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“YOU GOTTA BE RESILIENT.” EXPLORING THE TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCE
OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED FOR ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT WHO THEN
RETURNED TO THEIR HOME INSTITUTION

By

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A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Higher Education

Written under the direction of

Florence Hamrick

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“You gotta be resilient.” Exploring the Transitional Experience of Students Suspended
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Dissertation Director:

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With graduation rates under strict scrutiny, American institutions of higher education (IHEs) are examining ways to improve student retention. Students go through several monumental transitions throughout their undergraduate and graduate careers, which affect the trajectory and nature of their academic experiences. One unanticipated transition for some students is being temporarily suspended from their IHE. Each year, numerous students are suspended for academic misconduct (e.g. cheating on an exam, plagiarizing a term paper, etc.). Once they serve their period of suspension, those students are eligible to return to their home institution. Frequently with no formal reintegration process, returning students are at risk for not persisting until graduation. This dissertation explores the reintegration experiences of five Rutgers University-New Brunswick (RUNB) students suspended for academic misconduct. Their experiences led to several recommendations for future practice, including providing additional education to students on the topic of academic integrity, handling each potential violation on a case-by-case basis, assigning campus advisors to students facing a separable offense, and utilizing Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs) as a formalized reintegration process for previously suspended students.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to start off by thanking my advisor and dissertation chair Dr. Florence Hamrick. Flo, I remember our first conversations together. When starting this program, I was scared and had trouble finding my footing. Thank you for taking me under your wing, improving my academic writing, and building my confidence every step of the way.

Thank you to the amazing members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Joan Collier, Dr. Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and Dr. Dayna Weintraub. Each of you have been supportive and encouraging throughout this journey, for which I am eternally grateful.

Thank you to Dr. Salvador Mena, Vice Chancellor of the Division of Student Affairs, for funding this study. Thank you to the Office of Student Conduct for providing data for this study. I also owe an endless amount of gratitude to the five research participants of this study. I hope I told your stories with the respect and honor they deserve.

I have to acknowledge my outstanding cohort members for which I have been lucky to learn from since the beginning of this program: Dr. Stephanie Brescia, Shari Cunningham, Dr. Ashley Forsythe, Magy Gergus, Dr. Maren Greathouse, Dana Michelle Harris, Mohini Mukherjee, Dr. Jay Stefanelli, and Chris Chengbo Yin. Thank you for keeping me sane. Thank you, also, to Dr. Janet Jun Siew Loh who served as my writing partner throughout the second half of this dissertation. You gave me the support I needed to finish. To Avery Arrington (in whatever path you decide to take), Justin Kelley, and Kevin Pitt: You're next!

Thank you to Jackie Moran. You are a supervisor, friend, and mentor. I am so grateful that I get to learn from you. Thank you to the other incredibly supportive staff within the Rutgers New Brunswick Title IX Office: Neriah Almahdi-Moore, Donald Moore, Molly Rynn, and Bill Spear.

I owe lots of respect and gratitude to the generations that have come before me, especially my parents Stacey and Paul LoSacco, and my big bro Christopher LoSacco. A special shoutout also goes to my grandmother Mary Jane LoSacco who kept a copy of one of the first papers I ever wrote in school (about peanut butter and jelly sandwiches) until the day she died. It's an honor to be the first person in my family to earn a Ph.D. I hope the generations after me now see that it's possible.

I'd also like to thank my mother-in-law Annalynn Miele (and later Guidepost Montesorri Daycare) for taking care of Ari all day every day so that I could work and write. Your love for Ari is beautiful and appreciated.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. My husband Jeff is one in a million. As everyone says, we make the best team. I also want to thank my doggies Nico and Amber for cuddling with me (sometimes on my laptop) as I wrote this. Finally, thank you endlessly to my baby Ari (born on February 3, 2021). Ari, you are the absolute light of my life. This, and everything else I do, is for you.

Dedication

To all of the other working moms striving to earn a doctorate degree. Turns out, we *can* do it all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Every college and university identifies certain standards and ethics that all students must follow. When a student fails to comply with the institution's rules and regulations, they receive consequences for their behavior. There are myriad reasons for a student to be suspended. For one, students risk being academically suspended when they make unsatisfactory academic progress (Swift, 1989). This usually occurs when an undergraduate student's GPA dips below their major's GPA minimum. When this happens, the student receives a warning letter from their academic department, explaining that if they do not raise their GPA by a specified time period, they will be suspended (Swift, 1989).

Suspension can also occur as a result of violating the code of student conduct or the academic integrity policy. The code of student conduct covers non-academic misconduct such as alcohol and other drug violations, assault, and theft, among many others. Academic integrity policies—the focus of this dissertation—consist of *academic* misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism (Miller, Shoptaugh, & Wooldridge, 2011). A typical definition of cheating is: “Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise” (Pavela, 1997, p. 104-105). Plagiarism is broadly defined as, “Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise” (Pavela, 1997, p. 105). Academic integrity policies also include several less-common behaviors such as facilitation of dishonesty and violating professional standards of ethics.

While a college's or university's specific policy definitions are the same for all students, academic dishonesty is viewed differently between undergraduate and graduate

students. It is expected that all post-secondary students are aware of and abide by the concepts and ethics of academic integrity. However, comparatively, graduate students have been in an educational setting for a longer period of time than undergraduate students, are seeking a further degree and therefore are generally more committed to scholarly pursuits, and usually have additional academic milestones than undergraduates, such as completing a thesis, passing a qualifying exam, and/or writing a dissertation. Therefore, graduate students are held to a higher standard of academic integrity than undergraduate students. Cheating on an exam during a student's first year of college is not seen as heinous of a policy violation as cheating on an exam during law school or medical school, for example. Likewise, plagiarizing a term paper during sophomore year may be handled with more leniency than plagiarizing a thesis or dissertation.

This dissertation explores the phenomenon of suspension, and subsequent reintegration for both undergraduate and graduate students found responsible for academic misconduct. When an undergraduate or graduate student is suspended, they must take a mandatory but *temporary* leave of absence from the institution. This differs from expulsion, which is a mandatory and *permanent* leave of absence. Once the student's suspension ends, they can choose to re-enroll at the same institution, transfer to another institution, or decide not to continue with higher education at that time.

Although no national data exists on the rates of suspension for academic integrity violators, suspension is generally reserved for when a student is caught, reported, and found responsible for multiple policy violations, or a singular egregious policy violation (Schrage & Giacomini, 2009). Colleges and universities usually do not want students to take a break from their education, for fear that they will not return or fail to persist until

graduation (DesJardins & McCall, 2010). However, institutions maintain that certain behaviors warrant a mandatory leave of absence, in the form of a suspension.

According to Pavela's "model code" of academic integrity, violations that involved "considerable advanced planning, group coordination, or other serious acts of fraud or deception" warrant suspension (Pavela, 1997, p. 110). For example, suspension might be appropriate for a student who hired or otherwise arranged for another person to complete their assignment or exam, unlawfully retrieved a copy of an exam ahead of time, plagiarized the majority of a thesis or term paper, or committed other deceitful acts. A student may also face suspension for repeat violations of the academic integrity policy (Pavela, 1997). Specifically, if a student was found responsible for academic misconduct in a prior incident and was not suspended, they may be suspended for a second violation of academic integrity, no matter the level of the violation. Conversely, it may not be appropriate to suspend a first-time violator that failed to properly cite their sources in a paper, copied from someone's exam for one question, or committed other violations that are considered low-level. Undergraduate students likely receive more leniency and educational sanctioning compared to graduate students, given the academic expectations at that point in their educational career.

An academic suspension (e.g. when a student's GPA dips too low) does not typically result in a disciplinary record for the student, however, violating the code of student conduct or the academic integrity policy will. If a student transfers to another institution, applies for graduate/professional school, or becomes a state or federal employee, they usually undergo a disciplinary record check in addition to the standard criminal background check. Whenever a student is subject to a disciplinary record check,

they are required to report their misconduct. This, however, does not usually deter someone from committing academic misconduct. Even with the threat of suspension and a disciplinary record, many undergraduate and graduate students still violate their institution's academic integrity policy.

Background of the Problem

The number of students engaged in academic misconduct is already large and is expected to continue increasing (Gallant & Drinan, 2008; Young, Miller, & Barnhardt, 2018). Determining an exact rate of academic misconduct is difficult, since much of the research is self-reported and within single institution studies (Harris, Harrison, McNally, & Ford, 2019). The largest research study on academic integrity conducted by Dr. Donald McCabe, occurred between fall 2002 and spring 2015 (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2016). Focusing on four year IHEs, Dr. McCabe collected self-reported data from about 71,300 undergraduate students, excluding first year students, and found that 68% admitted to cheating on a written assignment or exam (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2016). Smaller scale studies have found the rate of misconduct to be as high as 90% of undergraduate students, depending on the specific population studied (Harris, Harrison, McNally, & Ford, 2019). Another study found that 40.4% of graduate students admitted to committing at least one act of academic dishonesty (Miller, Shoptaugh, & Wooldridge, 2011).

These staggering self-reported numbers are much higher than what institutions adjudicate, since most violations are either not caught or not reported. Happel and Jennings (2008) found that only 1.5% of students who admit to academic misconduct are caught, reported, and sanctioned for their behavior. The vast majority of violations were

either not caught, went unreported, or the student was not found responsible for a policy violation. While many faculty say they do not observe any academic misconduct in their classrooms (McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2012), others are aware of misconduct yet choose not to report it (Beasley, 2016; Happel & Jennings, 2008). Faculty argue that reporting a student for an academic integrity violation is stressful, time-consuming, and worrisome (Beasley, 2016; Drinan & Gallant, 2008; Keith-Spiegel, Tabachnick, Whitley, & Washburn, 1998). The feeling of pressure and apprehension by faculty also comes from a lack of training on how to spot misconduct, a fear of pushback, and “needing to appear as teaching a class in which students do not cheat” (Beasley, 2016, p. 46). Faculty members may feel less anxious and more comfortable to report if they become better informed on how to catch academic integrity violations.

Today’s technology makes it easier for faculty and staff to catch offenders. Easy to use sites, such as the very popular company Turnitin, were created to detect cheating and plagiarism (Herberling, 2002). When a professor uploads a student’s paper to the website Turnitin.com, for example, it automatically gets screened for any signs of plagiarism. The site then generates a report for the faculty member to see what percentage, and which sections, of the paper is suspected to be plagiarized (Turnitin LLC, 2020). The faculty member could then easily submit the Turnitin report as evidence for an academic integrity violation. Before this technology, faculty had a much harder time detecting cheating and plagiarism of academic assignments, since it relied on their own suspicion and detection skills. As a result of the current technology and the continued technological advances to come, academic integrity violations are expected to continue increasing.

The internet and social media resources are also making it easier for students to violate academic integrity policies in the first place. Before these resources, students might try to find a friend who would write an academic paper or complete an assignment for them. Now, rates of academic misconduct are drastically rising since students can easily pay for an assignment via the internet (Walker & Townley, 2012). There are over 225 active paper mill websites that offer free or low-cost academic papers to undergraduate and graduate students (Fain & Bates, 2003). To ensure that students know their services exist, paper mills advertise on social media platforms such as Facebook and WeChat, a platform particularly popular among Chinese international students (Zhao & Liu, 2019). Ghost writers specifically target international students under the assumption that they face added pressure to pass their classes, and that they have the funds to pay for services (Zhao & Liu, 2019).

Further research shows that the large number of international students enrolled at IHEs may affect the high prevalence of academic misconduct. According to the Wall Street Journal's analysis of public colleges and universities in the United States, international students are over five times more likely to be reported for cheating than domestic students (Jordan & Belkin, 2016). Cheating is sometimes seen as a survival mechanism for international students; once an international student gets to the United States, they will do almost anything to stay in their program and not face the embarrassment of having to return home (Marcus, 2011). Even if international students do not intend to violate any policies, they might not be aware of the western notions of academic integrity. International students, many speaking English as a second language and not being held to "American" rules growing up, are at more of a disadvantage than

domestic students (Fass-Holmes, 2017). For example, while plagiarism is a serious offense in the United States, in other countries, it is seen as honoring someone else's words and not necessary to cite (Marcus, 2011). Thus, international students may face serious consequences for unintentionally violating academic integrity policies.

International students are drastically overrepresented in academic misconduct cases at Rutgers University-New Brunswick (RUNB)—the setting for the study. According to data collected by the Office of Student Conduct between September 2011 and September 2018, the total academic integrity caseload has increased about 21.5% each academic year, and as the number of academic integrity reports increase, the number of accusations against international students increase (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2018). Roughly 24% of the total academic misconduct cases referred to the Office of Student Conduct accuse international students, while they only make up about 11.4% of the total Rutgers University-New Brunswick population (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2018). With the enrollment of international students rising across IHEs, and within RUNB, reports of academic misconduct are expected to rise (Institute of International Education, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Once suspended, academic integrity violators temporarily transition out of their student role. After their period of suspension is over, many students return to campus. However, given the difficulty of yet another transition, they may not graduate. A recent study found that students who were suspended for academic misconduct were less likely to be retained than students who received lesser sanctions (e.g. reflection letter, community service, participation in an academic integrity seminar, or disciplinary

probation) for the same violation (Olafson, Schraw, & Kehrwald, 2014). Persistence is especially difficult when suspended students are not provided with proper resources and support to aid in their transition back into the university community (Schlossberg, 2011; Schrage & Giacomini, 2009).

In order to retain this population, Houle (2013) and Suchan (2016) recommend that institutions, and specifically the office overseeing the academic integrity policy, have a clear suspension reintegration process. However, most institutions—including the setting for this study—lack formal student reintegration processes (Karp & Frank, 2016). In other words, when an undergraduate or graduate student completes their term of suspension, they reintegrate into the campus community on their own. They are often not required to meet with a campus administrator or complete any additional requirements designed to ease their transition. Since this population is vastly understudied, whether a formal or informal reintegration process would yield more positive experiences is currently unknown.

The current research also ignores the persistence of this group. A past study explored the characteristics of undergraduate students who chose to re-enroll post-suspension, but it did not focus on academic integrity violators and, most importantly, it did not address their subsequent experiences from their perspective or whether they persisted until graduation (Stimpson & Janosik, 2007). The study would have benefitted from qualitative analysis in order for student voice to be included in the data. Another study utilized interviews with suspended students (both undergraduate and graduate) to gain insight into their re-enrollment experience but, again, did not focus on academic

integrity violators and did not include information on their persistence (Rodríguez Lupercio, 2019).

