media team. Each campaign team nominated a student candidate, with that team's members serving as staffers for their nominee. The media team members interviewed the

student candidates and their staffers to learn each campaign team's views on various political issues. Students in the second course, *Government 208: Political Parties and Elections (PPE)*, were assigned to be members of the electorate. Throughout the simulation, the students in both classes were assigned various group and individual assignments, such as developing campaign strategies, holding press conferences, participating in a candidate debate, drafting press releases, writing op-ed pieces assessing each candidate's chances for victory, voting for a particular candidate, and writing reflections about their experiences.

At the end of the simulation, students from both courses completed an exit survey to solicit their feedback on the simulation and assess their attitudes toward politics after participating in the mock election (Mariani, 2007). Results of the survey indicated the simulation increased student interest and engagement in the political process. As a result of participating in the simulation, 71% of students in the PPPO course and 58% of students in the PPE course reported they would follow political campaigns more closely in the future. In addition, 83% of students in the PPPO course and 58% of students in the PPE course reported they viewed political campaigns more favorably after participating in the simulation. The greater impact reflected by the students in the PPPO course may be attributed to the fact that they took on more active roles as politicians, staffers, and media representatives. On the other hand, the students in the PPE course were more passive participants, primarily watching the action until they voted for a

candidate, which may account for their more modest responses. Taking into account that students who choose to take a political course may already have a positive attitude toward political activity, these results still indicate the potential for experience in political campaigns to promote political activity and encourage an enhanced sense of political efficacy (Mariani, 2007).

Saha and Print (2010) provide an interesting exploration of students' perceptions of the impact of high school elections on political engagement in the future. Based in Australia, the study surveyed almost 5,000 high school students to determine if running for office or voting for any student government positions contributed to a feeling of preparedness to vote, a commitment to vote in the future, an increase in political knowledge, and a desire to participate in peaceful activism (Saha & Print, 2010). The researchers concluded that students who vote or run for political office in high school elections feel empowered to make decisions in the school setting and begin to understand their power to affect change within their own political environments in the future. This sense of political efficacy (Pateman, 1970) encourages future political participation and a dedication to lifelong civic engagement.

These studies illustrate that there is a positive impact from students actively participating in a civic experience during campaign simulations and high school elections. However, there are no studies that qualitatively examine this through collegiate student government elections. By understanding the election

process through the lens of the candidates, the current study adds to the body of knowledge on student government elections and provides recommendations for practice to assist student affairs administrators in providing a positive political experience for students.

Political Efficacy

The theoretical framework of this study attempts to explain the impact of students' participation in student government elections on their perceptions of future political engagement. While there may be many ways to conceptualize the influence of the candidate experience, the idea of political efficacy is well suited to guide our understanding of the learning that occurs throughout student government elections.

As defined in the historic study, *The Voter Decides* (Campbell et al., 1954), political efficacy is "the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (p. 187) through the political process. The concept was initially developed through a study on political participation in the 1952 presidential election. Through a sample of eligible voters across the United States, 1,614 individuals participated in both a pre-election and post-election survey. The study was primarily concerned with examining the relationship between political participation and three variables – party identification, issue orientation, and candidate orientation. However, the researchers also had a hypothesis that political efficacy, to the

extent that it can be measured, would be related to political activity. Four items

were incorporated in the pre-election questionnaire to attempt to measure the

concept, which asked the participants to agree or disagree with the following

statements:

> (a) I don't think public officials care much what people like me think; (b)
>
> Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how the
>
> government runs things; (c) People like me don't have any say about what
>
> the government does; and (d) Sometimes politics and government seem so
>
> complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
>
> (Campbell et al., 1954, p. 187-188)

Based on the participants' responses, the authors created a scalable

measure for political efficacy to compare to the index of political participation.

Political efficacy was positively related to high levels of participation in the 1952

election. Even when the demographic variables typically considered indicative of

political participation (e.g., sex, race, age, education level, socio-economic status,

occupation) were held constant, the relationship between political efficacy and

political participation held true. Thus, it can be concluded that individuals who

feel that their involvement is capable of influencing policy are more likely to be

politically active than those who have a negative perception of the democratic

process (Campbell et al., 1954).

Since this landmark report, similar findings have been duplicated in numerous studies (Agger, Goldstein, & Pearl, 1961; Dahl, 1961; Finifter, 1970; Robinson, Rusk, & Head, 1968). However, 20 years later, Balch (1974) challenged previous notions of political efficacy through a study of 1,189 students at large, state universities across the nation. Rejecting the notion of political efficacy as a single trait on a scaled index, Balch proposed two dimensions of political efficacy: internal and external. *Internal efficacy* refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to effectively participate in and understand the political process. *External efficacy* refers to an individual's belief in the responsiveness of public officials to citizen demands. In addition, Balch questioned the use of "political efficacy" overall without narrowly defining the term in order to distinguish from other concepts, such as political trust or political competence, that are utilized to indicate an individual's propensity to participate.

Craig, Niemi, and Silver (1990) were able to clearly distinguish between internal and external political efficacy in their analysis of the National Election Studies 1987 pilot study results. Two waves of telephone interviews were conducted with a representative national sample of 360 participants. Over 35 items related to political efficacy and trust were utilized in the survey instrument, including the traditional items identified in Campbell et al. (1954) and new elements that had not been tested in national samples. In addition, the survey allowed for a wider range of responses on a five-point Likert-scale (strongly agree

to strongly disagree) instead of the simple agree or disagree options used in previous studies. Through a large factor analysis, six items were found to form a reliable scale for internal efficacy with four indicators for external efficacy. Table 2.2 displays the confirmed factors. Craig et al.'s findings reinforced the distinction between internal and external political efficacy, while also indicating a separation between external efficacy and political trust, which Balch (1974) had questioned.

Table 2.2

Confirmed Factors of Internal and External Political Efficacy

Internal
1. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people. (agree)
2. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics. (agree)
3. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country. (agree)
4. I think that I am as well-informed about politics and government as most people. (agree)
5. I often don't feel sure of myself when talking with other people about politics and government. (disagree)
6. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (disagree)

External
1. There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does. (agree)
2. Under our form of government, the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office. (agree)
3. If public officials are not interested in hearing what the people think, there

is really no way to make them listen. (disagree)

4. People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (disagree)

Research studies have consistently linked political efficacy to political engagement (Almond & Verba, 1963; Campbell et al., 1954; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Print, Saha, & Edwards, 2004, 2005; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In their landmark study, *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1963) described individuals with high political efficacy by saying:

The belief in one's competence is a key political attitude. The self-confident citizen appears to be the democratic citizen. Not only does he think he can participate, he thinks others ought to participate as well. Furthermore, he does not merely think he can take part in politics; he is likely to be more active. (p. 257)

To that point, Conway (1985) found that individuals with a high sense of political efficacy are 20-30% more likely to vote than individuals with a low sense of political efficacy. Similar findings have also held true in regard to other forms of civic engagement, such as campaigning, contacting public officials, and talking about politics (Berman, 1997; Finkel, 1985; National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999; Niemi and Associates, 1974). However, internal

44

political efficacy has been found to be a more significant indicator of political engagement than external political efficacy. As indicated by several studies (Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993; Pollock, 1983; Shingles, 1981; Wollman & Stouder, 1991), high internal political efficacy combined with low external efficacy is still associated with high political engagement. While these individuals avoid voting, they still engage in the political process through a broader range of alternatives, including campaigning and contacting elected officials (Fraser, 1970; Hawkins, Marando, & Taylor, 1971; Pollock, 1983).

The concept of political efficacy is heavily utilized as a predictor of engagement in local, state, and national politics. However, it has not been used to explore engagement in student government elections, except through examining participation in student government as a means to increase students' political efficacy. By using the lens as a theoretical guide for the current study, the understanding of political efficacy was extended to make sense of a new population.

One reason that political efficacy seems to be well suited for this study is that it provides a framework to understand why students choose to run as candidates in student government elections. College students are citizens of their university communities. Thus, one could view a student's sense of internal political efficacy as the belief that he or she has the skills or abilities to engage in the institutional governance process of which student government plays a

45

significant role. In addition, external political efficacy could be described as a student's belief that the institutional administrators will respond to student demands. If students feel a sense of efficacy in regard to their campus political environment, it could be assumed that they would be more willing to actively engage in that democratic process.

Another reason for utilizing political efficacy in this study was to examine how the experience of running for office in student government elections impacts the candidates' perceptions of their future political involvement. Several studies have explored high school student elections and campaign simulations to determine their influence on students' sense of political efficacy. However, collegiate student government elections have not been analyzed in this way. In addition, most of the studies completed have been quantitative in nature, using surveys to assess the students' agreement with statements regarding political efficacy. This study allowed for a deeper understanding of the students' perceptions of political efficacy to emerge from their descriptions of their experiences as candidates.

Summary

In summary, according to many researchers on political participation, the consequences of an apathetic citizenry are detrimental to our democratic society (Macedo et al., 2005). Studies show that positive experiences through student government can positively influence future political participation, as it increases

46

students' sense of political efficacy (Saha & Print, 2010). However, there are no studies that explore the experiences of candidates in collegiate student government elections to understand how that process impacts the students' perceptions of future political engagement. There is much to learn about their experiences and the implications on political efficacy.

Chapter 3

Method

This chapter presents the research methods that were utilized in the study. First, I restate the research questions along with the details of the design of the study. Then, I outline my strategies for recruiting study participants and for data collection. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations for this research and the study's limitations.

This study took a constructivist approach to examining the experiences of candidates in student government elections. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the constructivist paradigm is based on the idea that reality is shaped by each individual's life experiences. As a result, multiple, valid meanings may exist for one phenomenon because reality is subjective and based on each person's interpretations of experiences (Stake, 1995).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the methodological choices of this study:

1. Why do students choose to run for a leadership position in student government elections?

2. How do candidates describe their experiences of running for a leadership position in student government elections?

3. How do candidates describe their sense of political efficacy after participation in student government elections?

Design

Since the purpose of this study was to examine how candidates describe their experiences in student government elections, qualitative methodology was employed (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative research allows for close interaction with the participants and focuses on their perspectives in order to use their own words to describe their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By utilizing a qualitative approach, I was able to understand the unique perspectives of the candidates and how each of their interpretations of the student government elections shaped their views of political participation.

Data Sources

There were two sources for data collection: a pre-screening questionnaire and individual interviews. With the online pre-screening questionnaire, I collected some basic demographic information about my participants prior to the interview. Questions included their major, hometown, student classification, dates of their most recent election for president or vice president, and the nature of the election for president and vice president (e.g. individual candidate, part of a ticket, or as a slate of candidates). This pre-screening questionnaire helped identify students who met the selection criteria for the study.

The primary method of data collection for this study was through semi-structured individual interviews. All interviews were conducted via Skype or FaceTime. An authentic interview experience was possible through interviews utilizing video software, because I still had the ability to evaluate the verbal and nonverbal cues of the participants (Sullivan, 2012). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and were audio recorded for transcription. The interview protocol consisted of questions regarding the students' motivation for running in student government elections, their experiences as candidates in the election, and the impact of their candidacy on their views of civic engagement. (See Appendix A for the protocol.) During the analysis phase, I had a question about one of the participant's answers during her individual interview. Therefore, a follow-up email was sent to the participant, and she responded with additional information to clarify her earlier comment.

Sample Selection Criteria

When selecting participants, there were four criteria for inclusion in this study. First, participants who previously participated in student government elections as candidates for president or vice president no earlier than 2015 were considered eligible. This criterion was influenced by my desire for the participants to have recently been through the election process in order for their experiences to be easily recalled. The decision to interview candidates for president and vice president was made because these are typically the highest student leadership

positions on university campuses. The positions come with significant responsibility and are typically highly contested. Therefore, the students running for these roles would presumably be dedicated to the election process and approach the campaigning process through strategy instead of viewing it as a lark.

Second, the participants must have been students from large (i.e. over 20,000 students in fall 2015), public, four-year institutions in Texas. As studies have shown (May, 2010; Miller & Nadler, 2006; Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, & Barnett, 2005), institutional characteristics and philosophy toward student government can impact the student experience in the election process. Therefore, efforts were taken to select participants from a specific type of institution in order for the findings not to be influenced by potential differences between public vs. private schools, small vs. large schools, and community colleges vs. four-year institutions. In addition, it is likely that the political climate in which the institution is situated could influence the students' perspectives. By selecting participants who participated in student government elections in one state, this potential influence was limited.

Third, only candidates who participated in a contested election were considered for inclusion in the study. Candidates who won their election because they were the only candidate would likely have a different experience than those who had to campaign against other students in order to be elected. Therefore, only candidates in contested elections were included in the study.

The final criterion was based on the election process at each institution. Only students who were required to run as individual candidates or as part of a president–vice president ticket were eligible to participate in the study. Students who participated in the election as part of a political party system or slate of candidates may have had a different experience than those who have to campaign only as an individual or as part of a president–vice president ticket. I was interested in the individual student experience as a candidate in student government elections and wanted to limit the potential influence that a political party system or slate could have on a student's campaign.

The outcome of each candidate's election was not a determining factor for selection in the study. I was interested in examining the students' perceptions of the election process overall. While the result of the election may produce differences in the students' experiences based on outcome, I believe the questions included in the interview protocol emphasized the process of the election instead of the final vote count. Therefore, students who won and students who lost their elections for student government president or vice president were included in the study.

<div align="center">**Recruitment**</div>

In order to ensure the participants met the sample selection criteria, I used a combination of purposeful random sampling and criterion sampling methods (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). To create the sampling frame of the population, I

utilized the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board database of higher

education institutions to identify large (i.e. minimum 20,000 students in fall

2015), public, four-year institutions in Texas. Previous research suggests

institutional characteristics made a difference in voter turnout during student

government elections. By eliminating differences in institution type, some of the

inherent differences associated with size and control were limited.

