

Pop Admin: Discourse in Higher Education Media

by

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## Abstract

This study examines how educational administrators experience contributing to the public sphere of academic-media discourse. Opinion editorials (op-eds) written by higher education administrators are expressions of administrative praxis that have the capacity to inspire meaningful change in the study and practice of educational administration. Guided by Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, this study uses semi-structured interviews to interpret the experiences of four administrators who contributed to an administration issues column in a popular higher education publication. This study also incorporates the views of a senior staff member of the publication, who provides important historical and contextual information about the administration issues column. Ten major themes emerged through the process of open coding that aligned with this study's research question, research objectives, and overarching theoretical framework, informed by Habermas' theory of communicative action.

The major findings of this study revealed that all participants attributed meaning in different ways to the process of writing for the administration issues column. Despite varying perspectives of the roles of administrators in the public sphere, as identified in the literature review, the majority of the participants expressed that it is important that administrators' voices be included in popular higher education publications—not only as a means of sharing professional knowledge, but also to share their views on a variety of issues affecting higher education. The data also revealed a correlation between participants sharing their op-ed columns via social media platforms, specifically Twitter, with a higher rate of audience engagement.

This study makes five recommendations: that graduate programs prepare students in educational administration programs to learn how to communicate concisely; that administrators

should write about their experiences, opinions, and advice in op-ed articles; that educational administrators should network with industry professionals, publish in academic publications, and present at academic conferences; that educational administrators should include a ‘public writing’ category in their curriculum vitae; and, that educational administrators should actively engage on social media platforms. Future studies should focus on improving educational administrator preparation programs, which can equip administrators with important skills and technological fluency to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century university.

*Keywords: Educational administration, communicative action, higher education, media, op-ed, academic journalism, alt-publishing, public pedagogy, public sphere.*

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This thesis is dedicated to future educational administration researchers.

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## Chapter 1

### Overview of Study

*“...the resurgence of public writing is a rare occasion for optimism about the future of organized intellectual life” – Evan Kindley in Growing Up in Public (2015)*

### Introduction

In their book *Going Public: A Guide for Social Sciences* (2017), Arlene Stein and Jessie Daniels offer practical ways for academics in the social sciences to go public with their research. They recommend that more academics should engage with digital, print, and social media to share their research with broad audiences to “reframe and reinvigorate their discipline . . . and [to call] upon their colleagues to engage in pressing issues in their communities—and the world” (p. 4). Stein and Daniels (2017) posit that academic-media engagement takes different forms, such as writing opinion editorials (op-eds), contributing to academic blogs, and sharing content on social media platforms. And, although not specifically referenced in their book, the scholarly and non-scholarly literature demonstrates how some higher education administrators use media engagement to disseminate their academic and professional knowledge and to build connections with their peers. A study is needed to understand how higher education administrators experience writing for public audiences and to explore the ways in which they contribute advice, opinions, and knowledge in the media to situate administrative discourse in everyday contexts.

This study examines administrators’ voices through in-depth, open-ended interviews with four higher education administrators who currently write (or previously contributed to) a column on higher education administration issues, as well as an interview with a senior staff member

from the publication. This study specifically considers the participants' experiences writing for the administration issues column and how they construct meaning in spaces dedicated to administrative discourse. Using Habermas' theory of communicative action to frame this study, it explores the ways in which administrators strive to achieve communicative rationality in academic-media discourse. However, administrator participation in the public sphere places them in a legitimacy dilemma, which Habermas (1975; 1996) notes is inherent to administrative roles as they occupy both the lifeworld of societal values and communicative rationality, and the systems world of laws and regulations. Looking specifically at op-eds written by administrators, this study considers whether they are effective communicative tools for sharing their knowledge and experience with the higher education community.

### **Problem**

Publications such as Stein and Daniels (2017) book *Going Public* offer practical advice on how academics might share their work publicly through print, digital, and social media. However, few studies exist in the scholarly literature that discuss administrators' engagement in the media as a means of contributing their knowledge and experience to the public sphere, and the significance of media discourse as an effective communicative tool to overcome the legitimacy dilemma inherent in administration. The result is that the scholarly literature lacks comprehensive studies on the benefits of administrator contributions to the public sphere.

## **Research Question and Objectives**

This study focused on one overarching research question: How do higher education administrators experience contributing to the public sphere of academic-media discourse? From this question, two research objectives emerged:

1. Identify the ways in which administrators attempt to achieve communicative rationality (the outcome of successful communication) through writing op-eds.
2. Explore how administrators construct meaningful dialogue in spaces dedicated to administrative discourse.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first aim of this study is to understand how higher education administrators experienced writing for the administration issues op-ed column in a popular higher education publication. The second aim of the study is to provide educational administration and leadership researchers with recommendations for how to engage with media to share academic and professional knowledge.

## **Significance**

This study aims to fill the current gap in the literature about higher education administrator participation in the public sphere of academic-media discourse. This study provides unique insights from several higher education administrators who share their personal experiences in contributing to an administration issues column. Few studies provide these examples within the framework of Habermas' theory of communicative action, to demonstrate



the ways in which media can be an effective communicative tool to overcome the legitimization crisis inherent to administration.

### **Assumptions**

Framed by Habermas' theory of communicative action, this study uses the terms 'media' and 'public sphere' interchangeably, though it acknowledges that not all media represents an ideal or democratic public sphere in which societal issues are freely discussed and debated. Guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, this study attempts to interpret the participants' first-hand accounts of their experiences writing for the administration issues column. This study presumes that each experience is unique and not representative of all administrators who write for public audiences.

### **Limitations**

The participants' perspectives, opinions, and experiences do not reveal universal truths about all higher education administrators who choose to engage with the media. Many educational administrators may never express their views publicly, as they may be perceived as speaking on behalf of their institutions. As Stein and Daniels (2017) note in *Going Public*, writing for public audiences may not appeal to everyone as it requires an individual to move outside one's own scholarship to the public sphere where their ideas may face unwelcome scrutiny and critique (p. 5). This study is also limited in terms of the number of participants, which is typical in IPA studies (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 49) and therefore does not represent a significant portion of administrators who are active in the media.

## Definitions of Terms

Several key terms or terms that are specific to social media or particular fields are used throughout this study and are defined below:

Academic journalism	Journalism produced by university faculty.
Alt-ac	Alternative academic, used to describe academics who take on both academic and administrative roles, or other non-traditional roles.
Alt-publishing	Alternative publishing channels such as open-access journals, blogs, op-eds, etc. that are different from traditional journal and book publishing.
Alt-metrics	A term that emerged in 2010 to describe a range of new (alternative) methods for analyzing and informing scholarship using the social web.
Columnist	A journalist who contributes regularly to a newspaper or magazine.
Editorial	An article written for a magazine or newspaper that contributes an opinion.

Hashtag	The ‘#’ symbol before a word or phrase (e.g. #edadmin) that serves as a search term or subject marker that allow users to follow a particular topic or trend.
Op-ed	Opinion-editorials (rather than “opposite the editorial page”), which most commonly appear in newspapers and magazines, written from the perspective of a contributing author.
Popular	Cultural activities or products intended for the general public rather than specialists or intellectuals.
Tweet	280-character message on the social media platform Twitter.

### **Author’s Comments**

This study has personal significance to me. I believe that administrators’ voices are important to include in higher education publications because they contribute insights and perspectives that are unique to administration. Administrators are required to balance shared societal values, norms, and culture with instrumental reality, and are bound by laws, rules, and regulations (Knox, 2016, p. 487). Various forms of media can be used as communicative tools to share administrator perspectives, and in an ideal public sphere, ideas should be freely exchanged and debated. In keeping with my goal of making my research useful, I have provided a list of resources that may be instructional on how researchers can go public with their own work and re-define the roles of higher education administrators in the popular imagination.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

Higher education administrators who write for popular publications knowingly or unknowingly, take on the precarious task of explaining, defending, and legitimizing, the purpose of educational administration to the broader higher education community. Dedicated opinion (op-ed) columns that discuss administrative issues, such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* Administration 101 series (Perlmutter, 2018, June 17, April 29, March 11, February 11; 2017, November 12, October 8, September 10, July 16, June 13, May 14, April 10, March 5, January 30, January 1), Career Talk column (Furlong, J.S. and Vick, J.M., December 2016) and others (Jenkins, 2005; Fish, 2003); *University Affairs* magazine (Cote-Meek, 2017; Mancuso, 2012, 2014; Owram, 2010, 2012), op-eds found in *Times Higher Education* (Knight, 2017) and *Inside Higher Education* (Bean, 2015) to name a few, are communicative tools that have the capacity to bring visibility to administrative roles and provide insight into the complexities and lived experiences of higher education administrators. Op-ed articles, such as those listed above, are among the most common forms of administrator-media engagement found in the literature and exist in a deliberative public sphere that situates administrative discourse in everyday contexts. In fact, much of the research published within the past decade on public intellectualism suggests that there has been a resurgence in the movement encouraging academics to go public with their work; that is, to share their research with academics and non-academics alike on platforms not limited to traditional scholarly journals, as a way of improving accessibility of academic research to broad, informed audiences (Kindley, 2015; Remler, Waisanen, & Gabor, 2013; Rowe &

Brass, 2008; Stein & Daniels, 2017). However, few studies currently exist on administrator engagement in the public sphere through publishing in print and digital higher education publications. A review of the literature can help to determine the ways in which administrators add their voice to higher education publications through publishing op-eds and how they construct meaningful dialogue in spaces dedicated to administrative discourse.

Habermas' theory of communicative action provides a useful framework in which to understand discourse in the modern public sphere. Eriksen and Weigård's (2003) work on understanding this theory provides a concise understanding of communicative action, which is influenced by the analytical philosophy of language, the phenomenological tradition of the shared lifeworld, and symbolic interactionism, which "emphasises [sic] the uniqueness of the human linguistic capability, and how language structures the way in which we relate to the world" (p. 35). Simply put, the theory of communicative action refers to the speech acts between at least two subjects to arrive at an understanding (p. 36). Therefore, for a conversation to have meaning, Eriksen and Weigård (2003) explain that, according to Habermas, the "utterances" must be true, the speech acts must be right, and the speaker's intention must be expressed in the way it is meant (p. 36). They also note that, according to Habermas, this is an ideal and not the reality of most everyday communicative practices. However, as social beings, we must continue to strive for communicative rationality through linguistic communication (pp. 37-38). In the modern context of media discourse, op-eds written by higher education administrators can be framed by the theory of communicative action and viewed as effective communicative tools that enable administrators be deliberative participants in the public sphere.

Three themes emerged from this literature review. The first is that educational administrators' participation in the public sphere provides a space to achieve communicative

rationality. In Knox's (2016) recent study on the application of Habermas' theory of communicative action, the author focuses on the administration legitimacy dilemma and posits that public administrators face a contradiction in their roles because they must occupy two worlds—the lifeworld of societal values and communicative rationality, and the systems world of laws and regulation (p. 480). Language, in particular, is used in the lifeworld to “resist systematic imperatives, which ultimately undermine communicative structures” (p. 481). The public sphere represents a space in which individuals may come together to openly discuss societal issues, which can be problematic to administrators as they are caught between these two worlds (p. 481). The field of educational administration and leadership has a long history of attempting to resolve three inter-related crises in rationality, legitimacy, and motivation (Bates, 1982; Foster, 1980; Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Within the theoretical framework of communicative action, the public sphere provides opportunities to achieve communicative rationality and to overcome these crises through clear communication and meaningful engagement with the higher education community.

The second theme that emerged is that the public sphere provides opportunities for educational administrators to engage in democratic discourse. Alternative publishing is symptomatic of what Lagoze, Edwards, Sandvig, and Plantin (2015) describe as the “destabilization” of traditional scholarly infrastructures. They posit that some academics question the validity of publishing in scholarly journals when open access, made possible by the Internet, allows for wider dissemination of their work (p. 1054). Lagoze et al. (2015) and Stein and Daniels (2017) suggest that alternative metrics (alt-metrics), such as numbers of downloads or page views, are valid indicators of scope and readership. However, some scholars contest the advantages of writing in the public sphere (Bozeman, 2012; Spurgin, 2011). And while entry into

the public sphere is not always a democratic process, educational administrators appear to find meaningful engagement via social media platforms. Though it is not within the scope of this literature review to explore all the possibilities of administrator social media use, it is worth noting that administrator engagement on social media, particularly Twitter, provides them with useful ways to share their knowledge and experiences (Calabrese, 2012; Cho, 2016; Jefferis & Bisschoff, 2017) and to overcome the legitimation dilemma (Knox, 2016). Advances in social networking technology are shifting the definition of what it means to engage in the public sphere and to make knowledge more accessible for new figures to emerge and speak to their disciplines as subject matter experts.