The importance of retention leaves IHEs focusing on persistence and graduation rates among every group of students (Herzog, 2005; Kerby, 2015; Selingo, 2013). Admissions offices have long tried to predict undergraduate and graduate student success using independent variables such as high school GPA and standardized test scores such as SAT/ACT and GRE, among many others (Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel, & Schmidt, 2015). More recently, institutions have incorporated data outside of the application process to predict student persistence, such as a student's grade in a specific course (McMurtrie, 2018), their level of engagement or socialization on campus (McMurtrie, 2018; Treaster, 2017), and—the center of this dissertation—their disciplinary record (Bauman, 2018).

RUNB is one of the first IHEs to track a wide range of student discipline data in hopes of predicting future student behavior. Up until now, most student conduct offices only tracked the overall number of violations for general informational purposes, and as required by law (Bauman, 2018). Institutions were simply running frequencies, and gaining knowledge on the happenings of their campus, without capitalizing on that information. RUNB took their efforts a step further by running several key data points (e.g. number of academic integrity violations, current number of incidents compared to number of incidents last year, etc.) on a bi-weekly basis. The student conduct office regularly emailed those numbers to a variety of university stakeholders in the form of an eye-catching infographic (see Appendix A). This showed a select group of faculty and staff members which incidents were occurring at which times, or within which

departments. For example, if the business school saw an increase in academic integrity violations within the past two weeks, they could plan educational outreach and other initiatives to deter future misconduct. With upholding academic integrity and increasing retention rates as two primary goals for higher education, IHEs should better understand the experiences of students suspended for academic misconduct.

The voices of undergraduate and graduate students suspended for academic misconduct have not been included in the literature to date. Extensive quantitative research exists for student disciplinary suspensions and subsequent reintegration in secondary education (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014; Brown, 2007; Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018), but the same attention has not been given to undergraduate- or graduate-level suspensions. Within higher education, there is an abundance of literature related to GPA and academic suspensions (Brady, 2008; Denovchek, 1992; Dill, Gilbert, Hill, Minchew, & Sempier, 2010; Garnett, 1990; Hansmeier, 1965; Houle, 2013; Mcdermott, 2007; Suchan, 2016). However, little research exists on disciplinary suspensions within higher education (Kompalla & McCarthy, 2001; Rodríguez Lupercio, 2019; Stimpson & Janosik, 2007; Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009), and even fewer studies dedicated specifically to suspension as a result of academic integrity violations (Fass-Holmes, 2017; Olafson, Schraw, & Kehrwald, 2014).

Research Question

This dissertation contributes to research focusing on the experience of undergraduate and graduate students who violate their IHE's academic integrity policy and later return to the same institution. The following research question guided this dissertation: How do students previously suspended for an academic integrity violation

experience reintegration at RUNB? By choosing RUNB as the setting for this study, I am capitalizing on that institution's early efforts in collecting in-depth academic integrity data. Although the setting of this study only includes one institution, it gives voice to a traditionally understudied population of students, and may offer implications for other institutions.

Methodological Approach

Current research on suspension reintegration for academic integrity violators uses quantitative methods and does not often include the voice of the students themselves (Olafson, Schraw, & Kehrwald, 2014; Stimpson & Janosik, 2007). Contrastingly, this dissertation takes a phenomenological approach to the problem. Phenomenology is a methodological framework that utilizes in-depth participant interviews to gain a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Perälylä 2005; Turner, 2010; van Manen, 2014). In this case, the particular phenomenon is the reintegration experience of previously suspended academic integrity violators. Being the first of its kind, this dissertation relies on a theoretical framework to guide this uncharted territory.

Theoretical Framework

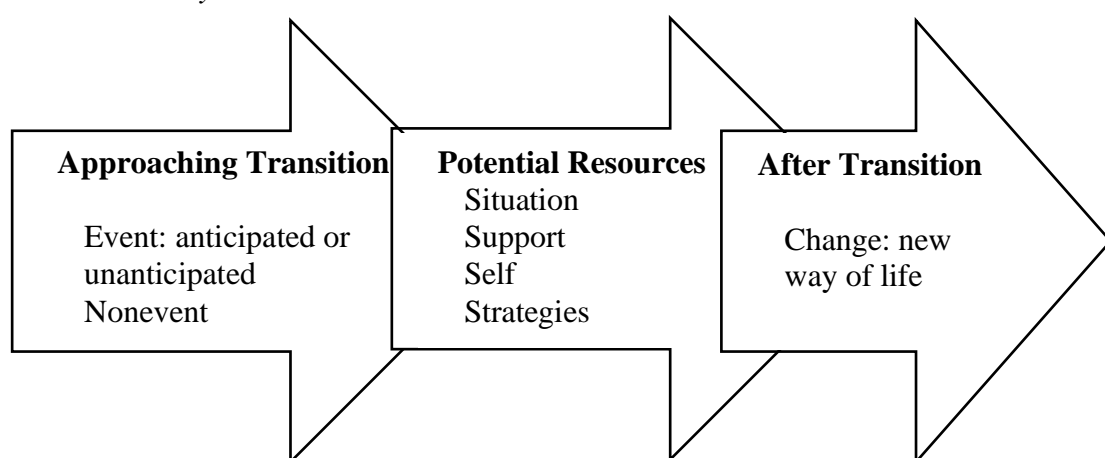
Adapting to campus life can be one of the most significant and challenging transitions both undergraduate and graduate students experience. Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and accompanying model was developed as a way for counselors to help adults manage the stress and confusion associated with transitions. Though not originally designed solely to explain undergraduate or graduate student transitions, Schlossberg quickly used the model to show colleges and universities how to improve their programs and services (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Since then, the

model has been applied to higher education frequently, typically with the aim of improving students' experiences with difficult transitions (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Huerta & Fishman, 2014). Building upon past research, I argue this model should be used as the principal theoretical framework. Using this model, I examine the reintegration experience of academically suspended students, including their temporary transition out of their institution and, more specifically, their transition back to their institution to finish their degree.

This dissertation centers around the three major parts of transition theory (see Figure 1), as described by Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012). The first, identifying the transition, involves categorizing the transition (anticipated, unanticipated, or a nonevent), understanding the extent to which the process could impact the individual, and identifying where the individual is in the change process. The population for this study is unique in that it consists of students who have already experienced two different transitions in relation to this particular phenomenon.

Figure 1

Transition Theory Model



Note. Adapted from “Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world (4th ed.),” by M. Anderson, J. Goodman, and N. Schlossberg, 2012, p. 39.

First, an *unanticipated* and involuntary transition occurred when their student status was removed following an academic integrity violation. No one goes into their undergraduate or graduate program anticipating that they will be suspended during their tenure, which makes this particular transition not only unanticipated but also unwanted. Unanticipated transitions can be debilitating (Pearlin, 1980), result in poor decision-making (Fouad, Bynner, & Anderson, 2008), and may negatively impact student success or completion (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006).

Then, after their period of suspension ended, these students chose to re-enroll at the same institution, resulting in an *anticipated* transition back into student status. Although that transition was planned, it may not have been easier for the student to actually experience. Often, the change back and forth in student status can be too difficult to manage, and results in students dropping out of their IHE before completing their degree (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006).

The second part of the transition model focuses on identifying the individual's coping resources, known as the 4 Ss—situation, self, support, and strategies—and will inform the data collection and analysis phases of this dissertation. The best way to understand a difficult transition in someone's life, including their coping strategies and the support they receive to aid in that transition, is to ask them about their experience directly. This dissertation uses students' voices to better understand their reintegration experience and the supports, or lack thereof, they relied on throughout that process. Specific demographic questions, such as the student's race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, are also considered, since these contextual factors have been found

to impact how a person perceives and experiences transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Fouad, Bynner, & Anderson, 2008).

In line with the transition model, the findings and recommendations from this dissertation emphasize the importance of strengthening resources in order to better assist the individual in transition. Recommendations for this dissertation provide concrete ways for IHEs to aid suspended students in their reintegration process. According to Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012), “Moving through a transition requires letting go of aspects of the self; letting go of former roles and learning new ones” (p. 40). A transition does not just involve a period of adjustment, but rather involves learning a new way of life (Neimeyer, 2001). It can be especially difficult to transition away from and then back to a particular role in life, such as when an undergraduate or graduate student is suspended for a period of time before continuing their education, and the literature to date has not yet thoroughly explored this territory. The findings from this dissertation foster a better understanding of these students’ experiences and suggest ways for administrators to improve this transitional process.

Colleges and universities assist students with several anticipated transitions into IHEs. First-year students, including international, transfer, and graduate students, benefit from an orientation to their particular institution (Ward-Roof, 2010). IHEs dedicate financial resources and staff to making the orientation program valuable for students. Even more tailored programs exist for first-year students who are deemed at-risk of failing out of their IHE during their first year (Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, & Oestreicher, 2017). Some institutions also offer first-year and/or second-year seminars designed to further integrate undergraduate students (Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Piper, Krehbiel, &

Krehbiel, 2015) and graduate students (Tokuno, 2008) into the campus community. In addition to helping with anticipated transitions, institutions also assist students through unanticipated transitions.

For example, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is currently disrupting college and university campuses around the world. As a result, many IHEs sent students home as early as March 2020 and moved instruction completely online. Although unanticipated by both students and IHEs, most colleges and universities created support for students in this abrupt shift to normal campus life. Head (2020) recommends that faculty incorporate “empathy and compassion” into their online courses by considering individual circumstances that challenge academic success and adjusting as necessary (p. 13). For example, faculty are expected to hold class during their scheduled time, but also give grace to students who have an essential job, or who are now living in a different time zone (Field, 2020). Other institutions are giving students a laptop to complete their coursework (Supiano, 2020), providing access to free food by opening a campus food pantry (Kafka, 2020), and reviewing and approving student petitions to continue living on campus due to challenging circumstances (Dill, 2020), among other supportive measures.

Although IHEs aid in many important student transitions, others are ignored. Suspension reintegration is one instance of a typically unassisted transition. If IHEs improved their understanding of the experiences of suspended students, they could better assist future reintegration transitions.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide clarification for understanding key terms used in this study.

Academic misconduct – Violating a college or university academic integrity policy (e.g. cheating, plagiarizing, not abiding by research or professional ethics, etc.).

International Student – Students who have completed most of their K-12 schooling in their home country of origin, prior to studying in the United States.

re-enrollment – When a student working toward a degree takes a leave of absence, of any kind, and then returns to the same institution.

Reintegration – The transitional experience of a student who was working toward a degree, took time away from their academic program, and is now returning to the same institution.

Suspension – “A separation of the student from the college or university for a definite period of time, after which the student is eligible to return” (Stoner & Lowery, 2004, p. 55).

Dissertation Outline

Chapter 1 discussed the importance of academic integrity within higher education. The academic misconduct rates at the selected institution were explored, along with typical punishments for academic integrity, including suspension. This chapter included an explanation of the impacts suspensions have on college and university retention rates, and the importance of understanding the student suspension reintegration experience. Using phenomenological approaches and guided by transition theory, the goal of the study is to better understand the experience of previously suspended academic integrity violators. The chapter concluded with a definition of key terms that are used throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing related literature. This principally includes research on academic misconduct and suspension reintegration. Disciplinary suspensions within secondary and higher education are also thoroughly explored. Finally, this chapter concludes with a review of the current literature related to academic suspensions. As a whole, this chapter illuminates a gap in the literature that this dissertation begins to fill.

Chapter 3 outlines the research questions, methodological framework, and research design. First, several research questions that guide the study are outlined. A discussion on phenomenology and how that methodology directed the proposed research design follows. Chapter 3 includes an exploration of my positionality as the researcher. The site of the study is thoroughly explored with an emphasis on the academic integrity process and statistics of student academic misconduct. A description of data collection and data analysis follows.

Chapter 4 summarizes the findings from the study. Using Schlossberg's transition theory and accompanying model as a guide, this chapter begins to answer the overarching research question: How do students previously suspended for an academic integrity violation experience reintegration at Rutgers University-New Brunswick? Overall, chapter 4 synthesizes the participants' experiences through a phenomenological lens.

Chapter 5 lists the key takeaways and findings from the study. Reflections and observations are made regarding the theory and associated models utilized in the study. An explanation of limitations and recommendations for future research follow. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for practice, specifically focusing on how academic and

student affairs professionals within a higher education setting can work together to improve the reintegration experience of suspended students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into three parts. Part one presents an overview of academic misconduct and how it often leads to disciplinary suspensions and reintegration—a particularly complex transition with major implications for both suspended students and universities. Part two focuses on disciplinary suspension, both in secondary and higher education, and the subsequent reintegration literature. Part three explores how suspensions caused by academic misconduct—the focus of this dissertation—are distinct from academic suspensions—the traditional focus in the literature. As a whole, this chapter illuminates the importance of further studying suspension reintegration. Situating this project in the conversation, the literature review shows the need to better understand the reintegration experiences of undergraduate and graduate students suspended for academic misconduct.

Academic Misconduct Suspensions

Institutions consistently enforce academic integrity policies, but the mechanisms for handling potential misconduct and the punishments for confirmed violations, vary drastically. There are generally five different systems colleges and universities utilize to address potential academic integrity violations: traditional honor code, modified honor code, student conduct office, academic integrity policy, or a decentralized system (Bertram Gallant, 2020). A traditional honor code leaves the task of upholding academic integrity to the students. Within this model, all students sign an honor pledge and are responsible for reporting and adjudicating any student who violates that pledge (McCabe & Pavela, 2000). Exams are not proctored and if cheating occurs during an exam, the typical sanction is suspension or expulsion (Bertram Gallant, 2020; Happel & Jennings,

2008). A *modified* honor code differs in that the typical sanction is an “XF” or permanent failure in the course in which the violation occurred (McCabe & Pavela, 2000). Modified honor codes are associated with lower levels of academic misconduct, but higher-level misconduct still occurs and may result in suspension (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002). Studies have found that students are not deterred by the fear of possible punishment because they think they will not get caught for their misconduct (Happel & Jennings, 2008; Vandehey, Diekhoff, & LaBeff, 2007). Providing education about the institution’s culture of academic integrity has shown to be more beneficial than the use of harsh sanctioning (Sledge & Pringle, 2010). Even with this information, honor codes do not prevent misconduct or suspensions of academic integrity violators.

