

The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work
and Building Tools for Resilience

by

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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

**The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student
Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience**

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Abstract

TIFFANY MARLENE SHIERLING: The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience

This dissertation explored the psychological challenges student conduct administrators (SCAs) face in higher education. These professionals have encountered significant emotional labor, vicarious trauma, and ethical dilemmas as they address student misconduct while striving to achieve educational and developmental outcomes. The study highlighted a research gap concerning the impact of these challenges on the mental well-being of SCAs, which hinders the development of effective support systems. This study aimed to address the mental health needs of SCAs by developing a comprehensive toolkit. Grounded in self-compassion theory and resilience theory, the toolkit provides resources for emotional self-regulation, supervisor training, and institutional recommendations.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who have undertaken the demanding role of student conduct administrator. Your resilience and commitment to fostering ethical campus environments warrant recognition, as does your need for self-care amid the complexities of their responsibilities. Furthermore, I offer this dedication in memoriam to my Aunt Jen, and with deep gratitude to my Uncle Jon, whose early encouragement instilled in me the value of higher education. I cannot forget my grandfather, who always hoped we would get a good education. This is for him, knowing his dream came true.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures	xi
Chapter I: Introduction.....	2
Background	3
Significance of Study	7
Rationale.....	8
Conceptual Framework	11
Self-Compassion Theory	12
Resilience Theory	14
Purpose of the Study	16
Research Questions	19
Assumptions	20
Definitions of Terms	21
Organization of the Dissertation	23
Summary	24
Chapter II: Literature Review	25

Historical Context of Student Conduct	25
Resilience in the Organizational Context.....	27
Psychological Impacts: Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout, and Vicarious Trauma	29
Cross-Professional Perspectives.....	30
Mixed-Methods Approaches to Understanding Professional Experiences	31
Gap in Literature	31
Summary	32
Chapter III: Methodology	34
Introduction	34
Purpose of the Study	34
Research Questions	35
Research Design.....	35
Context and Setting of the Study	36
Population and Sample.....	37
Instrument.....	37
Data Collection Procedures	39
Ethical Considerations.....	41
Data Analysis	42
Limitations and Delimitations.....	43
Summary	44

Executive Summary	46
Abstract	46
Problem Statement and Significance.....	46
Problem and Context	46
Significance and Rationale	47
Research Questions	50
Literature Review	50
Results and Analysis	52
Quantitative Results and Analysis.....	52
Qualitative Results and Analysis.....	55
Discussion	58
Results of Research Questions	59
Implications for Practice	61
Recommendations for Practice.....	62
SCAs.....	62
Supervisors	63
Association of Student Conduct Administrators	63
Areas for Improvement for Future Studies	64
References.....	67
Appendix A: Permission to Study ASCA Members.....	73

Appendix B: Emails to Gain Study/Participant Entry	74
Appendix C: Survey.....	76
Appendix D: Survey Informed Consent	81
Appendix E: Survey for Interview Interest.....	82
Appendix F: Interview Protocols – Interview Questions.....	85
Appendix G: Interview Informed Consent Form.....	86
Appendix H: Recruitment Flyer.....	88
Appendix I: IRB Protecting Human Subjects Certificate	89
Appendix J: Documentation of Professional Review	90

List of Figures

Figure 1: Burnout Predicted by Support	54
Figure 2: Burnout Predicted by Self-Care	54

Chapter I: Introduction

Student conduct administrators (SCAs) operate at the intersection of institutional risk, legal compliance, and student development, while navigating psychological demands that have significantly impacted well-being for as long as student conduct has been a profession. SCAs in higher education navigate distinct psychological demands, stemming from emotional labor, exposure to vicarious trauma, and complex ethical considerations involved in managing student misconduct while upholding developmental and educational goals. Chernoff (2016) stated, “Professionals in student affairs—especially those working in student conduct and related areas—who cultivate self-awareness may play a key role in reducing turnover in the field and enhancing overall job satisfaction” (p. 140).

Despite the growing recognition of burnout and compassion fatigue in higher education staff, there remains insufficient research specifically examining how the disciplinary nature of student conduct work impacts mental well-being outcomes for these professionals. This gap in understanding has prevented institutions from developing targeted support mechanisms and interventions that could improve retention, job satisfaction, and effectiveness of conduct professionals, ultimately affecting the quality of the student conduct process.

Furthermore, this emotional strain has contributed to elevated turnover rates in the profession. As Ferraino (n.d.) noted, the “College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) reports turnover is at an all-time high since it started doing research” (p. 1). Although Ferraino addressed student affairs broadly, the relevance of this concept extends to SCAs who operate in that domain. In some cases, staff turnover is so severe that institutions maintain open job postings year-round. This persistent understaffing often results

in increased workloads for remaining SCAs, which can negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being.

SCAs often find themselves navigating a persistent tension in their professional roles. On one hand, SCAs are expected to engage students through educational and individualized approaches that promote personal growth and accountability. On the other hand, they must adhere to strict compliance with institutional policies and federal regulations, which introduces potential for legal scrutiny and litigation. This duality creates a complex emotional landscape.

As Miller (2018) observed, conflicting demands can place SCAs in a vulnerable emotional state, potentially compromising their mental and physical health and straining interpersonal relationships. The need for intentional well-being support in the profession is further underscored by Miller's assertion that SCAs have experienced shifts in their interactions and relationships with students, largely due to increased anxiety and stress stemming from a more legalized adjudication system. This concept highlights how legalistic pressures embedded in student conduct work can intensify stress and emotional fatigue, emphasizing the urgency for systemic wellness interventions tailored specifically to SCAs.

Background

Mental health of SCAs is shaped by a constellation of factors that extend beyond their daily decision making. Although SCAs routinely determine case outcomes, sanctions, and student enrollment status, SCA's well-being is also impacted by deeper systemic and emotional dynamics. Among these dynamics are the persistent exposure to trauma narratives, which places SCAs at risk for vicarious trauma (VT) and secondary traumatic stress (STS). These conditions, often associated with helping professions, arise when professionals internalize the emotional weight of others' experiences (Noor et al., 2025). SCAs frequently engage with students who

disclose incidents of sexual assault, mental health crises, and violence, making SCAs vulnerable to symptoms such as emotional numbing, hypervigilance, and intrusive thoughts.

Chronic exposure to others' trauma and crises puts SCAs at risk for long-term psychological effects such as compassion fatigue, burnout, STS, and VT. Compassion fatigue is characterized by both emotional and physical symptoms, including anxiety, depression, and cognitive shifts, and can lead to illness and even increased mortality among helping professionals (Beaton & Murphy, 1995 as cited in Figley, 2002). These symptoms are echoed in more current literature that documents "empathy-based strain" (Vega, 2019, p. 299) as a contributor to declining mental health in caregiving roles, particularly in higher education and human services (Vega, 2019).

Burnout, as defined by Maslach et al. (2001), is a syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, remains a pressing concern. In a study by Winfield and Paris (2022), higher education professionals, especially those in student-facing roles, reported high levels of emotional exhaustion and role overload, with many professionals citing inadequate institutional supports as a factor contributing to burnout. These conditions not only impact on job satisfaction and retention but also undermine the effectiveness of conduct work.

STS, a condition in which professionals begin to experience symptoms mirroring posttraumatic stress disorder due to exposure to others' trauma, is particularly relevant to SCAs. As Figley (2002) explained, STS manifests through intrusive thoughts, avoidance, hypervigilance, and emotional numbing. SCAs have increased responsibilities in areas often exposed to narratives of trauma, violence, and grief, making them vulnerable to STS.

Title IX is one such area in which there is a high level of exposure to narratives that can make an SCA vulnerable to STS. Miller (2018) shared, “Historically, addressing campus sexual violence and sexual harassment has never been easy or without challenge, but the complexity of responding to and addressing these issues has significantly increased” (p. 49). Title IX reports may encompass a wide range of disclosures, including incidents of sexual assault occurring during a student’s enrollment and trauma experienced prior to matriculation, such as during high school or earlier.

STS has direct implications for SCAs, given the frequent overlap between Title IX procedures and student conduct processes. In some institutional contexts, Title IX coordinator and SCA roles are held by the same individual, further intensifying the emotional and procedural demands of the position. Beyond this dual-role configuration, SCAs may also engage with Title IX cases as hearing officers, investigators, or report reviewers, with each role requiring synthesis of sensitive information and navigation of complex legal and ethical considerations. Although not exhaustive, these intersections underscore the multifaceted nature of student conduct work and its potential to contribute to psychological strain through repeated exposure to trauma-laden narratives and high-stakes decision making.

VT involves shifts in one’s belief systems and worldview due to repeated exposure to traumatic content and also poses a serious risk. McCann and Pearlman’s (1990) foundational definition was supported by more recent research that found VT can lead to existential distress, diminished job satisfaction, and coping difficulties (Madill et al., 2018). SCAs are especially vulnerable to VT due to their involvement in multidisciplinary teams such as behavioral intervention teams and threat assessment teams. These teams are convened when institutions evaluate whether a student poses a potential threat to the campus community. In such contexts,

SCAs are often tasked with synthesizing and responding to complex, trauma-laden narratives shared by students. This repeated exposure to emotionally charged content, coupled with responsibility of making high-stakes determinations, places SCAs in a psychologically demanding position that can significantly impact their mental health and professional sustainability.

Although these conditions have been increasingly recognized in counseling and social work professions, they have remained significantly underexplored and undersupported in student affairs, especially in the student conduct field. Research has shown SCAs are more likely to encounter trauma-laden content than other student affairs professionals and may feel isolated or unsupported when managing the emotional labor required in their roles (Davis, 2024). This discrepancy underscores the need for targeted research, resources, and institutional support to better equip SCAs for the emotional demands of their work. Despite these known risks, there remains a significant gap in resilience-building training and wellness-focused interventions tailored to SCAs. Much of the current literature has focused on student development outcomes or professionalism in the conduct field, but the well-being of the professionals themselves is often overlooked (Davis, 2024).

In addition to trauma exposure, SCAs face systemic institutional pressures that complicate their roles. Lack of autonomy is a recurring concern, especially when senior leadership intervenes in conduct decisions. Davis (2024) emphasized misunderstandings about the conduct process among campus stakeholders often result in unrealistic expectations and scrutiny, which undermine the educational intent of conduct work. These institutional dynamics contribute to role ambiguity and professional invalidation, further intensifying emotional labor.

Compounding these challenges are the legal and compliance demands embedded in student conduct administration. SCAs must navigate complex regulatory frameworks such as Title IX, FERPA, and the Clery Act, all of which carry significant procedural and emotional weight. The threat of litigation, whether through student complaints, parental involvement, or institutional liability, can have a profound psychological impact. As Miller (2018) stated, researchers have shown psychological efforts by employees lead to burnout.

Taken together, these factors illustrate the multifaceted nature of stress in student conduct work. The intersection of trauma exposure, institutional power dynamics, and legal compliance creates an environment where emotional labor is both intense and underrecognized. This background underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions that support the mental health and resilience of SCAs.

Significance of Study

SCAs fulfill multifaceted roles in higher education institutions, often acting as policy enforcers, educators, advisors, referral agents, and emotional support systems for students navigating challenging behavioral issues (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016). Positioned on the front lines of campus mental health and safety, SCAs regularly engage in emotionally charged interactions that demand high levels of emotional labor. Although their commitment to student advocacy is often a source of professional fulfillment, it also incurs substantial psychological costs.

Bernstein Chernoff (2016) noted, “Helpers may encounter a wide variety of stressors in his or her job or role responsibilities” (p. 4), a reality especially true for SCAs who manage student distress, conduct cases, and institutional accountability. Recent studies have affirmed this reality, showing student affairs professionals—including SCAs—have experienced heightened

levels of stress, burnout, and psychological strain due to increased mental health crises, legal pressures, and limited campus resources (Rickey, 2024).

The significance of this research lies in its dual impact: it not only contributes to the academic literature on emotional labor and resilience in higher education but also offers a practical intervention institutions can implement to improve staff retention, job satisfaction, and quality of student conduct processes. By grounding the toolkit in self-compassion and resilience theory, and tailoring it to the lived experiences of SCAs, this study moved beyond generic wellness strategies to provide targeted, actionable support. Ultimately, this research affirmed the importance of recognizing and addressing the hidden emotional costs of accountability in student conduct work. It advocates for a paradigm shift in how institutions support SCAs—not merely as policy enforcers, but also as professionals whose well-being is essential to the educational mission of higher education.

Rationale

The rationale for developing a toolkit for SCAs stemmed from a convergence of research highlighting the emotional toll of student conduct work and absence of targeted, profession-specific interventions. Although SCAs face risks such as burnout, STS, and VT, existing institutional responses often rely on generalized wellness strategies that fail to address the unique demands of conduct administration. Toolkit-based interventions have been successfully implemented in other professions with similar stress profiles. For instance, wellness modules for crisis responders and litigation retreats for physicians have demonstrated structured, evidence-informed resources can reduce emotional exhaustion and improve professional efficacy (Minges, 2025).