The last major theme is that increased and continuous engagement in the public sphere permits educational administrators to re-define themselves as academics. Higher education administrators were not always as engaged in the media as they are now. Baldwin (1995) provides a comprehensive history of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* since its inception in 1966 and posits that the publication now known as *The Chronicle* has become the voice of higher education, but not initially with the involvement of administrators. A review of op-eds written by administrators reveals a different picture of administrator-media collaboration today. Educational administrators actively contribute to opinion and advice columns and have noted in many op-eds that they are concerned with engaging in scholarship, in addition to administering in schools (Bickford and Whisnant, 2010; DeSimone, 2010; Katz, 2008; Kotsopoulos, 2014) and have noted as such recently in the scholarly literature (Coe & Chinta, 2016). Katz (2008) defines ‘scholar-administrators’ as administrators who have a “strong commitment to the notion that higher administrators [sic] ought to be genuine scholar-teachers . . . since these are the people who should understand both the values and processes that make quality higher education work”

(para. 2). A study by Coe and Chinta (2016) finds that administrators who publish, though not required in their roles, gain a better understanding of the value of scholarship as well as improved respect and recognition from faculty (p. 479). However, they find that most studies by administrators focus on the practice of administration and not the scholarship of administration, stating, “nowhere in the literature is there information on the meaning found in the experience of producing scholarship, nor is there much information on what administrators should be doing with regard to scholarship” (p. 476). It appears that not a great deal has changed since Heck and Hallinger (2005) reviewed where the field of educational administration and leadership stands today, suggesting that it has never been “an area of rigorous empirical investigation and knowledge accumulation” (p. 230). If op-eds like those listed above encourage administrators to pursue scholarly engagement, they may, in turn, encourage increased scholarly activity. One cause for optimism is that administrator preparation programs are prioritizing the use of technology in students’ formative years, which may help future administrators to be more active in the public sphere. Administrators’ lack of technological knowledge is noted in the literature as being an issue that is inhibiting administrators from properly administering in modern universities and new solutions are being explored (Calabrese, 2012; Perez & Uline, 2003; Wankel & Wankel, 2011). A generation of administrators who are able to use a range of communicative tools may improve and help to re-define the roles of administrators in universities.

In the ideal public sphere, ideas and information would be freely exchanged and debated. While the media does not always represent the ideal public sphere, op-eds written by educational administrators demonstrate that attempts at communicative rationality are being made and that administrators are deliberately participating in discourse about higher education. The



resurgence in the public intellectualism movement is encouraging more academics to write for public audiences. Op-eds written by administrators have the potential of reaching more administrators than articles published in traditional journals and could improve publishing in the field of educational administration and leadership as administrators re-imagine their roles as scholar-administrators. The public sphere is a space in which administrators can attempt to achieve communicative rationality with the higher education community, engage in democratic discourse, as traditional scholarly infrastructure is unsettled, and re-define their roles as administrators in today's universities. This literature review examines a body of work from the fields of educational administration, public administration, communication, media studies, educational technology, and others to better identify the ways in which administrators attempt to achieve communicative rationality through public writing and how they construct meaningful dialogue in spaces dedicated to administrative discourse.

### **Administrator participation in the public sphere to achieve communicative rationality**

In the sphere of academic-media discourse, inclusion of administrators' voices is significant. Op-eds that give voice to higher education administrators are useful communicative tools that have the capacity to inspire meaningful change in the study and practice of educational administration. In their study, Rowe and Brass (2008) establish that op-eds are the most common form of academic-media engagement of four possible contact modes (p. 679) and are noted by Day and Golan (2005) to be an "important part of democratic discourse" (p. 69). As noted above, op-eds are one of the most common forms of administrative-media engagement found during the collection of literature. This section examines the ways in which higher education administrators contribute to the public sphere of academic-media discourse to overcome the three inter-related

crises noted by Habermas as rationality, legitimacy, and motivation through communicative rationality, adopt journalistic practices to produce understandable and relevant content, and produce op-eds that conform to Habermas' ideal speech situations by communicating the purpose of administration based on undistorted consensus.

In a modern era with almost unlimited access to information, print, digital, and social media may be viewed as spaces for deliberative democracy in which academic-media discourse can be exchanged and debated freely among members of the higher education community. Op-eds written by higher education administrators provide examples of the challenges and lived experiences of administrators in today's universities. By participating in the public sphere of academic-media discourse, administrator op-eds can explain why some find it to be a rewarding career. In this manner, they counter common narratives that are traditionally associated with doing administrative work in universities that suggest that administrators have 'joined the dark side' (Mancuso, 2012, 2014; Owram, 2010). This lack of public confidence is symptomatic of the legitimacy crisis experienced by administrators, further explained by Knox (2016) as "the contradiction faced by administrators as they exercise discretion when translating abstract laws and policies into concrete rules, procedures, and actions while remaining flexible and open to the public" (p. 478). Foster (1980), interpreting Habermas' work *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), explains that modern capitalist states experience crises in rationality, legitimacy, and motivation, and that modern administrative theory can be linked to "a developing crisis in public confidence" (p. 499). A review of the literature confirms that a state of crisis exists as mentioned. Kochan (2002) notes that "[e]verywhere we turn we seem to be in a state of crisis, whether in public administration, organizational analysis, politics, or education" and that these crises have undermined our institutions and underlying foundational philosophies (p. 137). Fitzgerald (2014)

suggests that the university is in a state of crisis, as higher education experienced a significant paradigm shift from thinking of the university as a public good that produces an educated public to an economic commodity (p. 210). The field of educational administration and leadership, like the fields of public administration and higher education, is well-noted to have suffered from these inter-related crises (Bates, 1982; Foster, 1980), which continues into the present day as administrators produce theory that inadequately connects to practice (Heck and Hallinger, 2005). Rowe and Brass (2008) draw a connection between fields in crisis and public discourse, suggesting that academic-media collaborations beyond academic publishing “constitute public intervention in which academics must embrace popular modes of criticism and expression” (p. 688). The participation by academics in the media, which is traditionally a journalistic area, demonstrates how op-eds may be viewed as an interruption to a field in crisis for the purpose of popularizing, politicizing, and creating a space for critical discourse (p. 687). Academics who go public with their own research by publishing it in public forums such as op-eds, websites, or other forms of media, represent deliberate participation in the public sphere, which creates new opportunities for dialogue about issues affecting higher education.

Op-eds written by administrators are examples of a medium known as academic-journalism that has been advanced by scholars as a collaborative form of publishing that has gained popularity in the public intellectualism movement. The literature suggests that academic-journalism is mutually beneficial to both the fields of academia and the field of journalism, as it can help academic disciplines to translate their knowledge to non-specialists (Kindley, 2015; Remler, Waisanen, & Gabor, 2013; Rowe and Brass, 2008). The emphasis on making discourse understandable is emphasized in the ideal Habermasian public sphere, defined by Eriksen and Weigård (2003) as “a forum where what happens is determined by what can be made generally

understandable, interesting, believable, relevant and acceptable, through the use of everyday language” (p. 186). In this context, journalistic practices may be beneficial for academics who want to translate their work to broad audiences, particularly in popular education publications. Adopting journalistic practices addresses a problem identified by Remler et al. (2003), which is that academics and journalists produce “too little investigation and analysis of complex problems communicated in a way that is publicly accessible” (p. 358). Through collaboration with journalists by writing op-eds, or providing expert advice, academics can produce socially-important journalism that benefits teaching and contributes meaningful public knowledge, while assisting the field of journalism by “expanding the forms of journalism produced in academia” (p. 358). This is important because, as Rowe and Brass (2008) suggest, academics produce work using complex and obscure language that isolates readers, and by producing ‘everyday’ academic discourse, academics might better place their knowledge “in the service of wider public discourse, and particularly . . . journalistic publics” (p. 678). Many scholars acknowledge the apparent contradiction between these disciplines, as academia and journalism use different methodologies, practices, and processes to produce knowledge (Kindley, 2015; Remler et al., 2013; Rowe & Brass, 2008; Williams, 2014). But while their approaches may vary, Rowe and Brass posit that journalists and academics may find some common ground as ‘knowledge workers’ or ‘intellectual workers’ whose labour concerns the “production and circulation of knowledge, ideas and other cultural products” (p. 679). Journalistic practices are useful in helping academics to communicate to public audiences, and for participating in the public sphere, though they may not always meet Habermas’ criteria of an ideal public sphere.

There are varying opinions about whether media discourse can be said to represent Habermas’ ideal public sphere, which is “constituted by freedom of communication . . . [and]

makes possible the public use of reason” (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003, p. 186). Rowe and Brass (2008) posit that the new public sphere has expanded its definition to include print and digital media (p. 684). Wolfgang and Jenkins (2015) appear to agree, stating that online comment sections found in public affairs publications “hold potential for representing the Habermasian public sphere” as long as the publications are publicly accessible, robust and diverse, and hold the potential for “rational-critical discourse” (p. 1). This discourse should also meet all four of Habermas’ ideal speech situations described by Foster (1980) as comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness (p. 503). However, in Anderson’s (2004) review of Foster’s work, he explains that Foster is concerned that language, which can be used as a technology of thought, can control information systems, including our education system (p. 250) and posits that since the media does not require consumers to participate or to approach information dispensed to them with a spirit of inquiry, citizens become “passive consumers of information channeled through the funnel of corporate and government power” (p. 246). Furthermore, language in the media can be used to communicate an undisclosed political agenda as language is “always performative and never means just what it says” (p. 249). In fact, out of concern for the core value of administration to become anything other than teaching, Foster recommends that the term ‘educational administration’ be replaced with the term ‘*educative* administration’, meaning administration that is primarily about learning and which is “as free as possible of power’s distorting effects” (as cited in Anderson, 2004, p. 250). However, a review of administrator op-eds suggests that administrators attempt to explain what is at the heart of educational administration. In an op-ed column, Mancuso (2014) writes that “administration is like teaching” and adds that administration is “fundamentally . . . about learning” (para. 4). Though skeptical about media involvement, particularly around the use of language to control discourse, Foster

(1980), echoing Habermas (1975), agrees that the fundamental solution to a legitimation crisis in educational administration is ‘communicative ethics’, which is defined by Foster (1980) as “a morality based on undistorted discussion and consensus” (pp. 502-503). By this definition, it is unclear from the literature if op-eds written by administrators can be said to achieve communicative ethics. More information would need to be known about the contributing author, the publication, and the publisher to determine to what degree the language was changed during the editing process prior to publication. Rowe and Brass (2008) acknowledge that academic information goes through some modification by the media sphere since journalists and academics operate under different methodologies.

Administrators contribute to an emerging public pedagogy through media collaborations, primarily op-ed columns in print and digital higher education publications and websites. Media engagement by the scholarly community can be said to constitute public intervention to address disciplines that are in decline: crises within the field of educational administration and leadership have been well-documented. The review of the literature has so far established that educational administrators’ participation in the media through the publications of op-eds is notable, and that, through the framework of communicative action, can be viewed as deliberate participation in the public sphere. And while adopting journalistic practices may be beneficial to academics to encourage them to communicate in plain language in a way that aligns with Habermas’ ideal speech situations, administrator op-eds in particular would need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis to judge if they can be said to achieve communicative rationality.

## **Administrator participation in the public sphere as a space for democratic discourse**

A major outcome of the increasing move toward academics publishing in alternative publication channels (alt-publishing) is the de-stabilization of traditional publishing structures. Alt-publishing and alternative metrics (alt-metrics) appear consistently in the literature as valid methods of sharing and measuring the impact of scholarship in the new public sphere (Lagoze, Edwards, Sandvig & Plantin, 2015; Stein & Daniels; 2017). Lagoze et al. (2015) establish that traditional publication channels may be viewed as invisible infrastructure, one that once supported knowledge work, but which has since destabilized due to open access to information made possible by the Internet (p. 1054). However, alt-publishing is not entirely democratic, as noted by some scholars who suggest that a few centralist figures tend to dominate the media, which can be damaging to a discipline (Bozeman, 2012; Marshall, 2015; Spurgin, 2011). However, social and collaborative technologies have easier entry points, and studies have documented the benefits of social media engagement by administrators (Cho, 2016; Knox, 2016). Social media, as the new public sphere, can help administrators to combat feelings of isolation (Cho, 2016; Calabrese, 2012; Jefferis & Bisschoff, 2017;) and help them to overcome the legitimacy dilemma inherent to administrators (Knox, 2016). Social media and academic-journalist collaborations also create opportunities for new researchers, many of whom are exploring alternative careers in academia (known as alternative academics or alt-acs) and publish in non-traditional, public forums as they experience less incentive of trying to secure tenure-track positions (Kindley, 2015; Stein & Daniels, 2017).