The final three academic integrity systems differ in who oversees the adjudication process. In the student conduct model, centralized student conduct offices handle the adjudication process, with little involvement from faculty or students. In the academic integrity policy model, a senior academic affairs officer oversees the adjudication process, which may include faculty and/or students but will not include student conduct officers per se. In a decentralized system, individual academic departments and faculty members are responsible for handling all lower-level academic integrity violations and a centralized student conduct office handles cases that could result in suspension or expulsion (Bertram Gallant, 2020).

The designated adjudicators are to be well trained on how to properly resolve academic integrity cases, no matter which system is used. Academic integrity adjudicators receive guidance on how to appropriately handle a potential violation, including learning what constitutes a violation, each step of the adjudication process, and

how to determine appropriate sanctions. This information is also described within the IHE's academic integrity policy and is usually derived from the model codes of student conduct and academic integrity.

When a student is found responsible for academic misconduct, the policy violation(s) and subsequent sanction(s) are noted in their disciplinary record with the IHE. Undergraduate and graduate students' disciplinary records remain on file for the duration of their student status. If they are found responsible for another violation, their disciplinary history is considered for sanctioning purposes (Pavela, 1979). Some IHEs retain student disciplinary files after the student has graduated or otherwise left the college/university. RUNB's University Records Retention Policy, for example, "requires that disciplinary records be kept for ten years from the date of the letter providing notice of final disciplinary action" (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2022, p. 25). During this time, a student may sign a release to have their disciplinary record shared for background check purposes. This is a common practice for when a student transfers to another IHE, applies to graduate and professional schools, and applies for employment at agencies that require background checks, such as state and federal jobs. A student's misconduct (when caught, reported, and adjudicated) could have a lasting effect on their future, which adds to the importance of a fair and just adjudication process.

As a result of two landmark cases, courts have held that all IHEs, both public and private, must afford due process rights to students accused of a disciplinary violation (*Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, 1961; *Slaughter v. Brigham Young University*, 1975), which includes academic integrity cases. Scholars have interpreted the court decisions and outlined what this means in the form of a model student conduct code

(Stoner & Lowery, 2004) and code of academic integrity (Pavela, 1997). These model codes include guidance on defining violations, outlining procedures, and implementing sanctions—including suspension—among other things (Pavela, 1997). Noticeably missing from both model codes is a structure for, or even a discussion about, suspension reintegration. As more reports of academic misconduct are being adjudicated, and more students are being suspended from higher education, more research is needed on suspended students' reintegration experiences.

Suspension Reintegration Process

Without a model to follow, most institutions lack a formal suspension reintegration process (Houle, 2013; Suchan, 2016). A few IHEs, however, do loosely outline reintegration procedures. Some colleges and universities, for example, require previously suspended students to meet with a student conduct staff member within the first few weeks of being back at the institution, with the purpose of discussing how that office can best support them moving forward (ASCA Women of Student Conduct, 2018). Requiring a meeting with a University staff member can be helpful in offering support and resources to the student, with the goal of preventing recidivism (Winslade & Williams, 2017). Other institutions take a more formalized approach and incorporate restorative practices in lieu of or immediately following a period of suspension. In either case, these techniques are used to repair the harm that was done and successfully reintegrate the suspended student into the campus community.

Restorative Justice (RJ)

Restorative practices have existed for centuries but have only recently become popular for campus disciplinary systems. RJ differs from traditional institutional

adjudication processes in that it incorporates the victim, the offender, any relevant administrators, and other involved parties, in the decision and sanctioning process (Karp & Sacks, 2014). Together, the group encourages the offender to accept responsibility for their misconduct, repair the harm they caused, and “work to reduce the risk of re-offense by building positive social ties to the community” (Karp, 2015, p. 2). Also differing from traditional adjudication processes, RJ is generally categorized as non-disciplinary, as the purpose is not to determine whether a policy violation occurred. The college/university maintains records of all RJ processes that occur, but, ideally, after a successful RJ process, the offender would not have a disciplinary record.

Several institutions have found success in using RJ for a variety of student code of conduct violations. For example, The College of New Jersey and RUNB have found RJ to be “overwhelmingly positive” as an option in addressing sexual misconduct violations, determining that both victims and accused students were satisfied with the process and felt that harm was repaired (North, 2019). Likewise, a study at Skidmore College showed that recidivism rates were lowered when alcohol and drug offenders went through an RJ process, compared to a traditional campus disciplinary process (Karp & Conrad, 2005). As more positive results are being shown, more institutions are beginning to use restorative practices. Some institutions are now using restorative practices for academic integrity procedures.

Academic Integrity Matters (AIM) began at the University of Minnesota in 2015 (Strange & Kuecker-Grotjohn, 2018) and has since been adapted at many other institutions, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Strange & Kuecker-Grotjohn, 2018), Lakehead University, (Lakehead University, 2022), and the University

of British Columbia-Okanagan (University of British Columbia, 2022). AIM allows students who accept responsibility for their misconduct to talk with student and faculty volunteers and together, determine consequences for their violation (Rademacher, 2017). If the student complies with the agreed upon sanctions, the university will expunge their disciplinary record for that violation (Rademacher, 2017). While this may be a good alternative for minor first-time violations, in other instances, suspension is warranted and subsequently required. In those cases, instead of utilizing RJ to determine sanctions, some institutions use it to reintegrate students back to their college or university after their sanctions are complete.

A specific type of RJ process, called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs), is meant for reintegrating offenders back into their community following sanction completion (Bohmert, Duwe, & Hipple, 2018). Drawing on previously established restorative practices, CoSAs emerged as an effort to reduce recidivism and reintegrate sex offenders back into the community after their release from prison (Bohmert et al., 2018). In a traditional CoSA process, one or two trained facilitators, along with roughly four or five trained volunteers, meet with an offender on a weekly basis. Their role is to support the offender in determining how best to repair the harm they caused (Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017). Research has shown that after participating in a CoSA, offenders have “reported improvements in a number of areas, including agency, self-esteem, coping skills, social skills, problem solving, and emotional and self-regulation” (Bohmert et al., 2018, p. 743). Participating in a CoSA can also strengthen life skills such as resolving conflict, taking accountability for one’s own actions, and restoring relationships after harm was caused (Evans, Lester, & Anfara Jr., 2013). Noting

the positive results in the criminal justice system, colleges and universities are beginning to utilize CoSAs for the reintegration of suspended students found responsible for disciplinary violations.

Many institutions are incorporating restorative practices, and CoSAs in particular, within their codes of student conduct and academic integrity processes (Treiling, MacCammon, & Tomeny, 2017). The CoSA process at a college or university follows the same format as a CoSA process within the justice system (Das, Macbeth, & Elsaesser, 2019, p. 5):

A circle process usually entails participants sitting around in a physical circle and one or two facilitators, leading the process. A talking piece, an object of significance chosen by the circle members, is passed around, usually clockwise, and only the person holding the talking piece is authorized to speak. After introductory comments, often including a discussion of values underlying the process, the facilitator poses a question or a topic, and then passes the talking piece. Circles provide an orderly and reflective process that reinforces the underlying values of restorative discipline and peaceable schools.

Although restorative justice may take more time, resources, and commitment from administrators to implement (Miele & Hamrick, 2019), results have been overwhelmingly positive in higher education disciplinary systems. According to a fairly recent study, student conduct offices at 18 colleges and universities across the United States, including public and private institutions of all sizes, implemented CoSAs as a restorative reintegration practice for suspended students—including academic integrity violators—returning to their institution (Karp & Sacks, 2014). The results showed that CoSAs helped to successfully reintegrate previously suspended students into their campus community, which lessened their risk of re-offending and positively contributed to their academic success (Karp & Sacks, 2014). Subsequent student retention rates, however, were not specifically and explicitly tracked.

Even though the undergraduate and graduate student populations have changed demographically, and new techniques have been introduced, the model code of academic integrity has remained constant for the past 25 years. More research is needed in order to evolve practices and include information in the model code about suspension reintegration. By better understanding suspended student experiences, the findings of this dissertation yield suggestions for implementing an institutional reintegration process, something that is currently missing from the model codes described earlier.

Disciplinary Suspensions

A disciplinary suspension occurs as a result of one egregious or repeated lower-level violations of an IHE's code of conduct (Pavela, 1997). Such offenses could include illicit drug violations, theft, sexual harassment, and other disruptive behaviors outside the realm of academic misconduct (Dutile, 2003). However, it could also include higher-level acts of plagiarism or cheating. An institution assigns suspension as a form of punishment and as a deterrent for future misconduct. When the student returns to their undergraduate or graduate program, additional support may or may not be provided by the institution. This section reviews disciplinary suspension reintegration from both secondary and higher education contexts.

Disciplinary Suspensions within Secondary Education

Disciplinary suspension processes differ among institutions of secondary and higher education. The decision to suspend a high school student comes from the highest ranking official, the school principal, and may involve school board members and the student's parents or guardians (Theriot, Craun, & Dupper, 2010). Within the higher education setting, a faculty member, staff member, or even a board of peers can suspend

a student, without involvement from the highest ranking official, such as the president or a board of governors (Bertram Gallant, 2020). The subsequent reintegration processes also differ. Namely, undergraduate and graduate students can decide not to re-enroll after their suspension, but high school is generally compulsory until age 16, and even up to age 18 in some states. While many differences exist, the outcomes of suspension reintegration are similar among secondary and higher education students.

Similar to undergraduate and graduate students, high school students are less likely to graduate if they have been previously suspended (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014). Suspended high school students have been found to be less academically developed (Brown, 2007; Lcoe & Steinberg, 2018), they may be put in negative or unstable situations while not in school (Brown, 2007), and their suspension might be emotionally difficult to go through (Brown, 2007). When they do return, students often feel labeled or judged for their suspension. A recent study found that “whether imagined or confirmed, students’ worries about how they were perceived generated social and interpersonal struggles that impacted their readaptation efforts” (Vazquez, 2015, p. 108). Suspended students being put in a difficult environment, processing many emotions, and feeling judged by others, is not limited to the secondary education setting. Undergraduate and graduate students may also face the same difficulties during their suspension.

High school students are in great need of support when they return to their original school district, post-suspension and an individualized reintegration process is recommended (Vazquez, 2015). The reintegration process should include administrators staying in contact with the student or their families during the suspension period, and meeting with the student upon their return to school (Vazquez, 2015). The research is

clear in that schools should create a network of support for suspended students if they want to increase graduation rates among this population.

Disciplinary Suspensions within Higher Education

To date, very little research has been conducted on the reintegration experiences of suspended students in higher education settings. Only one recent study has taken a phenomenological approach to explore this topic from the perspective of the suspended students. Rodríguez Lupercio (2019) interviewed six students (undergraduate and graduate), all from different college and universities, who were suspended for disciplinary reasons and then returned to their previous institution. The participants all described different re-enrollment processes, none of which focused on reintegrating the student into the campus community or supporting the suspended student at all. Generally, the processes involved the student completing a variety of re-enrollment forms, without ever speaking to a University administrator. Even worse, some students were not informed about the re-enrollment process at their institution and were left to figure it out on their own. All six students “experienced negative perceptions of the disciplinary suspension and re-enrollment experience” (Rodríguez Lupercio, 2019, p. 126). In order to get a better sense of the issue at hand, this scholar urged future research on the reintegration experience of suspended students—which is at the center of this study.

Academic Suspensions

Unlike *disciplinary* suspensions, a substantial amount of information exists on students transitioning back to their college or university after serving an *academic* suspension (Brady, 2008; Denovchek, 1992; Houle, 2013; Mcdermott, 2007; Suchan, 2016). An academic suspension is a mandatory leave of absence that occurs when a

student is not making satisfactory progress toward their degree (Houle, 2013). This could include, for example, when a student's GPA falls below what their major requires. This differs from students who violate the academic integrity policy, but may otherwise be making satisfactory academic progress.

When a student returns from their period of academic suspension, the tacit expectation is academic success until graduation. However, past research on academically suspended students has shown that only a small number will complete their degree (Denovchek, 1992; Mcdermott, 2007). In fact, students who are temporarily academically dismissed are less likely to graduate than students who, of their own accord, temporarily drop out for other reasons (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006). One study found that only around 20% of academically suspended students eventually graduate (Mcdermott, 2007). Another study found that only 31.6% of academically suspended students returned to their previous university and only 19.5% of those re-enrolling persisted until graduation (Goldman, Blackwell, & Beach, 2003). With graduation rates so low among this population, it is important to better understand the experiences and perspectives of suspended students.

The transition away from and back to student status can be difficult to navigate. After being told they were academically suspended, students reported feeling "scared/fear, shock, [that they received a] wake-up call, shut down, devastation, disappointment, worthless, and embarrassment/shame" (Suchan, 2016, p. 132). Upon returning to their institution, students described feeling more confident in themselves and having a stronger will to persist (Suchan, 2016). Researchers recommend that administrators have a clear transition or reintegration process for academically suspended

students, with built-in resources and support including—at minimum—the suspended students speaking with a faculty or staff member prior to or immediately after their return (Brady, 2008; Houle, 2013; Suchan, 2016). Brady (2008) suggested the reintegration process also be individualized to the student since “each student is unique in terms of needs and abilities which may impact success” (p. 64). For example, one student may need to be connected with the campus counseling center as a part of their reintegration process, while another student would benefit more from required meetings with an academic advisor. Each individualized process should include offering varying levels of support for the previously suspended student.

Mississippi State University (MSU) created a way for students who qualify for an academic suspension to improve their GPA and persist to graduation without actually leaving the institution (Dill et al., 2010). Eligible and willing students can participate in Bulldog Rebound, previously known as MSU’s Learning Skills Support Program. Bulldog Rebound requires that students meet with a program coordinator bi-weekly, meet at least once with their faculty advisor, complete a three-hour course on reading and studying skills, and maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher for that semester, while taking a reduced course load. Since its inception, “65% of the [Bulldog Rebound] participants returned to school the semester following participation compared to 22% of the nonparticipant suspended students” (Dill et al., 2010, p. 277). Findings indicated that a formalized process with built-in institutional support leads to higher retention rates among students at risk of academic suspension.

Similar to MSU, one particular community college known in the study as “Midwestern Institution,” deferred a student’s academic suspension if they agreed to

participate in one of three retention initiatives. The most rigorous option was the Just One Program (JOP). JOP was an eight-week course, where attendance was mandatory at every session, designed to help with reading and math comprehension. During those eight weeks, participants were also required to meet with a mentor at least once to discuss time and study management skills. The second and less rigorous option was the PATH workshop. This was a three-hour workshop, run by counselors, where students discussed their personal and academic barriers and were provided with resources. The last and least rigorous option was the Individual Retention Plan, where students identified their personal and academic barriers, self-reflected, and then wrote a plan to overcome those barriers. Students completed this activity on their own time. Results showed that retention improved with participating in any these initiatives; participating students returned to college the following semester in higher rates than nonparticipating students. Furthermore, retention rates were the highest among JOP participants compared to the PATH workshop and Individual Retention Plan participants (Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009). JOP participants may have had higher retention rates because they received the highest level of institutional support.