By adapting these models to the student conduct context, this study proposed a toolkit that integrated both individual and systemic support strategies. The inclusion of self-compassion theory provided a framework for emotional regulation and recovery, and resilience theory offered guidance on building adaptive capacity through promotive factors such as peer support and supervisory relationships. The toolkit's design was informed by empirical data collected from SCAs, ensuring relevance and applicability. Implementation was supported through professional associations and institutional partnerships, with evaluation metrics focused on usability, perceived impact, and changes in stress-related outcomes.

SCAs in higher education are uniquely positioned at the intersection of student support, disciplinary procedures, and institutional risk management. As a result, SCAs are frequently exposed to emotionally charged incidents such as sexual misconduct, threats of violence, mental health crises, and cases involving substance abuse (Jed Foundation, 2021). Over time, repeated exposure to these high-stakes situations and trauma-laden narratives may place SCAs at significant risk for compassion fatigue, burnout, STS, and VT.

These psychological risks are not merely theoretical concerns; these risks have tangible consequences for both individual SCAs and the institutions they serve. SCAs experiencing chronic emotional strain may face reduced job performance, impaired decision making, and diminished capacity for empathetic engagement with students. Over time, this trauma can lead to increased absenteeism, professional disengagement, and ultimately, attrition from the field. The loss of experienced SCAs not only disrupts continuity in student support and disciplinary processes but also places additional strain on remaining staff, perpetuating a cycle of burnout. Moreover, when SCAs are emotionally depleted, quality of student interactions and

developmental outcomes may suffer, undermining the educational mission of the conduct process itself.

Despite growing awareness of mental health concerns in higher education professionals, a gap persists in the availability of targeted interventions or institutional resources specifically for SCAs. Existing scholarship has begun to explore the emotional toll of student affairs work, particularly in relation to burnout, compassion fatigue, and STS. Studies such as Chernoff's (2016) have identified elevated stress levels among SCAs, especially those involved in Title IX investigations and behavioral intervention processes. Research by Winfield and Paris (2022) further highlighted the prevalence of emotional exhaustion and role overload among student-facing professionals in higher education. Although these studies offered valuable insights into the psychological challenges faced by SCAs, they have often focused on isolated aspects of the role or broader student affairs contexts, leaving a gap in a comprehensive, profession-specific understanding. Moreover, few studies have translated these findings into actionable interventions tailored to the unique demands of student conduct work.

Building on this foundation, it became evident a more targeted and holistic approach was needed to address the specific mental health challenges faced by SCAs. This absence presented a critical gap in both professional support and development. From a research perspective, there has been a lack of comprehensive, empirical inquiry into the mental health experiences of SCAs, particularly regarding the cumulative effects of emotional labor and trauma exposure. Although related fields such as counseling and social work have well-established frameworks for understanding and mitigating these risks, the student conduct profession has remained underrepresented in scholarly discourse. From a practice standpoint, few institutions have offered wellness interventions or resilience-building resources tailored to the unique demands of

student conduct work. By bridging these gaps, this study aimed to contribute both to academic literature and development of practical tools that enhance professional sustainability and well-being among SCAs.

If left unaddressed, the mental health challenges faced by SCAs may have far-reaching implications for both individual practitioners and institutional effectiveness. The emotional toll of conduct work can compromise SCAs' ability to engage in developmental conversations, make sound decisions, and maintain professional boundaries. This toll not only affects the well-being of SCAs but also undermines the integrity of the student conduct process, potentially diminishing its educational value and eroding trust among students. Furthermore, high turnover rates resulting from burnout and compassion fatigue disrupt continuity in conduct operations and strain institutional resources. Therefore, addressing these challenges is essential not only for supporting the professionals who carry out this work but also for preserving the quality and consistency of student conduct practices across higher education.

This absence of targeted resources underscores the need for this study, which sought to address the mental health challenges faced by SCAs through the creation of a comprehensive, evidence-informed toolkit. By centering SCAs as individuals navigating complex emotional labor in high-stakes institutional environments, this research affirmed the importance of integrating resilience-building strategies and systemic support structures as foundational elements of professional sustainability in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks, self-compassion theory and resilience theory, which, together, offered a holistic lens for understanding the emotional experiences of SCAs. Self-compassion theory, developed by Neff (2011), emphasizes

the importance of treating oneself with kindness during moments of stress or failure, fostering emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Resilience theory, as articulated by Zimmerman (2013), conceptualizes resilience not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic process shaped by internal strengths and external supports. These frameworks provided a foundation for exploring how SCAs navigated emotional labor and built adaptive capacity in the face of professional challenges.

Self-Compassion Theory

This study was grounded in Neff's (2011) theory of self-compassion, as presented in her foundational work *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*. Neff argued self-compassion offers a healthier and more sustainable alternative to the commonly used strategy of self-criticism as a motivator in both personal and professional contexts. Neff (2011) defined self-compassion as "being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism" (p. 10).

According to Neff (2011), self-compassion encompasses three essential elements that work together to foster a healthier relationship with oneself. The first component, self-kindness, involves treating ourselves with the same care and understanding one would offer a good friend, rather than engaging in harsh self-criticism when one faces difficulties or makes mistakes. The second element, common humanity, helps one recognize their struggles and feelings of inadequacy are not unique personal failures but rather universal aspects of the human condition that connect individuals together. Finally, mindfulness requires a person to observe painful thoughts and emotions with balanced awareness, neither pushing them away nor becoming overwhelmed by them, but instead acknowledging them as temporary experiences that are part of

a person's larger emotional landscape. Together, these three components create a framework for responding to personal suffering with greater wisdom and compassion.

Neff's (2011) theory of self-compassion offers a valuable lens through which to understand the emotional experiences of SCAs. She defined self-compassion as treating oneself with kindness during moments of failure or distress, recognizing shared human experiences, and maintaining mindful awareness of painful emotions. These principles are particularly relevant to SCAs, who often internalize the emotional weight of their work. Fostering self-kindness and emotional regulation, self-compassion may help SCAs navigate the pressures of their role more sustainably, reducing the risk of burnout and enhancing professional resilience.

Neff (2011) challenged the myth that self-compassion reduces accountability. Instead, she argued self-compassion encourages individuals to take responsibility for their actions in a non-shaming way, sharing, "When we're self-compassionate, we're kind to ourselves, not because we want to feel better than others, but because we simply want to feel better" (Neff, 2011, p. 27). SCAs, who often operate under intense scrutiny and must navigate complex ethical and interpersonal situations, a self-compassionate mindset allows for professional growth without the damaging effects of guilt or shame. Moreover, Neff (2011) emphasized self-compassion builds resilience. She stated, "Self-compassion gives us the strength to stand up to ourselves when we become self-critical, to be honest about our limitations, and to be kind to ourselves in the face of failure" (Neff, 2011, p. 74). This ability to recover from professional challenges with self-awareness and kindness is central to preventing burnout and fostering long-term career sustainability among SCAs.

In the context of this study, Neff's (2011) framework was used not only to understand how SCAs may better navigate compassion fatigue, burnout, STS, and VT, but also to offer a

model for how resilience and well-being can be cultivated through intentional self-kindness and awareness. Integrating self-compassion into training and professional development may offer SCAs a tool for emotional regulation, mental health preservation, and continued professional efficacy.

Self-compassion theory provides an essential foundation for understanding resilience because it equips individuals with the emotional resources needed to navigate adversity (Neff, 2011). By fostering kindness toward oneself, acknowledging shared human experiences, and practicing mindfulness, self-compassion reduces self-criticism and promotes emotional regulation during challenging times. These qualities create psychological safety, allowing individuals to approach difficulties with greater clarity and adaptability. Resilience theory builds upon this internal strength by emphasizing the capacity to recover and grow from setbacks. In essence, self-compassion nurtures the mindset that makes resilience possible, transforming obstacles into opportunities for learning and personal growth.

Resilience Theory

Resilience theory offers a dynamic and context-sensitive framework for understanding how SCAs adapt to the emotional demands of their roles. Zimmerman (2013) conceptualized resilience not as a fixed trait, but as a process shaped by promotive factors, internal assets such as self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and external resources like mentorship and institutional support. This framework is particularly relevant to SCAs, who routinely encounter emotionally charged situations, including student crises, Title IX investigations, and behavioral threat assessments. These experiences expose SCAs to chronic stress, VT, and ethical dilemmas, making resilience building essential for professional sustainability.

The risk-protective model in resilience theory helps explain how promotive factors buffer the impact of occupational stressors. For example, Davis (2024) found SCAs with strong supervisory support reported lower levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion, suggesting institutional resources can moderate the relationship between high-risk job demands and negative mental health outcomes.

The protective-protective model further illuminates how multiple promotive factors can interact to enhance well-being. SCAs who possess both emotional regulation skills and access to peer support networks may be better equipped to manage cumulative effects of emotional labor. This synergistic effect was supported by Brownlow (2025), who found SCAs participating in wellness initiatives (e.g., counseling, fitness programs, and peer mentoring) reported higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions.

Zimmerman's (2013) challenge model also offers insight into how SCAs develop resilience through exposure to manageable adversity. Early-career SCAs who are gradually introduced to complex cases, such as low-level conduct violations, may build coping mechanisms that prepare them for more intense situations like sexual misconduct hearings or behavioral threat assessments. However, this model also presents limitations: if the initial challenges are too overwhelming or unsupported, they may lead to burnout rather than growth. This underscores the importance of structured onboarding and supervision, which can ensure challenge exposure remains developmentally appropriate.

Although resilience theory provides a valuable lens for understanding adaptation and coping, it must be applied critically. Most existing literature has focused on youth or clinical populations, and there is limited empirical research specifically examining resilience processes among SCAs. Moreover, resilience theory alone may not fully capture the systemic and

institutional factors (e.g., lack of autonomy and role ambiguity) that contribute to psychological strain in conduct work. Therefore, this study integrated resilience theory with self-compassion theory to offer a more holistic understanding of SCA well-being, recognizing both individual coping strategies and need for systemic support.

By grounding this study in resilience theory, the research acknowledged the complex interplay between personal strengths and environmental supports that shape SCAs' mental health outcomes. This framework not only guided the development of the proposed toolkit but also affirmed the importance of cultivating both internal and external promotive factors to sustain professionals in emotionally demanding roles.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to address the mental health challenges faced by SCAs in higher education by developing a comprehensive, evidence-informed toolkit. The toolkit was proposed as a practical intervention because SCAs often lack access to structured wellness resources tailored to the unique emotional labor of their roles. Toolkit-based interventions have proven effective in other high-stress professions, such as healthcare and law enforcement, where practitioners face similar exposure to trauma, ethical dilemmas, and institutional pressures. Drawing upon the models of other professions, the toolkit was grounded in self-compassion theory and resilience theory and included resources for emotional regulation, supervisor training, and institutional recommendations.

The toolkit was developed using findings from a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design. Phase 1 involved a quantitative survey to identify common stressors and emotional labor demands experienced by SCAs. Phase 2 included qualitative interviews with SCAs to explore how they managed these stressors and what support mechanisms they found effective. These

findings informed the toolkit's structure and content, ensuring the toolkit reflected the lived experiences of SCAs. The toolkit was piloted through professional communities such as the Association for Student Conduct Administration, the Women in Student Conduct Community of Practice, and its effectiveness was evaluated through follow-up surveys and feedback sessions. Implementation was designed to be flexible, allowing institutions to adopt the toolkit as part of staff onboarding, professional development, or wellness programming. Supervisors and department leaders are encouraged to administer the toolkit in collaboration with SCAs to foster a culture of support and sustainability.

Despite growing awareness of burnout and emotional strain in student affairs, there is a lack of targeted interventions specifically designed for SCAs. By focusing on both individual and systemic contributors to mental health challenges, the study sought to produce a practical resource that enhances professional sustainability and promotes psychological well-being among SCAs.

SCAs routinely encounter emotionally intensive and frequently traumatic student circumstances, including incidents of sexual misconduct, acute mental health crises, violence-related threats, and substance abuse violations (Stimpson & Janosik, 2015). The cumulative exposure to these high-acuity situations positions SCAs in a heightened risk profile for occupational hazards, including burnout, compassion fatigue, STS, and VT, and psychological phenomena extensively documented in analogous helping professions such as social work, clinical counseling, and healthcare delivery (Bride, 2007; Figley, 1995; Stamm, 2010). Nevertheless, in the domain of SCA, these occupational psychological stressors remain substantially underinvestigated and inadequately addressed in both scholarly discourse and institutional practice.