Alternatives to traditional publishing infrastructures, such as op-eds, open-access journals, blogs, and social media platforms, are potential symptoms of what Lagoze et al. (2015) refer to as a “general instability in knowledge infrastructures” (p. 1054). The popularity of alt-

publishing channels is directly related to a need for meaningful engagement by academics. Due to the restrictions that publishers place on intellectual property, academics react to these “frictions”, which are exacerbated by the emergence of personal computing and freedom of information on the Internet, among other noted frictions (p. 1057). The Internet, which has destabilized traditional publishing structures, has made “the invisible visible and [rendered] once-stable arrangements fragile” (p. 1054). Rowe and Brass (2008) argue that the problem of academic isolation is specifically caused by the way that academics write, which is often incomprehensible and inaccessible to non-specialists, which renders their research incapable of being placed “in the service of wider public discourse [and] . . . journalistic publics (p. 678). Additionally, alt-metrics have therefore emerged as a valid way of measuring reach and size of audiences and are defined by Stein and Daniels (2017) as a term that emerged in 2010 to describe “a range of new methods for analyzing and informing scholarship using the social web” (p. 178). However, they also note that alt-metrics mainly “serve the interest of the publications or platforms” and that we should consider all types of metrics, such as responsibility, diversity, public engagement, transactional, and transformational metrics (pp. 180-181). Yet, while alt-publishing and alt-metrics suggest that more academics may publish in forums that are more likely to be read by broad audiences, there is still limited engagement by educational administrators in the public sphere, which may be attributed to their positions as public figures in schools, or to a lack of technological knowledge or training.

There is some question about whether public writing benefits a discipline. Marshall (2015) suggests that the rise of the public academic persona occurred because of a massive shift that happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from profiling certain academic personalities who were resources for media industries, to a construction of individual online public personas that were



made possible by the Internet (p. 127). Marshall suggests that media has transformed the role of the contemporary academic into one where having a public persona is essential to their public identity and where their ideas are situated “beyond research and writing and into a world where the presentation of the self takes precedence” (p. 131). Spurgin (2011) notes that ‘academic megastars’ who are profiled in such publications as the *Times* are often misleading because they are portrayed as central figures surrounded by unreasonable colleagues, whose own work is legitimized while casting a shadow on the rest of the discipline (p. 233). Marshall (2015) suggests that with the current shift toward an ‘attention economy’, authoritative higher education sources have the power to “shape the image of academics . . . in the popular imagination” (p. 235). Bozeman (2012) advises against ‘beauty contest scholarship’ and reasons that administrative practitioners have likely never been enrolled in a public administration program, and so it would seem “irrefutable that journals are the places to be” (p. 1020). While Marshall suggests that the production of an attention economy means that more academics have the opportunity to find a voice via the Internet, Spurgin (2011) and Bozeman (2012) are skeptical about public discourse and the credibility implied by popular media. Remler et al. (2013) would likely agree that a focus on central figures within a discipline is detrimental, stating that academic journalism “is needed and . . . cannot be done by a few elite academics” (p. 369). While it is true that advances in technology and access to the Internet make it easy for academics to participate in higher education discourse, academics need to be well-practiced in pitching articles to publications—skills that books such as *Going Public* by Stein and Daniels (2017) attempt to teach. Williams (2014) echoes a similar issue, stating that while it is important to translate academic work to the masses, publishing in the media “is not ‘broadly democratic; the glossies, after all, reach only a limited, upscale slice of the public sphere’” (p. 42). However, Kindley

(2015) states that the definition of a public intellectual today is changing fast due to advancements in social networking technology and constrictions of the job market (p. 472). While this study has focused largely on administrator op-eds, public intellectuals in the field of educational administration and leadership may come forward using these new technologies made available through the Internet.

Administrators use social media as a means of democratic participation in the public sphere. Knox (2016) notes that because administrators must exist between the lifeworld and the systems world, social media can be used as communicative tools to achieve communicative rationality in their interactions with the public (p. 480). A few studies have been published suggesting the potential benefits of social media usage by educational administrators to share professional learning and research, most notably, through Twitter, the 280-character microblogging site. Cho (2016) suggests that the use of hashtags via Twitter on particular topics can serve as public forums that can encourage conversations about educational administration (e.g. #edadmin). While social platforms like Twitter—the most commonly used platform by academics, according to Stein and Daniels (2017)—have the potential to improve connectivity between administrators and the higher education community, they are only effective if their professional usages are widely known. They also note that social media usage is particularly beneficial to graduate students and younger academics, who reported that “social media connections provide both emotional and intellectual support, which they find particularly important at that stage in their academic career” (p. 90). Resources such as the reference book *Higher Education Administration with Social Media* by Wankel and Wankel (2011) are crucial for helping educational administrators to recognize the ways in which Twitter and other social media platforms can be used professionally; however more studies are needed to promote ways

in which administrators might use social media as communicative tools to share their research and knowledge.

The public sphere provides spaces in which educational administrators can participate in democratic discourse. Many examples of administrator-media collaborations are through op-eds, however, as numerous scholars have pointed out, there are issues with the undemocratic process of media publishing, which is often dominated by online personas (Bozeman, 2012; Marshall, 2015; Remler et al., 2013; Spurgin, 2011; Williams; 2014). A quantitative or mixed methods analysis would be needed to assess who these public figures are in the field of educational administration and leadership, though even a brief review of the available administrator op-eds suggests that some academics appear in the literature numerous times and are recognized as the “heroic, magisterial figures” of public intellectualism (Kindley, 2015, p. 472). However, as Kindley (2015) points out, it is important not to think of public intellectuals in terms of the few notable figures that immediately come to mind, but to acknowledge that the definition of a public intellectual is rapidly changing and that there is “no question that online publication and social networking technology ... are unsettling old hierarchies” (p. 472).

### **The public sphere as a space for re-defining administrator roles in today’s universities**

Op-ed columns dedicated to administrator issues provide administrators with a space in which to explore their ever-changing roles as school leaders. This section of the literature review looks at ways in which participation in the public sphere helps administrators to re-define their roles. A brief overview of administrator engagement in the authoritative source for higher education news, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, demonstrates the ways in which administrator-media engagement has significantly increased over the years (Baldwin, 1995). One

of the ways in which administrators are re-defining their roles is as scholar-administrators, that is, administrators who actively participate in teaching and research, despite not being required to do so (Bickford & Whisnant, 2010; Coe & Chinta, 2016; DeSimone, 2010; Katz, 2008; Kotsopoulos, 2014). In these op-eds, administrators challenge traditional administrative roles and encourage more engagement in scholarly activity, which is lacking in the scholarly literature (Coe & Chinta, 2016). As technological fluency is emphasized in more administrator preparation programs, future scholar-administrators will have the skills to use digital tools for effective communication.

Participation from the higher education community in public spaces is documented in accounts of the emergence of academic presses such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Baldwin (1995) writes that the newspaper scholars know today as *The Chronicle*, began as a shared supplement known as *Moonshooter*, which was bound into a small group of alumni magazines. This eventually transformed into a publication that arguably became the voice of higher education, but one that lacked any kind of major dialogue from educational administrators (p. 53). Baldwin suggests that administrators initially became more involved with the newspaper through of the career advertisements section, which was “the single most important resource that higher education administrators used to begin their personal job searches” (p. 15). *The Chronicle* also contributed to the homogenization of the academic arena, creating a “multiversity”, a series of communities and academic activities that are brought together under one name with a common purpose. In that sense, a history of this trade paper suggests that it has the power to create communities, and in doing so, provides a solution to the kind of isolation experienced by academics and administrators alike. Baldwin’s review of the history of *The Chronicle* is, therefore, especially notable for its observation that trade papers are a response to “a yearning for

some kind of voice” (p. 53). Participation by administrators in major higher education publications is increasing, which is not only representative of their participation in the public sphere, but also demonstrates that administrators actively engage with the higher education community in ways that were previously unprecedented.

There are a significant number of articles written by administrators about an emerging type of academic known as an “administrator-scholar”, defined by Bickford and Whisnant (2010) as a “growing cadre of administrators ... hired with Ph.D’s in their fields” (para. 3), which can be taken as evidence of a new generation of administrators who also do research. Foreword-thinking and profound ideas are discussed in administrator op-eds. For example, Bickford and Whisnant (2010) document a five-year academic plan that they intend to submit to the University of North Carolina, requesting the creation of a formal structure that would assist the growing cohort of administrator-scholars (para. 10). Their proposal included a flexible program that would allow administrators to continue their research, access compensation and professional development funding, and be incorporated into faculty governance structures (para. 10). An article written by the same authors three years later noted that an “alt-ac (alternative academic) working group” was born after their original proposal was reduced to a vague statement that the university would recognize staff contributions and encourage activities of staff engaged in scholarship (Bickford & Whisnant, 2013). At the time of the article, the authors planned on completing an inventory of professional development and reward programs with a goal of presenting a formal proposal recommending policy changes to the senior administration (para. 20). This example found in the non-scholarly literature demonstrates one way that administrator-scholars attempted to influence policy. The documentation of these experiences in op-eds has the potential of sharing ideas and affecting change to enable administrators to

participate in scholarship, which is significantly lacking in the field. Coe and Chinta (2016) contribute a significant study on the ontology of scholar-administrators, noting that engagement in scholarship, though not a requirement of most administrative jobs, provides administrators with “a greater appreciation for not only the effort required to do research but also the consequent impacts that research has on all other aspects of academia such as in teaching as well as service” (p. 479). Likewise, academics note that their respect for administrators who engaged in scholarly activity improved and that collaborations with faculty strengthened their relationship and “generated a mutual appreciation for the work realm of academic administration and faculty jobs” (p. 480). Participation in scholarship is encouraged in administrator opinion and advice columns. These are important spaces in which to influence practitioners in the field who would not necessarily read the scholarly literature that emphasizes the need for a stronger connection between theory and practice.

In their review of where the field of educational administration and leadership stands today, Heck and Hallinger (2005) state their concern about whether future generations of researchers will inherit adequate research skills so they may “separate what moves the field intellectually from what continues to spin it in ideological or methodological circles” (p. 239). Fortunately, scholars have identified the importance of technological fluency in administration preparation programs (Calabrese, 2012; Donlevy, 2004; Perez & Uline, 2003). Donlevy (2004) states that “[e]xpertise in technology has become an essential administrative prerequisite” (p. 214). Though many of the technological skills that Donlevy lists refer to how technology can be applied in schools, an emphasis on technology in modern administration preparation programs may logically translate to an awareness of social and collaborative technologies that help administrators build connection with their peers. Calabrese (2012) documents a study in which

he required his educational administration graduate students to keep blogs, and through the lens of Appreciative Inquiry, to write reflective posts and comment on classmates' content to develop inherent leadership qualities. Blogging is one of the ways that Stein and Daniels (2017) encourage academics to go public with their work and is one of many communicative tools that administrators could use to communicate effectively with the higher education community. With the resurgence of the public intellectualism movement, educational administration graduate students are positioned to actively engage in public discourse.

Educational administrators can re-define and explore new roles for administrators in the public sphere. Evident from a review of administrator op-eds is a new kind of administrator who values scholarship and teaching, and through public writing in op-eds, communicates the importance of contributing to the scholarly literature by practitioners and academics alike. Changes to educational administrator preparation problems by building technological skills may positively impact the future of the field of educational administration and leadership. According to Kindley (2015), new researchers are among the most likely to engage in public discourse, and this will likely be true of new educational administration researchers who utilize social and collaborative platforms to engage with the higher education community.

### **Conclusion**

The need to address alternative publics is critical. In his book *Public Access*, Michael Bérubé (1994) states that academics must popularize their work because “their very existence is being threatened” (p. 176). With regard to the field of educational administration and leadership, Bérubé’s claim is far from exaggeration. Heck and Hallinger (2005) establish that that this field has never been one of huge intellectual capacity (p. 239), and a recent study by Coe and Chinta

(2016) suggests that this is still true—there is a lack of understanding about what it means to produce scholarship within the field of educational administration and leadership (p. 474). The very existence of this field is under threat of not being considered a rational, legitimate, or worthwhile intellectual pursuit. However, the resurgence of the public intellectualism movement is, as Kindley (2015) suggests, an opportunity to include a “missing generation” of academics who were previously focused on “advancing professionally than . . . on contributing to public discourse” (p. 471). A recent *University Affairs* survey revealed that only 18.6 percent of Canadian PhD graduates actually find full-time professorships and so many academics find alternative careers in administration (Bowness, 2015). With so few reasons to focus solely on publishing in traditional journals, alt-publications and alt-metrics are being explored. Stein and Daniels (2017) also recommend that academics include a category in their curriculum vitae for ‘public writing’ as there are currently “no good ways to measure your work as a public scholar and make it count in ways that are legible across all institutions of higher education (pp. 185-186). In the future, it is not unthinkable that downloads, page views, and followers will count toward scholarly contributions and assist ‘popular’ academics with securing professorships and tenure.