Together these seemingly disparate areas of suspension and reintegration research point to a gap in the literature. While some research on academic misconduct suspensions exists, scholars and professionals would benefit from additional studies focusing on the student perspective. A lack of research also exists among disciplinary suspensions within higher education, though studies within *secondary* education consistently recommend formalizing a reintegration process and ensuring built-in institutional support. Similarly, high levels of support increased retention rates among academically suspended students,

but more research on their personal experiences is needed in order to develop a thorough understanding of model policies and practices.

Summary

Chapter 2 featured a review of suspension reintegration literature from three separate perspectives: suspension as a result of academic misconduct, disciplinary suspension, and academic suspension. When evaluating this literature, a gap emerged. There is a deficit of literature on the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students post-suspension for academic integrity violations. This study contributes to the current body of literature by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis on the reintegration experiences of undergraduate and graduate students suspended for academic misconduct.

Chapter 3: Methodological Framework and Research Design

This chapter details the guiding research questions, along with the methodological framework most apt for pursuing those questions. Informed by phenomenology, the research design of this study utilizes qualitative methods, specifically interviews. A description of the data collection and analysis processes, for said qualitative methods, is included in this chapter. This section concludes by discussing my positionality as a researcher.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

In order to better understand student transition experiences, the following research question, underpinned by Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and accompanying model, guides the study.

1. How do students previously suspended for an academic integrity violation experience subsequent reintegration into RUNB?

Ten sub-questions were added to ground the research study in the existing literature and organize the study overall. The following three sub-questions focus on providing context to each situation by identifying the type of transition (anticipated, unanticipated, or a nonevent) and motivations behind the transition, as described by Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012).

1. Do academic integrity violators anticipate being suspended?
2. What are the reasons students cite for violating the academic integrity policy?
3. How do previously suspended students describe the challenges and strengths of the academic integrity process?

The next set of sub-questions center around the impact of suspension and utilization of coping resources, categorized by Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) as situation, self, support, and strategies.

4. How do academic integrity violators spend their suspension?
5. What support systems (institutional or otherwise) do suspended students have and what are the areas where support is lacking?
6. What impact does suspension have on students who violate the academic integrity policy?
7. What impact does suspension have on a student's future?

The last set of sub-questions focus on the transition back to RUNB and the subsequent reintegration experience.

8. Why do suspended students choose to re-enroll in or at RUNB?
9. What are the barriers to reintegration?
10. How could RUNB improve the reintegration experience for suspended students?

This study also includes the following demographic questions, since they have been found to impact how a person experiences transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Fouad, Bynner, & Anderson, 2008).

1. What is the participant's race?
2. What is the participant's gender?
3. Is the participant a first-generation student?

Methodological Framework

In order to wholly understand a particular phenomenon, it is important to speak directly with the people who have been impacted. Historically, much of the research on

undergraduate and graduate student reintegration utilizes quantitative methods and as a result, those researchers never heard directly from the students (Olafson, Schraw, & Kehrwald, 2014; Stimpson & Janosik, 2007). This study, on the other hand, is guided by phenomenology and thus, qualitative methods. This contributes to a more recent body of research that recognizes the importance of including student voices in research centering on student experience (Brady, 2008; Rodríguez Lupercio, 2019). By employing a phenomenological research design, this study sought thick descriptions of the participants' experiences (Geertz, 1973) and, as a result, provides much needed insight into the understudied topic of suspension reintegration.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology began in the late 19th century as a new way of understanding and interpreting people's lived experiences (Kafle, 2011). Up until that point, researchers prioritized looking at a situation objectively and left little room for interpretation (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Edmund Husserl, known as the principal founder of phenomenology, instead argued "that phenomena as perceived by the individual's consciousness should be the object of scientific study" (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019, p. 92). Embracing subjectivity, phenomenology explores how multiple people interpret, make sense of, and describe a common experience (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). "To do phenomenological research means to get at the essence of a particular phenomenon among a typically small group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (Torres, Jones, & Arminio, 2014, p. 89). By using phenomenological approaches, this study sheds light on the reintegration experience of previously suspended students from the perspective of those who have lived through it.

Phenomenology has been used in a variety of studies related to undergraduate and graduate student experiences. Examples of past phenomenological research includes understanding the lived experience of students on the autism spectrum (Ward & Webster, 2018), multiracial students (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012), women student leaders (Haber-Curran, 2013), and a large variety of other undergraduate and graduate student populations. More specific to this dissertation, phenomenology, in conjunction with transition theory, has been used to study a wide range of college and university student transitions. Some of this recent phenomenological research includes students transitioning into IHEs (Harper & Newman, 2016; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015), transferring between IHEs (Hioki, Lester, & Martinez, 2015; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017), and transitioning out of IHEs post-graduation (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018; Olson, 2016). Phenomenology has only been used once before to explore the reintegrative transitional experience of college and university students who had been suspended after a disciplinary matter (Rodríguez Lupercio, 2019). Prior to this dissertation, phenomenological methods, and qualitative methods in general, have not been used to study the reintegration experience of students who were specifically suspended as a result of academic misconduct.

Though phenomenology has traditionally been underutilized in this context, it is the most apt methodology for this study. This methodology is notably beneficial for an understudied phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2011). With a limited amount of existing research on suspension reintegration, utilizing phenomenology helps to provide a broad overview of this particular student experience. Phenomenology also helps to identify practical implications, setting the stage for providing recommendations for practice

(Groenewald, 2004). Findings from this study allow for scholars and practitioners to better understand students' reintegration experiences. Once higher education administrators better understand the suspended student reintegration experience, they may use that information to inform development of policies or procedures that promote successful transitions. Guided by phenomenology, this study ensures that student voices are at the forefront of research on student reintegration experiences.

Research Design

The design of this study is shaped by best practices in phenomenology, informed by transition theory, and guided by the research questions previously outlined. Additionally, the design is influenced by my positionality within this work. Therefore, this section begins with a discussion of my positionality as a researcher. A description of the site and study participants follow. The data collection and analysis processes are also described in detail.

Positionality

Throughout this dissertation process, I considered and reconsidered my positionality by reflecting on my relationship with the research participants and my relationship with this topic, as recommended by Torres, Jones, and Arminio (2014). I am currently an administrator in the Office of Student Affairs Compliance & Title IX at Rutgers University-New Brunswick (RUNB) and work closely with the Office of Student Conduct, which is my previous employer. I have suspended a number of students for policy infractions throughout my career. Upon issuing a suspension, I wondered what level of support the student would receive during their time away from RUNB, if they would return to RUNB, and if so, what that transition would look like. However, I was

never privy to that information since a formal reintegration process at RUNB did not—and still does not—exist. Working in Student Affairs, I am dedicated to enhancing the student experience in every way possible. Given my positions within student conduct and Title IX, better understanding suspension reintegration—and improving that experience—remains a significant passion of mine.

I acknowledge that my career trajectory and current title alone could have influenced whether people wanted to participate in my study. Since an RUNB administrator is generally the one who makes the decision to suspend a student following an academic integrity violation, participants may not have wanted to be interviewed by another RUNB administrator. With this in mind, it was imperative that I fully explained my position in this context as a researcher and not as an administrator. I also thoroughly explained the purpose of my research at the beginning of every interview, in order to ensure transparency from the start. On the informed consent form, I briefly explained my position and clearly stated that participation (or not) in my study was voluntary, had no bearing on their disciplinary record, and that responses were not shared with anyone in the Office of Student Conduct. All these measures were taken to minimize the fear or uncertainty students may have.

I also recognize and acknowledge that my position as a researcher and an administrator constituted an usual power dynamic with participants. Given my position, the students may not have been as candid in their responses and may have been hesitant to provide critical feedback about the institution. On the other hand, some participants explicitly said they wanted to provide honest and critical feedback to someone within the institution, in hopes their responses positively impact policies or procedures at RUNB.

Aside from my professional positionality, there are other demographic factors that could have influenced this study. For one, I identify and present as a white cisgender female. Some participants identified as female, but none identified as white. Also unlike any of the participants of this study, I have never been suspended from my education. While the participants may not have known how I identify or what I experienced in the past, their perception of my background could have affected their responses. Some participants may have immediately felt comfortable speaking with me and some may have felt differently. However, in line with phenomenology, I listened intently and nonjudgmentally to all the participants in this study, with the goal of making them feel at ease throughout the interview. All five ultimately opened up and spoke very candidly with me.

Site Description

Capitalizing on its early data collection and analysis efforts surrounding academic integrity, the setting for this study is Rutgers University-New Brunswick (RUNB). With over 150 undergraduate majors and over 400 graduate programs, RUNB enrolls about 66,000 students (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2021). RUNB students come from all 50 states, over 130 countries, and are diverse in religion, ethnicity, age, class, and gender, among other identities (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2021). RUNB is “among the most ethnically diverse campuses in the nation” (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2021). Just as these facts and figures suggest, the participants in this study are diverse in many ways, and their diversity likely influences how they experience suspension reintegration.

Academic Integrity Policy at RUNB

The academic integrity policy at RUNB was created in 2008, with subsequent updates in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2020 (see Appendix B). The academic integrity policy outlines the campus' academic integrity standards, defines violations of the policy, describes adjudication procedures, and lists potential consequences for violating the policy. While RUNB does not follow one of the adjudication models previously described in chapter 1, it most closely resembles a decentralized system. At RUNB the academic integrity policy has traditionally been divided into two processes, based on whether students are accused of a separable offense, which could result in suspension, or nonseparable offense, which does not rise to the level of suspension. While the most recent policy update in 2020 replaced the terms "separable" and "nonseparable" offenses with "Level I," "Level II," and "Level III" violations, for the purposes of this dissertation, the terms "separable" and "nonseparable" offenses will still be used.

Separable offenses are generally handled by a staff member in the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) and nonseparable offenses are generally handled by a trained faculty member designated in each department to hear academic integrity cases (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2018). However, there are some exceptions. Some departments do not yet have faculty members trained in adjudicating academic integrity violations, resulting in an OSC staff member also handling the nonseparable offenses for that department. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some departments have very seasoned faculty adjudicators who are empowered by OSC to handle separable cases.

The academic integrity policy does not contain pre-determined sanctions for each violation type and does not specify how sanctions are determined. The code of student

conduct, on the other hand, states (Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2022, p. 17):

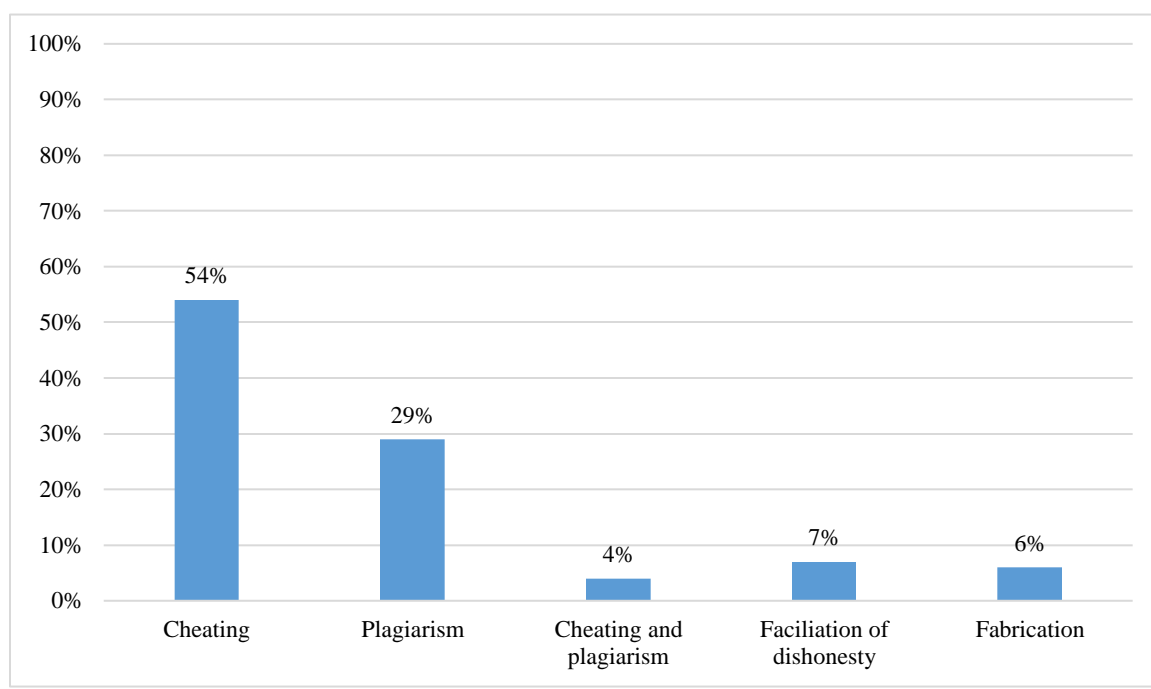
Sanctions for misconduct will be determined on a case-by-case basis, utilizing six main criteria:

1. The nature of the offense.
2. The precedent established by previous sanctions.
3. The previous disciplinary history of the student.
4. Aggravating or mitigating circumstances.
5. The developmental needs of the student.
6. The safety and well-being of the community.

Since it is not stated outright, it is unclear if case adjudicators utilize the same criteria when determining sanctions for academic integrity violations. However, the academic integrity policy includes the following examples of academic misconduct offenses that may result in suspension (Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2019, p. 6):

- A second [or more] academic integrity violation.
- Substantial plagiarism on a major assignment.
- Copying or using unauthorized materials, devices, or collaboration on a major exam.
- Having a substitute take an examination.
- Making up or falsifying evidence or data or other source materials for a major assignment.
- Facilitating dishonesty by another student on a major exam or assignment.
- Intentionally destroying or obstructing another student's work.
- Knowingly violating research or professional ethics.
- Any violation involving potentially criminal activity

According to RUNB student conduct records, the vast majority of cases that result in suspension involve cheating (54%), plagiarism (29%), or both simultaneously (4%), with a small number of cases involving facilitation of dishonesty (7%) or fabrication (6%).