The assumption that professionalism alone ensures effective practice fails to account for the emotional labor inherent in student conduct roles. Hochschild's (1983) groundbreaking work on emotional labor provided a critical lens for understanding the hidden psychological demands placed on SCAs. According to Hochschild (1984), emotional labor is "the management of feelings to create bodily and facial displays compliant with social requirements" (p. 35). This concept extends beyond simple emotion regulation to encompass how workers must display or portray socially correct emotions and reactions in given professional situations, often regardless of their authentic internal emotional state.

In their study, Hochschild (1983) identified two primary techniques of emotional labor workers employ to meet job requirements. Deep acting involves employees modifying their inner emotions, like pumping themselves up before going out on the work floor or doing pep talks, but surface acting occurs when employees hide their inner emotions and fake a smile, which is likely when they are tired or when facing a rude customer or upset patient (Workplace Emotional Labor and Diversity Lab, 2025). These techniques represent fundamentally different approaches to managing the gap between felt emotions and required emotional displays in professional contexts.

The application of Hochschild's (1983) framework to student conduct work revealed the extensive emotional labor demands these professionals face. SCAs must regulate their emotional responses to challenging cases while simultaneously conveying empathy, neutrality, and authority, complex emotional performance that requires constant calibration between surface and deep acting techniques. SCAs may need to employ surface acting when maintaining composure during hostile encounters with students or parents, and deep acting becomes necessary when genuinely connecting with distressed students to facilitate learning and growth. This ongoing

emotional management creates what Hochschild described as the commodification of human feeling in professional relationships.

Consequences of sustained emotional labor, as Hochschild (1983) warned, can be profound for workers' well-being. Emotional labor, like physical labor, is effortful and fatiguing when done repeatedly all day; yet, it often remains invisible and unacknowledged in organizational structures (Workplace Emotional Labor and Diversity Lab, 2025). For SCAs, this dynamic can erode well-being if institutional structures do not recognize and actively support the emotional dimensions of their work. Moreover, invisible demands of navigating institutional liability, following due process requirements, and competing student development needs can further intensify this emotional strain, creating an accumulating burden that requires systematic organizational attention and support.

Consequently, this investigation endeavored to reframe scholarly discourse by emphasizing the fundamental humanity of SCAs, acknowledging their psychological and emotional needs that frequently remain unrecognized in existing institutional frameworks. This study addressed the identified research gap through a systematic examination of stress responses experienced by SCAs and development of an evidence-based, practically-oriented intervention toolkit designed for implementation by both administrators and their supervisors to proactively identify, address, and mitigate occupational hazards, including burnout, compassion fatigue, STS, and VT. The overarching objective of this study was to enhance the professional sustainability and psychological well-being of practitioners in this critical domain of student affairs administration.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: What major stressors, including emotional labor demands, do SCAs in higher education encounter in their daily practice?
- RQ2: How do SCAs manage emotional labor in their professional roles?

Assumptions

This study was guided by several methodological assumptions that supported the validity and reliability of the research design. First, it was assumed participants would respond to both the survey and interview questions honestly and thoughtfully, providing accurate reflections of their lived experiences as SCAs.

Second, it was assumed SCAs possess sufficient self-awareness and professional insight to articulate the emotional and psychological dimensions of their work, particularly in relation to stress, emotional labor, and resilience. Third, the researcher assumed the mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was appropriate for capturing both the extensiveness and depth of SCAs' experiences. The quantitative phase identified general trends and stressors, and qualitative phase provided rich, contextualized narratives to inform the development of the mental well-being toolkit.

Fourth, it was assumed the sample of SCAs recruited through professional organizations and social media platforms was sufficiently diverse in terms of institutional type, geographic location, and years of experience to allow for meaningful analysis and replicability in the profession. Finally, the researcher assumed the integration of survey and interview data would yield actionable insights that can be translated into practical interventions for improving SCAs' mental health and professional sustainability.

This approach recognized effective interventions must resonate with practitioners' own conceptualizations of their role, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Rather than recommending

solutions based on abstract theoretical models, the constructivist orientation facilitates cocreation of knowledge between researchers and participants, ensuring resulting recommendations possess both scholarly rigor and practical utility in the dynamic landscape of higher education administration.

Definitions of Terms

The field of student conduct administration varies widely in terminology across institutions and professional contexts. For this study, it was important to clarify key terms frequently used by SCAs in their responsibilities. These definitions aim to establish a shared understanding of the language that shapes the professional discourse surrounding student conduct administration work.

The terms included in this section were drawn from multiple sources, including established literature in the fields of student affairs and trauma studies, relevant professional standards, commonly accepted dictionary definitions, and researchers' interpretations informed by both practice and context. Given the interdisciplinary nature of SCA, which intersects with counseling, legal compliance, education, and social work, it was necessary to define these concepts with both precision and contextual relevance. Providing these definitions also helped ensure conceptual clarity and consistency throughout the study.

- The Clery Act
 - Requires colleges and universities to report campus crime data, support victims of violence, and publicly outline the policies and procedures they have put into place to improve campus safety (Clery Center, n.d.).

- Emotional Labor
 - Hochschild (1983) described emotional labor as the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines.
- Empathy
 - Refers to the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
- Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
 - STS describes the emotional stress and behaviors resulting from an indirect experience of another individual's direct traumatic experience (Jang et al., 2023).
- Student Conduct Administrator (SCA)
 - Refers to student affairs professionals whose primary responsibility is administering student conduct practices (Davis, 2024). For this study, this title did not include those faculty and staff with secondary conduct responsibility, such as faculty, residence life live-in professionals, and Greek life professionals.
- Student Code of Conduct
 - A formal document that outlines behavioral expectations, responsibilities, and rights of students in a college or university. It serves as a guide for maintaining a safe, respectful, and educational campus environment by clearly defining unacceptable behaviors and procedures for addressing them.

According to Lowery and Stoner (2004), an effective code not only upholds institutional values but also ensures fairness, promotes accountability, and supports student development through educational disciplinary processes. The code of conduct is a key tool used by SCAs to balance campus safety with student learning and growth.

- Title IX
 - Individuals in the United States must not be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in any educational program or activity that receives federal financial assistance, based on their sex (U.S. Department of Education, 1972).
- Vicarious Trauma (VT)
 - Vicarious trauma is the experience of absorbing others' pain in times of their distress so deeply that it affects your own well-being (Cleveland Clinic, n.d).
- Violation
 - Refers to an action that breaks or acts against something, especially a law, agreement, principle, or something that should be treated with respect (Cambridge University Press, n.d).

Organization of the Dissertation

This initial chapter laid the groundwork for the research, introducing the study on SCAs' mental health and its context. This chapter clearly articulated the guiding research questions and underscored the study's importance, purpose, and underlying rationale. The chapter concluded by outlining the study's assumptions and defining key terms. Subsequent chapters delve into

relevant literature (Chapter II) and detail research methodology, including participants, data collection, and analysis (Chapter III), executive summary, and two publishable articles.

Summary

Chapter I provided the background and context for this study on the mental health and well-being of SCAs. The chapter highlighted unique stressors faced by SCAs. It emphasized the significance of this research, given the high turnover rates and lack of targeted support for SCAs, and articulated the study's purpose to address this gap by examining the impact of these stressors and developing a practical toolkit to support SCAs in their roles. Research questions that guided the study were presented, focusing on major stressors, emotional labor, and how SCAs manage that emotional labor.

The chapter also outlined the study's assumptions, noting its grounding in a constructivist epistemological lens, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of SCAs. Finally, key terms relevant to the study (e.g., Clery Act, Title IX, and FERPA) were defined, establishing a shared understanding for the subsequent chapters. The following chapters build upon this foundation by reviewing existing literature, detailing methodology, presenting research findings, and discussing implications of these findings for the well-being and professional practice of SCAs.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Student conduct administrators (SCAs) occupy a unique and challenging position in higher education. They serve simultaneously as educators, policy enforcers, and student advocates. Emotional and psychological demands of this multifaceted role have increasingly drawn attention from researchers and practitioners alike, as SCAs navigate complex mental health challenges, including burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, and mounting pressures of judicialization. This literature review examines mental health challenges faced by SCAs through the lens of two complementary theoretical frameworks: Neff's (2011) self-compassion theory and Zimmerman's (2013) resilience theory. By synthesizing existing research in these frameworks, this review illuminates both systemic factors contributing to SCAs' mental health struggles and evidence-based strategies that may enhance their psychological well-being and professional sustainability.

Historical Context of Student Conduct

In early colonial America, higher education looked very different. Waryold and Lancaster (2013) mentioned, "College life was a highly structured environment, with significant oversight from college faculty and had a general expectation of being in loco parentis, or in 'place of parents'" (p. 6). Higher education resembled more of a boarding high school. As higher education matured beyond its colonial roots, the post-Civil War era marked a pivotal shift in administrative responsibility. Emergence of roles such as the dean of men and dean of women reflected a growing institutional focus on student behavior and oversight, still grounded in the in loco parentis philosophy (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013). There was still an expectation of in loco parentis, and processes and operations that were in place supported that notion.

Building on the structural changes of the post-war period, the 1930s introduced a more developmental lens to student affairs. Waryold and Lancaster (2013) mentioned, during this period, the American Council on Education initiated a formal inquiry into how colleges and universities were supporting students' holistic development beyond the confines of the classroom. The shift was adding a focus on what higher education was doing outside of the classroom for students. However, there was still an expectation of in loco parentis during this period. Waryold and Lancaster further explained colleges and universities were approaching a pivotal transformation in how they structured and delivered the higher education experience.

The post-World War II expansion of higher education brought unprecedented enrollment growth and institutional reform. These changes accelerated the evolution of student conduct practices, aligning them more closely with emerging societal expectations and legal standards. Waryold and Lancaster (2013) stated shifts in the broader landscape of higher education directly influenced the evolution of student conduct as a professional field. Although there were many changes happening in higher education, and by extension, student conduct, there were still more to come.

Although postwar reforms laid the foundation for modern student affairs, the Civil Rights Era catalyzed transformative legal and cultural shifts. Landmark cases such as *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961) redefined the rights of students and reshaped the conduct process into a more legally accountable and educationally focused system. *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961) was a landmark case in how the current student conduct processes handle due process. The distinction between an administrative process in higher education and criminal justice system was defined by the court. Waryold and Lancaster (2013) mentioned, "The court ruled that 'due process' in the institutional setting involved notice and an

opportunity to be heard” (p. 9). This ruling is largely understood and accepted as the move away from *in loco parentis* (Hoekema, 1994). The court specified the student conduct process is an educational process, and criminal process is punitive.

In the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, student conduct systems continued to evolve, balancing legal compliance with educational intent. Today’s SCAs operate in a complex landscape shaped by historical precedent, legal mandates, and increasing emotional demands (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013). The student conduct process is in place to ensure the university community and student as a person are safe. This conflict can be of a mental health nature because of the disclosures from students and students’ attitudes toward the professional.

Resilience in the Organizational Context

Institutional culture and support systems play a critical role in shaping SCA well-being. Davis (2024) emphasized structured supervisory support can mitigate burnout and turnover. SCAs working in environments with clear boundaries, mentorship programs, and proactive mental health resources report higher resilience and job satisfaction. Watelet (2024) and Ferraino (n.d.) found flexible work arrangements and wellness initiatives enhance administrator well-being. Organizational resources such as Employee Assistance Programs, counseling services, and professional development opportunities contribute to a culture of care. These supports not only buffer against occupational stress but also foster self-compassion and resilience, aligning with the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. These findings suggest resilience among SCAs is not solely an individual responsibility but emerges through the interaction of personal capacities and environmental supports. Organizations that prioritize flexibility, establish clear boundaries, and offer proactive mental health resources foster environments where both self-compassion and resilience can thrive.

Self-compassion and resilience offer promising frameworks for addressing the emotional toll of student conduct work. Neff (2011) defined self-compassion as treating oneself with kindness, recognizing shared humanity, and maintaining mindful awareness. These principles counteract self-criticism and emotional isolation, common among SCAs navigating complex cases.

Resilience theory, as articulated by Zimmerman (2013), conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic process shaped by internal assets and external supports. Davis (2024) found SCAs with strong supervisory relationships and decision-making autonomy reported lower levels of burnout. Brownlow (2025) demonstrated wellness initiatives and peer support networks enhance resilience and job satisfaction.

Together, these frameworks underscore the importance of cultivating both individual coping strategies and systemic support. Integrating self-compassion and resilience into professional development can promote emotional regulation and long-term sustainability for SCAs. Through self-compassion, the toolkit will support individual skill building, particularly in areas such as emotional regulation. Drawing on internal assets outlined in resilience theory, the toolkit further enhances these individual skills and introduces effective coping mechanisms. Finally, by emphasizing external support, the toolkit empowers SCAs to initiate meaningful conversations with supervisors or mentors, fostering a supportive environment that strengthens resilience.