Upon obtaining this list of institutions (see Appendix B), I reviewed

information regarding each university's student government election policies

through the institutions' websites. I did this primarily to determine if the election

procedures for each campus required students to run as individual candidates for

student government president or vice president. For the institutions that required

students to run as individual candidates or on a president-vice president ticket, I

examined their university websites, campus newspaper archives, and other

available media sources to obtain the names of students who participated in

student government elections as candidates for president or vice president in 2015

or later. I then identified the students' email addresses through publicly

accessible directory information through their institution's website. Directory

information was not accessible for six current student government presidents and

vice presidents, so I contacted the student government offices of the institutions to

speak to the students via telephone. When directory information was unavailable

for former student government leaders or students who did not win their election,

I contacted them via a private Facebook message (Appendix C) in order to request their current email address. Only one student responded to the Facebook message.

An invitation email, which explained the purpose of this study, was sent to the identified students in order to request their participation in the study. An electronic link to the online participant questionnaire, which was created through Qualtrics, was included in the invitation email (see Appendix D for the introductory email). The opening webpage of the questionnaire served as the consent form (See Appendix E for the questionnaire and consent form). Of the 18 students who completed the online questionnaire, four declined to participate in an individual interview.

For those who gave their consent and met the research criteria, I sent a follow-up email formally inviting them to participate in a Skype or FaceTime interview (See Appendix F). Six of the students emailed back with their availability, and individual interviews were scheduled. For those who did not respond to the initial follow-up email, I called the phone numbers provided in the online questionnaire to speak to the students (See Appendix G for phone script). Through this effort, four more individual interviews were scheduled. Of the remaining four students, three never responded to my emails or phone calls and one student was unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. Several weeks after the findings were written, another student completed the online questionnaire; however, she was not invited to participate further in the study.

Thus, 10 students in total participated fully in the study. Creswell (2013) suggests a range from three to 15 participants for a qualitative study. By interviewing these 10 individuals, I was able to attain representation of student government presidents and vice presidents from four institutions and achieve data saturation.

Participants

As shown in Table 3.1, all of the participants came with various levels of experience in student government prior to running. The participants had an average of 2.6 semesters of experience in student government prior to running, with one candidate having no experience and one candidate having over 5 semesters serving. Of the 10 students interviewed, eight were male and two were females. All were seniors except for Jeremy[1] who was a junior.

Most of the former candidates ran for student government president, with only two being candidates for student government vice president. Six of the candidates ran on a ticket. Half of the participants won their elections and half lost.

---

[1] All names of participants are pseudonyms.

Table 3.1: Participant Information

| Name | Personal | | Student Government | Election | | | |
	Gender	Classification	Experience	Type	Semester	Position	Outcome
Aaron	Male	Senior	2 semesters	Individual	Spring 2016	President	Won
Caleb*	Male	Senior	2 semesters	Individual	Spring 2015	VP	Won
David	Male	Senior	2 semesters	Individual	Spring 2016	President	Lost
Garrett	Male	Senior	2 semesters	Ticket	Spring 2016	President	Won
Haley	Female	Senior	5 semesters	Individual	Spring 2016	President	Won
James	Male	Senior	2 semesters	Ticket	Spring 2016	President	Won
Jeremy	Male	Junior	3 semesters	Ticket	Spring 2016	President	Lost
José	Male	Senior	3 semesters	Ticket	Spring 2016	President	Lost
Katie	Female	Senior	5+ semesters	Ticket	Spring 2016	President	Lost
Tyler	Male	Senior	None	Ticket	Spring 2016	VP	Lost

* Caleb also ran for Vice President and won his election in Spring 2014.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, I personally transcribed them within 72 hours. Then, I did an initial reading of the transcripts and utilized open coding to identify the themes that emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Open coding, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2007), involves developing coding categories that identify insights from the participants' descriptive responses. Constant comparative analysis was then used to narrow the codes into distinct groupings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). After the initial open coding process, I reviewed the transcripts in a cyclical manner, sorting through the identified codes in each transcript and reflecting on them to discover patterns within the data. New codes were added as the transcripts were re-analyzed. Similar codes were then grouped together to create categories and subcategories. This continual comparison of codes allowed for the most important findings of the study to surface. (See Appendix H for a list of codes.)

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2013) identifies eight ways to validate qualitative research. For this study, I employed four of them, as described below.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

This was accomplished in Chapter One as I gave a personal biography of my experience with this topic.

Rich, Thick Description

It was my goal to provide rich, thick descriptions in the findings of this study. During the interview process, I consistently asked the participants to expand upon their responses by explaining and describing terms or ideas, even when my experience allowed for my understanding. I strived to use the participants' words and perceptions so the reader can fully comprehend the students' unique experiences.

Member Checking

Upon completion of the interviews, I sent the transcripts back to the participants to verify their accuracy and to allow the participants to approve or make amendments. In addition, I shared the final themes with the participants, so they could review the findings of the study. No changes were requested by the participants. This utilization of member checking allows for credibility of my interpretations and findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Peer Review

I asked a student affairs colleague, who has experience with the student government elections process, to provide a peer review of my work by examining the coding and analysis used. By reading through all of the transcripts, the reviewer checked for researcher bias and ensured the trustworthiness of the analysis. There were no disagreements regarding the codes utilized or interpretation of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

During each phase of this study, I took every effort to ensure no harm was done to any participant. All procedures outlined by The University of Texas at Arlington's Institutional Review Board and the participating institutions were followed. Participants' identities were protected through all data collection and analysis stages by eliminating identifying information, safely storing the data, and destroying records when appropriate. Finally, I utilized pseudonyms in the interview transcriptions and in the findings of this study to ensure participants and their institutions will not be identified.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of any study. The participants in this study were candidates from large, public, four-year institutions in Texas. Yet, the universities may still have unique institutional characteristics, policies regarding student government elections, and campus cultures to impact the experiences of these candidates. It is also possible that other student leaders from institutions in and out of Texas might have very different experiences as candidates from the participants in the study. Because this study was limited to the experiences of a select group of candidates for student government president or vice president, the experiences of other candidates were not presented.

This study was also limited because the participants were asked to reflect on their previous experiences as candidates. In remembering frames of mind that occurred in the past, it is possible the students' perceptions have changed over time. In addition, there could have been affects based on the timing of the study. The interviews took place just after the 2016 United States presidential election. The rhetoric surrounding the hotly contested race could have affected how the students perceived their experiences. Nonetheless, this study provides an in-depth exploration of the experiences of 10 candidates in student government elections, which is a unique contribution to the field.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodological choices and design of this study. In addition, the recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedures were described in detail. The chapter concluded with measures that were taken to ensure trustworthiness and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the experiences of candidates in student government elections at large, four-year, public universities. Through interviews with 10 former candidates for student government president and vice president, several themes emerged. Statements from the participants are provided to draw upon their unique experiences and aid in the understanding of how candidacy in student government elections helped to shape the students' views of political participation.

This chapter is organized into four sections, which answer the three research questions of the study. The first section outlines the participants' motivations for running for president or vice president in student government elections. The second section describes the students' experiences during the campaigning process, while the third section illustrates what they learned throughout the election. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the participants' perceptions regarding future political involvement.

Motivation

Candidates for president or vice president in student government elections are striving to earn the highest leadership positions in their university's student government association. However, the candidates choose to run for a position for a variety of reasons. While compensation or other perks are often used to

incentivize participation in student government leadership roles (American

Student Government Association, 2013), interestingly none of the participants of

the current study noted that incentives influenced their decision to run for

president or vice president.[2] Instead, key motivators included having a vision for

change, wanting an opportunity for growth, being encouraged by their peers or

mentors, and feeling expected to run for the good of the organization.

Vision for Change

Carpenter (1972) found students joined student government to make

changes on their campus. Thus, it was not surprising to learn most of the

candidates interviewed for this study mentioned one of their reasons for running

for student government president or vice president was they saw things they

would like to change at their institution or within their student government.

David, a losing presidential candidate, wanted to run, because he felt there was a

lot of separation between the members of student government due to members not

knowing each other on a personal level. In order to effect positive change on

campus, David felt the organization needed to provide the members opportunities

to make deeper connections with their fellow senators. He explained:

If you're going to be debating on a floor against someone's idea, then that

individual is nothing more than that idea. But if you get to know that

---

[2] The interview protocol did not include any specific questions regarding incentives that would be provided to the participants if elected president or vice president.

person for what they're worth, for whom they truly are as a person, [then] you have a lot more respect for that person and that person's idea.

Thus, he ran on a platform to provide more teambuilding events and trainings for Student Senate members to interact on a one-on-one basis.

Similarly, James, a winning presidential candidate, felt he could bring change to the organization to help it work more effectively and efficiently. He "identified a lot of room for growth" and felt he could bring that positive change if he was in the role of president. His platform included points to transform the culture of student government to make it relevant for more students by shedding light on mental health issues and sexual assault on campus.

Haley, a winning presidential candidate, also hoped to bring change to the campus overall. She had assisted the student government president as Chief of Staff the year before running herself. From her vantage point, she "got to see the day-to-day life of the student body president and see how challenging it was. And see different areas where I thought maybe there could be some improvement." Her platform included plans to engage with the Texas Legislature on issues affecting college students, such as tax-free textbooks and increased mental health care on campuses.

Not only did the participants see student government as an avenue to make improvements on their campuses, they also felt confident in their individual ability to create that change. James demonstrated this belief by saying:

I thought that if I equipped myself with the right tools and I surrounded

myself with the right people, I could positively affect that change… Why

put your name in the hat if you don't have the utmost confidence in

yourself and in your team?

Similarly, Katie felt she had the expertise to be a good student government

president. She explained:

I have a lot of traits that are inherently political. I love people; I love

writing; I love public speaking; I love critically thinking about how we can

solve problems… So I think it all kind of came together for me. I had all

of these talents… I knew [running for president] was what I wanted to do.

Katie was confident in her ability to implement changes on campus, while

utilizing the student government presidency as a vehicle in which to make an

impact at her institution.

Tyler's vision for change was a bit different than the other candidates

interviewed. While the other students ran serious campaigns with the goal to win

their race, Tyler's intention was to poke fun at the election process by running a

satirical campaign. Having at least one satire president-vice president ticket on the

ballot is customary at his institution. Thus, Tyler and one of his friends decided to

take on these roles. When his presidential running mate pulled out two weeks

before the election, Tyler partnered with another presidential candidate. This new

running mate had originally wanted to run a serious campaign but decided to join

the satire team when his vice president chose to withdraw from the race. Even though Tyler did not enter the campaign with the intention to win (and did end up losing the election), he still had a vision for change. He wanted to make student government more applicable and encouraged the other candidates to do the same. He said:

> I only think there should be a satire campaign to remind people this isn't life or death seriousness… We can have fun in politics. It's not like we have to dress up all the time and talk in weird SAT words and just confuse people all the time. It can be fun. It can be relatable and digestible. I think it should be.

Tyler believed that running a comedic campaign could still serve an important purpose, forcing the serious candidates to make student government more relevant to the student body, so more people would turn up to vote. Although he did not truly want to win, he still ran in order to promote change within the student government overall.

Opportunity for Growth

A few of the candidates chose to run for student government president, because they saw it as an opportunity for growth. After interacting with some of the leaders within student government, Aaron, a winning presidential candidate, said their engagement was infectious and made him want to be involved. Early during his college career, he met the then student government president.

Reflecting on that interaction, Aaron said, "I was like, 'Hey! I want to be like

him.' I want to do what he's doing, because he seems to have his thing together,

his life together." He saw something in that student leader that he wanted to

emulate and felt student government was the opportunity to help him develop

those traits.

Similarly, David saw student government as a way to develop leadership

skills. When talking about why he ran for president, he said:

> The biggest reason I pursued the role as a student body president was
>
> more from a leadership standpoint… Individuals who have the ability to
>
> get a group of people together under them or with them rather – that's so
>
> much more attractive to me… I think those individuals [former student
>
> government presidents] have to be able to lead themselves well and not
>
> only themselves but also others.

He felt student government gave "people the opportunity to grow as individuals,"

and he wanted to grow through developing and practicing leadership skills

through the presidency. This finding supports Carpenter's (1972) research, which

found the potential for growth and development was a motivating factor for

students to join their student government organization.

Encouraged by Others

Although some candidates were motivated to run to gain specific skills, as

mentioned above, the most universal reason was that these students were

personally encouraged by others to run for their respective positions in student government elections. These interactions could have come very early, too. For example, José's first interaction with student government came from his freshman orientation. Some of the student leaders were staffing a table for student government and encouraged him to apply for their freshman intern program. He applied and was selected, which started his path toward student government president. Similarly, Caleb said he was urged to participate in student government by two of his mentors on campus. He explained:

> Like literally, when I say I was forced to do things, I didn't know no was an option. They literally forced me to run… [My mentor] had already started the application for me, and he was like basically put your name right here.

After Caleb was elected for his first position, he fell in love with student government and wanted to be one of the leaders of the organization. Positive support and encouragement from his friends and other members of student government gave him the motivation to run for vice president, twice.

Similarly, Haley was encouraged early on by a staff mentor on campus. However, her election had even greater import. At the beginning of her sophomore year, one of her student affairs advisors told her she needed to consider running for student government president because there had not been a female president in 15 years. Haley explained:

[He] sat me down as a very young sophomore… and said, "We need a girl as student body president. You need to think about that." And I was like, I'm only a sophomore!... And so I always had that little thought in the back of my mind, and he approached me again at the beginning of my junior year. And he was like, "Are you going to do this?" He was so incredibly influential.

Haley was grateful for her mentor's encouragement, which motivated her to run. She won her election and became only the fourth female student government president at her institution in 76 years.

While some of the candidates' encouragement came from friends or staff mentors, the entire student government organization pushed Aaron to run for president. Aaron explained that typically a student government organization has a group of five or six officers, where at least one of them will "rise to the ranks of president" in the natural flow of student leader transitions. However, at his institution, this was not possible that year. All of the current leadership team members were either graduating or were not going to be at the institution long enough for a full presidential term. Aaron said, "The organization actually just turned towards me and said, 'Listen, if you were to run with it, we would all support you, and we would all stand behind you.'… So I ran because the organization asked me to run." This endorsement from the student government's membership motivated him to take on the challenge of running for the position.