Figure 2*Percent of Academic Integrity (AI) Violations Resulting in Suspension*

RUNB's definitions of plagiarism and cheating match those of the model code of academic integrity, as described in chapter 1. Facilitation of dishonesty, which is missing from the model code, is defined at RUNB as, "Deliberately or carelessly allowing one's work to be used by other students without prior approval of the instructor or otherwise aiding others in committing violations of academic integrity" (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a, p. 2). Also missing from the model code, fabrication is defined at RUNB as, "The invention or falsification of sources, citations, data, or results, and recording or reporting them in any academic exercise." (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a, p. 2).

Since time away from the university is a likely outcome for academic misconduct, RUNB's adjudication process for a potentially separable offense is extremely thorough.

First, the accused student meets with the adjudicator to learn about the process and hear their rights in the process. These include, among others, the right to bring a support person and/or campus advisor to the meeting and the right not to participate in the process at all, effectively choosing to have the process continue without their participation. During this initial meeting, the student is invited to discuss the case from their perspective.

Once this meeting occurs and the adjudicator has collected all the available information about the case, they make a determination on charges. If a student is not charged with a policy violation, their case is closed. If a student is charged with one or more policy violation(s), they can answer “responsible” or “not responsible” to the charge(s). The academic integrity policy prior to the 2020 update also allowed for an answer of “no contest,” which is neither accepting nor denying responsibility to the charge(s). If a student answers “responsible” or “no contest,” the adjudicator recommends a sanction. The recommended sanction is based on the nature of the violation and the student’s past disciplinary history. While the recommended sanction could be suspension, it does not have to be. If a student answers “not responsible,” the adjudicator, the student, and the reporting party determine if the case goes to a disciplinary conference (where the case is decided by a dean of students) or a university hearing (where the case is decided by a board of 2 trained students and a trained faculty member). During either of those meetings, a decision of responsibility is determined. If the student is ultimately found not responsible, their case is closed. If the student is once again found responsible for violating policy, a sanction is imposed by the decision-maker

(Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2019; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a).

The adjudicator's decision must be sent to the accused student in writing. It is common practice for the student to receive the decision letter via email. The decision letter includes the policies the student was accused of violating, the adjudicator's decision on responsibility, the sanctions imposed (if applicable), and instructions on how to appeal the decision. According to the Office of Student Conduct, the adjudicator's decision letter will also include the following information, or something similar, whenever a student is suspended (A. Arrington, personal communication, October, 11, 2021):

Effective START DATE, you are suspended from Rutgers University through END DATE. During this period, you are excluded from participating in any academic or other activities of the University and are banned from the campus. Notice of this action shall appear on your transcript for the term of the suspension. It is our policy that while you are on suspension you may not earn credits at any other college or university for the purpose of transferring those credits and making progress toward your Rutgers degree. Students serving a suspension will not be permitted to register for classes until the period of suspension has concluded. Depending on your individual school, you may need to apply for reenrollment if you plan to return to Rutgers after your suspension has ended. You should check your school's re-enrollment policy or with a Dean or advisor at your school for further information. Suspension is of two types, term and/or conditional. A term suspension shall be for a stipulated period of time after which the student may return to the University community at the commencement of a regular period of study for which he or she is eligible. A conditional separation shall condition re-entry of the student into the University community upon fulfillment of specified requirements. The suspension shall continue until the Director of the Office of Student Conduct determines that the conditions have been satisfied. Yours is a TERM/CONDITIONAL suspension. The Registrar and your academic department will be informed of this decision once it becomes final. At that time, any pre-registration for classes that you may have enrolled in will be canceled, and you will be restricted from registering for any class in the future without the authorization of this office. Any grades reported for posting will be encumbered pending the appeals process. If you are not allowed to complete the current semester, you will receive a withdrawal grade for all current classes retroactive to the date of the original decision of suspension.

This is likely the only written information the student will receive regarding the terms of their suspension and how to return to RUNB following their suspension.

Within ten days of receiving the adjudicator's decision, the accused student has a right to submit a written letter of appeal contesting the decision, the sanction, or both.

The letter of appeal is read by an appeals board made up of two students and one faculty member (all of whom must have been uninvolved in the case thus far) who makes a determination on the case. They may decide to: (a) uphold both the finding and the sanction, (b) uphold the finding, but recommend that the sanction be modified, or (c) remand the case to a new disciplinary conference or university hearing. The decision of the appeals board is then sent to the Chief Academic Integrity Officer—generally, a high-ranking person in Academic Affairs—who makes the final determination; this decision cannot be appealed (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2019; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a).

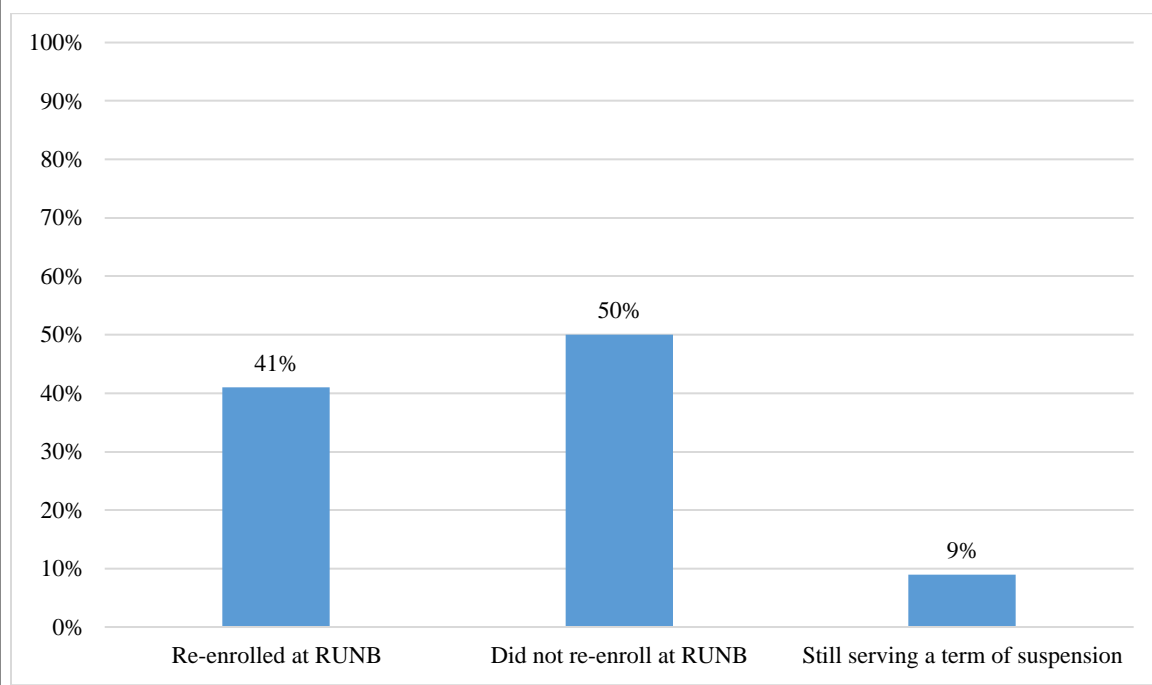
Throughout the entire adjudication process, students have the right to one support person and one campus advisor accompanying them to all meetings and disciplinary proceedings. A support person is someone (within or outside of the RUNB community) the student wants with them to make them feel more comfortable throughout the disciplinary process. A student may ask a friend, family member, or even a mental health counselor to be their support person. Their role is simply to be a source of emotional support for the accused student. It is outside of their role to represent the student throughout the process and they “cannot address a Hearing Board, Presiding Officer [at the hearing], or Conduct Officer unless granted permission by the Presiding Officer [at

the hearing] or Conduct Officer” (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2022, p. 4).

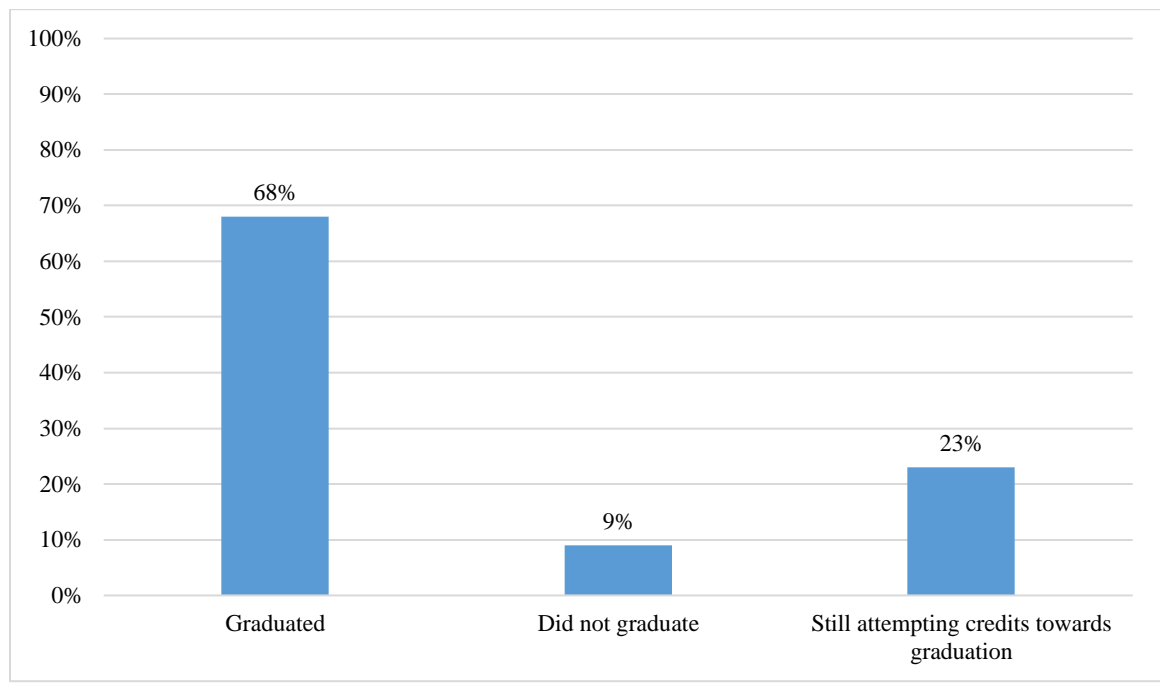
A campus advisor, on the other hand, is “a member of the University community who has been trained to provide support and guidance to accused students and complaint parties” (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2022, p. 3). Since they are trained by the Office of Student Conduct, Campus advisors can thoroughly explain the adjudication process to students. Campus advisors can also help students prepare statements and documents, including a written appeal after a determination is made on their case. Students are not assigned a campus advisor. If they want support, they must contact an advisor on their own, using the list of trained campus advisors on the Office of Student Conduct at RUNB’s website (Rutgers Student Affairs, 2022).

Academic Integrity Violators at RUNB

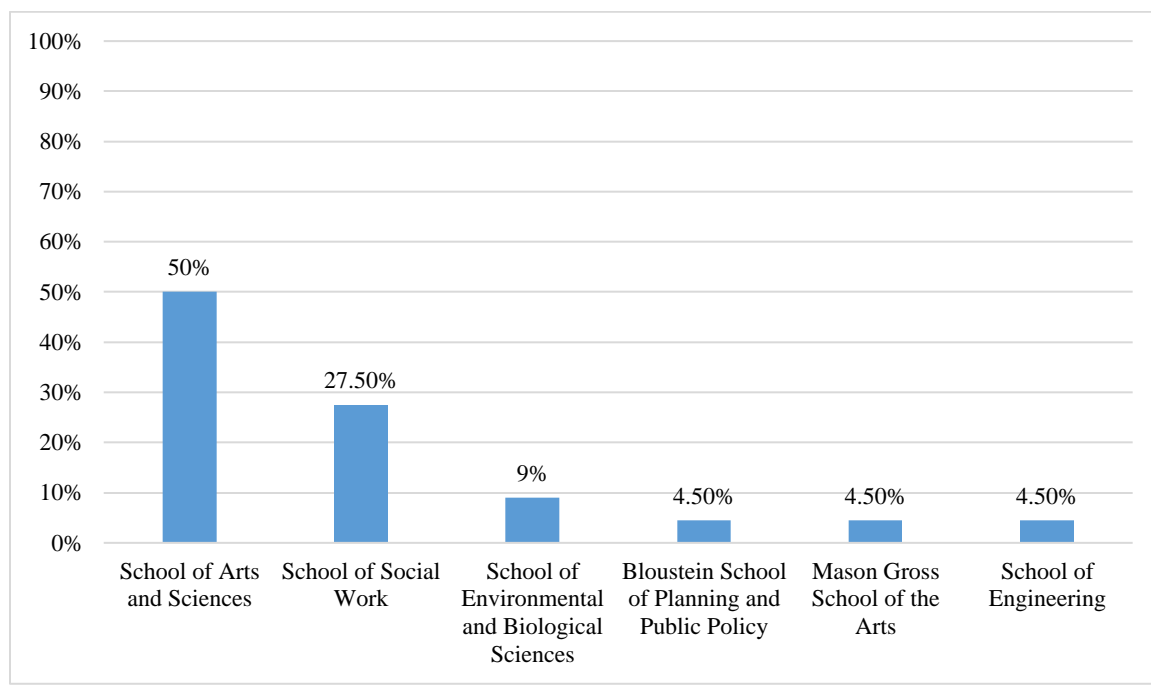
The Office of Student Conduct at RUNB provided a statistical overview of students suspended for academic misconduct from September 1, 2013 through November 2, 2021. According to their database, 54 total students, including undergraduate and graduate students, were suspended during that time frame. In specifically focusing on reintegration, they determined that 50% of students did not return to RUNB after their suspension, 41% of students did return to RUNB after their suspension, and, as of November 2, 2021, 9% of students were still completing their term of suspension.

Figure 3*Percent of Suspended Students by Re-Enrollment*

Of the returning students, 68% graduated, 23% were still attempting credits towards graduation (as of November 2, 2021), and 9% did not graduate and stopped attempting credits towards graduation.