Horrigan's (2016) exploration of meaning making among SCAs using developmental frameworks provides valuable insight into how cognitive and professional growth influence approaches to student discipline. Through qualitative interviews and photography exercises, the study applied Torbert's (2005) action logic model to examine how SCAs' developmental

perspectives shaped decision-making, student interactions, and institutional responsibilities. Notably, the finding SCAs operate in a range of meaning-making structures, rather than a single developmental stage, introduces a critical nuance to the risk-protective model of resilience theory. This theory suggests how SCAs make meaning of their experiences directly influences which protective factors are most effective for them. Therefore, resilience-building interventions must be tailored to account for individual developmental variability, ensuring support is not only present but also aligned with each SCA's unique interpretive framework.

Psychological Impacts: Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout, and Vicarious Trauma

The disciplinary nature of student conduct work exposes SCAs to a high risk of secondary traumatic stress (STS), burnout, and vicarious trauma (VT). Bernstein Chernoff (2016) and Russell Krebs et al. (2023) documented the prevalence of these conditions among student affairs professionals. Chronic exposure to student disclosures involving sexual assault, mental health crises, and violence can lead to emotional numbing, hypervigilance, and intrusive thoughts.

STS mirrors symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and is exacerbated by high-stakes decision-making and role ambiguity. Figley (2002) described STS as empathy-based strain, a concept echoed by Vega (2019) in higher education contexts. In contrast, VT, as defined by McCann and Pearlman (1990), reflects a cumulative shift in worldview and belief systems resulting from repeated exposure to trauma. This distinction is subtle but critical: although STS manifests as acute symptomology requiring coping strategies, VT involves deeper cognitive changes that call for meaning-making and reframing interventions. SCAs participating in threat assessment teams and Title IX investigations are particularly vulnerable to both, often

synthesizing emotionally charged narratives under institutional pressure, which can intensify both symptomatic stress and existential dissonance.

This developmental variability has important implications for both self-compassion and resilience approaches. SCAs at different developmental stages may require different types of support to cultivate self-compassion. Some SCAs may need help recognizing their harsh self-criticism, and other SCAs may need support in developing mindful awareness of their emotional states. Similarly, resilience-building strategies should be tailored to developmental readiness, with some SCAs benefiting from basic stress management skills and other SCAs being prepared for more complex meaning-making work. These psychological risks stem from both the nature of conduct work and decision-making responsibilities the work entails. The cumulative impact of trauma exposure and institutional dynamics necessitates targeted interventions to support SCA mental health.

Cross-Professional Perspectives

Evidence from other professions supports the development of wellness and resilience toolkits for SCAs. Healthcare, education, and social work have implemented structured interventions that improve outcomes. Minges (2025) found crisis-specific self-efficacy correlates with lower burnout and STS among behavioral health workers. Sullivan et al. (2024) and Genareo (2024) highlighted benefits of administrative support and therapy in managing occupational stress.

Employee assistance programs, trauma-informed care models, and professional retreats have demonstrated efficacy in reducing emotional exhaustion. These cross-professional insights provided a foundation for adapting toolkit-based interventions to the student conduct context, offering SCAs practical resources for emotional regulation and resilience-building.

Mixed-Methods Approaches to Understanding Professional Experiences

Yin (2016) emphasized the importance of situating research in existing knowledge bases, noting literature reviews help develop “sharper and more insightful questions about the topic” (p. 30). For SCA research, this involves examining the intersection of stress, burnout, and well-being in the specific context of SCA and drawing from broader literature on helping professions.

Creswell’s (2018) mixed-methods framework proved particularly valuable for SCA research, as the framework integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide holistic understanding of complex experiences. Creswell argued mixed methods provide a more complete picture because qualitative research explores participants’ lived experiences, and quantitative research examines trends and relationships among variables. This approach enables researchers to examine both statistical trends in SCA burnout and nuanced experiences of professionals navigating high-stress environments, creating space for both self-compassion and resilience factors to emerge in the data.

Gap in Literature

Although research on mental health in higher education has grown significantly, most studies have focused on students, faculty, or counseling staff, leaving a notable gap in understanding the well-being of SCAs. These individuals occupy a unique role that often involves managing high-stress situations, adjudicating sensitive cases, and balancing institutional compliance with student development. Despite the emotional labor and potential for burnout inherent in these responsibilities, there is limited empirical evidence exploring how these stressors impact their mental health. This lack of attention means specific challenges faced by SCAs, such as secondary trauma from handling cases involving violence or harassment, remain underexamined in scholarly discourse.

Absence of targeted research on this population has implications for both practice and policy. Without data-driven insights into their mental health needs, institutions may overlook critical support systems that could enhance resilience and job satisfaction among SCAs. Existing literature on related roles, such as counseling or student affairs, cannot fully capture the distinct pressures of adjudicating misconduct and maintaining campus safety through that adjudication. Consequently, this gap hinders the development of tailored interventions, training programs, and organizational strategies that prioritize mental well-being in conduct offices. Addressing this void is essential for fostering sustainable careers and ensuring professionals can effectively serve students while safeguarding their own psychological health.

Summary

The literature has consistently demonstrated SCAs face significant mental health challenges stemming from the complex, emotionally demanding nature of their work. However, when viewed through the complementary lenses of self-compassion theory and resilience theory, these challenges can be understood not as inevitable sources of burnout, but as opportunities for growth and adaptive capacity building when appropriate supports are in place.

Self-compassion theory offers SCAs a framework for relating to their own suffering and imperfection with kindness rather than harsh self-criticism. This approach becomes particularly valuable given the high-stakes nature of conduct decisions, where SCAs may second-guess themselves or internalize negative outcomes. Resilience theory complements this by providing a developmental understanding of how SCAs can build adaptive capacity over time through supportive relationships, graduated challenges, and skill-building opportunities.

Although some literature has offered general self-care recommendations for higher education professionals, there remains a significant lack of tailored, evidence-informed resources

designed specifically to support the mental well-being of student conduct professionals. Absence of a structured framework that integrates self-compassion and resilience-building specifically for SCAs represents a gap in professional development resources.

Most existing research has treated burnout and mental health challenges as problems to be solved rather than as opportunities for building adaptive capacity. Future research should explore how self-compassion and resilience interventions might be specifically designed and implemented for SCAs, considering the unique developmental, institutional, and professional factors that characterize their work.

This literature review revealed mental health challenges faced by SCAs are both significant and addressable through theoretically grounded interventions. Convergent evidence from multiple studies, professional contexts, and theoretical perspectives suggested supporting SCA well-being requires both individual skill development, particularly in self-compassion, and systemic organizational changes that build environmental resilience factors.

The literature has consistently called for a paradigm shift toward proactively supporting SCA mental health rather than simply responding to burnout and turnover. Institutions must recognize the emotional toll of SCA and implement evidence-based measures that address both individual and systemic factors contributing to mental health challenges.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

Student conduct administrators (SCAs) occupy one of higher education's most paradoxical roles, simultaneously serving as enforcers and educators and developmental guides, institutional protectors, and student advocates (Davis, 2024). These interactions often involve responding to behavioral concerns, implementing educational interventions, and navigating a complex web of institutional responsibilities. SCAs must frequently balance the demands of educating students, safeguarding institutional integrity, protecting rights of the accused, and managing risks associated with campus safety (Lancaster & Waryold, 2020). As such, these professionals are expected to remain cognitively agile and emotionally resilient, particularly in the face of societal pressures that manifest in campus communities, such as civil unrest or public health crises (Davis, 2024).

Despite the complexity and intensity of this role, the literature revealed a gap in the availability of mental well-being training specifically designed for SCAs. This study sought to address that gap by developing a mental well-being toolkit that include targeted training and supportive activities for SCAs in higher education settings. Davis (2024) emphasized the need for institutions to develop a deeper understanding of how to support SCAs in their professional roles, particularly given the high-risk nature of student conduct work. Thus, this research intended to contribute practical, evidence-based strategies to strengthen institutional support for SCAs through a tailored well-being framework.

Purpose of the Study

This explanatory sequential design (i.e., two-phase) study aimed to develop a mental well-being toolkit informed by the lived experiences of SCAs across the United States. The

proposed toolkit offers mental health training and practical activities specifically designed to support the emotional and psychological needs of SCAs.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- RQ1: What major stressors, including emotional labor demands, do SCAs in higher education encounter in their daily practice?
- RQ2: How do SCAs manage emotional labor in their professional roles?

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential design (i.e., two-phase) study design using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This design allowed the researcher to use preliminary quantitative findings to inform and refine qualitative data collection. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted mixed-method designs are beneficial in explaining and contextualizing quantitative results through in-depth qualitative analysis.

Selection of this mixed-methods approach was particularly well-suited for examining mental health experiences of student conduct professionals, a population whose complex occupational demands require nuanced investigation. SCAs operate at the intersection of education and mental health support, often serving as both disciplinary authorities and student advocates, roles that can create inherent psychological tension and stress. The quantitative phase provided measurable data on occurrence rates of mental health concerns, stress levels, and potential correlations such as caseload size, years of experience, and institutional support factors. However, quantitative measures alone cannot capture contextual factors that influence mental health outcomes in this specialized field.

The qualitative phase becomes essential for understanding the lived experiences behind the statistical patterns. Through interviews informed by the quantitative findings, the study explored how specific aspects of conduct work, such as managing difficult disciplinary cases or navigating competing institutional pressures, impacted professional well-being. This approach aligned with the complexity of mental health as a phenomenon both measurable through standardized instruments and deeply personal in its manifestation and experience.

The explanatory sequential design addressed a gap in the literature, as most research on higher education professionals' mental health has focused on faculty or general student affairs practitioners, leaving conduct professionals underrepresented despite their unique occupational stressors. The sequential nature ensured qualitative exploration was grounded in empirical patterns while allowing for discovery of unexpected themes quantitative measures might not capture, ultimately providing a more comprehensive understanding of this population's mental health needs.

Context and Setting of the Study

Data were collected with the support of the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA; see Appendix A). The full membership of ASCA received an email after the ASCA Research Committee approved data collection (see Appendix B). Although ASCA was an international association, due to time constraints and language limitations, the researcher only collected information from the participants in the United States who spoke English. Announcements were posted in Facebook groups of which the researcher was a member, related to student affairs and student conduct, such as Student Conduct Professionals, ASCA Women in Student Conduct Community of Practice, Jewish Student Affairs Professionals, and Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals.

Population and Sample

The researcher employed purposeful sampling, which Palinkas et al. (2015) stated is “widely used in qualitative research for identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” (p. 1). Using purposeful sampling gave the researcher the ability to collect the most valid responses that meet the inclusion criteria. The researcher collected demographic information in both the survey and during the interview to ensure there was a diverse sampling of institution type, geographic region, gender, and years in the field. After running a G*Power analysis, it was determined at least 92 responses were needed for the survey to be significantly relevant. The researcher expected 15–20 interviews. Once the researcher reached saturation, where the data from the interviews no longer generated new insights (Creswell, 2018), the researcher concluded the interviews.

The population the researcher intended to sample met the following criteria: (a) worked at a nonprofit college or university in the United States and (b) had 75% of their responsibilities be related to student conduct. Due to the laws that govern universities in the United States (e.g., the Clery Act), the researcher limited participation to those SCAs working in the United States. The researcher excluded SCAs with less than 75% of their responsibilities in student conduct, to gain an understanding of the profession of student conduct, and not have any other profession (e.g., residence education) captured.

Instrument

Phase 1 employed a survey (see Appendix C) created by the researcher and had four demographic questions, seven Likert scale questions, and two open-ended questions. The first question was the informed consent (see Appendix D). Then, there was demographic questions, such as how long they have worked in student conduct, what type of institution they worked, and

last part of the survey asked if they wanted to participate in an interview (see Appendix E), which took them to another survey to sign up for an interview. The survey results were used to help shape the interview questions (see Appendix F) for Phase 2. Sample questions from Phase 1 included the following:

1. In the past 2 months, how often have you felt burned out? (This includes feeling exhausted, cynical, or like nothing you do makes a difference)
2. How often do you take care of yourself? (For example: exercising, meditating, getting massages, or taking time off)
3. How supported do you feel at work when it comes to protecting your mental health?

Questions 1, 2, and 4 related directly to Research Question 1, and Question 3 related directly to Research Question 2.

Phase 2 involved interviews with participants. The interview started by confirming the participant had filled out the interview Informed Consent (see Appendix G), which was through another survey, with their name attached. The researcher introduced themselves and then allowed participants to introduce themselves. The researcher then explained the protocol for the interview, including how many questions they would be asking, and the recording and transcription. The researcher then asked open-ended questions, examples of which are listed as follows:

1. What aspects of your job do you find most stressful or emotionally challenging?
2. How do institutional policies or expectations contribute to your stress levels?
3. What strategies do you use to manage your emotions during difficult or confrontational meetings?
4. Do you feel that emotional labor is recognized and valued in your workplace? How does that affect your approach to managing it?