Significantly, Love and Miller (2003) reported one of the least effective strategies for increasing student government participation was the encouragement of current student leaders. Yet, as stated, this was not the case for the study participants. Encouragement from these key individuals played a critical role in their decision to run.

Some of the other candidates sought out the advice of others to reaffirm their decision to run for student government president or vice president. Jeremy went into his institution knowing he wanted to be part of student government. He reached out to one of his friends at the institution to ask when student government elections were typically held and then talked to several family members and friends to see if they were supportive of him running. He said everyone he consulted "confirmed that this felt like the right thing to do." Similarly, David met with several former student government presidents to "pick their brains" about the election process. He explained, "It was just a lot more of an individual decision while simultaneously consulting with others as to whether or not they thought it was the best idea and within my best interest." The guidance and encouragement he received from these former student leaders gave him the confidence to run for student government president.

"Expected"

Another motivating factor identified by some of the participants for running as a candidate for president or vice president was the feeling that they

were expected to run. Caleb, a winning vice presidential candidate, said a lot of people were asking him if he was going to run for vice president, as if it were "expected" of him. He had held several positions within his student government and was mentored by the then president. Another student was planning to run for VP, but the organization did not have confidence in the person's ability to serve in the position. Therefore, Caleb, with the encouragement of other members, decided it would be in the best interest of the organization for someone with student government experience and knowledge to serve in that role, so he chose to enter the race.

Katie's experience was similar in that she felt there were a lot of people who assumed she was going to run for student government president and offered to help her if she was a candidate. She said, "By the time my senior year rolled around, it was kind of an inevitable thing." She felt the choice to run was less her decision and more of an expectation that others had of her.

Each of the candidates who felt "expected" to run definitely wanted their respective positions for themselves. However, one of their largest motivations was not only just feeling encouragement from others but also feeling a responsibility to their organization and to their institution to run in order for a qualified candidate to be in these prestigious leadership positions.

Thus, the decision to run for student government president or vice president was not a choice the participants made alone. It was a culmination of

several factors: their belief that student government can make a difference; their interest in affecting positive change either on campus or within their student government; the opportunity for skill development; and the encouragement from others to run for office. These factors motivated them to dedicate a significant amount of time and energy into the student government elections process with the hopes of winning a prestigious leadership position on campus.

Nature of the Campaign Process

The development of a campaign for student government president and vice president involves strategy and lots of preparation. Several of the study participants viewed campaigning as a necessary evil or the means to an end in order to get the votes needed to win their respective position, while some seemed to truly enjoy the process. This section describes the candidates' experiences during their campaigns, including their support systems, approach to campaigning, the physical and emotional toll of campaigning, and the vulnerability of candidacy.

Campaign Support

All of the candidates spoke of the support they had through family, friends, and volunteers who helped them throughout their campaigns. Many of the candidates had structured campaign teams with volunteers who had assigned roles and responsibilities. David understood how large of a role his team played in the campaign. He said, "There was no way a campaign was going to be run well if I

didn't have a great group of people around me, and I did. I was so proud of the group of people I worked with." He recognized how much time and energy each of his team members put into the election and in supporting him. However, their work was not taken for granted. David explained, "It was *our* campaign; it was not *my* campaign. My last name may be on the ballot. But, it's just simply the collective effort of everyone in the group." He understood it took everyone on his team working together in order to accomplish their end goal.

Similarly, Katie's thoughts on her team demonstrate her appreciation of collective action as well. She said:

> There's so much to be said about having this diverse group of people working together toward the same ends. I think there's something really wonderful about being a part of something [campaign team] bigger than yourself that's working toward something [student government] that you really believe is good on behalf of something [university] that you really love.

Katie felt there was something powerful in the "sense of community" and camaraderie that comes from working on a campaign team with one's peers.

Several of the candidates felt so strongly about it being a team effort that they wanted their team members to play a role in developing their platform points and strategy for the campaign. James and his running mate structured their team where core members led various committees of student volunteers. Each team

member had the authority to set the vision for their portion of the campaign.

Similarly, Haley wanted her team to be friends and truly believe in her platform.

She explained:

> It was important to me that they were going to buy into what I was selling,
> and these people put their lives on hold for three months in order to
> campaign for you. And that's such an honor… I wanted them to play a
> role in creating the policy [points]. Because I think if you're going to be
> selling this, you have to be bought into it as much as I am. I want my
> people to be as passionate as I am.

Haley did not think she was "deserving of the caliber of people" on her team who
gave so much of their time and energy to support her dream. Therefore, she
strived to work as hard as she could to be the type of candidate that would make
her team proud.

Although the participants were truly appreciative of their supporters and
wanted to make their teams proud, some of the candidates realized they were also,
at times, too demanding or supercilious during their campaigns. When talking
about her interactions with her campaign team, Katie said, "I was so passionate
about every part of the process that I think I could have been more hands off than
I was – trusted people a little bit more to do their jobs." Similarly, José said there
were times when he needed to take a step back, swallow his pride, and not focus

too much on the details. At one point during the campaign, he was a little too assertive with his campaign team about accomplishing their tasks. He explained:

> One of my friends pointed out that you don't want to sever friendships or have something that you do affect you later on down the road. It was just making sure that I catch my pride back a little bit…and that I [do not have to] always be the one controlling things.

With this guidance, José chose to refrain from any behavior that would hurt the individuals who were supporting him the most.

Caleb noticed throughout the campaigning process that it was very easy to become "big-headed," because the nature of the campaign is to sell oneself as the best candidate for the position. Thus, it was easy to become conceited or self-interested when only talking about one's positive attributes and experiences. Aaron even went so far as to say that common traits of successful campaigners are narcissism and a "keen sense of center of attention." Therefore, it was difficult for some of the participants to balance the confidence needed to run a successful campaign, while not being too arrogant or assertive. Haley recognized this early on in her campaign and identified individuals within her team to advise her when necessary. She explained:

> I kept two people, my best friend and my sister. They were like my checkers… So, I had people there I said, 'I don't care what I'm doing. I don't care how much you think it's going to offend me. You need to tell

me when I'm doing something wrong, when I'm being annoying. Check

me.' And that was incredibly helpful.

The participants who had someone willing to "check" them periodically were able

to stay centered throughout the campaign and take a step back when necessary.

Thus, the candidates truly relied on their campaign teams for various types of

encouragement, support, and guidance.

Although the participants had a lot of support from their families, friends,

and campaign teams, they did not feel supported by their universities during the

election. Several of the candidates discussed how they were not given any

guidance from their institutions on how to build a successful campaign or what to

expect during the election process. James described this best by saying:

In my naïve thinking, I expected someone - I don't know who that

someone would have been, but I expected someone - to deliver to me in

nice packaging, a box. And in that box I thought that if I opened it up, it

would have my toolkit of how to successfully run for student body

president. That didn't happen, right? And I remember thinking to myself

after I made the decision [to run], what next? What do I do? ... I was asked

to do something from the ground up.

Similarly, Aaron said there were no safety nets available for candidates running

for leadership positions in student government elections. He said once a candidate

wins an election, there are resources provided through staff advisors and former

officers to help ease the transition into the new role. However, during the campaign, there was relatively no support provided from his institution. This perceived lack of guidance and assistance resulted in stress for the candidates as they had to determine the necessary steps to take on their own. James further explained:

> No one gave me a structure. No one told me who to ask to be my vice president. No one told me how to structure my team. No one told me when I was supposed to get the ball rolling. No one told me when to decide that I was going to run for student body president. So there [were] a lot of unanswered questions.

Thus, the candidates complained that there was no institutional support for them during the campaign. Deciding when to start their campaign preparations, how to select an appropriate running mate, how to structure their campaign teams, or how to develop their platforms were all decisions the candidates had to make on their own or seek out advice from former candidates.

Approach to Campaigning

In addition to establishing a support system during the election, each of the candidates also determined the approach he or she would take during the campaign. Their strategy development included decisions on how to stand out among their competitors, how to navigate campaign rules and regulations, and how to approach discussions about their opponents.

Several of the students talked to former candidates for president or vice president at their institution to gain insight or tips about the campaign. While Haley's winning effort did look to previous campaigns for guidance, she also wanted to do things differently that the candidates before her. She explained:

> I studied a lot of former student body president campaigns. I knew kind of a general outline of the way I wanted to do things…but I've seen this mentality [of] 'Well, that's the way we've always done it, so that's the way we're always going to do it.' I hated it. I wanted to be innovative, and I wanted to be different.

Jeremy also wanted his campaign to be different. He said, "We realized the student body doesn't want to vote for a politician. They want to vote for students." Therefore, he and his running mate were committed to not have a "cookie cutter" campaign and utilized videos, music, and a lighthearted tone in order to make their platform seem relatable to the student body. Nevertheless, Jeremy saw his campaign as "very serious;" it was their approach that was fun and embodied their personalities.

A large aspect of the students' campaigns was how closely they chose to follow the election regulations. Haley explained, "Our rules here for elections are insane – 30 pages of rules." The nature of the election policies varied by institution, but typically included guidelines on the time, place, and manner of campaigning, as well as expenditure limits. Violations of the rules could result in

fines, a spending cap, or even disqualification from the election. For some of the candidates, following the guidelines was a key part of their campaign. Katie explained, "The rules are really intense…So we really tried to stock up and make sure we were doing everything within the lines."

Some candidates spent a significant portion of their campaign defending their actions to election boards – committees of students that would hear cases of alleged campaign violations and assess punishments for candidates found guilty. James had several complaints filed against his campaign by other students, and he spent a lot of time defending himself and his team in front of the election supervisory board and the student government's Supreme Court. He explained:

> We had a complaint filed on us before public campaigning had even
>
> started – saying early campaigning for reaching out to people for their
>
> support. [The election board] ruled against us. We appealed… And
>
> another complaint was filed... There was just mudslinging like you
>
> wouldn't believe - complaint here, complaint there. It was just ridiculous.

While election violations and complaints are fairly common during hotly contested student elections, James felt his experience was especially "toxic" and the drama surrounding the election was at the forefront of his campaign process.

For some of the candidates who attempted to follow all of the election rules, it was disheartening to see others not take a similar approach. Jeremy struggled when he saw his opponents' campaigns get away with violations

without any form of punishment. Some of his opponents were found guilty of spending over the expenditure limits or campaigning outside of the allowable dates and times, but the fines and moratoria they were assessed did little to affect their campaigns negatively. He said:

> I think that was the most struggling thing to realize you can break the rules and still be okay… Watching rules being broken and nothing happened. So you question like why am I even being ethical? That's the upsetting part.

Thus, the students' experiences were greatly influenced by their decisions to adhere to the election rules, their observations of how their opponents' abided by the same regulations, and their perceptions of the equity surrounding penalties, or the lack thereof, for campaign violations.

In another aspect of their campaign approach, the students often had to decide whether they were going to focus on their own strengths or attempt to highlight their opponents' weaknesses in order to solicit votes. Then, they had to determine how to respond to their opponents' campaign tactics, choosing to fight fire with fire or allow some things to go without a response. After studying other student government president campaigns at her institution, Haley knew how intense the election process could be. She and her team chose to run an ethical campaign in which they could be proud. She explained:

This [campaign] is three months. And then if I'm elected this is one year of my whole life… We have to be able to live with what we've done. We have to live with our morals and all those things for the rest of our lives. So we are never going to do anything to compromise that… I knew I could go to sleep at night knowing that I was ethical, and I treated my competitors with kindness, in the way that I want to be treated.

Haley shared these sentiments with her campaign team and encouraged them to follow in her plan to run a clean campaign.

Similarly, José chose not to respond when his opponents would try to cast him in a negative light. Even when his campaign team would want him to take up for himself or lash out at the other teams, he decided not to react in a negative manner. José compared the situation to dealing with a bully in high school. He said, "They were trying to intimidate us; they were trying to make us feel belittled or make us feel like we didn't have a chance [to win.]" He knew his opponents were only trying to see how he would react, so he chose to not "feed the fire." He explained, "Is this really worth it? Is it worth it to tarnish our friendships… it's okay to just let some of these things go." At times he wished he could play the same game; however, in the end, he decided to uphold his morals and do what he felt was right.

I found it interesting that each candidate spoke of how they wanted to run a positive, clean campaign; however, they felt their competitors were unethical

and violated the election regulations. Yet, in this study, some of the participants were candidates at the same institution during the same election cycle, and thus opposed each other. As a result, the participants' contradictory views of their opponents' campaigns and their own ethical approaches may well have been biased. In order to protect the anonymity of the students, direct quotes to support this finding were not included. Though, it was an interesting conclusion that the students' perceptions of their opponents' campaign tactics differed from their opponents' intentions.

Physical and Emotional Toll

For many of the participants, campaigning for student government president or vice president was a complex process that required complete dedication and focus. When reflecting back on the nature of the campaign process, James said it was "just a complete and total blur, because it consumed [his] life for a year." Similarly, several of the candidates described the election experience as a 24/7 process, where they felt a constant need to be spreading their campaign message. Katie went so far as to say she was "obsessed" with the campaign and "felt an impetus to never sit down and be still" in order to find every opportunity to talk to students about her platform. Katie and her running mate even planned their class dates and times around their campaign. She explained, "[My running mate] and I actually registered our schedule so we would have classes on alternating days, so one of us would always be at our [campaign]

81

table." This allowed one of them to always be available to talk to students about their platform.

On the other hand, Jeremy implied it was not necessarily his choice to be so fixated on the campaign. By being a candidate, other people always seemed to turn the conversation toward the election. He said, "It kind of like turns into what everyone talks about with you… The campaign is your life." Jeremy soon realized the campaign would consume his life, whether he wanted it to or not.