This literature review focused on studies published within the last decade across multiple fields to provide a full scope of what it means to be a public intellectual in the present day, as well as the opportunities the public sphere of academic-media discourse provides to higher education administrators. This literature review focused as much as possible on administrator-media collaborations, though there are few scholarly sources on this subject. However, many examples of administrator op-eds could be found in print and online higher education publications and websites and were significant in informing this literature review.



Three major themes emerged during the collection of relevant literature: that higher education administrators' participation in the public sphere provides them with a space to achieve communicative rationality, to engage in democratic discourse, and to re-define their roles in the popular imagination. There are limitations to public writing. Stein and Daniels (2017) note that many academics may feel uncomfortable being publicly scrutinized and critiqued (p. 5). Day and Golan (2005) posit that while op-eds are important, they may have limited functionality as a public forum due to the restrictions placed on them by editors (p. 69). In contrast, Rowe and Brass (2008) maintain that op-eds are still “contested territory between professional journalists and academics, sometimes in ideologically charged circumstances” that have the potential of mounting attacks at educational elites, resulting in “anti-intellectualism . . . [fostering] an antagonistic relationship between the academy and the everyday” (p. 694). Additionally, news websites and magazines are not completely accessible to broad audiences, as many charge a fee to view premium articles or for an annual subscription. For example, *Times Higher Education* allows registered users to read up to three articles for free every month before being required to pay a monthly fee. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* allows users to read many articles for free, but only paid users can access premium articles. Though it is not unreasonable for any organization to charge payment for content, particularly as many journalists are forced to work freelance with fewer in-house journalist opportunities available, many higher education news websites are still *mostly* free to the public and arguably much less expensive than academic journal subscriptions.

Publishing in traditional academic journals and in the public sphere of higher education media are both valuable, though they have different currency in the academic world. Educational administrators need to be concerned with bridging the divide between theory and practice, and

this means using every tool in their toolbox, including digital, print, and social media. Though few books and articles focus specifically on how administrators might engage in scholarship and also write about it publicly, administrator-scholars should take it upon themselves to read books on how to go public, as many administrators are also academics. They should tweet about #edadmin issues, guest blog on alt-ac websites, and pitch freelance editorial articles to higher education publications. The more the higher education community communicates across media platforms, the more important it will be for higher education administrators to be equipped with the necessary tools to join the conversation.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology and Research Design**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides the methodological framework and research design of this study. I provide an explanation about Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as my chosen qualitative methodology and include information about participant selection, research procedures, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations of the participants.

#### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was chosen for this study because of its emphasis on understanding participant experience. As theorized by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), IPA draws on the principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, and is “concerned with understanding personal lived experience and thus with exploring persons’ relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process (phenomenon)” (p. 40). Originally developed for the field of psychology, Smith et al. suggest that IPA is being adopted by various disciplines, including the social sciences (p. 4). One of the key aspects to designing this study was the focus on rich, personal accounts of why participants chose to write for the administrator issues column published by a higher education publication to answer the research question: how do higher education administrators experience contributing to the public sphere of academic-media discourse? Alase (2017) notes that one of the advantages to using IPA is that it affords “new and novice researchers the opportunity to explore . . . the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants” (p. 9), which is ultimately what this study was trying to

accomplish. An IPA approach requires a double positional role, or the double hermeneutic, in which the researcher makes sense of the participant, who is making sense of a phenomenon (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). A methodological approach guided by IPA allowed for participant experience to be the focus of the study, and for the results of the study to focus primarily on the experiences of the participants, while bracketing or containing researcher bias.

### **Guiding Principles for Study**

- The participants of this study are the proper authorities of their experiences and their descriptions or opinions about the significance of administrative discourse in popular publications may vary.
- Lived experiences are complex and cannot easily be coded and categorized. This study's attempt to do so is to further our understanding of public discourse by higher education administrators.
- Traditional scholarly studies are imperative to the legitimacy of the field of educational administration and leadership and this study is meant to encourage more studies like it, not to discourage contributions to the scholarly literature.
- As the researcher, I acknowledge my own biases and optimism about the benefits and opportunities for public discourse in the field of higher education and administration prior to data collection and analysis (see author's note).
- The views and perspectives of the participants do not reflect universal truths held by all higher education administrators.

## **Research Design**

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it allowed me to better understand the experiences of my participants in writing for a popular higher education publication. I conducted open-ended interviews to ask questions about the participants' interests in public writing, what topics they selected and why, their overall experience writing for the administration issues column, as well as other related questions. In the beginning stages of my research project, I mapped out a procedural framework that allowed me to ask exploratory questions that would ensure the interview focused on the experiences of the participants. The consent form encouraged participants to answer questions honestly, and to their best recollection, according to their own experiences. To ensure that responses would be provided as freely as possible, participants were assured that the interview data would be kept in strictest confidence and that any identifying information would be removed from the study, which presented unexpected challenges that are further explained below in *Ethical Considerations*.

## **Method**

Thematic, open-ended interviews were conducted with consenting study participants. Open-ended interviews were the preferred qualitative method of data collection chosen for this study as it permitted participants to fully explain their personal experiences regarding the phenomena of writing for the higher education publication. Open-ended interviews also ensured that the study focused on experience, which was the primary objective of using IPA methodology. Interviews also allowed me to listen to the participants' experiences about contributing to the administration issues column in a popular higher education publication; to learn about what the participants gained from contributing to public discourse through short-form

writing; and, consider the significance of op-eds as communicative tools for administrators to contribute their perspectives to the public sphere of academic-media discourse.

### **Participant Selection and Data Collection**

The participants in this study were selected from the contributing authors of the administration issues column in the chosen higher education publication, and from among the senior staff of the same publication. As contributing authors, the writers of the column were in the best position to discuss the process and experience of writing for a popular higher education publication for a period ranging from one to three years. Similarly, the senior staff member from the publication was able to provide useful background and contextual information that furthered my understanding about how the authors of the column were selected; to what extent the authors had creative freedom over what topics they wrote about; and the significance, if any, of including administrators' voices in higher education publications. Based on the parameters and specificity of this study, a total of five (5) participants were invited to participate in open-ended interviews: four (4) contributing authors and one (1) staff member from the publication. All five participants agreed to contribute to this study and interviews were conducted over a two-week period.

### **Initial Contact**

After institutional ethics approval was granted, participants were e-mailed a letter of initial contact that outlined the purpose of the study, the benefits of contributing to this study, and a note regarding confidentiality (see Appendix 1). The primary benefit of contributing to this study as a previous or past author of the administration issues column was noted as being able to provide knowledge as subject-matter experts and to extend discourse in the field of educational

administration and leadership. Similarly, the contributing staff member would add value by providing expert background knowledge about the publication that assisted me in understanding its history and the origins and vision of the administration issues column.

Participants were informed that I would be conducting interviews that could be conducted via telephone, Skype, or email for approximately one to three hours for the duration of the study. All participants responded via e-mail that telephone interviews were preferable and interviews in the participants' respective time zones were arranged. All participants were subsequently e-mailed information letters and consent forms, which noted that any data collected for this study would be stored securely and that the names and positions of participants would be kept confidential. However, it was also noted that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. As the names of the participants have been published in a popular publication, it may be possible to figure out who the participants might be. However, data collected from the interviews would not be attributed to any one participant. The collection and secure storage of data is further described in the section *Interviews*.

## **Interviews**

Open-ended interviews were conducted via telephone with all participants, which lasted approximately one hour per participant. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcripts were provided to the participants within one week after the interviews were conducted to verify their accuracy. I determined that no more than one hour seemed necessary to speak with each of the participants to ask all the questions that seemed relevant to this study and to feel satisfied that all participants had shared openly about their experiences. A schedule of interview questions was not provided to the participants ahead of their scheduled

interviews to ensure that I could naturally transition between questions and ask other relevant questions that arose organically through our conversations (see Appendix 2). Interview questions were intentionally open-ended to prompt the participants to discuss their personal experiences writing for the publication and to determine the participants' views on the significance, if any, of higher education administrators' voices in higher education publications. Once collected, all interview transcriptions were anonymized and stored in a locked storage cabinet separate from any identifying information that may compromise the confidentiality of the participants. Electronic documentation was stored on a password-protected laptop.

### **Member Checks**

To ensure the accuracy of the interview data, the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcripts were manually typed to capture the dialogue of our conversation. As per the consent form, transcripts from the interviews were provided to participants to verify their accuracy. Within the consent form, participants were also able to withdraw any interview data that they did not feel comfortable disclosing within 30 days of the interview, and no participants requested their data be withdrawn. All participants confirmed in writing that the interview transcripts provided an accurate record of our conversation.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of open coding to mine the data collected from the open-ended interviews was used, as outlined in Berg and Lune's (2012) informative guide on using qualitative methods. After the interview data was reviewed by the respective participants for accuracy, interview data from all five participants was reviewed and *a priori* codes were assigned based on this study's



research question, which asks how higher education administrators experience contributing to the public sphere of academic-media discourse.

The process of open coding resulted in approximately 50 *a priori* codes, which were organized into 10 broad categories. The process of open coding was complete once the interview data was saturated; that is, until the same *a priori* codes began to repeat themselves and I felt satisfied that all possible themes were identified. Next, I organized the data into 10 broad, thematic categories, which emerged as follows:

1. Involvement with higher education publication
2. Freedom of expression
3. Writing process and selection of topics
4. Purpose of administrators' voices in higher education publications
5. Importance of diverse perspectives
6. Personal and meaningful experiences writing for the column
7. Further contributions to scholarship and public pedagogy
8. Audience engagement
9. Social media engagement
10. Perspectives on higher education administration

The findings and further discussion of the major thematic categories are included in the next chapter. However, it is notable that many of the categories emerged organically during the open-ended interviews with the participants and not because they corresponded specifically to the questions pre-determined in the interview schedule.

## **Confidentiality and Other Ethical Considerations**

It should be noted that providing complete confidentiality to participants in this study proved to be difficult. I have not included the name of the publication or identifying information of the contributing authors to ensure confidentiality of all participants. However, it was pointed out to me by one participant that, because there are so few higher education leaders who write for public audiences, particularly those from minority groups, that I cannot guarantee their complete confidentiality. This participant was completely right. To make this study as confidential as possible so that participants felt that they could be open and honest about their experiences, I decided, in consultation with one of my research supervisors, to omit the country of origin of the higher education publication. And while many participants noted that confidentiality was not particularly important to them (as they were already accustomed to their views being published for a public audience), I ultimately chose to do everything within my ability as the researcher to maintain the confidential nature of the study. However, I think future studies would benefit from including more identifying information about their participants. Since there are few examples of higher education administrators who are public intellectuals, future studies that highlight these public figures could help to create awareness of administrative experiences and engagement in the public sphere.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Study Results**

#### **Overview**

This chapter provides a detailed description of the major findings of this study. A total of 10 major thematic categories emerged that contributed to my understanding of this study's main research question of how higher education administrators experience contributing to the public sphere of academic-media discourse, as well as to my two research objectives: to identify the ways in which administrators attempt to achieve communicative rationality through writing op-eds; and to explore how administrators construct meaningful dialogue in spaces dedicated to administrative discourse.

Overall, the participants reported that they had positive experiences writing for the administration issues column in the popular higher education publication featured in this study. Participants responded that they thought it was important to include administrators' voices in higher education publications and that administrators have a valuable role to play in contributing to public pedagogy. In every case, the participants were approached by a staff member from the publication to write the administration issues column because of their existing connection to the publication and/or its media company through previously-written op-ed articles and networking at professional conferences. Participants reported that they had almost complete freedom to be able to choose what topics they wrote about, with the only limitations being 1) that the topics were related to administration, and 2) that they adhered to a specific word count. They wrote on a variety of topics inspired largely by the issues that they were responding to or thinking about at the time as leaders of higher education institutions. Short-form journalism was described by

participants as a challenging approach of addressing issues in a meaningful way, but one that taught them how to express their ideas in a concise format. The importance of academic writing in traditional scholarly publications was never undervalued. In fact, participants emphasized the importance of engaging in scholarly activities and described how they used some of their op-ed writing as inspiration, or in one case, as an outline, for academic presentations and publications. Participants spoke about the significance of including administrators' voices in higher education publications for several reasons, including the fact that administrators can frame research in a way that describes why it is important. Ultimately, administrators can promote why research in their institutions should be funded since administrative perspectives are valuable and contribute to a more complex understanding of broad higher education issues. The participants reported that the experience of writing the administration issues column was meaningful and that they would write more op-eds (and in some cases, already had) in the future if the timing was right and the topic was important to them. Each participant contributed their unique perspectives to this study and provided a better understanding of the lived experiences of administrators who write op-eds in popular higher education publications.