Question 1 mapped directly to Research Question 1, and Questions 2–4 mapped directly to Research Question 2. The questions given were examples, as questions might have changed due to survey responses.

Data Collection Procedures

Before beginning the study, the researcher obtained approval to research the membership of ASCA and then IRB approval. A recruitment flyer (see Appendix H) and an email outlining participation criteria and study delimitations was disseminated through ASCA and the following Facebook groups: Student Conduct Professionals, ASCA Women in Student Conduct Community of Practice, Jewish Student Affairs Professionals, and Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals. The Flyer was posted once a week for a month. The survey was open for about a month. A survey developed by the researcher was administered through the Qualtrics survey platform hosted by Lynn University. Privacy was ensured because no identifying information will be collected on the survey.

First, the researcher collected quantitative data via a Likert scale survey and analyzed the data. Then, they identified results and created interview questions for Phase 2 of the research, which involved collecting qualitative data. The researcher then used the qualitative and quantitative results to inform creation of the toolkit of resources. The first question on this survey was the informed consent.

Initial data collection began with a brief quantitative online Qualtrics survey composed of Likert-scale items, two open-ended questions, and demographic questions to assess the perceived major stressors that impact the mental well-being of SCAs in higher education. The survey was estimated to take no longer than 8–10 minutes to complete. The survey assessed participants' feelings toward stressors in the student conduct profession and whether they managed the

stressors. The last question in the survey was a link to another survey that participants would fill out if they were interested in being interviewed. This second survey only collected contact information and a new informed consent was attached to the participant's name and was not tied to responses from the first survey.

The survey results informed the semistructured interview questions, allowing the questions to be tailored to the collected results. These interview questions were drafted before the survey was sent and tailored once the results were analyzed. The semistructured interviews were scheduled via email or phone, at times convenient for participants. Interviews lasted 1 hour and were conducted and recorded via Zoom, then immediately downloaded and saved in NordLocker.

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and inform the development of interview questions. The researcher also used a Pearson r correlation test to show the correlation between demographics and survey responses. Semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded using both Zoom's artificial intelligence tools and a secondary audio recorder for backup purposes. Recordings of the interviews were uploaded to NordLocker immediately. The researcher used the transcript function on Zoom and then went back to listen to the recording to make certain the transcript matched. The researcher removed identifying information at this time.

Field notes were manually taken to aid bias bracketing and preliminary coding. While interviewing, the researcher kept a notebook that contained notes from the interviews. These notes were any beliefs, assumptions, or prior experiences the researcher needed to set aside to be objective when looking at the data. During the initial review of the data, the researcher applied

preliminary coding by assigning short labels to any ideas, concepts, or patterns that immediately stood out. These early codes helped organize the data and guide deeper analysis later.

Interview transcripts were sent to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy, and the researcher gave them 2 weeks to review the transcripts. After participants ensured accuracy, the researcher developed a systematic coding scheme. This identified recurring themes and patterns. Themes and patterns were used to create the toolkit of resiliency resources for SCAs.

Ethical Considerations

Risks to participants were minimal and may have included self-disclosure and emotional discomfort from recalling stressful professional experiences. The researcher provided participants with the option to pause or discontinue participation and offered support resources if needed. The primary benefit of participation was contributing to the development of a supportive mental well-being toolkit that may be used by participants and their institutions. All survey data were kept on Qualtrics. All other digital data and downloaded survey results were stored on the encrypted platform NordLocker. Data will be retained for 5 years, after which the data will be permanently deleted.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Survey responses were anonymous, with no identifying information collected. Interview participants provided informed consent electronically and were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. All identifying information was securely stored on NordLocker. This ensured only the researcher has access to information and left little professional risk for the participant.

Data Analysis

Phase 1 included quantitative survey data, which were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to summarize trends and inform qualitative inquiry. The JASP statistical analysis program was used to analyze the quantitative data. This allowed the researcher to analyze the data for basic trends and determine how survey data would inform the qualitative interview questions. Prior to data collection, the researcher conducted a priori power analysis. The researcher also employed Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency and reliability of the survey scales. When reporting the results of the study, the researcher reported these numbers to strengthen the study's methodology. The researcher used Pearson r correlational analyses to analyze stress levels and burnout, years of experience and job satisfaction, caseload and mental health indicators, and institutional support and wellbeing measures.

Phase 2 was a qualitative analysis; the researcher employed open, axial, and selective coding in the process. According to Clark and Braun (2014), a good thematic analysis does more than simply reporting data; the researcher must tell a story about the data in relation to the research question. Open coding started with extensive thematic domains (William & Moser, 2019). The researcher coded each interview after receiving the participant's returned member check. Next, axial coding occurred, where emergent themes were categorized. Through axial coding, the researcher was able to identify the relation between the open codes (William & Moser, 2019).

The next step was selective coding. Through selective coding, the researcher was able to "select and integrate categories or organized data from axial coding in a cohesive and meaning-filled expression" (William & Moser, 2019, p. 52). Through selective coding, the themes were connected to resilience theory and Neff's (2011) self-compassion theory. The researcher

provided detailed descriptions, integrating interview data with survey findings to create a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of SCAs.

Use of member checking and bias bracketing enhanced the credibility and dependability of the study. Bias bracketing is the setting aside of the researcher's own prior assumptions or personal judgements to avoid misrepresenting the participant's intended meaning, perception, or experience (Ho & Limpaecher, 2022). Negative and discrepant cases were reported to provide a balanced interpretation of the data. The researcher integrated the negative responses and discrepancies, or responses that do not fit the pattern, into the analysis to show honesty and thoroughness. The researcher triangulated the data by using direct comparison and confirmation, confirming whether qualitative findings supported or contradicted the quantitative patterns, and incorporating participant narratives to provide context and depth to the interpretation. There was also explanation and contextualization, which is when the qualitative data explains the why behind the quantitative patterns.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study did not investigate job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, nor did it address perspectives of administrators who engage in student conduct work as a minor component of their roles. Instead, this study focused specifically on professionals whose primary responsibility was student conduct.

The study faced several potential limitations and delimitations. Potential limitations included challenges in achieving a representative sample size, risk of social desirability bias where participants may tailor their responses to perceived researcher expectations, and technical difficulties that may arise during data collection. The study also had specific delimitations that defined its scope. Members of student affairs who did not work at least 75% of their time in

student conduct could not participate because the study was focused on specific stressors of SCAs; therefore, those professionals outside of student conduct were not studied. Members of the student conduct profession who did not reside in the United States could not participate due to the laws that govern student conduct in the United States.

Limitations were mitigated through clear communication of the study's purpose, reminders about the value of authentic responses, and use of redundant recording methods. The researcher used specifically the personal reflexive field notes, where the researcher captured biases, experiences that resonated with their own, and time when they felt concerned or protective about a participant's well-being.

Expected Product

The primary deliverable of this study was a mental well-being training toolkit tailored for SCAs in higher education. The interviews with participants were used to create a toolkit grounded in Neff's (2011) principles of self-compassion and Zimmerman's (2013) resilience theory. The toolkit included breathwork activities, journalling prompts, positive self-talk and other activities designed to promote resilience and holistic well-being among SCAs. The researcher tested the module's usefulness by presenting it to the ASCA Women in Student Conduct Community of Practice and sending a follow-up survey to those who attended. The final toolkit is free and housed on a website.

Summary

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to develop a mental well-being toolkit for SCAs in higher education. The research addressed a significant gap in mental health support for SCAs who face unique stressors in their dual roles as enforcers and educators. The study was guided by two primary research questions examining (a) major

stressors and emotional labor demands SCAs encounter and their impact on mental well-being, and (b) how SCAs experience and manage emotional labor, including factors contributing to their resilience. Using purposeful sampling, the study targeted SCAs working at nonprofit U.S. colleges and universities and dedicated 75% or more of their responsibilities to student conduct. Recruitment occurred through the ASCA and relevant professional Facebook groups.

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via the JASP statistical program. Qualitative interview data underwent open, axial, and selective coding to identify themes connected to resilience theory and Neff's (2011) self-compassion framework. Member checking and bias bracketing enhanced credibility. The study maintained participant anonymity in surveys and used pseudonyms for interviews. All data were securely stored on encrypted platforms (i.e., NordLocker), with minimal risks limited to potential emotional discomfort from recalling stressful experiences. The primary deliverable was a free, web-based mental well-being training toolkit grounded in self-compassion and resilience theories. The toolkit includes activities that promote wellness, including a guided meditation that is focused on the everyday of a SCA.

Executive Summary

Abstract

Student conduct administrators (SCAs) operate in emotionally intensive and high-stakes environments that require balancing legal compliance, student development, and institutional risk management, often while repeatedly engaging with trauma, crisis, and conflict. Despite parallels to other helping professions, the psychological impact of this work has remained underexamined in the student conduct field. Grounded in self-compassion theory (Neff, 2011) and resilience theory (Zimmerman, 2013), this explanatory sequential mixed-methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) study examined the emotional labor demands, stressors, and coping strategies experienced by SCAs in higher education. Quantitative findings revealed strong relationships among stress, burnout, and anxiety, while highlighting the limited protective impact of individual self-care practices in the absence of institutional support. Qualitative themes illuminated the central role of emotional labor; trauma exposure; workload pressures; professional identity; and buffering effects of relational support, supervision, and community. Together, findings underscore SCA well-being is shaped less by individual resilience alone and more by systemic and relational factors. The study contributes to higher education literature by centering SCAs' lived experiences and translating empirical findings into practice-focused recommendations, including development of a profession-specific, evidence-informed mental well-being toolkit to support ethical decision-making, professional sustainability, and institutional integrity.

Problem Statement and Significance

Problem and Context

SCAs work in a uniquely demanding environment that blends disciplinary decision making, student development, legal compliance, and institutional risk management. They

routinely handle emotionally charged cases, such as sexual misconduct, mental health crises, threats of violence, and substance abuse, while maintaining neutrality, empathy, and educational purpose. Ongoing exposure to trauma narratives, ethical dilemmas, and high-stakes accountability places SCAs at elevated risk for burnout, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue. Despite being well documented in other helping professions, these risks have remained underexamined in the student conduct field (Horrigan, 2016).

This study addressed the lack of research-informed, profession-specific understanding and support for the mental well-being of SCAs. Existing literature and institutional efforts have often relied on generalized student affairs wellness strategies that fail to account for legal pressures, trauma exposure, and role conflict inherent in conduct work, contributing to burnout, turnover, and understaffing. Grounded in self-compassion and resilience theories, the study documented SCAs' lived experiences of emotional labor and translated them into a comprehensive, evidence-informed mental well-being toolkit, positioning SCAs' psychological health as essential to ethical, effective campus governance and institutional sustainability (Dooris et al., 2020; Mudhol, 2025).

Significance and Rationale

SCAs occupy complex roles that require balancing policy enforcement, education, mentorship, and student support in high-risk institutional environments (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016). Positioned at the intersection of campus safety and student mental health, SCAs regularly manage emotionally intense situations that demand sustained emotional regulation. Although the work can be meaningful, ongoing exposure to student crises, legal complexity, and institutional accountability carries significant psychological costs. Recent research has indicated elevated levels of stress, burnout, and mental health challenges among student affairs professionals,

including SCAs, driven by increasing student needs and limited institutional resources (Rickey, 2024).

This study has both academic and practical significance. It advanced scholarly understanding of emotional labor, burnout, and resilience in higher education, while addressing the lack of profession-specific supports for SCAs. Existing wellness initiatives tend to be broad and insufficiently responsive to distinctive pressures of conduct administration, contributing to diminished job satisfaction, impaired performance, and high turnover. These outcomes affect not only individual well-being but also the quality, consistency, and educational mission of student conduct processes.

Drawing on self-compassion (Neff, 2011) and resilience theories (Zimmerman, 2013), the study responded to this research gap through development of a comprehensive, evidence-informed toolkit tailored to the student conduct context. Unlike generalized wellness approaches, the proposed toolkit incorporated both individual coping strategies and systemic supports, grounded in empirical data from SCAs' lived experiences. Items in the toolkit included a guided meditation that comprises breathwork for SCAs, self-compassion inventory, and journaling prompts. Similar toolkit-based interventions in comparably high-stress professions have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing emotional exhaustion and improving professional functioning (Minges, 2025).

By centering SCAs as professionals engaged in sustained emotional labor in complex institutional systems, this study underscored the necessity of addressing hidden emotional burdens of conduct work. Supporting SCA well-being is positioned not only as a matter of individual care, but also essential to ethical decision-making, institutional integrity, and long-term sustainability of student conduct systems in higher education.