Going to such great lengths to run for these leadership positions took quite a toll on most of the participants interviewed. James described the campaign as "the most draining thing" he had done in his entire life, both physically and emotionally. Caleb explained the election was "physically demanding" because "you walk miles around campus. You're always on your feet. You're always moving." Similarly, David felt the physical toll of the campaign when speaking at student organization meetings to secure endorsements. He explained:

> The speaking period was hilarious. I forget how many speeches I gave in a five-day period – I think it was upwards of 30 or 35... One night, I had one of my friends drive me from campus to sorority row, and I [spoke to] four or five sororities within the course of 20 minutes. I was sprinting from house to house… Then got back in the car, and he drove me back to campus for more meetings that I needed to speak to.

This quest for endorsements was a significant part of the campaign experience for several of the students. Haley talked to 75 organizations in 10 days and had two student organizations that pledged their public support of her campaign. Katie also received backing from a few prominent clubs and organizations. Although the act of securing support from these groups took its physical toll, the candidates fully believed in the power of an endorsement to assist their campaign efforts. Thus, they were willing to speak to as many student organizations as possible to communicate their platforms and ask for corroboration.

Other candidates sacrificed their health during the campaign. José explained, "There were times when I had sleepless nights or I wouldn't eat three meals a day." In order to staff tables or hold signs in high-traffic areas across campus while still upholding their academic obligations, the candidates felt there was no choice but to sacrifice sleep and nutrition. Haley described her experience by saying:

> I think back to it, and I don't really know how I was able to do it… It was so stressful. The last week of the campaign, I got six hours of sleep that whole week. I lost 20 pounds. I was living, breathing this campaign and the only reason I was able to keep going was just the sheer adrenaline and passion and drive.

Similarly, Katie lost 20 pounds and said her hair began to fall out during the election. Aaron pushed himself so hard that he was sick for over three weeks after the campaign ended.

From an emotional standpoint, the campaigns resulted in a lot of uncertainty and rejection. James said there were many nights that he would be working late with his campaign team. After they would leave, he would sit on his couch and cry, because he was so "emotionally exhausted." Comparing their own campaigns to those of their competitors caused the candidates to question if they had done enough or if they would win. The realization that they may lose was difficult to fathom. In addition, hearing students say things like "I don't care" or "I'm not going to vote for you" was emotionally draining for the candidates who were working so hard on their campaigns.

Vulnerability of Candidacy

Another aspect of the campaign that was difficult for the candidates was the feeling of being exposed and vulnerable while running for president or vice president. Jeremy acknowledged that the campaign process brought a lot of public attention. He said:

> I don't know if students realize it until they start the campaign, but it's your name on the t-shirts. It's your face on the profile pictures. And so it's just a lot of attention, and that's a lot to prepare for.

Several of the candidates mentioned how much of a risk they were taking by putting their name on the ballot and campaigning in student government elections. Although Haley won her election, she said, "[I felt] so much anxiety, because you're putting yourself out there. And there's a strong potential that you're going to lose." She hated to think about the possibility of defeat, especially when she was investing so much money, time, energy, and emotion into the campaign. Haley further explained, "I felt like I was asking [the entire student body] to marry me. It's a very vulnerable position to be in, and you have to be comfortable with that." Thus, Haley had to deal with the thought of losing the election and facing public rejection, if she wanted the chance to serve as student government president.

Some of the students' feelings of anxiety came from the campaigns being so public. Most student government elections are heavily covered by student media outlets, and some even garner local, regional, or national attention. Aaron explained this by saying:

> For all the reasons it [running for president] is exciting, it's also very scary. If you say something or mess up in some sort of way, there are very real ramifications… If you put your foot in your mouth, you have a much higher likelihood of ending up in the [city newspaper].

Aaron understood that as a candidate for such a prestigious leadership role on his campus, there were potential consequences of making a mistake during his

campaign. Not only was it possible for him to lose, but he could also be publicly criticized and embarrassed if the media identified or highlighted any errors in his platform or word choice.

Katie and Haley faced a lot of public questioning of their ability to succeed as student body president as female candidates. Katie experienced misogyny during her losing campaign and felt victimized by the student media on her campus. She said, "I think people were really quick to dismiss me as a leader, because I was a small, blonde girl in a sorority." She felt her credibility was questioned, even though she had more experience in student government than any of the other candidates running. From her experience during the campaign and after watching the Trump/Clinton presidential election coverage, Katie has a stronger conviction to support more women running for public office. She said:

> We do these things to tear down smart, capable women and it's not only not in their best interest, but it's not in our best interest…regardless of what side of the aisle you align yourself on, I think it's so important that we empower more women to run for office at all levels.

Katie wondered how many women or individuals in general were intimidated from running for public office on the university level or local, state, or national level based on the scrutiny she faced because of her gender.

Although Haley won her election, she also faced misogynistic comments during her campaign for president. In her quest to become only the fourth female

president in her student government's history, Haley modified her campaigning strategy because she knew a female candidate would be perceived differently than the male candidates. She focused on adjusting her speaking voice to a lower octave in order to not "put people off." As a woman in a campaign, she felt she could not let her opponents or the rest of the campus community "see me sweat," so she made it an effort to keep her "emotions very close to the chest." In explaining her experience during the campaign, Haley said:

> I shouldn't have to deal with the comments about being a woman. I shouldn't have to be told that I'm not going to vote for you because you're going to be hormonal when you're on your period…

While most of the candidates felt vulnerable during their campaigns, Katie and Haley felt they had another layer of analysis to manage.

As a result, some of the candidates felt they gained a "really thick skin" in order to handle the scrutiny they faced. Perhaps Haley described this sentiment best when she said:

> I had to get very comfortable with people not liking me for arbitrary reasons. "Her hair is curly, we don't like her." "She's a girl, we don't like her"… Or simply because they're supporting someone else, "we don't like her." So, I got a really thick skin throughout the process.

From her experience in the campaign, she realized that she could not take anything too personally or let others' words affect her outlook on the election.

87

Even Tyler, who ran a satire campaign on his campus, said it was very uncomfortable for him to put himself out there. He felt he was popular on campus, but he was "really, really scared for awhile." He said he was just expecting to be the "funny guy." However, as a candidate for vice president, he still had to participate in the serious aspects of the race by speaking in debates and forums with the other candidates. Although his campaign's end goal was not to win and he did not have as much of an emotional stake in the race, it was still a vulnerable position that came with a lot of public analysis and comment.

While the campaigning process was time consuming and took its toll on the candidates, each of them seemed to embrace the experience. They understood the stress of the election was only for a specified period of time and the possibility of being elected as president or vice president was worth the temporary physical and emotional toll. James explained:

> I think there's a lot of pressure on candidates… [But] when push comes to shove, and when an opportunity is being dangled in front of you that you want nothing more than to take advantage of, it's like the adrenaline set in – the tunnel vision. It's the only thing that you subscribe to.

This sentiment may explain why the participants were so willing to do whatever necessary to win their election. Their passion for creating change on their campuses gave them the motivation to persevere through one of the toughest experiences of their lives.

Lessons Learned

While the election process may have been overwhelming and stressful at times, each of the candidates expressed how much they learned from the experience of participating as a candidate in student government elections. James noted, "This has been the single best and most substantial learning experience I have had in my life to date… I learned more about myself during those six weeks than I have about myself in the preceding 22 years." Key takeaways from the experience included gaining self-confidence and public speaking skills, recognizing the power of student government to create change on campus, and realizing sometimes there are things beyond your control that impact your life. While previous research acknowledges the learning and growth available through participation in student government, this is the only known study to identify the learning that occurs through the election process.

Confidence

Several of the candidates mentioned how their experience as a candidate helped them gain confidence because other students placed their trust in them. After being elected into her first student government position, Katie felt proud to be known on campus for her connection to an organization that could affect so much positive change. She said, "I loved the election process. I loved that that was kind of my thing." She further explained, "It was cool to be known amongst my peer group for doing something positive." Even when she lost her election for

president, Katie still felt confident in what her and her team had accomplished.

She said, "Just because the outcome comes out one way, it doesn't invalidate all

that you've done… even though you didn't win, you really, really did contribute

and give something back." Similarly, Jeremy felt he learned a lot about himself

during the campaign and achieved a lot, even though he lost the presidency. He

said, "It was definitely the biggest thing I've ever gone for or tried to do…so I

was very proud of myself for that. Not many people can say they ran for student

body president." By taking on such a large challenge and pushing until the end, he

has more faith in himself to take on other obstacles in the future.

Caleb felt he gained confidence through students encouraging him to run

for student government vice president. When talking about what he learned from

the election, he said:

> [The election gave me] confidence that I could do the role as VP. A lot of
>
> people were showing confidence in me – telling me how good of a VP I
>
> would be, so it put a lot of confidence in me.

Their trust in him helped him believe in his ability to take on the leadership role.

Some candidates felt it was their skeptics who helped them to be more

self-confident. David realized that there would always be people to encourage and

discourage him. However, it was up to him to be his own biggest fan. He said:

> If I don't have the highest confidence in myself versus another candidate
>
> within an election or it can be something as simple as getting selected for a

job. If I don't convey the fact that I'm the most confident in myself in

completing the task for the mission at hand, then certainly that other

person on the other side of the table will not have the same confidence [in

me] that I will.

This sense of self-assuredness helped him through the election process, as he held

onto his belief in his own abilities and ignored those who were critical of him.

Most telling of all, James recognized the importance of being confident in

your true self. His campaign focused on storytelling and having each student

share their unique story or background. He and his running mate wanted students

to share their story, be vulnerable, and take risks. They did this through

encouraging other students to post videos on Facebook, sharing successes or

issues they had faced during their time at the institution. Those who participated

shared intimate, personal stories about their experiences with sexual assault,

mental health issues, standing up for what they believed, and even accepting

defeat. Through sharing his story and encouraging others to share theirs, James

learned through the campaign that he identified as a gay male. He said, "It was

something that I realized after having an internal dialogue with myself. And I only

had an internal dialogue with myself, because I was having so many external

dialogues with other people throughout that process." Thus, through his

campaign, James realized the importance of being authentic and having the

confidence to share personal pieces of your identity.

Public Speaking

While some of the candidates chose to run for student government

president or vice president because they saw it as an avenue for growth, other

candidates were pleasantly surprised of the skills they developed throughout the

election. The candidates' campaigns provided extensive opportunities for the

students to develop public speaking skills. José explained:

> I remember a year before [the election], I couldn't public speak in front of
>
> people at all, and I was very scared. I could never see myself doing that.
>
> But whenever you're running for president or vice president, you kind of
>
> have no choice but to publicly speak in places, especially when you're
>
> asking for votes.

Similarly, Garrett acknowledged that he did not necessarily like talking to people

or being around people for extended periods of time prior to the election. Though,

the campaign required him to engage with students one on one and in large

groups. He explained, "I'm more of an introverted person at heart, so always

having to be around people and talking to people is kind of naturally draining for

me." However, through the process of sharing his platform and communicating

the vision for his presidency, he became more comfortable with speaking to

others.

On the other hand, David felt the campaign reaffirmed his love for public speaking. Further, he realized throughout the election how important it was to have data or facts to back up everything he said. He explained:

> I learned how much I really enjoy public speaking and putting together a
>
> solid presentation and making that in front of a group of people… This is
>
> where I know this experience can benefit me many, many years from now.

Learning how to sell himself to a group of his peers was an experience he knew would be valuable in his future endeavors.

Carpenter (1972) found that many students join student government because they recognize membership provides the opportunity to learn transferable skills. This study demonstrates this growth can also occur throughout the course of gaining membership into the organization and during the campaigning and election process.

Power of Student Government

Another valuable lesson the students learned through their experience as candidates was the nature of the power of students to create change on campus. Much of the students' beliefs regarding student influence on university decisions had a close connection to how they perceived their administration's views of student government and its leadership. The participants realized most of their power came in the form of relationships with their university's administration.

Aaron felt his student government had a lot of power on campus, because the student leaders were "in a partnership" with the administration. Although his student government does not have any formal power, they are able to accomplish a lot due to the relationships they have built with the university president and his leadership team. This is supportive of the collaborative institutional philosophy toward student government as defined by McKaig and Policelo (1999), where administrators value students' participation in shared governance. However, Aaron also acknowledged that the administrators like working with the student leaders because of their ability to take the liability for administrator decisions. He explained:

> [The] administration listens… because what I have to say will benefit them in the long run. If they are making an argument and I agree with that argument and I say it, they can say students feel this way and that passes the liability off of them and onto us.

This statement is indicative of the approach where administrators only desire students to voice their opinions if they are in harmony with the institution's perspective (McKaig & Policelo, 1999). While some may think this implies the administration only works with the student government in order to help push their own initiatives, Aaron did not see it that way. He felt they were working together "for the right reasons" and utilizing integrated leadership to make positive change.

On the other hand, Caleb felt his student government was sometimes just used as a pawn in order to push the administration or the faculty/staff's agenda. His perceptions support the research of Lizzio and Wilson (2009), which identified a "hierarchy of engagement" (p. 76) to describe administrator views of student government. Caleb described one of the lower levels of the hierarchy, where staff members only involved students in decision-making to comply with institutional requirements. He said:

> Faculty and staff meet with us a lot so they can check it off their list that they met with us. A lot of time we get called in… after the decision's already been made. And so it's kind of pointless. Why are we here? Our opinion clearly doesn't matter.

Luckily, Caleb said the administration typically values the student government. He said, "The president of the university values our opinions a lot and so do the VPs… we get brought in a lot sooner to [conversations] on their initiatives." On bigger initiatives, the student leaders may be brought into the conversation too late, but typically are allowed to be part of the conversation.

Katie's perceptions of the power of student government shifted significantly during her election. Prior to running, Katie saw a lot of potential to create change by working with administrators. She explained:

> I have a lot more faith in the system than a lot of people do. I've been able to impact change within a system… My friends always joke I'm like

Leslie Knope [comedic main character in television show, *Parks and Recreation*, who is committed to city government] because I really believe in the system and the capacity to impact things.