Figure 4*Percent of Returned Suspended Students by Graduation Status*

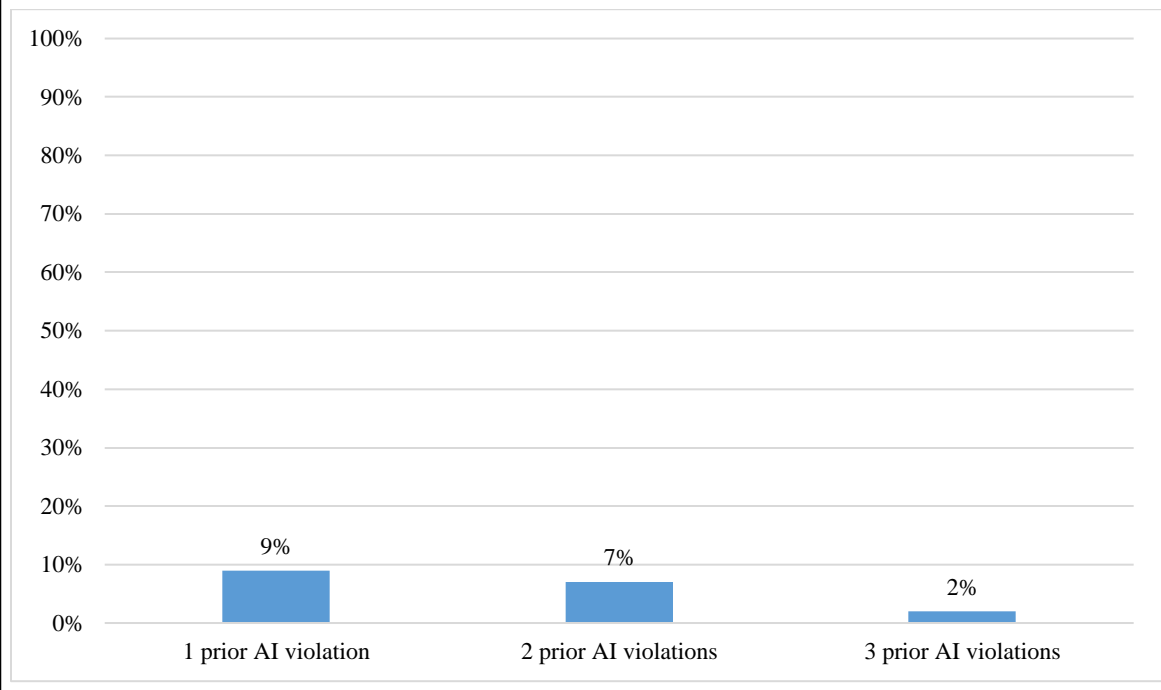
Of that same population of returning suspended students, 50% were in the School of Arts and Sciences, 27.5% were in the School of Social Work, 9% were in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, 4.5% were in the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, 4.5% were in Mason Gross School of the Arts, and 4.5% were in the School of Engineering. In line with the statistics provided, the School of Arts and Sciences was at the time, and is currently, the largest school for undergraduate students at RUNB.

Figure 5*Percent of Returned Suspended Students by School of Enrollment*

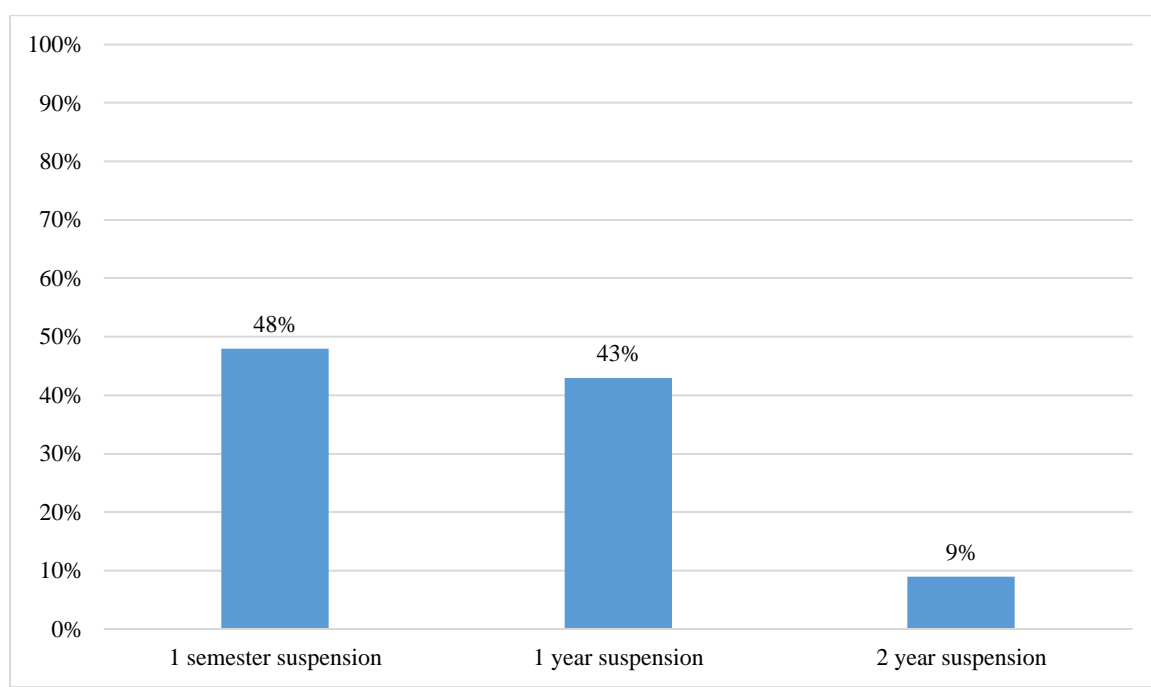
The Office of Student Conduct at RUNB also provided violation information for the overall population of suspended students. In looking at their past disciplinary history, 67% of suspended students had no prior academic integrity violations, 9% had 1 prior academic integrity violation, 7% had 2 prior academic integrity violations, and 2% had 3 prior academic integrity violations. When the same student had multiple academic integrity allegations within a close timeframe, adjudicators frequently handled the cases with one adjudication process. Within this population of students, 7% had two academic integrity violations handled at the same time that got them suspended. There was also a relatively small population of students (7%) who have had an academic integrity violation since being suspended.

Figure 6

Percent of Suspended Students by Prior Academic Integrity (AI) Violations



Finally, the Office of Student Conduct at RUNB provided sanction information for students suspended for academic misconduct. According to their database, 48% were suspended for 1 semester (sometimes including summer and/or winter term), 43% were suspended for 1 year, and 9% were suspended for 2 years. No one was suspended for more than 2 years, likely because expulsion was utilized after that point.

Figure 7*Percent of Suspended Students by Suspension Length*

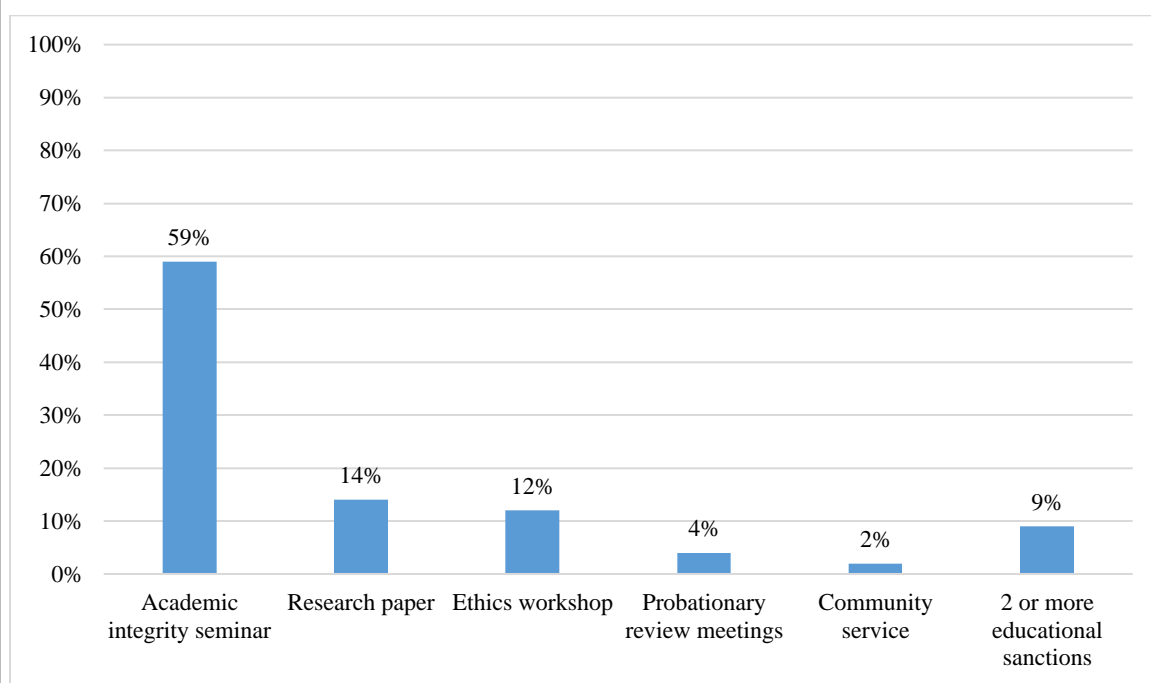
Most of the suspended students (57%) received probation as a sanction in conjunction with their suspension. The types of probation imposed were restrictive probation (81%) and disciplinary probation (19%). Disciplinary probation is a period of time when the student is not in good disciplinary standing from the University. It serves as a warning period not to repeat the behavior, and does not place any restrictions on the student (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2022). On the other hand, while a student is serving a *restrictive* probation, they are barred from representing Rutgers University in any official capacity, including intercollegiate athletics, major extracurricular activities, student exchange programs, or holding any elected position (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2022). When staff members in the Office of Student Conduct reviewed past cases, they found the level of probation a suspended

student received was not determined by whether the student was a repeat offender, but by the severity of the violation.

Students suspended for academic misconduct frequently received additional sanctions outside of their suspension and probation. Almost every suspended student (91%) also received an educational sanction. The educational sanctions assigned included: completing an academic integrity seminar (59%), writing a research paper on proper citation (14%), attending an ethics workshop (12%), attending probationary review meetings (4%), which are regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings with a student conduct staff member, and participating in community service (2%). Approximately 9% of suspended students, all of who were repeat offenders, were required to complete more than one educational sanctions in response to a single violation.

Figure 8

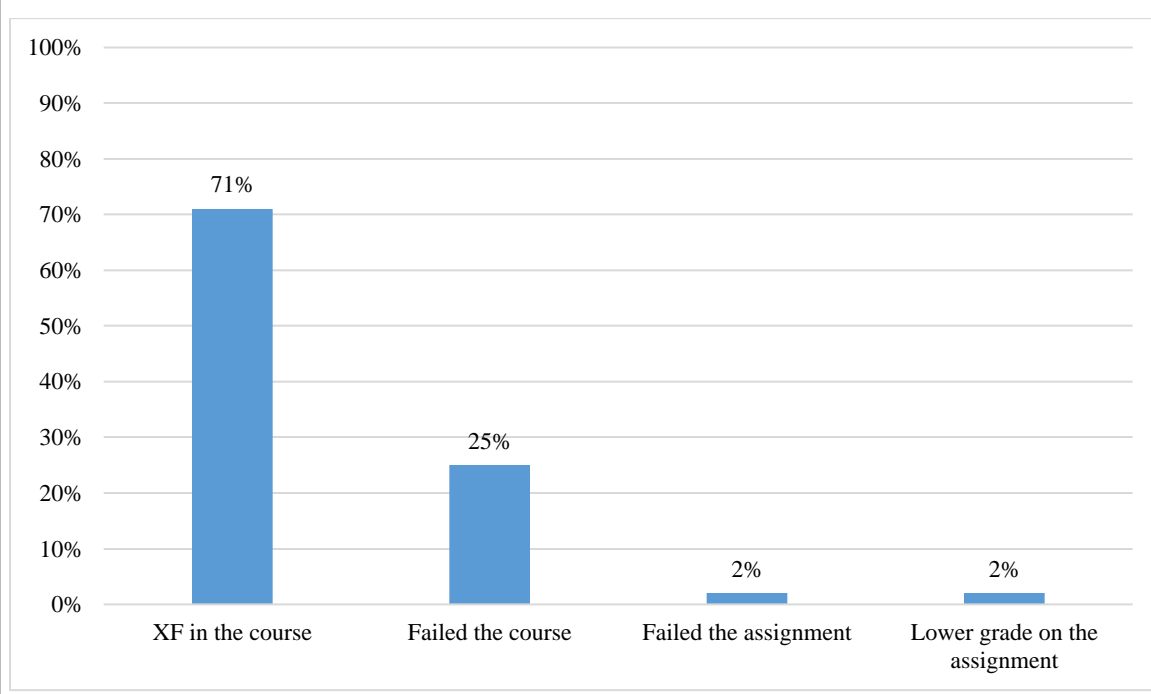
Percent of Suspended Students by Educational Sanction Type



Almost all suspended students (89%) also received a sanction that affected their grade in the course where the violation occurred. These sanctions consisted of getting an XF for the class (71%), failing the course (25%), receiving a failing grade on the assignment (2%), and the option to resubmit the assignment for a lower grade (2%).