### **Analysis of Major Thematic Categories**

In the following pages, I provide a detailed analysis of each of the ten major thematic categories and conclude by explaining how these major themes contribute to further understanding my research question and objectives. My findings are supported by direct quotations from the interview data and from the review of the literature.

## **Involvement with Higher Education Publication**

All participants first became writers of the administration issues column because they had previous contact with the publication or media company. The staff member from the publication who was interviewed noted that the publication tends to rely on existing contacts to select columnists and that they are intentional in their choices. Consideration of the columnist was given to a variety of factors, such as what position they hold at a university and if they have an established public profile, which demonstrates that the individual is already comfortable with writing for a public audience:

We generally relied on our contacts; people who we've known through our work with the publication. We knew our first writer because our paths had crossed at academic conferences, and I think they wrote an opinion piece with us beforehand and had been quoted in some articles. So, we knew they were someone who was open to expressing their point of view. They seemed like someone that would be a good fit.

However, not all participants interviewed as part of this study reported that they had previous op-ed writing experience. And while it is not required that all columnists have a background in writing for popular magazines, newspapers, or websites, the staff member noted that it was essential that they were at least open to the idea that they would be sharing their opinions and perspectives publicly for potential critique by the higher education community. One participant noted that they were aware that not everyone may agree with them, stating: "I suspect that there would be people that disagree with me, and that would be okay, too, because we're not all the same. We don't all administer the same way either". However, that is not to say that there

is no barrier to entry. In all cases, the participants had established themselves as reputable administrators in higher education institutions and had engaged in activities in the field of higher education, such as attending or presenting at professional and academic conferences, and in some cases, writing op-eds based on their experiences as academics and administrators. Therefore, I found a strong correlation between administrators who participate in scholarly activity and network with their peers, but particularly those that actively write both print and online articles, to be among those first approached to write op-ed articles for higher education media companies. Having no op-ed writing experience was less important than the professional networking connections that participants built with the publication. Those that did have previous op-ed writing experience can be said to have experience with what Rowe and Brass (2008) referred to as “the extramural ‘everyday life’ of the academic” (p. 689) through creating a public profile, as it demonstrates to those seeking the written views of subject-matter experts, that the individual is comfortable with presenting their ideas in a public forum for commentary and critique. As the staff member of the publication stated, they try to find people “that have already cultivated somewhat of a public profile because that generally shows that they are interested in outreach and communicating” as they must be “comfortable with taking the risk of putting themselves out there”. This approach coincides with what Stein and Daniels (2017) state in their book *Going Public*, that writing for a public audience requires academics to “leave our comfort zones, face potential silences, and open ourselves up to unwanted scrutiny or critique” (p. 5).

Many participants replied that they did not completely understand the reasons why they were approached about writing for the administration issues column but speculated that it was because they had an existing relationship with the publication, visible roles as university administrators, and an ability to add diverse perspectives to the column. When asked why they

thought they were contacted, one participant replied, “I don’t really know, to tell you the truth. I’ve always been friendly with the people at the organization that publishes the publication, so maybe they thought of me because of that”. Another participant with previous op-ed writing experience replied that, “I had written a few pieces already, and I was involved in a national-level conference that was put together by the organization that publishes the publication, so I guess they must have read some of my pieces and heard me speak”. One participant expressed that as a person of a particular ethnic background in administration they were able to “provide a different take on administration and write from that lens to the column”, suggesting that the publication was interested in hearing from not only a range of people occupying various administrative positions in universities, but also different genders and ethnicities. Another participant replied that as an administrator, they attended many conferences with other administrators and often met staff members from the publication in what they described to be “a network of administrators”.

Speaking with the participants regarding how they first became involved with the publication provided insight into how the administrators got started with public writing, and by example, may offer encouragement to other higher education administrators interested in writing op-eds. I found that previous experience writing op-eds was a benefit rather than a requirement for becoming a regular contributor to an administration issues column. I also recognized that many administrators are not necessarily looking to become dedicated columnists and may only be interested in contributing a few articles over the course of their career on certain issues they feel strongly about. All the participants had previously read the publication and were familiar with the types of articles they published, which may have contributed to their decision to agree to write for the op-ed column. In no case did the participants state that they hesitated to write for

the publication because they felt uncomfortable writing for a public audience, which likely stems from their visible roles as administrators in their institutions. Rather, it seemed that any hesitancy was more about the time commitment. As senior-level administrators often balance multiple priorities, some may find it appealing to write shorter articles that require less time to write than academic articles. What appeared to attract many of the participants to writing for the administration issues column was that it was a new challenge and a way to explore their own ideas, to write about current events and issues they were dealing with in their own lives and schools, and to write in a format that is different than traditional academic writing.

### **Freedom of Expression**

Participants reported that they had almost complete creative freedom when choosing what topics to write about in their columns, provided they wrote about issues that were relevant to higher education administration. When asked about the extent to which columnists have control over their content, the staff member of the publication responded that what contributing authors write about is “almost one hundred percent up to them” and that they “did that consciously, because . . . they are in the best position to decide what the most pressing issues are that they face”. Occasionally, they noted, columnists might approach them to suggest ideas for the column, but that this was an infrequent occurrence as they generally came up with their own topics. When asked about their ability to write about topics of their choosing, one participant responded that “the only limitation was length” and that there was “never any heavy editing”, while another participant responded that the editing process “was mostly adding or reducing words to meet word count”. As this column runs in both a print and online version of the publication, limitations of space were a real factor for the publication in terms of their ability to



publish what the columnist had written. Participants replied unanimously that they felt they were in control of their content, and were provided with direction from the publication to write about topics that interested them, as one participant stated:

I was basically told that I can write about anything that I felt like that is relevant to administration, because it's a column about admin issues. So, I always try to have that angle in my columns, which is relatively easy to do, because if you're an administrator at a university, you're affected by a lot of different things that are going on in society, many things that are going on in your university that you need to respond to, from sexual harassment and violence policy to responding to the Truth and Reconciliation, so it's pretty broad. You don't have to just focus on the mundane administrative tasks that we do.

Therefore, I found that the participants had a great deal of freedom to select topics that were relevant to them as higher education administrators, with the only real limitation being space, which appeared to vary between 750 and 850 words. On the issue of word count, one participant observed that they found it *more* challenging to write short-form op-ed articles than academic articles:

Well, as an academic, part of my job is to write, but it was a different audience, a different style—definitely not a formal, scholarly style. I had written in a more accessible format before, but I'd say that my hesitancy was really about the commitment of time and effort to write, because it's much harder to write in a condensed space than it is to write at length.

So, to try to convey a meaningful perspective in a very constrained space was challenging and time consuming.

As short-form journalism is a specific type of writing that varies greatly from academic writing, it is reasonable that academics might find it challenging to adapt to this new format. However, despite any challenges, all participants noted that there are some benefits to learning how to write concisely, such as the ability to write regular articles for the administration issues column in addition to their other demands. As one participant stated, “personally, since I’m an administrator, writing short pieces is very doable for me because I don’t have tons of time to do a lot of writing”. Another benefit is being able to express themselves in a short-form format for the media, and therefore making their writing more accessible to broad audiences who are less likely to read lengthy articles. Several of the participants noted the importance of writing short-form articles because most consumers read their news online or via social media. The nature of media engagement was explained by one participant, who states that, “we live in an era now where short sound bites are what people read . . . [o]ne good thing about short, crisp pieces is that the readability is more appealing to a broader audience, and I think that’s valuable”. Further, another participant states that it is one of academics’ “greatest failings” to not learn how to write concisely:

You’ve got to find a way to get your point across in that amount of space. The other thing is, if you think about how “we” as consumers of magazines and newspapers read, most of the time we don’t want three or four-page articles; we want a column with a few hundred

words that gives us something to think about or some facts. So, it's very useful for academics to learn to be a lot more concise than we are. It's one of our great failings.

It is important to note that at no point did any of the participants suggest that popular publications should take the place of academic journals and books. Short-form writing, while different from academic writing, was understood to be its own format, with its unique advantages and challenges.

### **Writing Process and Selection of Topics**

This section looks at the participants' writing process and how participants selected the topics to write about in their articles. Generally, participants were varied in their approaches to writing the administration issues column, with some taking a more structured approach and blocking time in their schedules to write. For example, one participant noted that they would often write on Sundays. However, the data reveals that many participants took an exploratory approach to writing and often did not begin writing the column with a plan. One participant stated that there were "individual days where I had a column due soon and I hadn't written it, but something always came up. And I had no idea how to structure it, but it always seemed to work out when I started writing". Similarly, another participant noted that each column is different and that over time it becomes more difficult to think of ideas that are both relevant to administrators and to a broader higher education audience, stating that it was "a little frustrating because I'll get close to the wire on a deadline and I still haven't really formulated what it is that I want to say". One participant described their writing process, stating that they would "spend a couple hours on it and see what came out". Therefore, the participant data suggests that most participants did not

often plan ahead to write their column, but through an exploratory process, they were often able to come up with ideas when they dedicated time to write, generally based on their own experiences or issues that they were dealing with in their own institutions.

The process of selecting topics also varied among participants. The topics were often chosen by participants based on issues they already knew about and did not require previous research, except occasionally, as one participant explained that they would sometimes consult on facts with relevant departments within their institutions. One participant described their process for selecting topics:

The decision to write about a particular topic is made through a process that I go through in my mind about my area of expertise, what I have learned about being an administrator, what do I think would be useful to convey to people, maybe somebody who is looking to become an administrator. And also, what issues are going on in society? What are people interested in at this particular point in time?

Many of the participants provided similar responses, stating that they often chose topics based on issues that they were thinking about at the time as well as what they thought their audience wanted to read about. In one case, a participant noted that writing the column could sometimes feel like “homework” as they continuously needed to come up with new and interesting topics, which they stated was often, “whatever I was thinking about at the time”. This included inspiration they received from books, articles they would read online, and current issues in their universities. Therefore, the participants’ op-ed pieces represent a snapshot of the current issues and topics that they were thinking about at the time.

The topics that the participants chose to write about reflected a broad range of issues, which included, but were not limited to science policy, the #MeToo movement, gender inequality, Indigenous issues, women's rights, international student recruitment, and recent political events. Participants reported that they tended to write for a broad, higher education audience and therefore their columns represented a broad spectrum of issues, rather than focusing on writing about administration itself. One participant was specifically opposed to writing about administration, stating, "I'm not sure people would find reading about what administrators have to say about administration all that fascinating". However, other participants felt that writing at least some columns about administration gave them the opportunity to introduce who they are and to explain their roles as administrators. These columns also gave administrators a platform to address important issues affecting administrators, such as the perennial administration-faculty divide, as one participant noted, "I tried to write a column on administration to remind folks that this divide between administrators and other members of the campus community is a huge wall". Columns about administration permitted participants to speak about administration issues directly, particularly those that affect the broader higher education community.

### **Purpose of Administrators' Voices in Higher Education Publications**

In all cases when asked, participants responded that they thought it was important to include administrators' voices in higher education publications, with responses ranging from agreeing that it is important, to stating that it is "crucial" and even "essential". The staff member of the publication noted that they thought it was important to include voices from higher education administrators to appeal to a large portion of their readers, which, according to a recent

reader survey, were 30% administrators, and to expose the rest of the higher education community to different perspectives:

I think it's essential [to include administrators' voices in higher education publications]. First of all, it's interesting for that portion of our readership who are on the administrative side to see issues that they can relate to and to see what's being discussed, but I think for university faculty and staff, because they are also part of our readership, that it might be interesting for them to see issues addressed from an administrator's perspective.

One participant noted that they believed that, by contributing their experiences and opinions on issues from the perspective of an administrator, that they were contributing original knowledge to the field of higher education. They stated that it is important to write for public audiences as an administrator because it is easy to forget that their perspectives are valuable, stating, "we forget that some of the experiences or knowledge that we've gained through those experiences might be important to someone else". This is likely the case, given the large percentage of administrators that read the publication. Another participant adds yet another perspective on the importance of administrators contributing to op-ed columns, which is that they can state why education is important in a way that provides positive exposure and public relations for their institutions. They posit that faculty are not always willing to communicate the importance of their programs, because they do not feel that it is their role to provide a rationale to the public about why these degrees matter, what jobs are possible, and why they are deserving of funding. The participant states that:

Many brilliant faculty members are not well-attuned to public relations. In other words, they don't think about how what they say might affect university funding. And maybe they don't care, because they don't regard that as their responsibility. But I've had some frustrating times . . . where I would try to tell them that the need to indicate why philosophy matters to public society, why English literature matters, and sometimes faculty would say, "that's not my job". So, funding and student recruitment is a question of rhetoric, and why does it matter, where would your jobs be, what can a student do with philosophy? And the humanities especially, more so than the social sciences, has been suffering a decline in enrolment for the last twenty-five years now. And it's partly because people haven't put their minds to this question enough. Somebody has to try to explain why universities matter.