She felt student government gave students a platform with a little leverage to work with administrators to make changes. However, after her election, Katie's perception was that the administration was divided. She felt some of them were encouraging of student involvement and were inspired by students' participation, which is indicative of the consumer relations approach or collaborative perspective identified by McKaig and Policelo (1999). However she felt other administrators perceived student government as a "nuisance." She believed some staff members thought, "How can we get these kids not to make us look bad or stop meddling in that?" This statement provides evidence of the public relations approach, where students can only express their opinions if they keep the university in a positive light. Katie summarized this by saying, "I think the administration is divided between people who want to see students make a difference and people who just want to manage the residual effects of whatever damage we might do." This caused Katie to lose some faith in authority and to not be as naïve in assuming everyone would be supportive of student involvement.

Several of the students felt their administration's views of student government were often the result of the high turnover of student leaders. Garrett explained it is often difficult to continue progress made on student issues,

"because there is such rapid turnover with student government." This sentiment supports previous research (Miles, Miller, & Nadler, 2008; Miller & Nadler, 2006), which found this to be one of the criticisms of student government. Thus, the participants believed it was important for students to have experience in student government in order to lessen the learning curve of incoming leaders. Similarly, Haley felt that her success as student government president was due to having established relationships with the administration prior to her term beginning. She said, "That made my transition so much easier because instead of walking in and saying, 'Hi, I'm Haley,' it was 'Hey, so good to see you again. Let's talk.'" This enabled her to hit the ground running to make changes on campus, because she had already garnered the trust of the administrators.

Tyler's views of the power of student government prior to running for student government vice president were indicative of him having no faith in the value of the organization. One of the reasons he ran a satiric campaign was to draw attention to the culture of student government, which he felt was "cut throat." He believed too much importance was placed on the top student leadership positions and because of this, the frontrunners in each election were willing to do anything to get elected in order to receive the perks that come with the positions, such as free tuition, monetary stipends, or opportunities to attend high-profile events. At one point during the election, he and his running mate started a petition to abolish the student government and had a lot of students

support their initiative. Thus, Tyler had no sense of external political efficacy or belief in the process of student government. However, by the conclusion of the election, Tyler's views had changed. He said, "I came out of it learning that maybe I do care more than I let on, at least about the governing body and students." He attended student government meetings for the next several weeks, read many of the bills they had passed in recent years, and even read a dissertation on the history of student government. He said, "Maybe if I would have cared as much as a freshman, I could have actually run an actual campaign [instead of a comedic one]." Hence, Tyler's sense of external political efficacy toward student government changed greatly throughout the election process. He grew to understand more about the process and became more engaged because of his involvement as a candidate in student government elections.

Overall, the students realized most of their success in creating change came not from the inherent power of the student government but from the relationships the student leaders developed with the administration. Aaron said, "Our influence is great, because our relationships are great." Therefore, the students felt the organization as an entity was only as powerful as the motivation and drive of the students within the group. James echoed this sentiment by saying, "The potential to make so much positive change happen on this campus, it really boils down to who's in these positions and what sort of work ethic and ambition

they bring to them." For that reason, he felt it was important to have students run who will take the positions seriously and use them to their full potential.

"Out of Your Control"

Finally, several of the candidates learned that sometimes there are things beyond your control that impact your life. Katie said she had always believed that if you worked hard, then everything would work out for you. Her entire college career had been preparing her to take on the student government presidency. She had served as a senator, wrote multiple pieces of legislation, and served as Chief of Staff for a former president's cabinet. Her campaign team was highly experienced, made up of volunteers who had served on the past three winning candidates' teams. She felt she had done everything in her power to prepare to be ready to take on the position and structure a campaign that would solicit the votes she needed to win. However, the negative outcome of the election was something she had not expected. She learned that she did not have as much control over things as she thought she did, and there were external circumstances for which she could not prepare. The initial election results were thrown out due to varying interpretations of an election rule that was allegedly broken by one of the candidates, and when the dates for the new election were set, Katie was out of the country. She said, "I was literally in India when I found out that we had to have a new election… It's like everything that ever, ever, ever could have gone wrong during our campaign absolutely did." Thus, she realized that all of her

preparations and good intentions were not enough to ensure a victory. She

explained, "This [was] the first time I was like 'Okay, there are circumstances

beyond my control that I can do nothing about that are going to influence

things.'"

Reflecting back on his campaign, Aaron felt similarly. Although he won

his election, there were things he would have liked to change about the

experience. His girlfriend at the time was not as encouraging as he would have

hoped, and those relationship struggles added to the stress he was feeling during

the campaign. In thinking about what he would have done differently, he

explained:

I would have chosen people who were going to support me

unconditionally… I thought I was looking for someone [as a significant

other] who had the same motivation or drive as I do… What I really

needed was a supportive, encouraging, compassionate individual.

However, he recognized that he handled everything the best he could in the

situation with the knowledge he had at the time. He said there were just a lot of

things "out of my control." He could not have anticipated how the campaign

would shine light on the problems with their relationship, and he just had to adjust

along the way.

While the candidates recognized how external circumstances could impact

their election experiences and results, they also believed things happened the way

they did for a reason. Although those that lost their elections were disappointed

with the results, they were still grateful for the experience and knew other

opportunities would be available to them. When talking about how he felt after he

lost his election, José said, "Don't be so set on it or think it's the end of the world

if you don't get it. The world's going to keep on going on. There are more things

that could be better opportunities." Similarly, Garrett said, "If you don't get

elected… you still have your whole life ahead of you. This isn't going to be…

your ultimate achievement in life." The candidates realized that the election

results were truly up to the student body. The only thing they could control was

the amount of effort they put into their campaigns. If they gave it their all and

things did not work out in their favor, they knew it was necessary to pick up the

pieces and move on to the next opportunity.

Although Katie lost her election for president, she too recognized that

would not be the defining moment of her life. While she was disappointed with

the results, she realized being a member of student government was not the only

way to impact the change she wanted to create on campus. In fact, one of the

largest impacts she made on campus happened after she had lost her campaign for

president and was no longer involved in student government. She worked with

administrators to create an endowment to provide monetary assistance to

survivors of domestic or sexual abuse. Katie explained:

I think a lot of making an impact [at your university] has to do with the

individual student [and knowing] how the systems work...I definitely

wouldn't have even known this was something that needed to be done, let

alone how to do it, had I not been in Student Government.

Thus, Katie saw student government as an avenue to learn the process of creating

change on campus but realized once she had that knowledge, she could make a

difference at her institution without the student government president title.

Overall, the participants were able to identify skills or lessons they learned

during the election process. Throughout their campaigns, they were presented

with opportunities to gain confidence, develop public speaking skills, and practice

navigating a political system. In addition, several of the students learned how to

handle defeat in a positive manner, recognizing that additional mechanisms to

impact change are available.

Perceptions of Future Political Participation

Research shows that participation in student government has been

connected to political participation in the future (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006). The

findings of this study show this connection may also be present between

candidacy in student government elections and future political engagement. From

their experiences as candidates, the students developed an understanding of their

valued role in a democratic society and how their student government experience

paralleled the experience of candidates in local, state, and national elections in

some ways. While the participants' perceptions of future political participation varied, each candidate felt their student government elections experience contributed to their beliefs of political engagement.

"How Politics Works"

Several of the candidates appreciated their experience as a candidate in student government elections, because it gave them an opportunity to learn more about the democratic process and practice political engagement in a safe environment. This supports previous research on the participation perspective, which recognizes that involvement in student government increases students' knowledge of the political process (Hahn, 1998: Print et al., 2002). José felt his student government elections experience provided him the opportunity to "get [his] foot in the door and understand how politics works." Similarly, Jeremy thought the experience was "eye opening" and gave him a taste of what elections are like at the local, state, and national level. He said:

> It did feel like a real glance… if I go into real politics when I'm older and if I run for office, this is kind of what it'll be like. So I'm happy that it gave me a kind of mini example of what real politics looks like and what real campaigns and elections look like.

By participating in student government elections as a candidate, he was able to gain first-hand experience of developing a platform, managing a campaign team, and soliciting votes from constituents.

Similarly, James felt he learned a lot about the democratic process, which inspired him to participate in politics after college. He explained:

> I think that I, as a person, am better equipped to run for public office at the city, state, and federal level than are my counterparts who haven't been in student government or haven't run their own campaigns based on the real time experiences that I've had and based on the opportunities that I've been given… Because of all of the opportunities it's provided me, I am more appreciative. I'm more grateful, and it inspired me to perhaps do something a little bit more.

His candidacy gave him an opportunity to participate in politics on the university level, which parallels the experience he will have engaging in the future. James' thoughts further support the research of Print et al. (2002), which found involvement in student government increases the likelihood of students participating in politics as an adult. James' felt his experience in student government elections motivated him to continue that involvement.

Haley felt politics has a negative connotation with the public, but through her experiences, she developed a different understanding. She explained:

> Politics is not necessarily a bad thing. People just hear 'politics,' think Republican and Democrat, and then think we're going to fight each other. There's politics in the workplace. There's politics in your classrooms.

> There's politics everywhere, and really politics is about dynamics – in
> working dynamics, in relationships.

She recognized politics, in and of itself, does not have to be destructive and is actually a necessity in working with others. Haley said she learned to "examine a situation through everybody's eyes and understand where everyone is coming from," before developing her stance on an issue. Thus, in learning how politics works – in student government elections and the "real world" – these students felt better prepared for a future in democratic engagement or even navigating interactions with others.

A Parallel Experience

A few of the candidates discussed the similarities between student government elections and local, state, or national elections in regard to voter turnout and constituency sizes. Student governments on large, public university campuses in Texas are representative of constituencies including anywhere from 20,000 to over 60,000 students. Garrett, who won his election for president, found a parallel between the number of students at his institution and the number of citizens in a small city or congressional district. He said, "The position I'm occupying right now could [represent] the same number of people that a mayor of some cities have to deal with." Similarly, Katie explained that more people voted for her for student government president, even though she lost, than the number of people who voted for the winning Senate candidate in some states. This

105

realization was inspiring for these students as they were able to comprehend the seriousness of their roles and the experiences they were able to gain through representing such a large number of constituents.

Overall, the candidates were able to identify many parallels between their student government campaigns and elections at the local, state, and national levels. Haley summarized this theme well by saying:

I have so much appreciation for those candidates, because I know on a very small scale how hard it was [to campaign]. And I can't imagine being a working professional doing all these things and wanting to serve your state, your city, your country. So, I have so much respect for those individuals, because I feel for them and I know on a small scale how stressful it was.

This newfound appreciation for public officials was possible through the experiences these students had as candidates. Without the firsthand experience of running a campaign at the university-level, the students may have never realized the impact they can have in society or the amount of time, energy, and strength necessary to serve in a representative role.

Even though all of the candidates stated they would continue to stay informed of what was occurring in the political world, the manner in which they planned to engage in politics in the future varied. Some students intended to be

highly involved by publicly supporting candidates or even running for office themselves, while other students demonstrated more pragmatic involvement.

Voting

Many of the candidates understood the importance of voting for the success of the American democracy and expressed frustration with others who did not see the value of their right to vote. Caleb was discouraged to see how apathetic his fellow students were during his election. As he campaigned, he came across students who chose to vote for candidates for what he thought were uninformed reasons. He said:

> People vote for one candidate over the other because that candidate gave them pizza. This person is now representing you! People don't care. They're uninformed when they vote…[They say,] "I voted for this person because my friends voted for this person." It just shows me how little they actually value their vote.

Similarly, Haley said she now understands the importance of people being informed when they vote and not taking their vote for granted. She believed it was important for voters to know what the candidates stand for and to take their vote seriously. People "writing in Harambe [a gorilla at the Cincinnati Zoo that was killed after a child fell into the gorilla's enclosure] for president" did not understand the value that should be placed on elections.

Garrett spoke a lot about civic duty and how important it is for everyone to take pride in our country. His experience as a candidate helped him understand how essential participation through voting is to a democracy. He explained, "It's helped re-affirm how important it [voting] is. It's a real time example where you know every vote counts." Garrett's election for student government president was very close, as he won by just over 100 votes. Therefore, he learned the value of each and every vote.

Similarly, James recognized the importance of voting, because his election as student body president was a direct result of others taking the time to vote for him. James was able to articulate this sentiment by saying:

> I am a product of civic engagement on a really small and really localized level. The opportunity that I am so grateful for is a direct product of civic engagement. So it had really put things into perspective. I've experienced firsthand the importance of voting, and I talk to people about that all the time.

From his experience as a candidate, he understood he was only able to serve in the role of president because other students valued their vote and took the time to cast a ballot for him. James' thoughts help explain Saha and Print's research (2010), on how running for a position in student government elections has been shown to add to students' political socialization over and above what occurs simply through

108

voting. The firsthand experience of being elected into a role due to others' votes helps to further sustain the importance of casting a ballot.

Since the participants saw how important voting was to them, they became very passionate about voter registration in order for other people to be eligible to vote in local, state, and national elections. Aaron explained, "When we're talking about enabling people to cast their decision and vote. Heck yeah! Let's go." Providing citizens the opportunity to engage in politics as voters was something the participants hoped to continue to assist with beyond college.

Engagement as a Supporter or Candidate

One area in which the participants differed was their views of volunteering in a campaign for a local, state, or national election. Several of the candidates had been involved, having worked on multiple campaigns during their junior high, high school, and university days. These students tended to anticipate their political engagement would continue, even if their student government election experience was not completely positive. Jeremy was instrumental in founding the High School Republicans of Texas organization, a statewide network. He had participated in several campaigns for a state representative race, two gubernatorial elections, and one presidential election – even travelling to a swing state to support his candidate. He planned to continue his political involvement in some manner. Similarly, Katie worked for the Clinton campaign and had the opportunity to shadow her press secretary. She said:

109

I would say moving forward, I plan to be involved in politics at least in

some capacity for the rest of my life if I'm able. I think that's the best way

that I can use my talents, to serve wherever I might find myself.

This sentiment was furthered by her intention to move to Washington, DC to

assist with the Virginian gubernatorial race upon graduation. After experiencing

misogynist comments during her own campaign and watching the 2016 U.S.

presidential election, Katie decided to turn down her other job offers and change

her career path to work to get more women in public office.

On the other hand, there were several candidates who specifically said

they did not plan to volunteer for any political campaigns. Although they

recognized the importance of having campaign teams and support from

volunteers, they were still unwilling to provide assistance for other candidates.