Framework and Methodology

This study was grounded in self-compassion theory and resilience theory, which together provided a comprehensive framework for examining the emotional experiences of SCAs. Self-compassion theory emphasizes kindness toward oneself during periods of difficulty as a mechanism for emotional regulation and psychological well-being (Neff, 2011), while resilience theory conceptualizes coping as a dynamic process shaped by both individual capacities and environmental supports (Zimmerman, 2013). When integrated, these perspectives offered a multidimensional lens for understanding how SCAs navigate emotional labor and develop adaptive capacity in demanding professional contexts. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, and qualitative responses from surveys and interviews were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns across participants.

Drawing on Neff's (2011) theory, self-compassion is understood to be as responding to experiences of failure, stress, or inadequacy with warmth, mindfulness, and recognition of shared human struggle rather than self-criticism. Three core components of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness promote balanced emotional awareness and adaptive responses to distress. For SCAs who routinely manage high-stakes cases and ethical complexity, self-compassion offers a sustainable approach to emotional regulation that may reduce vulnerability to burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress (STS), and vicarious trauma (VT). Contrary to concerns about diminished accountability, self-compassion supports reflection, learning, and professional growth without reliance on shame or self-punishment.

Resilience theory further contextualizes SCAs' well-being by emphasizing recovery and growth amid occupational stress. Zimmerman (2013) conceptualized resilience as a process influenced by promotive factors, including internal assets such as emotional regulation and

external supports such as supervision and peer networks. Empirical findings have suggested supervisory support, mentorship, and access to wellness resources can buffer emotional exhaustion and enhance job satisfaction among SCAs (Brownlow, 2025; Davis, 2024). Resilience models also highlight the importance of developmentally appropriate challenges, reinforcing the need for structured onboarding and sustained institutional support.

Although resilience theory provides valuable insight, its limited application to student conduct professionals underscores the need for integration with self-compassion theory. Together, these frameworks account for both individual coping mechanisms and systemic influences on well-being. Grounding the study in these perspectives informed the development of a profession-specific toolkit designed to strengthen resilience, promote emotional sustainability, and support SCAs working in emotionally intensive roles.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: What major stressors, including emotional labor demands, do SCAs in higher education encounter in their daily practice?
- RQ2: How do SCAs manage emotional labor in their professional roles?

Literature Review

SCAs occupy a complex role at the intersection of education, policy enforcement, student support, and institutional risk management. As higher education has become increasingly legalistic and student mental health needs have intensified, SCAs have faced persistent emotional and psychological strain associated with burnout, compassion fatigue, STS, and VT. This literature review examines these challenges through self-compassion theory (Neff, 2011) and

resilience theory (Zimmerman, 2013), highlighting both individual and organizational factors influencing SCAs' well-being.

Historically, student conduct processes evolved from the *in loco parentis* model toward a legally grounded, educational framework following landmark decisions such as *Dixon v. Alabama* (1961). This shift formalized due process while increasing the emotional and ethical complexity of conduct work. Contemporary SCAs must balance legal accountability, student development, and community safety, often while managing emotionally charged disclosures involving violence, mental health crises, and sexual misconduct (Waryold & Lancaster, 2013).

Research has consistently demonstrated institutional support significantly shapes SCAs' resilience. Supervisory relationships, mentorship, flexibility, and access to mental health resources are associated with lower burnout and higher job satisfaction (Davis, 2024; Watelet, 2024). Self-compassion offers an internal coping framework by promoting self-kindness, mindfulness, and recognition of shared human struggle, while resilience theory emphasizes adaptive capacity fostered through both internal skills and external supports (Neff, 2011; Zimmerman, 2013).

Empirical studies have shown repeated exposure to trauma narratives places SCAs at elevated risk for STS, VT, and emotional exhaustion (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016; Russell Krebs et al., 2023). Cross-professional research in healthcare and social services has suggested structured, toolkit-based interventions can mitigate these outcomes and enhance professional sustainability (Minges, 2025). Mixed-methods approaches further enable a nuanced understanding of both prevalence and lived experience, supporting the integration of self-compassion and resilience into practical, profession-specific interventions (Creswell, 2018).

Methodology: Mixed Methods

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, using quantitative findings to inform subsequent qualitative data collection. This approach was selected to contextualize statistical results through in-depth exploration of participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative phase generated data on the prevalence of mental health concerns, stress levels, and related occupational factors among SCAs, and the qualitative phase examined the lived experiences underlying these patterns. Interviews explored how demands of conduct work and competing institutional roles affected professional well-being. This design addressed a gap in the literature by centering SCAs, a group often underrepresented in mental health research and provided a more comprehensive understanding of their mental health needs by integrating empirical trends with experiential insight.

Results and Analysis

Quantitative Results and Analysis

This study examined the relationship between workload, support systems, and indicators of professional distress, including stress, burnout, and anxiety, among student conduct professionals across the United States. A power analysis conducted using G*Power indicated a statistical power of 0.98, suggesting the sample size was more than sufficient to detect meaningful effects. During initial data screening, 22 participants were identified as having completed only approximately 7% of the survey and were subsequently removed to ensure data quality and integrity. The final dataset reflected 101 sufficiently completed responses (93% or 100%), strengthening the reliability of the findings. Reliability analysis indicated low internal consistency among the selected items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .279$), which is consistent with the

multidimensional nature of the constructs assessed, including both distress indicators and coping resources. Accordingly, items were analyzed individually instead as a composite.

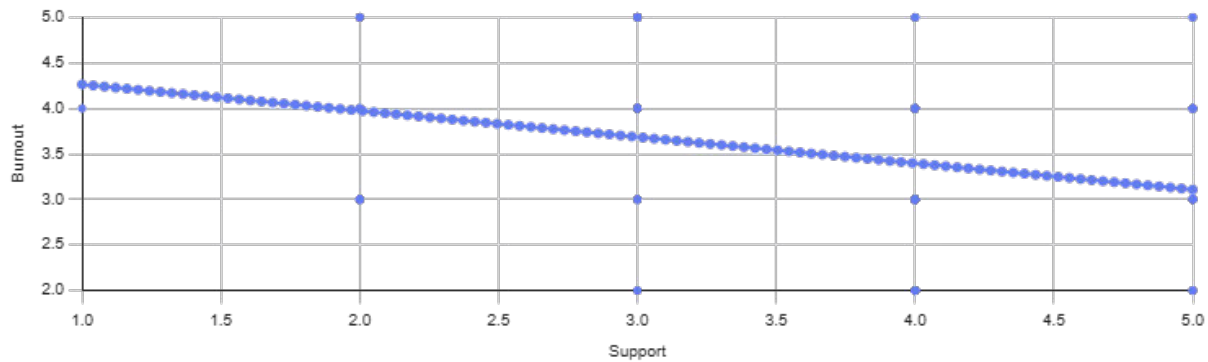
Analysis of the cleaned dataset revealed strong relationships among stress, burnout, and role-related anxiety, indicating these constructs are closely interconnected and may represent a broader experience of professional distress. Participants reported moderate to high levels of work-related stress ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.63$). Burnout symptoms were experienced between sometimes and often ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.77$), and role-related anxiety followed a similar pattern ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.80$). Access to support systems was reported at a moderate level ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.76$), and engagement in self-care practices was likewise moderate ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.85$).

Building on these descriptive findings, correlational analyses revealed several significant relationships among key study variables. Work-related stress was positively correlated with both burnout ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) and role-related anxiety ($r = .48$, $p < .001$), indicating higher stress levels were associated with increased emotional strain. Similarly, access to support systems was negatively associated with burnout ($r = -.29$, $p = .01$), further indicating a potential protective effect.

Figure 1 demonstrates burnout among SCAs may be mitigated by perceived support, as evidenced by an inverse relationship in which greater levels of perceived support corresponded with lower reported levels of burnout.

Figure 1

Burnout Predicted by Support

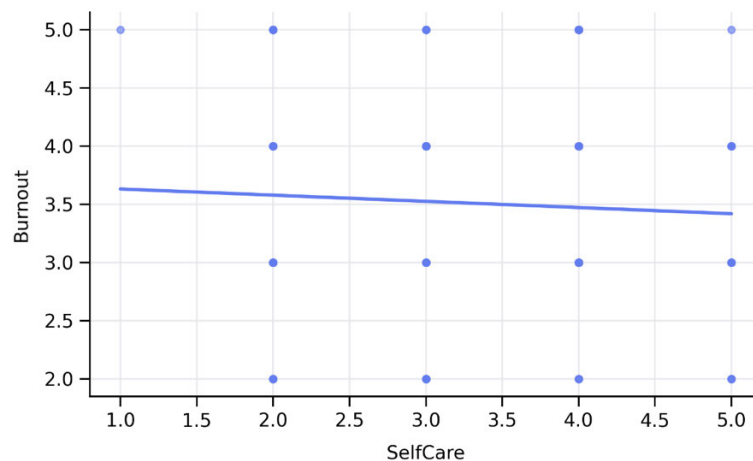


Note. Simple linear regression illustrates the relationship between access to support systems and burnout among student conduct administrators.

In contrast, self-care practices were negatively correlated with burnout ($r = -.35$, $p = .002$), suggesting greater engagement in self-care was linked to lower levels of burnout (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Burnout Predicted by Self-Care



Note. Simple linear regression illustrates the relationship between self-care practices and burnout among student conduct administrators.

Qualitative Results and Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, informed by constant comparative methods. Following data collection, all interview transcripts were reviewed fully to ensure familiarity with the data and support initial immersion in participants' experiences. Open coding was then conducted, during which segments of text were labeled to capture discrete ideas, emotions, and patterns related to the lived experiences of SCAs. Codes were both inductive, emerging directly from the data, and sensitized by the study's theoretical framework, including concepts related to emotional labor, resilience, and self-compassion. After initial coding, focused coding was used to group similar codes into broader conceptual categories. During this stage, patterns across participants were examined, and relationships between codes were identified.

The final phase of analysis involved developing themes by synthesizing categories into higher-level constructs that reflected shared meanings among participants. Themes were refined through iterative review, ensuring each theme was internally coherent, distinct from others, and supported by representative participant quotations. This process yielded a set of themes that captured the complexity of SCAs' experiences, particularly in relation to emotional labor, support systems, and professional sustainability.

Community, Relationships, and Social Support. For SCAs, a strong sense of community and relational support was foundational to sustaining their work. The data reflected how meaningful connections with colleagues, supervisors, and external networks served as both a practical and emotional anchor in an often isolating and misunderstood role. Administrators emphasized the importance of working in environments where supervisors understand the complexity of conduct work, collaboration is valued, and colleagues offer empathy rather than

judgment. Feeling seen, trusted, and supported allowed professionals to navigate difficult decisions and emotionally charged situations with greater confidence and resilience, reinforcing they were not doing this work alone. When asked what types of support from supervisors, colleagues, or institution would be most helpful, Mary described the need for advocacy that occurs beyond her presence, explaining meaningful support meant “knowing that [they are] being both praised and defended in rooms [they are] not in.”

Emotional Labor, Trauma, and Mental Health Impact. SCAs consistently described the significant emotional labor inherent in their roles, particularly the cumulative impact of managing conflict, crisis, and trauma. Exposure to student distress, hostile interactions, and high-stakes outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion, can contribute to anxiety, burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary or vicarious trauma. The data highlighted how administrators must constantly balance professionalism with humanity, often absorbing others’ emotions while simultaneously regulating their own emotions. This internal management of feelings was articulated by Carmen, who described, “[I] need to internalize some of my feelings when it comes to students, that make you frustrated and angry,” reflecting how emotional suppression often becomes an unspoken requirement of the role. This emotional toll was further intensified by the perception the work is thankless or misunderstood, leaving little space to fully process the weight of decisions that can profoundly affect students’ lives.

Self-Care, Coping Strategies, and Personal Wellness. In response to the intensity of their work, SCAs relied on a wide range of intentional self-care and coping strategies to maintain personal wellness. Participants identified both structured supports (e.g., therapy, breathwork, and grounding practices) and informal practices, including physical activity, music, journaling, spending time with pets, and taking intentional breaks. These strategies were often used to

process lingering stress from complex or emotionally charged situations, as illustrated by Leah, who shared, “When I am really stewing on something, I get it out on page.” Such practices were not viewed as luxuries but as necessary tools for emotional regulation and long-term sustainability in the role. For many SCAs, self-care also included setting boundaries, leaving work at work when possible, and intentionally finding moments of joy that helped counterbalance the stress and seriousness of their professional responsibilities.