Figure 9

Percent of Suspended Students by Grade-Related Sanction Type



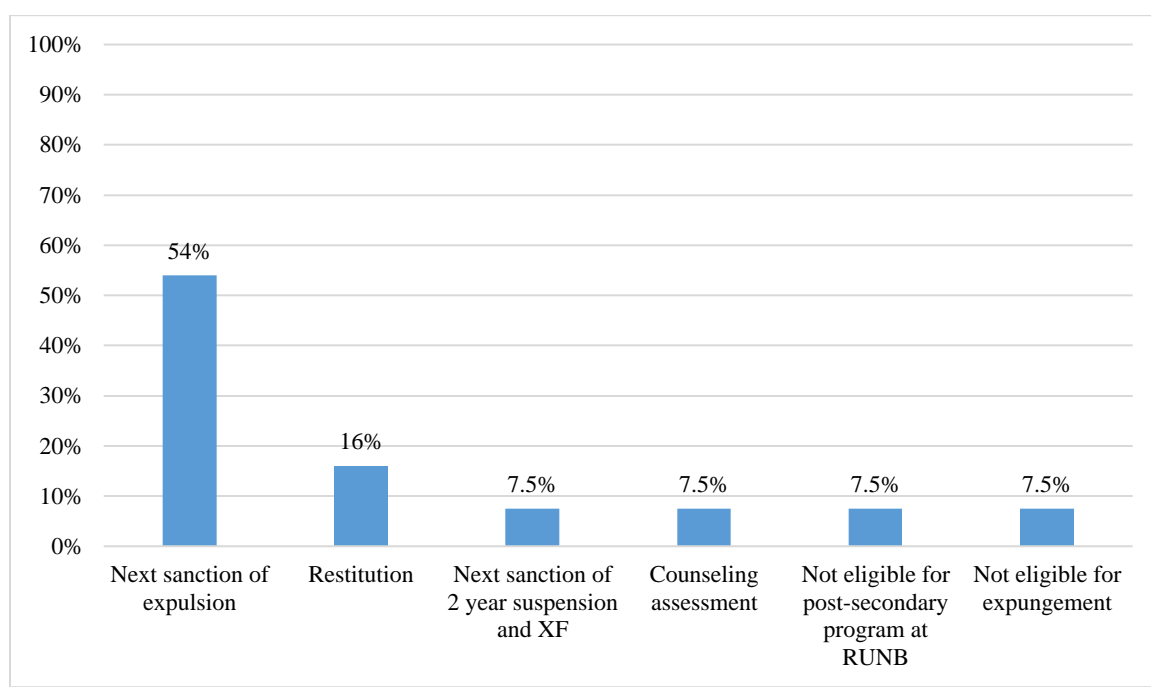
An XF is a permanent grade for a course on a student's transcript and is referred to as a "disciplinary failure" (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2012). Students may petition to have the XF removed, but it is not guaranteed. The academic integrity policy (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a) outlines the process:

Requests for removal of the X from an XF grade must be submitted in writing to the appropriate Campus Appeals Committee. Such requests will not be considered until at least 18 months from the time of the violation that resulted in the XF. In order for the request to be granted, the student, at a minimum, following the original violation, must have an exemplary record with respect to academic integrity, must have completed a Rutgers academic integrity workshop or seminar, and must satisfactorily answer a required series of essay questions on why the X should be removed. The Campus Appeals Committee shall make the final decision concerning the request. If the request is denied, the student must wait another year to submit another request (p. 9).

Even with the option to do so, students may choose not to petition to get an XF removed, especially if they do not perceive it to impact their graduation or future after RUNB.

Lastly, the student conduct data showed that academic integrity adjudicators sometimes imposed other less-typical sanctions. About 24% of suspended students received other sanctions not yet mentioned. Those consisted of receiving a recommended *next* sanction of expulsion (54%), paying restitution of \$1,500¹ (16%), receiving a recommended *next* sanction of suspension for 2 years and an XF (7.5%), an off-campus counseling assessment (7.5%), not being eligible for admission into any Rutgers University graduate or professional program (7.5%), and not being eligible for expungement (7.5%).

¹ All students were a part of the same academic misconduct case. The exact amount of \$1,500 was relevant to the facts of that case.

Figure 10*Percent of Suspended Students by Other Sanction Type*

The student conduct data shows that while there are typical sanctions for academic integrity violators, each case is unique and adjudicated as such.

Participant Selection

Using a predetermined set of criteria (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015) I identified and selected participants for this study. Specifically, I only interviewed people (a) who were “caught,” reported, found responsible, and suspended from RUNB via the academic integrity process (as described above) after September 1, 2013, and (b) later re-enrolled, or (at the time of data collection) planned to re-enroll, at RUNB. People who either were not suspended or those who were suspended but never re-enrolled, or did not plan to re-enroll, at RUNB were excluded from the study. While some RUNB students were academically suspended due to a low GPA or

found responsible for a non-academic code of student conduct violation, participants were only eligible for this study if they were suspended *specifically* for an academic integrity violation.

Staff members within the Office of Student Conduct at RUNB (at which I am no longer employed) assisted with recruitment for this study. The Office of Student Conduct at RUNB adjudicates roughly 300-500 reports of potentially separable academic integrity violations a year, but not all students are found responsible for violating policy (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 2018). Additionally, for some students found responsible, suspension was neither warranted nor imposed. On July 30, 2021 the Director of Student Conduct at RUNB ran a query in their database to show the email addresses of every Rutgers University-New Brunswick student suspended for an academic integrity violation from September 1, 2013 until July 30, 2021. The query produced 53 unique entries.² The Director emailed this study's recruitment text (see Appendix C) to all 53 people, and 11 emails bounced back. While 42 emails were sent successfully, it is unclear how many were actually read since read receipts were not used. If students were suspended in the earlier years of the timeframe, still suspended, or transferred out of RUNB after their suspension, they likely wouldn't still be checking the email address on file with the Office of Student Conduct. From this outreach, two participants contacted me to join the study.

On August 9, 2021 I emailed RUNB's Associate Director of Student Conduct and a Student Conduct Coordinator who were responsible for adjudicating separable academic integrity cases. I asked them to personally reach out to any RUNB students

² There may have been more academic integrity violators during this time period that were not accurately recorded in the student conduct database and therefore would not show up on this query.

who they know would qualify for the study. They both said they would think about the students they have worked with and send the recruitment information to anyone that qualified. Unfortunately, those staff members did not confirm whether they sent invitations, and no additional participants were gained at this point.

On August 20, 2021 the Assistant Director of Student Conduct at RUNB ran another query in their database to show the email addresses of every RUNB student suspended for an academic integrity violation from September 1, 2013 until August 20, 2021. This query produced 54 unique entries. The Assistant Director emailed the recruitment information to all 54 people (53 of whom were included in the initial outreach) and, again, 11 emails bounced back. This time 43 emails were sent successfully, but read receipts were not used once again. From this outreach, one additional participant contacted me to join the study.

On October 11, 2021 the Assistant Director of Student Conduct at RUNB ran another query in their database to show the email addresses of every RUNB student suspended for an academic integrity violation from September 1, 2013 until October 11, 2021. This query, once again, produced 54 unique entries. The Assistant Director emailed the recruitment information to the same 43 people, reminding respondents of their invitation to participate. From this outreach, one additional participant contacted me to join the study.

On November 2, 2021 the Assistant Director of Student Conduct at RUNB ran a different query in their database. This query produced the RUID numbers of every RUNB student suspended for an academic integrity violation from September 1, 2013 until November 2, 2021, which, once again, was 54 unique entries. The Assistant Director then

ran the RUID numbers in another database to see who was still an active student at RUNB. This query produced phone numbers for five current RUNB students who were previously suspended for academic misconduct. The Assistant Director called all five students on their cell phones. While three phone numbers were no longer active or in service, she was able to successfully speak with two students and, once again, relay the recruitment information. One person said they did not have time to participate in the study and the other person agreed to participate. From this outreach, I received the fifth and final participant.

Since this is a sensitive and potentially emotional topic, I worked to build rapport and trust with the research participants, starting with the initial outreach as recommended by Torres, Jones, and Arminio (2014). Within the initial invitation to participate in this process and the informed consent form, I noted the reciprocity within the research process, by stating what they might gain from participating in the process. Notably, participants were given \$100 in the form of a virtual Visa gift card as compensation for their time³. In addition to monetary compensation, participants were able to speak about their experience and offer insight on suspension reintegration at RUNB. Their voices, and the findings of this study, will inform productive change in related policies and practices at IHEs.

Data Collection

Phenomenological approaches within higher education can vary, but there are always two specific requirements. First, the researcher must conduct in-depth interviews with the people who directly experienced the phenomenon at hand (Perälä, 2005;

³ The Division of Student Affairs at Rutgers University-New Brunswick agreed to underwrite funds for the incentive.

Patton, 2002; Turner, 2010; van Manen, 2014). In-person interviews are preferred for qualitative research, but if that is impossible, video, phone, or email interviews will suffice (Seidman, 2006). This study allows for gaining a deeper understanding of student transition and reintegration by speaking with the suspended students themselves.

Unfortunately, in-person interviews were not possible for this study. We are currently living through the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As of May 2, 2022, there are over 81.1 million total cases of COVID-19 in the United States, with over 2.2 million in New Jersey alone (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022). As a result of public health circumstances, one phone interview and four virtual video conferencing interviews were completed instead of in-person interviews.

The second requirement of phenomenology is that the researcher must listen deeply and empathetically to what each participant is sharing during the interviews (Maruna & Butler, 2005). This also helps to build rapport and trust with research participants (Torres, Jones, & Arminio, 2014). It can be extremely difficult for someone to talk about a negative time in their life, and getting suspended for academic misconduct certainly falls into that category. Living through a global pandemic adds to the difficulty of opening up about past trauma. I treated each interview uniquely and with care. I actively listened, observed their verbal and nonverbal cues (during the four virtual interviews), and adjusted my approach as necessary.

Phenomenological interviewing involves a mix of broad open-ended questions, and more specific probing questions (Bevan, 2014; Maruna & Butler, 2005; Saldaña, 2016; Turner, 2010). For this study, I used a semi-structured interview protocol focused on gaining information related to the research questions (see Appendix D). The protocol

began with broad open-ended questions to allow for participants to speak freely about their transitional reintegration experience. Based on the information they provided, I asked more specific and individually-tailored questions. This allowed me to listen intently and ask probing questions of each person, as opposed to using pre-determined questions (Torres, Jones, & Arminio, 2014). Each interview lasted about one hour. I only considered the interview complete when I had a thorough understanding of how each student experienced suspension and thought about or experienced post-suspension reintegration.

Audio recording interviews is standard practice in phenomenology, in order to refer back to the information and to create a transcript for the data analysis process (van Manen, 2014). With explicit written permission from the participants, four of the interviews were audio recorded (see Appendix E & F for consent forms). I then utilized a transcription service called Rev.com to quickly convert all the audio recordings into interview transcripts. Upon receiving the transcripts, I removed all identifying information, including replacing participant names with their chosen pseudonyms. The fifth participant, however, did not consent to being recorded. That particular interview was conducted via phone and I took handwritten notes, without writing any identifying information.

Data Analysis

Grounded in phenomenology, interview data coding and analysis took place in a four-step process. First, I read through each interview transcript and made “first impression” or initial codes (Saldaña, 2021, p. 35). These codes consisted of words or phrases that described or summarized the reintegration experience for suspended

students. Second, I arranged those codes into categories, based on salient ideas related to the research questions (Saldaña, 2021). Next, I conducted a second, and third, cycle of coding and categorizing. This ensured that I had a detailed and exhaustive list of codes and categories (Saldaña, 2021; Seidman, 2006). Lastly, I compared and analyzed the final categories of codes for any emerging themes and concepts, noting any discrepancies that developed. By following this iterative analysis process, I was able to capture, as closely as possible, the essence of the reintegration experience of students who were suspended for academic misconduct.

Using what emerged from the data analysis process, I developed what sociologists understand as “thick description” to aid a richer understanding of the reintegration experience of suspended students (Geertz, 1973, p. 27). Thick description allows for the reader to be “drawn into the setting and able to understand through rich, detailed description of that setting, the cultural nuances and patterns present” (Torres, Jones, & Arminio, 2014, p. 103). Knowing the details, impact, and emotions surrounding the suspension and subsequent reintegration process helped to bring the students’ voices into the forefront of the literature, something that has not previously been featured in post-suspension reintegration literature.

Examination of findings allowed for the development of recommendations for future practice and future research studies. Given situational uniqueness, conclusions from this study may not precisely apply to other institutions. However, the development of a thick description of this particular phenomenon enhances the study’s potential for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and IHEs outside of RUNB could benefit from reviewing (and perhaps implementing) the recommendations. Overall, this study’s

research findings, positioned in the existing literature, aid readers in understanding the reintegration experience of suspended students, which could have a positive impact on institutional response moving forward.

Summary

Chapter 3 showcased the overall research question, the ten theoretically-based sub-questions, and the three demographic questions included in this study. This chapter also included an explanation of why the methodological and theoretical framework—phenomenology—was selected to address those questions. Next, the research design of this study was presented. My positionality as the researcher, and how my positionality impacted aspects of the research design, was described. The chapter concludes with a site description and explanations of participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter begins with a brief discussion on the phenomenological approach to this dissertation. Building on that phenomenological lens, a discussion follows on how Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory was a framework for the findings of this research study. Since both phenomenology and transition theory involve focusing on individual experiences to then gain insight into a collective event, I start the findings with outlining demographic information for each participant and sharing more about their individual suspension stories. Once the reader has been introduced to each of the participants, the chapter progresses to the sub-questions of the study. Following each research sub-question are the findings associated with that topic. When viewed collectively, the findings illuminate the transitional experience of RUNB students previously suspended for academic misconduct who then returned to finish their degree.

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology was a crucial methodological framework for this study. By utilizing in-depth participant interviews, phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon told through stories of actual lived experiences (Patton, 2002; Perälä 2005; Turner, 2010; van Manen, 2014). To recap, in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the transitional experiences of academic integrity violators, I interviewed five students suspended from Rutgers University-New Brunswick. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and four out of the five interviews were recorded; one participant agreed to be interviewed only if the conversation was not recorded. During all the interviews, I took extensive handwritten notes while remaining attentive to the participant and our conversation. All four of the recordings were then transcribed by Rev.com. In reviewing the transcriptions and my

handwritten notes, common themes emerged across the data. Using a phenomenological approach revealed how the themes accurately reflect the essence of the reintegration experience of suspended students.

Transition Theory as a Framework

Schlossberg's transition theory was introduced in 1981 and adapted in 1989. Although not specifically focused on higher education, the theory can be used to improve the transitional experiences of college students. While this theory has been applied to the field of higher education many times, including to better understand the reintegration experience of suspended students, this study is the first to use transition theory as a framework specifically for examining suspension for academic integrity violators. This study utilized all three components of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory as a framework for both the data collection and the data analysis. The interviews and findings involved (a) identifying each participant's transition, (b) understanding the extent in which the transition impacted the participant, and (c) identifying where the participant is in their transition process. The interviews and findings also focused on the individual's coping resources categorized by Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) as the 4 Ss: situation, self, support, and strategies. Each interview (a) discussed the situation surrounding the participant's suspension, (b) who they are as individuals, (c) how their support or lack of support impacted their experience, (d) coping strategies they learned, and (e) strategies on how to improve the experience of future suspended students. The findings lend themselves to a discussion on how IHEs, and specifically RUNB, can improve their post-suspension reintegration process for students.

Participant Information

Before diving into the findings, an overview of the five participants in this study is needed, using their chosen pseudonyms and pronouns: Wale (he/him), Regina (she/her), Will (he/him), Alex (she/her), and Rishi (he/him). Since the population of students suspended for academic misconduct at RUNB is relatively small, and there are privacy concerns, only relevant demographic information is shared. A person's race/ethnicity, gender, and first-generation status have been found to impact how a person experiences transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Fouad, Bynner, & Anderson, 2008). Therefore, those demographics are included in Table 1 below.