Some of the participants felt this way, because they understood the potential

disadvantages of publicly supporting a particular candidate or political party.

Haley explained:

I haven't volunteered on a campaign, because I kind of know what that

means in the future. Once you tie yourself to one candidate, you have that

on your resume forever. And there haven't been candidates in the area that

I feel strongly enough about.

Similarly, Tyler felt uncomfortable publicly stating his political beliefs. He

acknowledged that he had a lot of different friend groups who have varying

values and beliefs. He did not want to strain any relationships by supporting one particular ideology.

Other candidates did not want to publicly support one particular candidate or party, because they prefer to gather information on the candidates until the very end of the election. José agreed that he does not necessarily lean toward any particular party. Therefore, he typically would wait "down to the wire" to decide which candidate to support. Then he would engage and vote for the person he felt was most qualified.

While the candidates were not sure where their futures would take them, a few of the students felt it was likely that they would run for public office. José said, "I still want to participate in politics as much as I can… I want to represent the people… Putting myself into the position where I could actually make change." Similarly, James said he would not be surprised if he ended up in politics. He explained:

> I would be humbled beyond belief to serve as President of the United States. I'm not saying that I'm going to run, but I guess I'm not saying that I'm not going to run for it. I would be lying if I were to say that I never considered it, just because I've really been bit by the public service bug, if you will.

James said his dream job would be serving as a university president, but he would be open to launching a campaign for a congressman or senator, and then seeing where his political career took him.

Jeremy said he had wanted to run for public office at some point in his future. However, the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election caused him to feel as though he needed to re-evaluate and re-analyze everything. He explained:

> I just don't know what to think – with America's future, the Republican Party's future, and my future if I go into politics…. Do I want to go into politics? Can I even go into politics? What if politicians aren't a thing anymore? What if it's outsiders like Trump, so maybe I shouldn't get involved in politics until I want to run?

Jeremy's feelings of shock came just days after Trump was elected President of the United States. Based on the results, he was confused at what his political future would look like and what path he should take in order to set himself up for success in politics.

Overall, almost all of the candidates were able to articulate the importance of participating in politics and how much power each person brings to a democracy. These realizations support previous research on the development perspective, which refers to the ability of student government participation to help students create a civic identity where they realize they are valued participants in the democratic process (Youniss et al., 1997). Unfortunately, most of the

participants were still leery to publicly state their political ideology because of perceived potential repercussions from family members, friends, and employers. Universities do not incorporate American political parties into the student government election process, and thus the candidates do not gain any experience in navigating opposing viewpoints based upon party ideology. Thus, this may explain why the participants gained an appreciation of democratic engagement and staying informed on political issues through their student government experience, but many remained uncomfortable with publicly supporting a candidate or choosing a party through which to run for office.

Summary

In summary, candidacy in student government elections was perceived to be a valuable experience by the participants in this study. Key findings included the students' motivation for running for president or vice president, including the ability to impact change on their campuses, the opportunity to grow as an individual, or through encouragement from friends, family members, and mentors. In addition, the participants spoke of the nature of the campaigning process, which was impacted by the support systems the candidates had in place, their approach to abiding by election regulations, and the physical and emotional toll they experienced during their campaign. Through the election process, the participants gained self-confidence, public speaking skills, and knowledge on how politics works. Their experiences as candidates influenced their views on future

113

political participation and how they would choose to democratically engage after

college.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Higher education institutions play a large role in providing opportunities to learn about democratic engagement and launching students on a path toward future political participation. This is accomplished especially through participation in student government organizations. While there is significant research on the benefits of student government membership, there are few studies on the election process itself.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to fill a void in the literature on the experiences of candidates in student government elections. By examining the experiences of candidates for student government president and vice president at four-year, public universities in Texas, an understanding of the students' motivations for running, their perceptions of their experience, and the experiences' impact on their political efficacy was gained.

This chapter presents the key findings of the study and implications for practice, theory, and future research.

Summary of Findings

Qualitative methodology was utilized to understand the candidates' unique experiences in student government elections. Ten students participated in semi-structured interviews, answering questions on their decision to run for a leadership position in student government, the nature of the campaigning process,

lessons they learned during the election, and their views of future political

participation. The following section offers a summary of the findings specifically

connected to the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1

1. Why do students choose to run for a leadership position in student
   government elections?

The students chose to run in student government elections for a variety of

reasons. The most common motivating factors included having a vision for

change within the student government organization or for the campus as a whole,

feeling as though they could implement those changes, wanting to gain the skills

they saw demonstrated by other student leaders, being encouraged to run by other

students, and feeling expected to run for the good of the student government. The

desire to create change and to develop leadership skills was identified in the

literature (e.g., Carpenter, 1972) as possible reasons for students choosing to join

student government. However, the influence of other student leaders on the

candidates' decision to run was not found in previous research. In fact, the

findings of the current study completely contradict research (e.g., Love & Miller,

2003) that identified encouragement from other student leaders to be one of the

lowest influencers of joining student government.

Research Question 2

2. How do candidates describe their experiences of running for a leadership position in student government elections?

Each of the participants had unique experiences as candidates in student government elections. However, there were similarities in their perceptions of the campaigning process and key takeaways of their candidacies. All discussed the role of their families, friends, and campaign teams in assisting them during the election - providing emotional support, strategy development, and peer-to-peer advice. Unfortunately, the students did not feel supported by their institutions during their campaigns and wished there had been more resources provided on what to expect throughout the process.

The election rules and regulations were another significant part of the experience as the candidates chose how closely they would adhere to the guidelines and how they would respond if others violated the policies. Many of the participants strived to run clean, positive campaigns and were disheartened when their opponents allegedly did not take the same approach. When the participants perceived other candidates were able to break the election regulations without suffering any ramifications, they began to question if it was worth it to follow the rules and if doing so would negatively impact their chances to win their race.

In addition, almost every student elaborated on the stress of the election process. The time, energy, and focus required to run a successful campaign was physically and emotionally draining for the students, with several mentioning weight loss, hair loss, and fatigue as results of the experience. In addition, the students spoke of the scrutiny they faced while in the public eye. Having their name on the ballot sometimes brought public scrutiny resulting in comments about their ability to serve in the roles of president and vice president. The two female candidates faced another layer of criticism when they encountered misogynist comments because of their gender.

Finally, the candidates spoke in depth about how much they learned from the election process. From gaining confidence to developing public speaking skills, each of them identified key takeaways from the experience. One of the largest takeaways was the students' realization of how politics works. Through developing a platform, leading a campaign team, and soliciting votes, the participants gained firsthand experience in the democratic process. This resulted in an increased appreciation for engaged voters and public officials. However, the participants who had negative experiences during their student government campaigns also walked away with less faith in the system and in authority.

Research Question 3

3.   How do candidates describe their sense of political efficacy after participation in student government elections?

118

The lens of political efficacy (Campbell et al., 1954) provided insights into the participants' perceptions of the student government elections process as well as their views of engagement in local, state, and national politics. The candidates demonstrated internal political efficacy through choosing to run for a leadership position. They believed in their ability to take on one of the highest student leader roles at their institution and to impact positive change on their campus. Some of the candidates demonstrated external political efficacy through their belief that their institution's administration valued their input on university decisions and viewed the student government as a partner in the governance structure. However, some of the participants did not have a high sense of external political efficacy, because they felt their administration only consulted the student government when it benefited the university and attempted to control the damage that student leaders could cause through vocalizing their opinions. Although all of the participants may not have had the highest trust in their administration, the students' overwhelming sense of internal political efficacy was enough to prevail and keep them engaged in the political process at their institution. This supports previous research (Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993; Pollock, 1983; Shingles, 1981; Wollman & Stouder, 1991) on the importance of internal efficacy in predicting future political involvement.

In regard to their future political participation, the candidates differed in their plans to engage. Some candidates were confident that they would run for

119

public office and publicly support particular candidates or parties. Their student government elections experience furthered their passion for democratic engagement and gave them first-hand experience in navigating a political system.

On the other hand, some of the participants had little interest in pursuing careers in politics or publicly supporting candidates. Their interest in student government was not a rung on their political ladder or trajectory. It was an experience to gain skills, draw attention to an issue, or a unique way to be involved in campus life. The students felt uncomfortable tying themselves to one particular ideology or political party because of potential repercussions in their careers or dissonance within their friend circles.

The common take away from their campaign experiences was that all the participants gained firsthand experience in engaging in a political system as candidates. This led to a greater understanding of the importance of voting and staying informed on political issues. They saw the benefit of democratic engagement and encouraging others to participate through voter registration and voter mobilization efforts.

Implications

The findings of this study hold implications for practice, theory, and research as described below. The chapter concludes with a reflection regarding the significance of the study.

Practice

This study highlights the learning that occurs during the election process and the physical and emotional toll that is placed upon the candidates. However, several of the students discussed feeling uninformed and unsupported by staff during the challenging campaigns. They were expected to run large-scale, complex campaigns without any guidance on what to anticipate or what steps they should take to be successful. This finding suggests that student affairs practitioners must offer guidance and resources to candidates to provide them the support needed to meet the challenges of the election. Institutions should inform students of what to expect during the campaigning process and provide opportunities for candidates to seek counsel if the stress of the election becomes overwhelming. Further, candidates may feel better equipped to manage the election process, if the administration offers in-person sessions on campaign tips and strategies, a website listing resources available on campus, and an email or phone number students can utilize to ask questions of the current election staff. These steps could reduce the stress and feelings of unpreparedness experienced by the participants of this study.

Many of the candidates in this study mentioned the difficulty of running a clean, positive, rule-following campaign when they perceived others violated the campaign regulations without punishment. In order to uphold the integrity of the election process and encourage those who follow the institution's campaign

guidelines, universities need to hold students accountable for their choices during the election. By not imposing any type of penalties for failure to follow the rules, the institution is, in effect, reinforcing this negative behavior. Creating an ombudsman position to assist with overseeing campaign behavior could be helpful in ensuring students understand the importance of the election regulations and abide by them.

Theory

This is the first known study to apply the theory of political efficacy to student government elections at the university-level. Usually, political efficacy is used to describe participation in local, state, or national politics. Thus, by utilizing external and internal political efficacy as the lens in which to view the experiences of the candidates, the theory was extended. In order to apply the theory to this level of political engagement, I had to redefine internal and political efficacy (Balch, 1974; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990) to fit the context of this study. While internal political efficacy typically describes citizens' beliefs in their ability to engage in political systems, for the purposes of this study, internal efficacy explained the participants' beliefs in their ability to run as candidates for president or vice president in student government elections. Similarly, while external efficacy typically refers to the responsiveness of the political system on citizen demands, the current study defined external efficacy as the participants' perceptions of the value of student government at their institutions, specifically on

122

the organization's level of power to change things on campus to better meet students' needs.

Through adapting the assumptions of the theory to match the student government realm, the theory was able to help explain why students may choose to run for student leadership positions, as the participants expressed their belief in themselves to serve in the roles of president or vice president (i.e. high internal political efficacy). In addition, several of the students perceived student government to be a vehicle for change on their campuses (i.e. high external political efficacy). Other students perceived their student government's level of power to be fairly weak, dependent upon the students in leadership positions to establish working relationships with administrators (i.e. low external political efficacy). These perceptions of student government seemed to translate to the participants' views of future political participation, either further inspiring an increased level of engagement in politics or satisfaction with only voting in major elections.

Future Research

Because this study only represents the experiences of 10 candidates for student government president and vice president at four, large, public four-year institutions in Texas, there are many ways to expand this research. This can be accomplished by examining the experiences of candidates from a variety of institution types, sizes, and locations. It is possible that institutional characteristics

have an impact on students' involvement in student government elections. In addition, future studies should include students running for various positions in student government, beyond president and vice president. There could be differences in the experiences of candidates based on the position in which they are vying.

Future research should explore how the demographic characteristics of candidates influence the students' election experience. Gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age may play a role in how the students perceive their experiences. This study only included two female candidates, but their experiences were different based on both the reason behind the encouragement (e.g., Haley was inspired to run to be only the fourth female president) and the misogynistic comments they faced during the campaign. More research is needed to determine if these findings were specific to their experiences or are common for female candidates. This study also only included traditional-aged students. Therefore, more research is required to know if nontraditional students would view their election experiences in a similar manner.

In addition, future studies could examine the experiences of non-domestic students or students with immigrant parents. One of the participants of this study seemed to have a much greater appreciation for political participation, because of the hope and belief in the system that his immigrant parents taught him. It is possible that international students or students with immigrant parents may view

the election process differently because they value their ability to participate more than domestic students.

Another potential research topic is to explore satirical campaigns for student government leaders in more detail. One of the participants of this study had a unique perspective on the election process due to his campaign being focused on illuminating the negative aspects of student government. More research is needed to determine if this is a common practice during student elections or if it is centralized at this one institution. Further, exploring these types of campaigns might shed light on the effect satiric campaigns on the role of student governments at these institutions and the campaign themselves.

Although this study noted the use of incentives to encourage participation in student government, it did not specifically analyze how compensation or other perks may affect students' motivations for running or their campaign experiences. Therefore, future qualitative and quantitative research could compare student elections at institutions where the winning candidates receive compensation versus campuses that do not rely on these perks. Do these incentives change the candidates' motivations, the election process, or the role of the student leaders? Do these leaders develop similar beliefs about their internal and external political efficacy as students who were not compensated in the same ways?

Finally, because this study was qualitative in nature and limited to only 10 participants, it is recommended that the themes identified be explored on a more

general basis. A quantitative instrument could be developed which incorporates the feelings of stress the candidates felt during their campaigns, the learning outcomes identified, and the students' sense of political efficacy to assess the extent to which other candidates experienced similar things during their student government election process. In addition, future research might explore the differences between winning and losing campaigns on political efficacy and expectations of future engagement. Finally, follow-up studies that check back with these candidates in five and/or 10 years to see if their expectations had been met would reveal if their involvement in college did help usher in a life-time of political engagement.