Workload, Structure, and Systemic Constraints. The data underscored how systemic and organizational factors significantly shape the daily experience of SCAs. Heavy caseloads, complex and high-risk cases, legal and compliance demands, and limited staffing or resources created ongoing pressure. Administrators frequently noted a lack of autonomy, time, or institutional clarity, particularly when navigating litigation, Title IX processes, and hearings. These challenges were especially pronounced in cases where multiple systems collided, as Jody described feeling most stressed and shared, “There is an intersection of mental health and behavior, because there is less of a clear pathway for resolution that is going to be meaningful.” Such structural ambiguity often exacerbates stress, limits flexibility, and contributes to frustration when expectations placed on conduct offices exceed their capacity. Therefore, navigating these systems requires not only technical expertise but constant strategic decision making in imperfect institutional frameworks.

Professional Identity, Recognition, and Meaning. Despite challenges of the role, SCAs articulated a strong sense of professional identity grounded in values, integrity, and student advocacy. Many described their work as purpose-driven, emphasizing fairness, education, and care as central to their understanding of their responsibilities. At the same time, desire for meaningful recognition, through validation, transparency, and authentic acknowledgment of the

work, emerged as a critical theme. Georgia's reflection illustrated this tension, as she noted, "[Recognition] is something that is not the norm" in conduct work, explaining, "We don't have students come back and often say, hey, thanks for suspending me." She further said those students outside the office "don't necessarily understand the level of things [staff members] see, and so they don't know what to recognize [them] for." When SCAs feel their contributions are understood and valued by leadership and institution reinforces SCAs' motivation and professional confidence. When recognition aligns with personal values and emotional realities of the role, it helps administrators sustain commitment to a demanding, complex, and deeply impactful field.

Discussion

The findings illuminated the complex and emotionally intensive nature of SCAs' work, emphasizing that sustainability in the role is shaped by an interplay of relational, emotional, and systemic factors. When viewed through Neff's (2003) self-compassion framework, the emphasis SCAs placed on community, supervisor understanding, and peer support reflects the construct of common humanity, underscoring the importance of recognizing shared struggle in mitigating isolation within a frequently misunderstood role. At the same time, the emotional labor associated with managing conflict, trauma, and high-stakes decision making often required administrators to suppress or internalize their emotional responses, signaling a disruption in self-kindness and mindfulness, as professionals prioritized composure over emotional processing. Without adequate opportunities for reflection, validation, and meaning-making, these conditions contributed to heightened vulnerability to compassion fatigue and burnout.

From the perspective of Zimmerman's (2013) resilience theory, these findings highlight both individual and contextual factors that shape SCAs' ability to adapt and persist in high-demand environments. While SCAs demonstrated resilience through strong professional identities, values-driven practice, and intentional self-care and boundary setting, these individual assets alone were insufficient in the absence of supportive institutional structures. Resilience, therefore, emerged not solely as an individual trait but as a dynamic process influenced by access to relational resources, organizational clarity, and manageable workloads. The findings reinforce that protective factors—such as affirming supervision, peer networks, and institutional recognition—play a critical role in fostering adaptive capacity, while systemic barriers may undermine even highly resilient practitioners. Taken together, these results suggest that sustaining SCAs requires both intrapersonal strategies aligned with self-compassion and organizational commitments that cultivate environments where resilience can be meaningfully supported and sustained.

Results of Research Questions

RQ1 asked, What major stressors, including emotional labor demands, do SCAs in higher education encounter in their daily practice? SCAs experienced a constellation of stressors that shaped their daily professional practice, with emotional labor emerging as a central and persistent demand. Participants described managing high-stakes situations involving student trauma, conflict, and behavioral crises while navigating hostility, competing expectations, and giving outcomes that can significantly impact students' lives (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016; Stimpson & Janosik, 2015). Emotional toll of suspensions, expulsions, and adversarial interactions required SCAs to consistently regulate their emotions, often internalizing frustration, anger, or sadness to maintain professionalism, reflecting the core tenets of emotional labor

theory (Hochschild, 1983). This sustained emotional regulation contributed to anxiety, burnout, and compassion fatigue, particularly when opportunities for recovery or processing were limited (Figley, 2002; Maslach et al., 2001; Vega, 2019).

Institutional and systemic factors further intensified these stressors. Heavy caseloads, complex and high-risk cases, limited staffing, and evolving legal and compliance requirements, particularly related to Title IX, mental health intersections, and hearings, created ongoing pressure and uncertainty (Miller, 2018; Rickey, 2024). Participants described stress arising from unclear pathways for resolution, inconsistent institutional support, and lack of autonomy over workloads or decision-making, which aligned with research emphasizing role ambiguity and limited organizational support as key contributors to burnout (Davis, 2024; Winfield & Paris, 2022). These structural constraints compounded emotional labor demands by placing SCAs in positions where expectations exceed capacity, reinforcing a sense of frustration and vulnerability in a role often misunderstood or insufficiently recognized by those who work outside the conduct office (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016; Davis, 2024).

RQ2 asked, How do SCAs manage emotional labor in their professional roles? SCAs described managing emotional labor through a combination of intentional self-care practices, personal coping strategies, and boundary-setting behaviors to sustain emotional regulation and well-being. Participants highlighted the importance of both structured supports, such as therapy, grounding practices, and breathwork, and informal strategies, including journaling, physical activity, music, time with pets, and intentional breaks. These practices were described as essential tools for processing emotionally charged experiences, releasing accumulated stress, and preventing emotional overload, consistent with research on coping mechanisms in helping professions and student affairs contexts (Rickey, 2024; Vega, 2019). For many SCAs, ability to

pause, reflect, and create personal space from work demands was key to managing the lasting emotional effects of their roles, aligning with scholarship emphasizing emotional regulation as a protective factor against burnout and secondary stress (Figley, 2002; Neff, 2011).

In addition to individual strategies, relational and meaning-based approaches played a critical role in emotional labor management. Supportive supervision, peer validation, and trusted professional communities helped SCAs feel less isolated and more confident in their decision-making, reinforcing findings that organizational and supervisory support serve as key protective factors against stress and burnout (Davis, 2024; Brownlow, 2025). Participants also emphasized the importance of professional identity, values, and advocacy for students as sources of motivation and resilience, consistent with research demonstrating that connection to purpose and meaning can buffer emotional strain in student affairs roles (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016; Glick & Degges-White, 2019). Although recognition from students is rare and institutional acknowledgment is inconsistent, aligning daily work with personal values such as fairness, integrity, and care allowed SCAs to sustain commitment despite emotional strain. Together, these strategies illustrated emotional labor management is not solely an individual responsibility but deeply influenced by relational support and organizational context, supported by literature emphasizing the interplay between individual coping and environmental resources in resilience processes (Davis, 2024; Zimmerman, 2013).

Implications for Practice

Findings underscored emotional labor is a core and ongoing component of SCAs' work and must be recognized as such by institutions. SCAs routinely manage trauma, conflict, and high-stakes decisions while navigating complex legal and compliance demands, often with limited clarity or resources (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016; Miller, 2018). Treating emotional

regulation and trauma exposure as inherent aspects of the role, rather than invisible labor, aligns with emotional labor theory and can help normalize support seeking, reduce burnout, and improve role sustainability (Hochschild, 1983; Maslach et al., 2001; Figley, 2002).

Supportive, relational supervision emerged as a critical protective factor. Practice implications point to the need for supervisors and senior leaders to actively advocate for conduct staff, provide validation, and contextualize conduct work for campus partners. Coupled with realistic workload assessment, clear institutional pathways, and embedded wellness supports, these practices can significantly mitigate stress and turnover (Davis, 2024; Winfield & Paris, 2022). Finally, institutions should adopt recognition practices that reflect realities of student conduct work, where success is often unseen and appreciation from students is rare, reinforcing SCAs' professional identity and long-term commitment to a demanding yet essential function of student support and institutional integrity (Bernstein Chernoff, 2016; Glick & Degges-White, 2019).

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for practice emerged to support the sustainability and effectiveness of SCAs. These recommendations recognize managing emotional labor and systemic stressors is a shared responsibility among individual practitioners, supervisors, and national professional organizations. The following suggestions are offered to promote well-being, reduce burnout, and strengthen the long-term capacity of SCAs while maintaining integrity and care central to the work.

SCAs

SCAs should be encouraged and supported to engage intentionally in practices that acknowledge and manage the emotional labor of their roles. This includes actively using self-

care strategies (e.g., reflection, journaling, therapy, grounding practices) not as optional wellness activities, but as essential professional sustainability tools. SCAs should also be supported in developing skills around boundary-setting, emotional regulation, and self-advocacy when workloads or case complexity exceed capacity. Seeking peer consultation, mentoring relationships, and professional communities can help reduce isolation and normalize the emotional realities of conduct work. Finally, SCAs should be empowered to align their work with core values such as fairness, integrity, and care, reinforcing professional identity as a source of meaning and resilience.

Supervisors

Supervisors play a critical role in mitigating stress and emotional exhaustion among SCAs. Supervisory practices should move beyond task oversight to include relational and advocacy-based leadership. This includes regular check-ins that acknowledge emotional labor, proactive support during high-impact or complex cases, and advocacy for staff in institutional spaces where conduct work may be misunderstood. Supervisors should assess workload not only by case volume but also emotional intensity and complexity, particularly when cases involve mental health intersections, trauma, or legal risk. Transparent communication, clear expectations, and visible recognition of staff contributions can reinforce trust, reduce burnout, and promote long-term retention in conduct roles.

Association of Student Conduct Administrators

National professional organizations such as Association of Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA) are well-positioned to shape fieldwide norms and provide leadership on emotional labor and sustainability in student conduct work. ASCA should continue to elevate emotional labor, trauma exposure, and wellness as central professional issues through

conferences, publications, and professional development offerings. Recommendations include developing training specific to emotional regulation, secondary trauma, and resilience for SCAs, and providing guidance on supervision best practices and workload assessment. ASCA can also advocate for clearer institutional recognition of conduct work by offering model job competencies, supervision frameworks, and standards that explicitly name emotional labor as a core aspect of the profession. By doing so, the organization can help institutions better support SCAs while strengthening the field's overall sustainability and integrity.

Collectively, these recommendations underscore that sustaining SCAs requires shared responsibility across individuals, supervisors, institutions, and professional organizations. Addressing emotional labor, workload realities, and recognition at multiple levels is essential to supporting the well-being, effectiveness, and longevity of those who serve in this critical role.

Areas for Improvement for Future Studies

Although this study contributed to the understanding of emotional labor among SCAs, it also highlighted several opportunities for future research to deepen and expand this body of knowledge. Continued examination of emotional labor in student conduct work is necessary to better capture its complexity, longitudinal impact, and institutional influence. The following areas for future study aim to address methodological gaps, broaden perspectives, and strengthen translation of research into evidence-informed practice.

Most current understanding of emotional labor among SCAs is based on cross-sectional or retrospective data (Rickey, 2024). Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how emotional labor, coping strategies, and well-being evolve over time. Such studies could explore how sustained exposure to trauma, policy shifts (e.g., Title IX changes), or

organizational restructuring impacts professional sustainability, burnout, and retention in the student conduct field.

Although this study centered SCA voices, future research should incorporate perspectives from supervisors, senior student affairs leaders, and campus partners to better understand institutional dynamics that shape conduct work. Comparative studies examining supervisory practices, decision-making authority, and workload allocation could illuminate organizational factors that either buffer or exacerbate emotional labor. This multilevel approach would strengthen practice-based recommendations and institutional accountability.

Future studies could assess effectiveness of targeted interventions aimed at supporting SCAs, such as structured debriefing models, trauma-informed supervision, wellness programming, or workload assessment tools. Evaluating which institutional practices meaningfully reduce burnout or improve job satisfaction would move the field from descriptive research toward evidence-informed practice. Future studies should also collect demographic information on types of universities that the participants are employed at.

Given the strong role of values, purpose, and identity in sustaining SCAs, future research should more explicitly explore how professional identity development interacts with emotional labor. Studies grounded in identity or meaning-making frameworks could examine how SCAs construct resilience, maintain commitment, or decide to leave the profession. This line of inquiry may be particularly valuable for understanding retention and career longevity.

Together, these directions for future research suggest the need for longitudinal, multilevel, and intervention-focused studies that give greater attention to identity development and institutional context. Advancing research in these areas can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional labor shapes the professional lives of SCAs and inform

strategies to support sustainability, retention, and well-being in the field. By moving beyond descriptive accounts toward evaluative and systems-oriented research, future studies can meaningfully contribute to both scholarship and practice in student conduct administration.

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Appendix A: Permission to Study ASCA Members

Re: [EXTERNAL]New Request to Study the Membership



ASCA Research <research@theasca.org>

To: ● Tiffany Shierling

Cc: ○ Amanda Mesirov; ○ Central Office

You replied to this message on 1/13/2026 3:18 PM.



Tue 1/13/2026 3:01 PM

Hello Tiffany,

Thank you very much for your patience with our communication to you regarding your request to study the membership.