I found, in the process of interviewing the participants, that an administrator presence in higher education publications is important because it allows administrators to contribute original knowledge and experience to the field of higher education and to translate why universities matter in a way that has the potential of showcasing research in their institutions and demonstrates why universities are worthy of funding.

### **Importance of Diverse Perspectives**

Inclusion of diverse perspectives was a major theme that emerged from the interview data. The participants and the staff member interviewed from the publication acknowledged the importance of not only writing about a diverse range of issues, but also hearing from administrators from different academic backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, and geography.

Participants contributed to the column for an average of about two years, though in one case a participant wrote for three years when the publication went through staffing changes. When asked about why they stopped writing for the column, participants stated that aside from their contract coming to an end, they felt it was important to allow other administrators with different perspectives to contribute to the column. When asked why they chose to stop writing for the column, one participant stated that, “I felt like another voice should be heard” and another stated that, “I think we agreed I would do it for a certain number of years. It was a pre-arranged amount of time . . . and I thought I would give someone else a chance to write for the column”. When asked about what the publication looks for from its writers for the administration issues column, the staff member was able to provide some criteria, describing their previous and current choices of writers as “intentional” and that they attempt to find administrators who can provide a range of different perspectives. They state that they pre-arrange an amount of time that the administrator will contribute to the column, beginning with a year, with the understanding that there is an option for a second year. When considering criteria for writers, the staff member stated that they try to keep a “variety of factors in mind” but that it is not always easy “to find a perfect person that fills all of them”. As previously noted, they also consider other factors, such as whether that person has cultivated a public profile and has demonstrated that they are comfortable writing for a public audience. The participants also recognized that their perspectives on the same issue may vary. One participant stated that administrators may have different views on a specific policy, stating:

I wrote in one of my previous columns that not every administrator thinks the way I do about sexual violence and harassment policies on campus, and about what our role is. It’s



my own positionality that informs the lens that I look through, the work that I do at the university. And I suspect that there would be people that disagree with me, and that would be okay too, because we're not all the same. We don't all administer in the same way, either.

I found that the participants and the staff at the publication recognized the importance of including diverse perspectives. The publication attempts to find administrators who currently occupy different senior administrator positions in universities and who are able to provide their views on current issues or topics they find meaningful. As previously established, the publication provides a significant amount of creative freedom to the participants about what issues they can discuss, allowing for many broad perspectives. While participants noted that they do not try to attempt to write at length about any particular topic in their columns, given the space constraints, the column provides a broad range of perspectives on important issues in universities that have the potential of sparking conversations and discussion among readers, and through interactions between the readers and the participants.

### **Personal and Meaningful Experiences Writing for the Column**

In all cases, participants reported that they had a positive experience writing for the column. Participants enjoyed writing in a style that is different than academic writing, providing them with the opportunity to interact with a readership and to feel the intrinsic satisfaction of having explored their own conceptualizations of what it means to be a higher education administrator. When asked to reflect on their experience contributing to the administration issues column, one participant replied that they have enjoyed the experience and the benefits of being

able to contribute knowledge and understanding to the field of higher education. Another participant replied that, “I enjoyed it. It was fun”, and while there were a few occasions when they did not know exactly what they were going to write about, they appreciated that the experience gave them the chance, as they stated, “to articulate some of the things I had been thinking about”. One participant noted that:

Overall it was a positive experience. The publication was hugely professional, so they were easy to work with. Personally, I felt it was rewarding to have the time and space to reflect on my experiences as an administrator and to write my ideas down and express them in a cohesive way. It was therapeutic and rewarding to see my thoughts take shape.

I found that the most-noted reasons why participants found the experience meaningful was their ability to contribute original knowledge to the field of higher education, to explore their own thoughts and feelings on a particular subject, to offer a possible perspective that might create dialogue or interest in further research or discussion; to express themselves in a creative way, and to write in a format that is different than academic writing. It is significant to note that administrators enjoyed writing op-eds because of how different the process was to academic writing, and not to replace academic writing. The participants were able to contribute their own perspectives and understandings in a way that did not dominate their time as academics, though it should be stated that this is not to diminish the time commitment that it often required to write short-form academic journalism.

## **Further Contributions to Scholarship and Public Pedagogy**

In many cases, the participants noted that their experience writing the administration issues column encouraged them to write further op-eds and even write academic papers or give presentations. One participant explained that after their experience writing the administration issues column that they went on to write another “five or six op-eds” and stated that, “I don’t think I would have done that or thought about doing it if I hadn’t gotten used to writing . . . this publication” and that “I don’t think I would have thought that I could or should”. In many cases, the participants noted that they would be open to writing other op-eds in the future provided the timing was right and the subject was meaningful. When asked whether they would consider writing other op-eds in the future, one participant replied that they would if “there was a topic that I really felt strongly about”, and another participant replied, “Sure, if it were meaningful and the timing was right”, although they felt that since they had left their administrative position that they would not necessarily be able to write from the lens of a higher education administrator.

Some participants also used their op-eds to create academic presentations and papers. One participant noted that if they ever choose to write a longer paper on one of their ideas, that their op-ed column provided a useful outline. In one example, a participant described when they took a 200-word blog post they had written and turned it into a 3,000-word presentation. They saw the same benefits of writing op-eds, stating, “and if I decided that I want to write something longer, I have a bit of an outline for it . . . I can probably take some of these pieces and do longer talks on some of them”. In another case, a participant implemented some of the ideas that they wrote about in their column, stating: “I actually implemented a program prioritization process. I wrote about learning outcomes and I still continue to work in the sector promoting learning

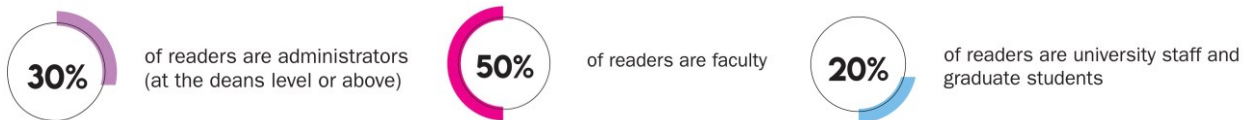
outcomes and the assessment of student learning and what kind of metrics can be used to assess learning outcomes”.

In many cases, the op-ed columns inspired future op-eds or at least made participants open to the idea of writing them, as well as potentially creating outlines for presentations at conferences. Many of the ideas in the columns are still relevant today and continue to inspire further ideas that can be implemented in universities.

### **Audience Engagement**

Each participant reported varying levels of engagement with an audience, ranging from little to no engagement to active engagement involving interacting with an audience on social media. The concept of an audience was always there as the participants would choose the topics of their columns based on issues they were dealing with or thinking about at the time, and which they also thought would be relevant to administrators and the broader higher education community. Therefore, whether the participants received feedback from readers or not, they wrote for a perceived audience. In almost all cases, the participants reported that they did not exactly know who their readers were. When asked if they had a sense of who their readers might be, one participant responded “no, I don’t really get a good sense of who my readers are”, and another stated, “you don’t know who reads your columns. I knew faculty members who never picked up the publication and others read it faithfully. I wasn’t quite sure who my audience was”. One participant described their experience writing columns for a broad higher education audience because they were not sure exactly who their readers might be: “I was writing to a broad group of people that read that publication, and not just administrators”. Given that the participants did not always know who their readers were, reader surveys from the publication

provide some insight into the specific proportion of the readers that are administrators and how many were other members of the higher education community. The staff member from the publication provided the following rough estimate of their readers, based on recent reader surveys, which suggests that 30% of the readers are administrators, 50% are faculty, and the remaining 20% are university staff and graduate students. Therefore, appealing to a broader audience was a potentially effective way of encouraging not only other administrators to read the column, but to also expose faculty, staff, and graduate students to administrative perspectives on various issues.



Engagement with readers also varied greatly between participants. One participant was struck by how many people seemed unaware that they were writing the column, stating, “I was always struck by how few people knew I did this”. As they explain further:

I was fascinated by how few people knew I was writing this column, which wasn’t a lot. I don’t think a lot of people were reading the magazine. Or someone would glance at one of my columns and say, “oh, this is really good” and I would say “but have you seen the others?”, and they would say, “no, I didn’t know you did this regularly”. I would say, “well, I’ve been doing this for two years”. So, it’s not widely read, is what I felt after that.

They also described an experience in which an administrator at another institution provided feedback on the column, which gave the participant the impression that perhaps it was only other administrators who were reading it. Experiences with reader engagement varied significantly. Another participant described their experiences with reader feedback, which included verbal feedback from colleagues as well as feedback on Twitter. As this participant is active on social media, they noted that they would also share the op-eds they would write on Twitter and receive feedback about it there. Another participant noted that they would often receive feedback from individuals from a particular sector that they wrote about, stating “for example, if I was talking about tuition, I’d get feedback from people in the finance sector”. Given that the publication is published both in a print version and online, multiple mechanisms for reader feedback exist, such as online comment sections, letters to the editor, email, social media likes, shares, tweets and re-tweets, and verbal feedback. One participant describes how they went back to read the comments on some of their past op-ed articles and had made a joke about the maddening nature of collegial governance and that it would be “much easier if you could just give orders to people”, to which someone wrote, “collegial governance is important to academic freedom”. And while the participant knew that, they acknowledged that they had been too “flippant”, which suggests that the participant did not consider how others would respond to their columns or attempts at humour. Given their leadership positions in universities, it is possible that the participants also had to consider how their messages reflected on their institutions, in addition to writing on topics that were interesting and relevant to higher education administration. In another example, a participant noted that they made a choice to state in one of their articles about policies related to gender inequality that, “universities likely already have policies in place”, to let the potential reader know that they knew what they were talking about,

stating “you kind of put that in there as a one-liner to make sure the reader knows that you already know that”. Acknowledging what they already knew as administrators allowed participants to build on what is already widely understood and to create new knowledge and understandings about a specific subject.

### **Social Media Engagement**

Though I did not intend to discuss social media engagement at length, it was mentioned in almost every interview and emerged as a major thematic category during the data analysis process. There is no denying that engagement on social media by media companies is essential to share news articles, as many people receive their news on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media sites. The senior staff member of the publication confirmed that they are active on social media and share the administration issues column, which receives significant engagement from readers. As the column is also posted on the website, the staff member noted that columns can receive feedback, likes, and shares, months and sometimes even years, after the publication date. As the staff member at the publication explained: “The cost of keeping stuff posted online is almost nothing. And it’s amazing, we’ll get comments on articles that are five years old. So obviously the content is still relevant”.

Most notable is that the participants that used social media to promote their columns cited Twitter as their main social media platform. The staff member from the publication noted that while the it engages with multiple social media platforms, “academics generally gravitate towards Twitter. I’m not sure why that particular platform, but it seems to work well in terms of dialogue”. One participant who is active on social media stated that they would share their latest columns on Twitter in the hopes that their followers will read the article. However, another

participant who did not engage with social media at all stated, “Twitter is such a dangerous universe”. Though the purpose of this study was not to explore administrator uses of social media, it is perhaps unavoidable in this day and age to discuss media without also including a discussion about social media, which is why engagement on social media platforms emerged as a major thematic category. When asked if they participated on social media, half of the participants replied that they actively engaged in at least one social media platform, and while the other half of the participants replied that they did not, one of the participants reported that while they are personally not active on social media, their office runs a social media account for the university. As one participant notes:

I had been active on social media before I started writing these pieces. And have been on Twitter for probably two years in more of a public profile. And so, when I get these op-ed pieces written, I pin it to my Twitter account so that people can see the latest column I wrote and then my followers will go and read it. I hope they will anyway.

One significant observation is that administrators who replied that they engaged on social media reported more active engagement with their readers. As most participants who engaged on social media used Twitter as their chosen platform, they noted that they would share their articles on Twitter and hear back from readers through the platform. A participant who reported that they had zero engagement on social media noted that they were surprised by the lack of readership engagement, making them feel as if no one read the publication as they had so few responses. As most people read their news online, they may be more likely to comment and share articles via social media as opposed to using the publication’s website, though further studies would be



needed to address users' preferences for engagement online. As the staff member from the publication observed that academics tend to choose Twitter as their platform of choice, it seems reasonable that engagement on Twitter is a demonstrated method to build a public profile and generate reader engagement.

### **Perspectives on Higher Education Administration**

Lastly, participants specifically spoke to the roles of higher education administrators in universities. One participant described the importance of being honest and genuine as an administrator and conducting themselves with dignity to earn the respect of their colleagues. In this case, this participant describes administration as a specific type of art, stating:

I do think the administration of universities is a particular art. But because of the very decentralized power in universities, it is a particular kind of art. Really, you have to build good will, you have to gain the trust of the faculty to some extent, even if they disagree with you, it's important that they see that you're doing things sincerely. If you see an administrator who is duplicitous or sneaky, it catches up with them, it really does.