Concluding Reflection

Participation in student government has been known to provide opportunities for skill development and opportunities to engage in a democratic process at the university level. However, little was known about the process in which students gain membership into the student government organization. Thus, by employing qualitative research methods, the experiences of 10 candidates for student government president and vice president were explored. Their perceptions of their experiences helped provide a deeper understanding of the student government election process. The findings of this study yield insight into these students' political views and thoughts on future democratic engagement.

126

Understanding how young adults perceive political participation and understand

the political process is essential for the success of the American democracy.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Let's start by having you tell me a little about yourself.

   a. Why did you choose to attend [institution]?

   b. Tell me about your family [e.g. parents, siblings] or who you lived with as you were growing up. Were they engaged politically? Describe.

2. Describe your previous experience participating in elections during elementary, middle, or high school.

   a. Did you vote? For what positions? Who or what influenced your decision to vote?

   b. Did you run for office? For what positions? Who or what influenced your decision to run for office?

   c. Did those experiences shape your views of participation in student government elections? In what ways?

3. Tell me about your leadership experiences here at [institution], especially in regard to your involvement in student government.

   a. Think back to the first campus election you participated in as a candidate. What position did you run for? How did you find out about student government elections?

   b. What were your expectations of the election process before you filed for the position?

4. (If the participant's first election was for a position other than president or vice president) What were your experiences during that first election?

   a. What was your approach to campaigning?

   b. What support systems did you have in place? [e.g. the role of family, friends, other students, faculty, and staff] How did they help you?

   c. Did you win or lose this election? How did this outcome influence your views of the election process?

   d. What did you learn during your experiences in your first student government election?

5. Why did you choose to run for [Student Congress President or Vice President] in student government elections?

   a. Who or what influenced your decision to run? How did they influence your decision?

   b. How would you describe your emotions once you decided to run?

      i. Were you excited about running this time? Why?

      ii. Were you scared or worried about running or [position] for any reasons? Why?

6. (If the participant has not already described this experience.)Tell me about your experience as a candidate for [Student Congress President or Vice President] in [the most recent] student government elections?

a. What was your approach to campaigning (i.e. soliciting votes)?

b. What support systems did you have in place? What did they do to support you?

c. What were your expectations of this election? (e.g., the process, your campaign, the opposition) What led to these beliefs?

d. What did you learn during your experiences in this election? About yourself? About your university? About the election process? About democracy/politics overall? Did anything surprise you?

e. What would you do differently if you could do it over again?

7. What are your perceptions of the value of student government at your institution?

a. Other students' perceptions?

b. Administration's perceptions?

c. Faculty/staff perceptions?

8. How would you describe your student government's level of power to make changes on the campus? Provide some examples.

9. Describe your experience participating in local, state, or national elections.

a. What have been your experiences with voting in local, state, or national elections? (e.g. first time to vote, how often have you voted, for what positions)

b. What did you consider before deciding to vote?

c. Describe your experience in assisting with a campaign for local, state, or national elections? (e.g. volunteering your time, donating money)

d. What influences your views of political participation? Media? Family/friends? In what ways does it influence you?

10. Has your student government elections experience shaped your views of political participation in local, state, or national elections? In what ways?

a. How do student government elections compare to local, state, or national elections? [e.g. in relation to filing for office, campaigning, the voting process]

11. What would you tell someone who is considering running for a position in student government elections?

12. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience as a candidate in student government elections that we haven't already discussed?

Appendix B

Potential Universities for Participant Selection

Institution Name	Enrollment (Fall 2015)
Sam Houston State University	20,031
Texas A&M University	58,515
Texas State University	37,979
Texas Tech University	35,546
University of Texas at Arlington	37,008
University of Texas at Austin	50,950
University of Texas at Dallas	24,554
University of Texas at El Paso	23,308
University of Texas at San Antonio	28,787
University of Texas – Pan American	28,584
University of Houston	42,704
University of North Texas	37,175

Note. Adapted from the Total Enrollment Public University data file from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2016. Retrieved from http://reports.thecb.state.tx.us/ibi_apps/WFServlet.ibfs

Appendix C

Facebook Message

Hello,

My name is Jennifer Fox, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Arlington. I am conducting a study for my dissertation, which is an examination of the experiences of presidential or vice presidential candidates in student government elections at four-year public institutions in Texas in 2015 or 2016.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study, which includes completing a 10-question pre-screening background questionnaire that should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. I will also conduct individual interviews with approximately eight qualifying participants who completed the pre-screening survey. The interview will take place in person or through Skype, based on the student's availability, and last 60-90 minutes.

If you are interested in participating, please send me your email address, and I will send you more information about the study.

Thank you,
Jennifer Fox
jdfox@uta.edu
469-245-8754

Appendix D

Introductory Email

Dear [insert name],

My name is Jennifer Fox, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Arlington. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for my dissertation research, which is an examination of the experiences of candidates in student government elections at four-year institutions in Texas. You were sent this email because you recently participated as a candidate for student government president or vice president at your university.

Participation in the Study:
Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence. This study is conducted in two parts. You may or may not be asked to participate in all parts of the study.

The first part is a 10-question pre-screening background questionnaire. It will only take 5-10 minutes of your time. For the second part of the study, I will conduct individual interviews with approximately eight qualifying participants who participated in the pre-screening survey. The interview will take place in person or through Skype, based on the student's availability, and last 60-90 minutes.

Should you be willing to participate in the study, you will need to read through the disclosure statement that appears on the first page of the questionnaire and click the "Yes" button. Doing so is considered the equivalent of providing your signature on a consent form. Otherwise, you will not be permitted to participate. Upon consent, you will be taken to the online questionnaire asking about your general background as well as your candidacy information in student government elections.

Possible Benefits of the Study:
From this research on candidates in student government elections, more can be understood concerning the experiences of students participating in the election process during college and how those experiences influence students' views of future political participation. Findings from this study could benefit institution administrators as they establish election policies and practices that seek to increase participation in politics. Your experiences may assist in understanding how young adults view democratic engagement overall.

To proceed to the questionnaire, click here.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at jdfox@uta.edu, or my UTA dissertation chair, Barbara Tobolowsky, at tobolow@uta.edu.

Thank you for your participation! To participate in the 5-10 minute questionnaire, click here.

Jennifer Fox
469-245-8754
jdfox@uta.edu

Appendix E

Pre-screening Questionnaire and Consent Form

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS: THE EXPERIENCES OF
CANDIDATES
AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL EFFICACY

Jennifer Fox, Ph.D. Candidate
The University of Texas at Arlington

INTRODUCTION

My name is Jennifer Fox, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Arlington. I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for my dissertation research, which is an examination of the experiences of candidates in student government elections at four-year institutions. You were sent this email because you recently participated as a candidate for student government president or vice president at your university.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to understand why students choose to participate as candidates in student government elections and how they perceive their experiences. This pre-screening questionnaire will help identify those potential participants whose student government elections experiences meet the basic criteria for inclusion in this study. The interview portion of the study will allow the researcher to better understand the students' experiences through conversation.

DURATION

The first part of the study involves completing a 10-question pre-screening background questionnaire. It will only take 5-10 minutes of your time. For the second part of the study, I will conduct individual interviews with approximately eight qualifying participants who participated in the pre-screening survey. The interview will take place in person or through Skype, based on the student's availability, and last 60-90 minutes.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

Approximately, 30-40 students who participated in student government elections as a candidate for president or vice president in 2015 or 2016 at a large Texas public institution will be invited to complete the background questionnaire (N=40). Individual interviews will be conducted with eight individuals, in total, who completed the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the individual interview.

141

PROCEDURES

You are requested to:

1. Provide your consent to participate in this questionnaire by clicking the "yes" button below.
2. Answer the questions in the survey. (You are not obligated to answer every question.)
3. Provide your consent to participate in an individual interview by clicking the "yes" button below.
4. Participate in an individual interview. (You are not obligated to answer every question.)

If you are selected to continue to the interview stage, you will be contacted via email with instructions regarding further participation.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

From this research on candidates in student government elections, more can be understood concerning the experiences of students participating in the election process during college and how those experiences influence students' views of future political participation. Findings from this study could benefit institution administrators as they establish election policies and practices that seek to increase student participation in politics. Your experiences may assist in understanding how individuals view democratic engagement overall.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort, please inform the researcher. You have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION

No compensation will be offered for participation in this questionnaire.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

There are no alternative procedures offered for this questionnaire. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. All data collected from this study will be stored in office 103G of Trimble Hall on the UT Arlington campus for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without

naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although you rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, The University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
Questions about this research study may be directed to Jennifer Fox, Ph.D. student at UT Arlington, jdfox@uta.edu. I can be reached at 469-245-8754. You can also reach Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, Faculty Advisor, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, UT Arlington. She can be reached at tobolow@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration, Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

CONSENT
By clicking "Yes" below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this questionnaire and to participate in the interview portion if selected to do so by the researcher. By clicking "Yes" you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

- o   Yes, I give my consent to participate in the questionnaire and interview.
- o   No, I do not want to participate.

Q1 School classification: (Select the most appropriate response)

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Graduate student

Q2 Major:

Q3 Hometown:

Q4 Have you been a candidate for student government president or vice president in student government elections?

Yes, for president

Yes, for vice president

No

Q5 In which semester(s) did you run for student government president or vice president? (Select all that apply.)

Prior to 2015

Spring 2015

Summer 2015

Fall 2015

Spring 2016

Summer 2016

Q6 In your most recent election for student government president or vice president, did you run as an individual, as part of a ticket, or as a slate of candidates?

Individual

Part of a ticket for president and vice president only

Slate of Candidates / Political Party system

Q7 In your most recent election for student government president or vice president, did you win or lose?

Win

Lose

Q8 Did you serve as a member of your collegiate student government prior to your election for president or vice president? If so, for how many semesters?

No, I was not a member prior to running for president or vice president.

Yes, 1 semester.

Yes, 2 semesters.

Yes, 3 semesters.

Yes, 4 semesters.

Yes, 5 semesters.

Yes, for more than 5 semesters.

Q9 Which positions have you held in your student government? (Select all that apply.)

Senator or general member

Committee chair

Executive board member

President

Vice President

Q10 Would you like to be considered as a potential interview participant? (Selecting "yes" does not obligate you to participate, nor does it guarantee that you will be selected to participate. Selecting "yes" indicates you would be willing to participate if requested to do so by the principal investigator.)

Yes

No

Please provide the requested information below in order for me to contact you.

Thank you!

Name

Phone

Email

Best time of day to reach you

Appendix F

Email Invitation to Participate in an Interview

Dear [*insert name*],

My name is Jennifer Fox, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Arlington in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies conducting dissertation research. The study is designed to gain a greater understanding of how the experiences of student government candidates may influence student views of future political participation.

Thank you for participating in the first phase of this study through completing the introductory questionnaire. I would like to invite you to participate in the second part of the study by participating in an individual interview. You have been purposefully selected to participate in an interview because of your former candidacy for student government president or vice president.

Possible Benefits of the Study:

From this research on candidates in student government elections, more can be understood concerning the experiences of students participating in the election process during college and how those experiences influence students' views of future political participation. Findings from this study could benefit institution administrators as they establish election policies and practices that seek to increase student participation in politics. Your experiences may assist in understanding how individuals view democratic engagement overall.

Participation in the Study:

I recognize that your experiences as a candidate for student government president or vice president are in the past. As such, you are being invited to take part in a personal interview to recall your experiences as a candidate. Some follow up from me via email, phone calls, and or text can be expected if there is clarification needed on any of your interview responses.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or quit at any time at no consequence. Every attempt will be made to ensure that your identity and private information is kept confidential.

If you are still interested in participating in an interview, please email me at jdfox@uta.edu with your availability. We can then set up a day and time to either meet face-to-face or communicate via Skype.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at jdfox@uta.edu or my UTA dissertation chair, Barbara Tobolowsky at tobolow@uta.edu.

Thank you for your participation!

Jennifer Fox
469-245-8754
jdfox@uta.edu

Appendix G
Phone Call Invitation to Participate in an Interview

Hello [*insert name*],

My name is Jennifer Fox, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Texas at Arlington conducting dissertation research. The study is designed to gain a greater understanding of how the experiences of student government candidates may influence student views of future political participation.

Thank you for participating in the first phase of this study through completing the introductory questionnaire. I would like to invite you to participate in the second part of the study by participating in an individual interview.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or quit at any time at no consequence. Every attempt will be made to ensure that your identity and private information is kept confidential.

If you are still interested in participating in an interview, can we set up a day and time to either meet face-to-face or communicate via Skype?

 [If no, thank them for their time and end the call.]

[If yes, offer available dates/times that I am available to find common availability, schedule the interview, and continue on with the script.]

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at jdfox@uta.edu or my UTA dissertation chair, Barbara Tobolowsky at tobolow@uta.edu.

I will send you an email reminder of our scheduled date/time.

Thank you for your participation!

Jennifer Fox
469-245-8754
jdfox@uta.edu

Appendix H
Codes Used in Analysis

Research Question	Code	Description
1 – Motivation	CHA	Vision / Change
	BE	Be like other student leaders
	ENC	Encouraged
	EXP	Expected
2 – Experiences	TEAM	Campaign team
	THICK	Gaining a thick skin
	BIG	Big head – check me
	TOOLKIT	Need toolkit or safety net
	RULES	Campaign rules
	MORAL	Clean, positive campaign
	OBS	Obsession with campaign
	DRAIN	Draining – physical & emotional
	VULN	Vulnerable
	FEM	Experience of female candidates
	L – CON	Gaining confidence
	L – SPEAK	Learning public speaking skills
	POWER	Power vs. relationships with admin
	ADMIN	Hierarchy of engagement
	CONTROL	External circumstances
3 – Political Efficacy	IE	Internal political efficacy
	EE	External political efficacy
	PART	How politics works
	COMP	Compare campaigns
	TURNOUT	Voter turnout
	APPR	Appreciation for candidates
	VR	Voter Registration
	MAT	Voting matters
	VOICE	Everyone deserves a voice
	NO CAMP	No campaign volunteering
	CAMP	Campaign volunteering

References

Abrahamowicz, D. (1988). College involvement, perceptions, and satisfaction: A study of membership in student organizations. *Journal of College Student Development, 29*(5), 233-238.