I am writing to let you know that the Research Committee reviewed your request to study the membership and have approved your study! All of the reviewers expressed excitement to see the results, and had no recommendations for changes. There was one piece of feedback from our reviewers, which requested that you make it clear that to participate an individual can complete the survey without having to agree to be interviewed. Our reviewers felt that this was not clear in the email drafts provided.

You can work with Amanda and the Central Office (cc'd here) to get your communications out to the Association. Please complete the [Marketing Request Form](#) and we will be able to assist with getting your information out to our members. If you have questions regarding the form, please contact Meg Armstrong at meg@theasca.org.

I hope that you will consider following up with us when your study is complete so you can share your results with the Association either at an upcoming conference or through one of our publication opportunities.

Please let me know if you have any questions or we can support you in any way, and again congratulations!

Sarah Leger, PhD

ASCA Research Committee Co-Chair

research@theasca.org

The information provided in this message is not fully vetted by ASCA and does not necessarily indicate any endorsement from ASCA. The views of individuals sharing are their own. This message is intended only for members of this group ("Research Committee"). Additionally, these groups are for professionals only (i.e., those who have left undergraduate institutions). Confidentiality via email messaging cannot be guaranteed by ASCA.

For questions or concerns, please contact Assistant Executive Director Dr. Amanda Mesirov at aed@theasca.org.

Appendix B: Emails to Gain Study/Participant Entry

Email Template: Request for Dissertation Research Participants

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Dissertation Research: The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience

Dear XXXXX,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Tiffany Shierling, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Ross College of Education at Lynn University. I am currently conducting research for my dissertation, titled “**The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience,**” and I am seeking volunteers to participate.

This study aims to explore the mental well-being experiences of student conduct professionals and create a resilience toolkit for the student conduct profession. Your participation would be incredibly valuable in helping me gather essential data and contribute to a deeper understanding of this important area.

What Participation Involves

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

- **Complete an online survey through Qualtrics.** This survey is expected to take approximately 8 minutes to complete. You do not have to complete the one-on-one interview to complete the survey.
- **Invited to Participate in a one-on-one interview:** The interview will last 30–60 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom.

All participation will be scheduled at your convenience, and I am flexible to accommodate your availability.

Confidentiality and Ethics

I understand the importance of your privacy. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential(interview) and anonymous(survey), as permitted by law. Your name will not be associated with your responses, and any data collected will be used solely for research purposes. This study has been reviewed and approved by Lynn University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) under protocol number [Your IRB Protocol Number].

Benefits of Participation

By participating, you will have the opportunity to:

- Share your unique insights and experiences on this topic.
- Contribute to important academic research that could influence future practice in the student conduct field.

How to Participate

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please select one of the following options:

- **Click on this link to access the survey:** [Link to Survey]

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me, Tiffany Shierling, at xxxxx@lynn.edu, xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Kelly Burlison at xxxxx@lynn.edu (Dissertation Chair) or Dr. RG Ghattas at xxxxx@lynn.edu (IRB chair)

Thank you very much for considering this invitation. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Shierling, Doctoral Candidate, Ross College of Education, Lynn University

Appendix C: Survey

Introduction: Thank you for considering participating in this research study for my dissertation. Before you decide, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study, what your participation will involve, and any potential risks or benefits. Please read this informed consent form carefully and feel free to ask any questions before deciding whether or not to participate.

Researcher Information:

Principal Investigator: Tiffany Shierling

Affiliation: Lynn University

Contact Information: [REDACTED]@lynn.edu

Purpose of the Study:

Study Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a survey. The estimated time commitment for your participation will be approximately 5-10 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection: All data collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymized. Your identity and personal information will be protected. The findings of the study will be reported in a manner that ensures the anonymity of all survey participants.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, sharing personal experiences or opinions may evoke emotional responses. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study, you may choose to withdraw without penalty. There are no benefits however, by participating in this study, you contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of student conduct.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not have any impact on your relationship with myself or Lynn University. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and it will not affect you in any way.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me, Tiffany Shierling, at [REDACTED]@lynn.edu, [REDACTED]. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Kelly Burlison at [REDACTED]@lynn.edu (Dissertation Chair) or Dr. RG Ghattas at [REDACTED]@lynn.edu (IRB chair)

☐ Yes

☐ No

How would you rate your current level of work-related stress?

- ☐ Very Low - I feel calm and relaxed at work with minimal stress
- ☐ Low - I experience occasional mild stress that doesn't significantly impact me
- ☐ Moderate - I have a manageable level of stress that sometimes affects my day
- ☐ High - I feel stressed frequently and it noticeably impacts my work and well-being
- ☐ Very High - I feel overwhelmed by stress most of the time and it significantly affects my
- ☐ Not Applicable

In the last 2 months, how often have you felt symptoms of burnout like exhaustion, cynicism, or feeling ineffectual?

- ☐ Never - I have not experienced any of these burnout symptoms
- ☐ Rarely - I experienced these symptoms once or twice, but very infrequently
- ☐ Sometimes - I experienced these symptoms occasionally, perhaps a few times a month
- ☐ Often - I experienced these symptoms frequently, multiple times per week
- ☐ Very Often - I experienced these symptoms almost daily or constantly
- ☐ Not Applicable

How often do you employ self-care practices like exercising, meditation, getting massages, taking time off?

- ☐ Never - I do not engage in any self-care practices
- ☐ Rarely - I engage in self-care practices once or twice a month
- ☐ Sometimes - I engage in self-care practices 1-2 times per week
- ☐ Often - I engage in self-care practices 3-4 times per week
- ☐ Very Often - I engage in self-care practices daily or almost daily
- ☐ Not Applicable

In the past 2 months, how often have you felt burned out? (This includes feeling exhausted, cynical, or like nothing you do makes a difference)

- ☐ Never - I have not felt burned out at all
- ☐ Rarely - I felt burned out once or twice during this period
- ☐ Sometimes - I felt burned out a few times a month
- ☐ Often - I felt burned out multiple times per week

- ☐ Very Often - I felt burned out almost daily or constantly
- ☐ Not Applicable

On average, how many hours per week do you spend working (including responding to emails/calls outside normal work hours)?

- ☐ 20-30 Hours
- ☐ 31-40 Hours
- ☐ 41-50 hours
- ☐ 51-60 hours
- ☐ 61 Plus Hours

How many cases does your office hear per year?

- ☐ 100 or Less Cases Per Year
- ☐ 101-300 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 301-500 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 501-700 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 701 - 900 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 901- 1500 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 1501- 2000 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 2001- 2500 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 2501- 3000 Cases Per Year
- ☐ 3001 Plus Cases Per Year

What parts of your job are hardest on you emotionally?

Do you have any other suggestions on how the university can better support your mental health and wellbeing relating to your job in student conduct?

What is your self-identified Gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Nonbinary
- ☐ Not Listed here, please type below
-
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How many years have you been in the field of Student Conduct

- ☐ 1-3 Years
- ☐ 4-6 Years
- ☐ 7-10 Years
- ☐ 11-15 Years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ 21 Plus Years

Where in the United States do you work?

- ☐ New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont)
- ☐ Middle Atlantic (Delaware, DC, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania)
- ☐ East Central (Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia)
- ☐ Southeast (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina)
- ☐ Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin)
- ☐ Heartland (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota)
- ☐ Southwest (Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas)
- ☐ Rocky Mountain (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming)
- ☐ Pacific Coast (California, Oregon, Washington)
- ☐ Non-Contiguous (Alaska & Hawaii)

If you wish to participate in the interview portion of this research, please fill out this [survey](#).

- ☐ I understand that if I want to participate in the interviews, I need to fill out the survey linked above.

Appendix D: Survey Informed Consent

Introduction: Thank you for considering participating in this research study for my dissertation. Before you decide, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study, what your participation will involve, and any potential risks or benefits. Please read this informed consent form carefully and feel free to ask any questions before deciding whether or not to participate.

Researcher Information:

Principal Investigator: Tiffany Shierling
Affiliation: Lynn University
Contact Information: xxxxxxxx@lynn.edu

Purpose of the Study:

Study Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a survey. The estimated time commitment for your participation will be approximately 5-10 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection: All data collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymized. Your identity and personal information will be protected. The findings of the study will be reported in a manner that ensures the anonymity of all survey participants.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, sharing personal experiences or opinions may evoke emotional responses. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study, you may choose to withdraw without penalty. There are no benefits however; by participating in this study, you contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of student conduct.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not have any impact on your relationship with myself or Lynn University. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and it will not affect you in any way.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me, Tiffany Shierling, at xxxx@lynn.edu, xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Kelly Burlison at xxxxx@lynn.edu (Dissertation Chair) or Dr. RG Ghattas at xxxxx@lynn.edu (IRB chair)

Appendix E: Survey for Interview Interest

Q4. Informed Consent Form Title: The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience

Introduction: Thank you for considering participating in this research study for my dissertation. Before you decide, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study, what your participation will involve, and any potential risks or benefits. Please read this informed consent form carefully and feel free to ask any questions before deciding whether or not to participate.

Researcher Information: Principal Investigator: Tiffany Shierling
Affiliation: Lynn University Contact Information:
[REDACTED]@lynn.edu

Purpose of the Study: Study Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one confidential interview. The estimated time commitment for your participation will be approximately 30-60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection: All data collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymized, and participants will be given pseudonyms. Your identity and personal information will be protected. Only the research team will have access to the data, and it will be stored securely on a password-

protected external hard drive. The findings of the study will be reported in a manner that ensures the anonymity of all participants.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, sharing personal experiences or opinions may evoke emotional responses. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study, you may choose to withdraw without penalty. There are no benefits however, by participating in this study, you contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of student conduct.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not have any impact on your relationship with myself or Lynn University. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and it will not affect you in any way.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me, Tiffany Shierling, at [REDACTED]@lynn.edu, [REDACTED]. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Kelly Burlison at [REDACTED]@lynn.edu (Dissertation Chair) or Dr. RG Ghattas at [REDACTED]@lynn.edu (IRB chair)

- ☐ Yes, I Agree
- ☐ No, I Do Not Agree

Q1. Name

Q2. Email

Appendix F: Interview Protocols – Interview Questions

Title of Study: The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student

Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience

Date & Time of Interview:

Location:

Interviewer: Tiffany Shierling

Interviewee:

Position /Title of Interviewee:

Briefly describe the project to the interviewee.

Demographic information of interviewee:

Obtain oral consent to be recorded. Explain that all information will be kept confidential and that identifying information will not be connected to quotes attributed to the respondent. Invite the participant to select their own pseudonym.

Example of questions are below:

1. What aspects of your job do you find most stressful or emotionally challenging?
2. How do institutional policies or expectations contribute to your stress levels?
3. What strategies do you use to manage your emotions during difficult or confrontational meetings?
4. Do you feel that emotional labor is recognized and valued in your workplace? How does that affect your approach to managing it?

Appendix G: Interview Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title: The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience

Introduction:

Thank you for considering participating in this research study for my dissertation. Before you decide, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study, what your participation will involve, and any potential risks or benefits. Please read this informed consent form carefully and feel free to ask any questions before deciding whether or not to participate.

Researcher Information:

Principal Investigator: Tiffany Shierling

Affiliation: Lynn University

Contact Information: xxxxx@lynn.edu

Purpose of the Study:

Study Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one confidential interview. The estimated time commitment for your participation will be approximately 30-60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Confidentiality and Data Protection:

All data collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymized, and participants will be given pseudonyms. Your identity and personal information will be protected. Only the research team will have access to the data, and it will be stored securely on a password-protected external hard drive. The findings of the study will be reported in a manner that ensures the anonymity of all participants.

Potential Risks and Benefits:

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, sharing personal experiences or opinions may evoke emotional responses. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study, you may choose to withdraw without penalty. There are no benefits however, by participating in this study, you contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of student conduct.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will

not have any impact on your relationship with myself or Lynn University. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and it will not affect you in any way.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me, Tiffany Shierling, at xxxxx@lynn.edu, xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Kelly Burlison at xxxxx@lynn.edu (Dissertation Chair) or Dr. RG Ghattas at xxxxx@lynn.edu (IRB chair)

By consenting below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this informed consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in the research study.

Print Name_____

Signature_____

Pseudonym_____

Date_____

Appendix H: Recruitment Flyer

Tiffany Shierling, with the direction of Dr. Kelly Burlison at Lynn University, is writing a dissertation titled: The Hidden Costs of Accountability: Unpacking the Emotional Labor of Student Conduct Work and Building Tools for Resilience. Please help by taking the survey!

Want to help the mental health of Student Conduct Professionals? Take this survey



Help Us Understand Your Opinions and Needs

We are conducting a survey to gather **valuable insights** about your experiences and preferences to improve our services.

Your Voice Matters

By participating, you'll help shape the future of mental health in student conduct and have a chance to make a difference in the community.

[Click here to take the survey](#)

Appendix I: IRB Protecting Human Subjects Certificate