In addition to the importance of conducting themselves sincerely, participants also stated that they viewed their roles first and foremost as academics who have taken on administrator positions in their institutions. One participant describes their experience balancing administration as part of their tripartite workload, considering it as part of their service to the academic community:

I saw myself—and I still see myself—as a faculty member who just had a greater share of their responsibility allocated to administrative service. I tried to maintain a tripartite distribution of effort, so still teaching at least one course per year, but also maintaining some aspect of scholarship as well. But I do think that those things helped to inform my perspective on administration.

I found that this type of administrator corresponded to the type of ‘scholar-administrator’ that had emerged in the review of the literature as a type of administrator who also engages in scholarly activities as part of their tripartite distribution of service, research, and teaching. In the case of scholar-administrators, Coe and Chinta (2016) found that administrators who had participated in scholarly activities gained a better understanding of academic scholarship and garnered respect from the faculty (p. 479), and therefore it is important to showcase administrators with this mindset to address the perennial divide between faculty and administrators.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude this section, the findings revealed that participants had unique and meaningful experiences writing the administration issues column in the popular higher education publication. However, there were some similarities, and where specific phenomena were repeatedly discussed, major themes emerged, which included the participants’ experiences first getting involved with the publication and being approached to write the administration issues column; freedom of expression to be able to select their own content; the significance of including administrators’ voices in popular higher education publications and the specific

reasons why they are important; the personal and meaningful experiences such as the ability to learn to communicate concisely and effectively in a short-form format, share their ideas, and explore their own perspectives on issues in a creative way that is different from academic writing; the importance of including diverse perspectives; the potential for further op-eds and engagement of academic activities inspired by topics written about in the administration issues column; varying experiences with audience engagement; the significance of engagement on social media, particularly through the platform Twitter as an academic; and observations, lessons, and views on administration, specifically that administration is an art and that administrators identified first and foremost as academics, challenging traditional conceptions of administrators in universities.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Summary of Major Findings**

This section looks at the major findings of the study and makes some observations about how they connect to this study's major theoretical framework. This section also includes recommendations based on the findings on the study and for future studies.

This study had two purposes:

1. To understand how higher education administrators experienced writing for the administration issues op-ed column in a popular higher education publication.
2. To provide educational administration researchers with recommendations for how to engage with media to share academic and professional knowledge.

Habermas' theory of communicative action provided a framework for this study. While it is not within the scope of this study to fully explain or consider every aspect of this theory, the notion of the public sphere and the concept of communicative rationality as a desirable outcome of academic-media discourse, are useful constructs for considering op-eds written by administrators. Few studies have used an IPA methodological approach to understanding administrator experiences as active participants in the public sphere, though it seems fitting as the concept of communicative rationality is ultimately subjective. As Eriksen and Weigård (2003) note, communicative rationality is a "kind of rationality . . . not tied to the subject-object relation of a cognizing and monologically acting individual, but to a subject-subject relation

between communicating and interacting individuals” (p. 4). It is a type of rationality that is essential to “maintain society as a social fabric regulated by norms, institutions and conventions, a place where new insights and knowledge can be developed and transferred” (p. 4).

The literature review established that administrator engagement in the public sphere creates spaces for administrative discourse which provides higher education administrators with opportunities to achieve communicative rationality, participate in democratic discourse, and re-define their roles as administrators in today’s universities. Interestingly, administrators echoed, in both the op-eds reviewed in the collection of literature and the participants’ interviews, that they identified primarily as academics and that engaging in scholarship was of continued importance to them. Therefore, although academic journals are not available to most people, educational administrators should continue to publish in them to further the knowledge in their respective fields. Though not all educational administrators will feel comfortable engaging in the public sphere of academic-media journalism, recent publications on how to go public are helpful to those who may be considering it (see *Resources for Educational Administration Researchers*). More studies are needed in which administrator experiences are highlighted, particularly on their experiences writing publicly and especially those of minority groups such as Indigenous people and women, to better understand the ways in which they construct meaning.

Through open-ended interviews with my participants, I’ve come to understand that they construct meaning in different ways, such as interacting with an audience, expressing their ideas in a format different from traditional academic writing, and contributing their understanding and knowledge to the field of higher education. In some cases, the participants had no prior experience as regular contributors to popular higher education publications; but in all cases, the participants had been approached to contribute to the administration issues column primarily

because they were distinguished administrators in their respective universities that had previously established a relationship with the publication. Some may assume that anyone writing for a popular publication may be a pseudo-expert, however, all of the participants are accomplished and successful academics with rich and interesting stories to share. All of the participants expressed that it was important to include administrators' voices in higher education publications, affirming that they do have an important role to play in shaping the future of the field of educational administration and leadership. I agree; including administrators' voices in popular publications ensures that their unique perspectives become part of the continuing discourse about higher education. Op-eds are just one of the ways in which administrators can address important issues in a format that is more likely to be read by a broad higher education audience. One of the most important lessons I learned from my participants is that writing about administration for other administrators was not the main objective, but rather, it was more important to provide their perspectives from their positions as administrators on many important issues affecting higher education today. Sharing op-ed articles and engaging on social media also seemed to improve interactions with readers and increased the chances that their articles would be shared, liked, or re-tweeted.

We can benefit from more administrators participating in the public sphere by writing op-eds and through other forms of media engagement. However, one of the major inhibiting factors is the time commitment. In this case, the participants were or are currently regular contributors to the administration issues column. Other administrators considering writing op-ed columns may pitch an article to a publication only when they feel a topic is meaningful and worthy of further discussion, if at all. Short-form journalism appears easy to write, but while a column may take less time to write than an academic publication, I learned that some participants experienced

great difficulty trying to condense important issues into a limited word count. A lot of thought and introspection was necessary for participants to come up with articles they thought were meaningful, and though the process could be frustrating, all participants reported that they had a positive experience writing for the publication, for the reasons previously stated. In many ways, the ability to condense important points into a succinct article is a valuable skill for administrators, who often need to communicate important information in a concise and understandable way. Administrators might benefit from writing op-eds and regularly practicing the art of short-form writing. Some participants noted that writing for this publication gave them the confidence and experience to be able to write other op-eds, in which they continued to express their ideas and showcase research in their own institutions. It is fundamental that administrators engage in scholarly activity, including publishing papers and presenting at academic conferences. The scholar-administrator can re-define the perception of higher education administrators if more choose to participate in scholarly activity, even if not required as part of their workload. But it is also important that administrators take time to share their experiences and knowledge with the rest of the higher education community in forums where they are more likely to be heard, such as Twitter, LinkedIn, op-eds in trade magazines, alumni magazines, newspapers, and articles in news websites, e.g. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

There are some limitations to this study. The views and opinions expressed by the participants are based on their individual experiences and so it can be problematic to try to discuss their findings in a way that can be applied generally to a group of people. And while the purpose of this study was not to develop a new theory, the more that studies report on individual and personal experiences of administrators, the more we may understand the significance of their diverse and valuable contributions to the public sphere of academic-media discourse.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations in this section are based on the findings in the literature and interview data and attempt to provide higher education administrators with actionable recommendations for how they might engage with the media to contribute their views and perspectives to the higher education community. The need for more public discourse in higher education administration is necessary and important. Based on the findings, I make five key recommendations that I think will improve administrators' ability to communicate their research, opinions, and lived experiences with the higher education community:

### **Graduate programs should better prepare future educational administrators to write concisely.**

In an interview with one of the participants, they stated that graduate school is about the worst place to try to learn how to write concisely. Graduate programs require students to explore theories, methodologies, and concepts through writing lengthy papers and thesis projects, often written in complex academic jargon. However, graduate programs can do better to prepare students for the “real world” of academic administration by making a conscious effort in teaching students how to write concisely, preferably by using digital technology, which is used in most higher education institutions today. The following are some ideas of how graduate programs might accomplish this:

- Graduate students might be asked to keep reading or reflection journals with a limited word count requirement as part of a course, preferably in an introductory graduate course.
- Students could be asked to keep a blog in which they discuss important issues, and “like” and comment on other students' blogs – as a blog can be started for free, this would come



at no extra cost to the university, and it can easily be connected to a range of social media platforms, such as Twitter.

- An academic journalism option course could be offered to both journalism and educational administration students in which they would learn to write articles and communicate concisely, promoting interdisciplinary learning within the institution.
- A module on writing for the media could be incorporated into an existing course, such as an Introduction to Issues in Educational Administration course, or it may be offered for extra credit.
- A library or info session might be offered on how academics can build a professional public profile on a blog or website, and how to share articles via social media, hosted by an op-ed column writer or a student from the university's newspaper.

These are just some possible ideas on how we can make a conscious effort to teach graduate students in administrator preparation programs how to better prepare to communicate in their institutions and how to share their knowledge and experiences online.

**Educational administrators should write about their experiences, opinions, and advice in op-ed articles.**

Educational administrators should make an effort to share their knowledge and experience through writing op-eds and other print or online articles. Many publications are open to academics pitching them ideas for articles, and with access to the Internet and the ability to publish articles at next to no cost for the publication, this is becoming easier to do. Listed below

are some ways in which academic administrators can begin to write about their experiences and current issues they are dealing with in the media:

- Administrators should subscribe to the publication they are interested in pitching an article to and read the articles to get an idea of the structure of short-form journalism (note: some publications publish long-form articles as well, and these can be researched if they are of interest to the administrator).
- Administrators should review the submission guidelines for any publication they are interested in pitching an idea to and create an outline of the major points they would like to discuss.
- Administrators could start a blog in which they share their research and opinions on different current issues affecting universities.
- Administrators can consult helpful guides such as *Going Public* by Arlene Stein and Jessie Daniels or *The Public Professor* by M.V. Lee Badgett, among other print and online resources, to gain an understanding of how to write for popular publications and how they might learn to be public intellectuals (see Resources for Administrators for recommendations).

**Educational administrators should network with industry professionals, publish in academic publications, and present at academic conferences.**

In every case, participants in this study were approached by a staff member at the publication about writing for the admin issues column because of their previous connections with the publication and/or its media company. Therefore, one of the recommendations that I make in this study is that academics in administrator preparation programs and professional

administrators should actively engage in scholarly activity by attending conferences, presenting papers, or writing journal articles, even if not required to as part of an administrative contract. Many graduate students begin to publish or attend conferences at this stage in their academic careers and it is a good time to begin to connect with professionals in their field as well as staff and representatives from higher education media companies. The following are suggestions for how administration researchers and professionals might engage in scholarly activities, if they are not already doing so:

- Submit autoethnographic articles to academic journals in the field of educational administration and leadership about their lived experiences as administrators.
- Attend and/or present papers at academic conferences to network with other administrators from other national and international universities.
- Create academic presentations using previous op-eds or blog posts as an outline.

**Educational administrators should include a ‘public writing’ category in their curriculum vitae.**

This recommendation comes from Stein and Daniel’s (2017) book *Going Public* in which they recommend that academics include public writing in their curriculum vitae. Though public writing may not be a significant factor in considering faculty tenure and promotion, alt-metrics that take into consideration other kinds of metrics such as audience reach and engagement, are increasingly being considered as universities change and evolve. Administrators should also try to include an op-ed, guest blog posts, or other articles they may write for reputable publications or websites in their curriculum vitae in a category titled ‘public writing’. The category could also

be used to include other relevant information, such as number of shares or views the article received to demonstrate reach.

### **Educational administrators should actively engage on social media platforms.**

One way that researchers, including graduate students and new researchers, may start contributing their views and actively engaging in the public sphere is by engaging on social media. The results of the study drew some interesting correlations between administrators who engaged on the social media platform Twitter and increased engagement with their readership. Establishing a public profile allows administrators to practice sharing their ideas and perspectives with a public audience and experiencing the discomfort of putting themselves out there for possible critique and ridicule by the higher education community. Existing administrators may already have visible positions in their universities and should consult their institutions on the best way to approach creating a public social media account. However, having a visible position within a university can also be beneficial because they may be in a position to share their experiences with an audience that is more curious and intrigued by what they might have to say, given their public role. Engagement on social media, especially Twitter, has been shown in the literature to help to combat feelings of isolation, which is inherent to administrators. It is also a good way to share professional knowledge and to help others who may want to take on administrative roles in their institutions or other administrators that may encounter the same issues. Engagement on social media should be approached cautiously, but it allows administrators to take control of their own public persona. As administrators, they may be discussed in the news or in the media, and one of the benefits of a social media account is that it allows the user to communicate directly with their followers. Social media is one way that

administrators can establish their authorities as subject matter experts and to control their image in the media. Some recommendations for ways in which administrators can begin to engage with the higher education community on social media include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Start a Twitter account and follow other like-minded peers, which may be found using relevant hashtags such as #edadmin.
- Create a profile on LinkedIn and connect with other academics and administrators in the university community as well as contributing professional articles.
- Live tweet at academic conferences using the conference hashtag.
- Follow publications that publish higher education articles and contribute reviews or opinions about new articles that they publish.