Agboh, D. K. (1994). The use and impact of computer technology on political elections. *ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society, 24*(1), 21-27.

Agger, R. E., Goldstein, M., & Pearl, S. (1961). Political cynicism: Measurement and meaning. *Journal of Politics, 23*(3), 477-506.

Alabama Student Party v. Student Government Association of the University of Alabama, 867 F.2d 1344 (11th Cir. 1989).

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

American Student Government Association. (2013). *SG Salary Survey*. Retrieved from

http://www.asgaonline.com/me2/dirmod.asp?sid=50B5B95D65A5499394 85AECEB5FFF00F&type=gen&mod=Core+Pages&gid=46AA0269CCD B4D9FB291F27581A56562

Astin, A. W. (1977). *Four critical years*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College and Student Personnel, 25,* 297-308.

Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San

      Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. (2001). Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations:

      Snowball research strategies. *Social Research Update*, *33*. Retrieved from

      http://citizenresearchnetwork.pbworks.com/f/accessing+hard+to+reach+p

      opulations+for+research.doc

Balch, G. (1974). Multiple indicators in survey research: The concept "sense of

      political efficacy." *Political Methodology, 1*(2), 1-43.

Berman, S. (1997). *Children's social consciousness and the development of social

      responsibility*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

Berry, J. M., Portney, K. E., & Thomson, K. (1993). *The rebirth of urban

      democracy*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute.

Botzek, G. (1972). They got what they asked for. *College Management, 7*(5), 8-

      10.

Buckley v. Valeo, 424 U.S. 1 (1976).

Buller, J. L. (2014). The two cultures of higher education in the twenty-first

      century and their impact on academic freedom. *AAUP Journal of

      Academic Freedom, 5*. Retrieved from http://www.aaup.org/file/Buller.pdf

Campbell, A., Gurin, G., & Miller, W. (1954). *The Voter Decides*. Evanston, IL:

      Peterson Row.

Carpenter, G. (1972). College student government as a leisure pursuit. Long

Beach, CA: California State College.

Coates, A., & Coates, G. H. (1985). *The story of student government in the*

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Professor

Emeritus Fund.

Coder, J. G. (2005). The vote is in: Student officer campaigns deserve first

amendment protections. *Journal of College and University Law, 31*(3),

677-708.

Conway, M. M. (1985). *Political participation in the United States*. Washington,

DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and*

procedures for developing grounded theory. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

Publications.

Craig, S. C., & Maggiotto, M. A. (1982). Measuring political efficacy. *Political*

Methodology, 8(3), 85-109.

Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A

report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior, 12*(3), 289-314.

Cress, C. M., Astin, H. S., Zimmerman, B., Oster, K., & Burkhardt, J. C. (2001).

Developmental outcomes of college students' involvement in leadership

activities. *Journal of College Student Development, 42*(1), 15-29.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cuyjet, M. (1994). Student government as a provider of student services. In M. Terrell & M. Cuyjet (Eds.), *Developing student government leadership* (pp. 73-89). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dahl, R. (1961). *Who governs?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dias, M. H. (2009). *The leadership perspectives of former student government presidents and the post-college impact of the presidency*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI Number: 3349576)

Dempsey, P. (2000). Student elections online: Dickinson Colleges uses technology to get out the vote. *Educause Quarterly, 23*(3), 48-51.

Edwards-Levy, A. (2014, November 21). Millenials really don't think everybody should vote. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/21/young-voters_n_6200852.html

Eller, Jr., T. R. (1949). *Student control since 1795: The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill*. Chapel Hill, N.C.

Ferrall, V. E. (2011). *Liberal Arts at the Brink*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Finifter, A. W. (1970). Dimensions of political alienation. *American Political Science Review, 64*, 389-410.

Finkel, S. E. (1985). Reciprocal effects of participation and political efficacy: A panel analysis. *American Journal of Political Science, 29*(4), 891-913.

Flint v. Dennison, 488 F.3d 816 (9th Cir. 2007).

Fraser, J. (1970). The mistrustful-efficacious hypothesis and political participation. *Journal of Politics, 32*(2), 444-449.

Freidson, E. (1955). *Student government, student leaders, and the American college*. Philadelphia, PA: United States National Student Association.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Galston, W. A. (2001). Political knowledge, political engagement, and civic education. *Annual Review of Political Science, 9*(4), 217-234.

Galston, W. A. (2004). Civic education and political participation. *Political Science and Politics, 37*(2), 263-266.

Giroux, T. (1974). Student government – A put-on? *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 58*(384), 1-2.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hahn, C. L. (1998). *Becoming political: Comparative perspectives on citizenship education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Harding, T. S. (1971). *College literary societies: Their contribution to higher education in the United States 1815-1876*. New York, NY: Pageant Press International Corp.

Hawkins, B. W., Marando, V. L., & Taylor, G. A. (1971). Efficacy, mistrust and political participation: Findings from additional data and indicators. *Journal of Politics, 33*(4), 1130-36.

Horowitz, H. L. (1987). *Campus life: Undergraduate cultures from the end of the eighteenth century to the present*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Kathlene, L., & Choate, J. (1999). Running for elected office: A ten-week political campaign simulation for upper-division courses. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 32*(1), 69-76.

Kocher, E., & Pascarella, E. (1988, April). *The effects of institutional transfer on status attainment*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Kuh, G D. (1994). *Student learning outside the classroom: Transcending artificial boundaries.* Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 79*(5), 540-563.

Laosebikan-Buggs, M. O. (2006). The role of student government: Perceptions and expectations. In M. Miller and D. Nadler (Eds.), *Student governance and institutional policy: Formation and implementation* (pp. 1-8). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Lewis, K. M., & Rice, T. W. (2005). Voter turnout in undergraduate student government elections. *Political Science and Politics, 38*(4), 723-729.

Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2009). Student participation in university governance: The role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(1), 69-84.

Love, R., & Miller, M. (2003). Increasing student participation in self governance: A comparison of graduate and undergraduate student perceptions. *College Student Journal, 37*(4), 532-545.

Macedo, S., Alex-Assensoh, Y., Berry, J.M., Brintnall, M., Campbell, D.E., Fraga, L.R., & Walsh, K.C. (2005). *Democracy at risk: How political choices undermine citizen participation, and what we can do about it*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Mariani, M. D. (2007). Connecting students to politics through a multi-class campaign simulation. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 40*(4), 789-794.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.

May, W. P. (2010). The history of student governance in higher education. *College Student Affairs Journal, 28*(2), 207-220.

McClamrock, D. H., Meyer, W. J., & Spencer, M. R. (1990). Alabama Student Party v. Student Government Association of the University of Alabama: The First Amendment and student-government election campaign speech in public universities. *Journal of College and University Law, 16*(4), 649-676.

McKaig, R., & Policello, S. (1999). The institutional context: Student government as a part of institutional governance. In T. N. Torok, *Advising student governments: Models for practice and strategies for success* (pp. 1-5). Columbia, SC: NACA Educational Foundation.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* (4th ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, J. M. (1997). *Student leader perceptions of increasing participation in self-governance.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Retrieved from https://login.ezproxy.uta.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.uta.edu/docview/304361460?accountid=7117

Miles, J. M., Miller, M. T., & Nadler, D. P. (2008). Student governance: Toward effectiveness and the ideal. *College Student Journal, 42*(4), 1061-1069.

Miles, J. M., Miller, M. T., & Nadler, D. P. (2012). Are you voting today?

    Student participation in self-government elections. *Eastern Educational*

    Journal, 41(1), 3-15.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A*

    sourcebook of new methods (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller, M. T. and Nadler, D. P. (Eds.). (2006). *Student governance and*

    institutional policy formation and implementation. Greenwich, CT:

    Greenwood/Information Age.

National Association of Secretaries of State. (1999). *New millennium project –*

    phase I: A nationwide study of 15-24 year old youth. Alexandria, VA: The

    Tarrance Group.

Niemi, R. G., & Associates. (1974). *The politics of future citizens*. San Francisco,

    CA: Jossey-Bass.

Niemi, R. G., Craig, S. C., & Mattei, F. (1991). Measuring internal political

    efficacy in the 1988 national election study. *American Political Science*

    Review, 85(4), 1407-1413.

Niemi, R. G., & Junn, J. (1998). *Civic education: What makes students learn?*

    New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Otten, C. M. (1970). *University authority and the student: The Berkeley*

    experience. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Oxendine, B. (1999). Electronic elections. *Student Leader*, Spring 1999.

    Retrieved from

    http://www.asgaonline.com/ME2/Audiences/dirsect.asp?sid=7F31AE8077

    DB44A5A60AF114B68E9153&nm=Home&AudID=B7353D3A67F945B

    58C57DBC83B9C459E

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students*. San

    Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and Democratic Theory*. New York, NY:

    Cambridge University Press.

Plutzer, E. (2002). Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources, and growth in

    young adulthood. *American Political Science Review, 96*(1), 41-56.

Pollock, P. H. (1983). The participatory consequences of internal and external

    political efficacy: A research note. *The Western Political Quarterly, 36*(3),

    400-409.

Powell, G. B. (1986). American voter turnout in comparative perspective.

    American Political Science Review, 80(1), 17-43.

Powers, D. M. (2009). The constitutional implications of expenditure limits in

    student government elections. *College Student Affairs Journal, 28*(1), 124-

    137.

Print, M., Ornstrom, S., & Nielsen, H. (2002). Education for democratic processes

    in schools and classrooms. *European Journal of Education, 37*(2), 193-

    210.

Print, M., Saha, L., & Edwards, K. (2004). *Youth electoral study – report 1:*

    Enrolment and voting. Sydney: Australian Electoral Commission.

Print, M., Saha, L., & Edwards, K. (2005). *Youth electoral study – report 2:*

    Youth, political engagement and voting. Sydney: Australian Electoral

    Commission.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American*

    community. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Read, B. (2005, May 13). Vote early, vote online. *The Chronicle of Higher*

    Education, A27.

Robinson, J. P., Rusk, J. G., & Head, K. B. (1968). Measures of political attitudes.

    Ann Arbor, Institute for Social Research, 50-52.

Ropers-Huilman, B., Carwile, L., & Barnett, K. (2005). Student activists'

    characterizations of administrators in higher education: Perceptions of

    power in "the system". *Review of Higher Education, 28*(3), 295.

Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American college and university: A history*. Athens, GA:

    The University of Georgia Press.

Sabin, J. E., & Daniels, N. (2001). Managed care: Strengthening the consumer

    voice in managed care. *Psychiatric Services, 52*(4), 461-464.

Saha, L. J., & Print, M. (2010). Student school elections and political

 engagement: A cradle of democracy? *International Journal of Educational*

 Research, 49(1), 22-32.

Shier, M. T. (2005). The way technology changes how we do what we do. *New*

 Directions for Student Services, 2005(112), 77-87.

Shingles, R. D. (1981). Black consciousness and political participation: The

 missing link. *American Political Science Review, 75*, 76-91.

Somers, W. (2003). *Encyclopedia of Union College history*. Schenectady, NY:

 Union College Press.

Springer, M. J. (2014). *How the States Shaped the Nation: American Electoral*

 Institutions and Voter Turnout, 1920-2000. Chicago, IL: The University of

 Chicago Press.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

 Publications.

Stoecker, J., Pascarella, E., & Wolfe, L. (1988) Persistence in higher education: A

 9-year test of a theoretical model. *Journal of College Student*

 Development, 29(3), 196-209.

Sullivan, J. R. (2012). Skype: An appropriate method of data collection for

 qualitative interviews? *The Hilltop Review, 6*(1), 54-60.

Teixeira, R. A. (1992). *The Disappearing American Voter*. Washington, DC: The

 Brookings Institution.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2016). Total enrollment public

   university [Data file]. Retrieved from

   http://reports.thecb.state.tx.us/ibi_apps/WFServlet.ibfs

Torok, T. N. (1999). *Advising student governments: Models for practice and*

   strategies for success. Columbia, SC: National Association for Campus

   Activities Educational Foundation.

Tuene, H. (2001). *Universities as sites of citizenship and civic responsibility:*

   United States study. Philadelphia: International Consortium for Higher

   Education Civic Responsibility and Democracy.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). Voice and equality: Civic

   voluntarism in American politics. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

   Press.

Weber, J., & Hengartner, U. (2009). *Usability study of the open audit voting*

   system helios. Retrieved from http://www.jannaweber.com/wp-

   content/uploads/2009/09/858Helios.pdf

Welker v. Cicerone, 174 F. Supp. 2d 1055 (CD. California, Eastern Division,

   2001).

Willis, L. J. (1997). The unconstitutionality of expenditure limits in public

   university student elections. *The Journal of Law & Education, 26*(1), 171-

   178.

Wollman, N., & Stouder, R. (1991). Believed efficacy and political activity: A

    test of the specificity hypothesis. *Journal of Social Psychology, 131*(4),

    557-567.

Yamamoto, M., Kushin, M., & Dalisay, F. (2016). Social media and political

    disengagement among young adults: A moderated mediation model of

    cynicism, efficacy, and social media use on apathy. *Mass Communication*

    and Society, *20*(2), 149-168.

Youniss, J., McLellan, J. A., & Yates, M. (1997). What we know about

    engendering civic identity. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 40*(5), 620-

    631.

Biographical Information

Jennifer Fox is passionate about all levels of education and has been working in higher education as a student affairs professional for over five years. She received her Bachelor's in Accounting (2011) and Master's in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies – Higher Education (2013) from The University of Texas at Arlington. Jennifer currently lives in Arlington, Texas where she advises the Student Government at UT Arlington.

Jennifer plans to extend the research of her dissertation by exploring the student government elections process at other institutions, specifically the experiences of female candidates for president or vice president. Other research interests include: collegiate student leadership development, the perceptions of student government at higher education institutions, and predictors of democratic engagement in young adults.

In her spare time, Jennifer enjoys playing the fiddle and singing in her family's country and western band.