### **Considerations for Future Studies**

Future studies should focus on how we might improve administration preparation programs. Future researchers in the field of educational administration and leadership will require different knowledge and skills than those required by researchers years ago who did not live in an age of technological advancement. Administrator preparation programs have the ability to change the trajectory of the field, from a field in a state of crisis, to a responsive and engaged field of study that considers all methods of publishing and measuring scholarly contributions. Studies could measure some of the recommendations I previously noted for improving administration preparation programs to emphasize teaching students how to communicate effectively in the public sphere. Future studies might also consider looking at ways in which the field of educational administration and leadership is changing as more administrators use technology to connect, share ideas, and problem solve. What platforms are most effective for

administrators, and how can we provide administrators with the skills so that they can confidently and intentionally engage with other members of the higher education community on these platforms? Future studies should consider the practical ways in which administrators connect with others in a technology-centric world. Lastly, future studies might focus on alternative ways in which educational administrators can share professional knowledge outside of traditional publishing structures *in addition* to engaging in peer-reviewed activities. While there are multiple resources for academics, it is important that they be inclusive and recognize the valuable contributions of all members of the higher education community if we are to ever move forward and re-imagine the administrator as a force for good in our universities.

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## Resources for Educational Administration Researchers

The following books and articles provide helpful tips that educational administration researchers can use to *go public* with their work:

### Books

- Badgett, M. V. L. (2016). *The public professor: How to use your research to change the world*. NYU Press.
- Gasman, M. (2016). *Academics going public: How to write and speak beyond academe*.
- Stein, A., & Daniels, J. (2017). *Going public: A guide for social scientists*. Chicago, IL: University Chicago Press.

### Online Articles

- Cassuto, I. (2018, January 7). How to go public, and why we must. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Go-PublicWhy-We/242155>
- Greenwald, R. A. (2016, November 13). Going public: Why young scholars should take their ideas beyond academe. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Going-Public/238351>
- O'Grady, K., & Roos, N. (2016, August 1). It's time for a global movement that pushes academic research beyond journal paywalls so it makes a difference in the world. Policy Options. Retrieved from <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/august-2016/linking-academic-research-with-the-public-and-policy-makers/>

New to administration starter kit: Everything new administrators need to know to be successful.

Available from The Chronicle Store: <https://store.chronicle.com/collections/starter->

[kits/products/starter-kit-new-to-the-administration?cid=FEATUREDNAV](https://store.chronicle.com/collections/starter-https://store.chronicle.com/collections/starter-kits/products/starter-kit-new-to-the-administration?cid=FEATUREDNAV)

***Suggested ways for educational administrator researchers to “go public” with their research and professional knowledge:***

- Pitch articles to print and online higher education publications
- Share on social media platforms, such as Twitter, using #edadmin or other hashtags
- Start an academic blog to share professional and academic knowledge or guest post
- Present administrative research projects at research days or lecture series
- Organize administrator book clubs or discussion groups at your local university

**Appendix 1**  
**Letters of Initial Contact**

**LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT to COLUMNISTS**

**Proposed Research Study Title:** Pop Administration: A Study of Administrative Discourse in Popular Higher Education Media

**Student Researcher:** Christine Valentine, MEd Candidate

Dear [Participant's Name]:

My name is Christine Valentine, an MEd candidate at the University of Alberta, and I am conducting a study for my master's thesis on administrative discourse in higher education media. I have chosen to focus my study on the administration issues column in [Name of Publication]. I hope through interviewing current and past editors of this column, as well as staff of the publication, I will be able collect original knowledge that will allow me to examine the significance of administrative voice in higher education media.

I am contacting you because I am interested in interviewing you as part of my study. As [a previous editor/ the current editor] of the admin issues column, you would be contributing to my study as a subject-matter expert about what topics you [found/ find] important to write about in the column, and your opinions about higher education administration. By agreeing to participant in my study, you would be contributing original knowledge that would extend the discourse in the field of educational administration and leadership.

It's important for me to note that all data collected from you for my study would be kept in the strictest confidence. No identifying information of my study participants will be included in my study. The time commitment would be approximately 1-3 hours and would require 1-3 interviews over a 6-month period. While I will attempt to meet with all study participants in-person (funding permitted), I will also be conducting interviews via Skype or over the telephone. I am happy to work with you to come up with a date for our first interview at a time that is convenient.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my study and for considering being a part of it. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Christine Valentine



## LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT to STAFF

**Proposed Research Study Title:** Pop Administration: A Study of Administrative Discourse in Popular Higher Education Media

**Student Researcher:** Christine Valentine, MEd Candidate

Dear [Participant's Name]:

My name is Christine Valentine, an MEd candidate at the University of Alberta, and I am conducting a study for my master's thesis on administrative discourse in higher education media. I have chosen to focus my study on administration issues column in [Name of Publication]. I hope through interviewing current and past editors of this column, as well as staff of the publication, I will be able collect original knowledge that will allow me to examine the significance of administrative voice in higher education media.

I am contacting you because I am interested in interviewing you as part of my study. As a staff member of the publication, your knowledge and understanding of this reputable higher education publication would provide valuable insight into the history of the publication and important contextual knowledge about administration issues column. Your contribution as a subject-matter expert would also be valuable to me as a researcher in contributing to my own understanding of the publication and more broadly, about the nature of administrative discourse in popular higher education media.

It's important for me to note that all data collected from you for my study would be kept in the strictest confidence. No identifying information of my study participants will be included in my study. The time commitment would be approximately 1-3 hours and would require 1-3 interviews over a 6-month period. While I will attempt to meet with all study participants in-person (funding permitted), I will also be conducting interviews via Skype or over the telephone. I am happy to work with you to come up with a date for our first interview at a time that is convenient.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my study and for considering being a part of it. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Christine Valentine

## **Appendix 2**

### **Information Letter and Consent Form**

#### **Study Title**

Pop Administration: A Study of Administrative Discourse in Popular Higher Education Media

#### **Background**

- You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a current or previous contributor to the administration issues column published in [Name of Publication]; or, you are a current or past employee at the publication who can add contextual knowledge relevant to the study.
- Your contact information was collected from the name and affiliated institution that was published in the printed and online issues of the publication.
- The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis.
- I will not use these research findings for any commercial use.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how educational administration issues are communicated in popular higher education media. By interviewing the contributing authors of the administration issues column in [Name of Publication], I will collect data and examine the nature of administrative discourse in this forum.

#### **Study Procedures**

- The procedure for this research project will involve interviews conducted by myself (the researcher).
- Approximately 1-3 hours of your time is expected with the potential of 1-3 interviews over a 6-month period of time.
- If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to answer the questions as honestly as possible.
- The following data will be collected in this study:
  - Interviews – conducted in-person, via Skype, or over the telephone.
  - Post-interview transcriptions – to be verified by you (the participant) for accuracy.
  - Data collected from the administration issues column.
  - Follow-up questions via Skype or telephone to clarify any of the data collected from interviews.
- Procedures:
  - Interviews will be conducted either in-person (funding permitted), via Skype, or over the telephone.
  - Printed transcripts will also be provided to you within 7 days of the interview.
  - You will have the opportunity to verify and check all data for accuracy (“member check”)

#### **Benefits**

- Contributing original knowledge and extending the discourse in the field of educational administration and leadership.

- Providing understanding and mindfulness about the study and practice of educational administration.
- Contributing to an academic study as a subject-matter expert.
- There are no anticipated costs for being part of this study.
- There is no compensation available for participation in this study.

### **Risks**

- There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.
- If I as the researcher, learn anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, I will notify you immediately.

### **Voluntary Participation**

- You are under no obligation to participate in this study.
- By agreeing to participate in this study, you are under no obligation to answer any specific questions.
- You may change your mind about participating in this study and may opt out at any time by contacting the research investigator and indicating your intent to withdraw from this study.
- You retain the right to ask for any of the data to be withdrawn up to 30 days from the point of interview by contacting the research investigator and indicating your intent to withdraw your data from this study. The data will be deleted from the QDA Miner database and a copy of the data will be provided to you, upon request.
- If you withdraw from the study, I will continue to use the data we have collected unless it is requested to be removed from the QDA Miner database.
- Upon the publication of my study, all data used in my study will be turned over to my supervisor and stored securely for a minimum of 5 years.

### **Confidentiality & Anonymity**

- The intended use of the research is for my thesis project. Upon completion, my thesis will become publicly accessible online through the University of Alberta's repository.
- Your names and positions will be kept confidential, and you will only be referred to as "past editors" and/or "magazine staff", however complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Since all participants of this study are public figures who have had their names and positions published in a national magazine, it may be possible to figure out who the participants of the study are, but data collected in interviews will not be able to be attributed to any one participant.
- The data will be kept confidential and only me (the researcher), and my supervisor will have access to the data.
- Hard copy data will be stored in a physically secure location (separate from the list of names of participants) and digital data will be stored securely in the QDA Miner database. All data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years following completion of the research project.
- You may receive a complete report of my research findings after the publication of the research project, upon written or verbal request.
- I may use this data to publish future journal articles and present at conferences.

**Further Information**

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher:

Christine Valentine

E-mail: [cvalent@ualberta.ca](mailto:cvalent@ualberta.ca)

Affiliated institution: University of Alberta

**The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.**

**Consent Statement**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed) and Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix 3**  
**Schedule of Interview Questions**

***INTERVIEW QUESTIONS to COLUMNISTS***

**Proposed Research Study Title:** Pop Administration: A Study of Administrative Discourse in Popular Higher Education Media

**Student Researcher:** Christine Valentine, MEd Candidate (University of Alberta)

**Introduction**

Thank you for making yourself available for today's interview session. The main purpose of this interview is for me to learn more about what topics you found important to include when you wrote for the administration issues column in [Name of Publication]. There are no correct answers to any of the questions. You will remain anonymous and any remarks you make during the interview will remain strictly confidential. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes.

**Key Questions**

1. How did you first become involved with the publication?
2. How did you decide what topics to write about?
3. Do you find it challenging to discuss important issues in a limited space?
4. Do you consider current issues in the field of educational administration and leadership when deciding on what topic to write about?
5. What is the significance, if any, of including administrators' voices in higher education publications?

**Note**

As this is a semi-structured interview, these key questions will guide my inquiry, but questions may vary slightly from what is included above.

**Closing Comments**

I appreciate your participation in this interview. Your responses will remain confidential. I will provide written transcripts of this interview session to you within 7 days and you will have 30 days to inform me if you would like any of your comments removed from the database. Thank you for your time today.

## ***INTERVIEW QUESTIONS to STAFF***

**Proposed Research Study Title:** Pop Administration: A Study of Administrative Discourse in Popular Higher Education Media

**Student Researcher:** Christine Valentine, MEd Candidate (University of Alberta)

### **Introduction**

Thank you for making yourself available for today's interview session. The main purpose of this interview is for me to learn more about the priorities of [Name of Publication] and specifically about administration issues column. There are no correct answers to any of the questions. You will remain anonymous and any remarks you make during the interview will remain strictly confidential. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes.

### **Key Questions**

1. How did you first become involved with the publication?
2. What is the mandate or purpose of the administration issues column?
3. Did the magazine look at any specific criteria when selecting the editors for this column?
4. What is the significance, if any, of including administrators' voices in higher education publications?
5. In your opinion, do you think issues affecting university administration are important to discuss in higher education media? (magazines, higher education websites, etc.)

### **Note**

As this is a semi-structured interview, these key questions will guide my inquiry, but questions may vary slightly from what is included above.

### **Closing Comments**

I appreciate your participation in this interview. Your responses will remain confidential. I will provide written transcripts of this interview session to you within 7 days and you will have 30 days to inform me if you would like any of your comments removed from the database. Thank you for your time today.

## Appendix 4

### Student Researcher Confidentiality Agreement

This form may be used for individuals hired to conduct specific research tasks, e.g., recording or editing image or sound data, transcribing, interpreting, translating, entering data, destroying data.

#### Project Title

Pop Administration: A Study of Administrative Discourse in Popular Higher Education Media

I, Christine Valentine, the student researcher, will be conducting research for my thesis project as part of my MEd degree in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta.

I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., files, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than my supervisor.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Provide a copy of all research information collected in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to my supervisor when I have completed the research tasks.
4. After consulting with my supervisor, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project after storing it securely for 5 years.

Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.