As noted in Table 1, some of the participants shared salient identities. All of the participants identified as non-white and first-generation college students. This overrepresentation of non-white and first generation students was unintentional and not a result of targeted recruitment outreach. The Office of Student Conduct did not provide information on the racial makeup or first-generation status among students who were previously suspended for academic misconduct. Therefore, it is unclear if non-white and/or first-generation college students were more likely to receive the general recruitment emails related to this study. Additionally, all of the graduate student respondents were enrolled in RUNB's Masters of Social Work program at the time of their violation. According to data provided by the Office of Student Conduct, the majority of previously suspended graduate students were enrolled in the School of Social Work (A. Arrington, personal communication, October, 11, 2021). However, it is unclear if social work students violated policy, were caught and reported, were suspended, or chose to return at higher rates than other graduate students.

In addition to demographic information, understanding the participants' length of suspension and the reason for their suspension aids in understanding their unique

experiences. The table below also details the suspension information for each participant. Will, Regina, Alex, and Wale all completed their term of suspension before returning to RUNB. Rishi's suspension, however, was pushed later as a result of a successful appeal process. Therefore, at the time of the interview, Rishi had not yet started his term of suspension. Rishi is currently suspended from January 2022 until December 2022 and then plans to return to RUNB to complete his undergraduate degree.

Rishi's experience poses several considerations as it relates to this study's overall research question. First and foremost, post-suspension reintegration could not be discussed to the level of the other participants since he had yet to experience that phenomenon. At the time of the interview, suspension reintegration was an *anticipated*—not an *actual*—phenomenon for Rishi. Social scientist Natanson (1973) posits the visualization of an anticipated event is possible because one can relate the experience to something they've been through before, even if they have yet to experience that particular phenomenon. In this study, Rishi was able to describe how he anticipates suspension reintegration going and feeling based on his past lived experiences. However, he cannot actually experience suspension reintegration until after December 2022, and only if he carries out his current plan of returning to RUNB following his term of suspension.

Rishi, unlike the other respondents, will experience two *anticipated* transitions. As mentioned in chapter 1, anticipated transitions are usually easier to experience than unanticipated transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). A person can better prepare for a transition if they have a general idea of what to expect. They can also put support systems in place to help them with the transition. The other four participants in this study found out they were suspended immediately prior to their suspension commencing. Rishi, however, finished his semester knowing that he would be suspended

the following year. He was able to anticipate his suspension prior to it actually occurring, which allowed him to prepare for the change in student status. If Rishi chooses to return to RUNB after his suspension, then he will join the other four participants in experiencing an anticipated transition back to student status. While Rishi's experience is clearly different from the others, his insights are valuable nonetheless.

Table 1*Demographic Information of Participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	First Generation	Degree Seeking	School	Status	Suspension Reason	Suspension Length
Wale	Male	Non-White	Yes	Masters	Social Work	Graduated	Plagiarism	1 semester
Regina	Female	Non-White	Yes	Bachelors	Arts and Sciences	Still enrolled	Cheating	1 semester
Will	Male	Non-White	Yes, in America	Masters	Social Work	Graduated	Plagiarism	1 semester
Alex	Female	Non-White	Yes	Masters	Social Work	Graduated	Plagiarism	1 year
Rishi	Male	Non-White	No	Bachelors	Engineering	Still enrolled	Cheating	1 year (did not occur yet)

Participant Incidents and Sanctioning

In order to better understand each participant, the following section details the incident that resulted in their suspension, as told by the students themselves. This section also outlines the other sanctions each student received (where applicable), in addition to suspension. Although likely nervous, all of the participants were extremely open with explaining their individual situations.

Wale. At the end of his first semester of graduate school, Wale found himself in an unexpected situation. He recalled:

I bought tickets to go to Art Basel in Miami. I'm a huge art person...I had just finished my homework on the way to the airport, but it snowed like crazy...and my flight was canceled...[the airline] couldn't do anything about it, and I was discouraged. I didn't wanna do anything. I just, like, drank and decided to [sleep] over at the airport.

He realized he forgot to turn in one assignment, so he contacted a friend of his in the program who had already taken that course. Wale asked his friend for assistance on the assignment. While his friend didn't complete the assignment for him, he did tell Wale specific sources to look at in order to complete the assignment on his own. Wale used those sources but did not cite them properly. He turned in the assignment and it immediately got flagged for plagiarism, specifically that he did not properly cite his sources. Wale said, "I did the whole assignment myself... I just used the sources that my friend suggested...but he knows how to cite properly and I don't."

Wale was suspended for one semester in his graduate program, but decided to take a full year off to travel. He also received an F (not an XF) in the course in which his violation occurred. In order for Wale to be eligible to return to RUNB following his suspension, he needed to write a scholarly article on plagiarism and attend an in-person ethics workshop with other students (both graduates and undergraduates) who violated

the academic integrity policy. When I asked if those educational sanctions were helpful to him, Wale said, “I don't wanna say it was helpful, I didn't learn anything...it just felt good knowing that I wasn't alone in this aspect. I wish I was made aware of that beforehand so I wouldn't have felt, like, so off the side from the community.” Several other participants shared the same sentiment, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Regina. When Regina took a final exam for a math class during her senior year, she was caught with a cheat sheet. She explained:

That class was very hard, and I was taking a bunch of other hard classes along with that. And this professor, he had a tendency of using past exams. So, before he started the course, he had all of the [prior] exams with the solutions posted online on his website...and you come across the old exams, then you kind of just download them...it's the same professor. [I thought,] “He'll probably have like a similar technique, similar types of questions, so I'll study off those”...For the first exam, I did that, and I realized that he did use the same questions again. And then [when I looked at the prior final exams], there were just so many questions and they were so difficult. And I felt like, no matter how much I studied, I wouldn't be able to memorize them or understand them because they were so difficult, and they were so lengthy.

She brought a cheat sheet with answers to the final exam. The teaching assistant immediately saw it, took it from her, and reported her for cheating.

Regina was suspended for the second semester of her senior year, but decided to take a full year off to work. She explained:

During that one semester, you know, you have to find something to do. So I got a job and I was pretty committed to that job and life was changing quickly. So I actually took another semester off too. I was out for a whole year, but I was only suspended for the first [semester].

In addition to being suspended, Regina received an XF in the course in which her misconduct occurred. The Office of Student Conduct confirmed that at the time of the interview, Regina still had an XF on her transcript. As a part of her sanction, Regina also had to take an online ethics workshop. She said, “They send you a bunch of prompts and

I think you get to pick the prompt and write about it and meet the word count.” When I asked if she found it to be helpful, she explained:

I did not think it was that helpful to be completely honest...I feel like it was something I already knew. And with every answer that I would put, I would be like, ‘I would not do that again. I understand how my actions affected someone else.’ And I felt like during the entire process of the hearing, I was thinking that already, [I] didn’t have to have it all written down. But I did and it was pretty easy, so I wouldn’t say I was too bothered by it.

Regina explained that a part of her sanction included specific instructions that her professors couldn’t recommend her for anything (such as awards or leadership positions), which she thought was disproportionate to the offense. Although she wasn’t sure of the exact language, her description of this specific sanction sounds similar to restrictive probation, which bars a student from being in a leadership role on RUNB’s campus, and as stated in chapter 3, is a very common sanction (81%) for academic integrity violators.

Will. During Will’s second semester of graduate school, he took a research class and did not understand the material. The assignment was to submit a paper, and he wasn’t very familiar with writing academic papers since schooling in his home country is exam-based. Will took a classmate’s paper and copied a lot of it, without crediting them. When he turned in his assignment, it was flagged for plagiarism.

Will was suspended for one semester in his graduate program and, unlike several others, did return to RUNB the following semester. When he returned from suspension, Will needed to retake the same course in which the violation occurred, since it was a requirement of his graduate program. In addition to being suspended, Will received an XF in the course in which his misconduct occurred. The Office of Student Conduct confirmed that at the time of the interview, Will still had an XF on his transcript. Will’s sanctions also included writing a research paper on plagiarism and attending an in-person

ethics workshop for graduate and undergraduate academic integrity violators. Will really connected with the facilitator of the ethics workshop. He looked up to him as an RUNB administrator and said to me about the facilitator, “He was amazing.” If Will comes back to RUNB for his doctorate degree, he would love to connect with that specific facilitator again.

Alex. Alex checked her final grades at the end of her first year of graduate school, and saw she had a zero in one of her classes. She later received an email from the dean of the school saying she was accused of plagiarizing her final exam. Alex was confused because she did not intentionally commit any wrongdoing. She explained that the professor allowed them to use a study guide for the midterm and the final in that class. Alex created and used the same study guide for both exams. However, during the final, she was told she had to cite the information in her study guide, which to Alex’s knowledge, had not been a requirement for the midterm. Alex explained:

[The dean] told me that the reason why it was considered plagiarized is because it wasn't specified where I cited one piece of the questions. And I was not aware that I had to cite it when I did the midterm, my teacher didn't say anything about that, and I did the exact same thing.

Alex was suspended for one semester in her graduate program, but decided to take a full year off to care for her family. She explained, “[My uncle] ended up passing away. And then this happened right in the same timeframe. I withdrew from school for a while.” In addition to being suspended, Alex received an F (not an XF) in the course. She later retook the same course, since it was a prerequisite for other required courses. Alex was also required to take an in-person ethics workshop, for graduate and undergraduate academic integrity violators, before she could return from her suspension. She said it was difficult to schedule and she was nervous that she wouldn’t complete it in time and then

“she’d have to wait to come back for another semester.” Luckily, she did complete the ethics workshop in time. When I asked if she found the workshop helpful, Alex stated:

In the workshop...in some aspects...they made it seem like it was much worse than a crime committed if like, someone hurts someone else or if there was some suspected drug use. The punishment for plagiarism was worse than it was for those other offenses....I was very surprised that that's how the school felt they needed to discipline students.

She also described what it was like having other academic integrity violators in the workshop with her. She said:

When I was at the workshop, there were actually multiple students there. And we spoke about it and it was similar experiences like misunderstandings of not citing or not properly wording certain things that got them in trouble. And it was very sad that a lot of us had to walk around with an F because of a small mistake.

Alex would later understand her mistake of not properly using citations, which positively impacted her writing moving forward. This experience led to Alex’s wanting more time to speak with suspended students like herself, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Rishi. In a summer course before his junior year, Rishi got caught cheating on an exam. Rishi used a practice exam while completing the actual exam, even though students were not allowed to use any testing aids. One of Rishi’s answers on the exam perfectly matched the answer to the practice exam, but the actual questions were very different. This immediately tipped the professor to realizing that Rishi was looking over and using the practice exam *during* the actual exam, which falls under the academic integrity policy’s definition of cheating.

Rishi was suspended for one year during his undergraduate program. He appealed his case and petitioned to be able to finish the semester he was currently enrolled in. As a result, his suspension was delayed, allowing him to complete that semester. Therefore,

Rishi had not yet started his term of suspension at the time of his interview for this study. His term of suspension is from January 2022 until December 2022. In addition to the suspension, Rishi received an XF in the course in which the misconduct occurred. The Office of Student Conduct confirmed that at the time of the interview, Rishi still had an XF on his transcript. As part of his sanction, Rishi also has to complete an ethics workshop, for undergraduate and graduate academic integrity violators, which he had not yet scheduled at the time of the interview.

The Transitional Experience of Suspended Students

This dissertation centers around the research question: How do students previously suspended for an academic integrity violation experience subsequent reintegration into RUNB? Ten sub-questions, broken down into three categories, also guide the study: 1) providing context, 2) impact of suspension, and 3) reintegration experience. The following sections address these three categories, the relevant sub-questions, and the common themes that emerged from the data.

Providing Context: “You’re guilty and that’s it.”

These first set of sub-questions and associated findings center around the context of each participant’s academic integrity violation. This section opens with a discussion of whether the five participants anticipated being suspended for their actions. Focusing on the essence of the experience from each participant’s point of view, the reasons for why they violated RUNB’s academic integrity policy are outlined. This section concludes with their critiques, and one positive aspect, of the academic integrity process.

Sub-Question 1: Do academic integrity violators anticipate being suspended?

None of the participants, and likely no students in general, entered RUNB thinking they would be suspended. At the time of the violation, only Regina and Rishi

had made conscious decisions to violate policy, and they explained their own specific and various reasons for doing so. Alex and Wale unintentionally violated policy; they were not aware they were committing academic misconduct at the time of their violations. At the beginning of the interview, Will told me that he had unintentionally violated policy, but he later clarified, “[I] knew it could have been a violation, but everything else was too much pressure.” No matter the original intention, after the participants’ individual student conduct meetings and hearings (if applicable), all five understood that their actions were violations of RUNB’s academic integrity policy.

Likewise, each participant clearly understood their suspension was a result of their own actions. Wale plainly stated, “It was completely my fault.” Similarly, Regina knew her behavior could be considered cheating. Alex, on the other hand, explained that at first she felt as if the teacher had a required quota of reporting academic misconduct and Alex’s accusation was a result of that quota. However, when Alex was leaving the meeting where she was found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy, she “kind of accepted that [she] did something wrong” and subsequently said, “I understand the code of conduct is very strict with the whole plagiarizing thing. I do understand that 100%.” Rishi also understands the importance of the academic integrity policy. When I asked Rishi if he agreed with the decision to suspend him for academic misconduct, he said, “I’m gonna go with yes.” If he could go back in time to before he violated the academic integrity policy, Rishi said he would “100% do things differently.” Like Rishi, Wale understood why he was suspended, but wished there was more support with his reintegration to RUNB. He explained, “Not to say that I shouldn't have been suspended, like, I understand the suspension part [but I wish someone had] explained to me, like, 'it's

not the end.’” Wale’s request for more support from RUNB, along with similar responses from other participants, will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Sub-Question 2: What are the reasons students cite for violating the academic integrity policy?

The participants in this study remind us that students do not violate the academic integrity policy “lightly.” While some students may violate other RUNB policies for pleasurable ends, such as underage drinking, academic misconduct is committed for other reasons. Five themes emerged regarding the reasons students violate the academic integrity policy: stress, a perceived lack of time, course difficulty, family situation, and a lack of citation knowledge.

Stress

All five participants described being overwhelmed when their misconduct occurred. Rishi plainly stated, “I was really stressed,” and Alex similarly said, “It was already a stressful semester.” When asked why she didn’t reach out for help, Alex replied, “With everything that was going on [in her personal life], I was just kind of all over the place and I didn’t think to reach out to the teacher.” When asked why other participants didn’t reach out to their professors for help, several participants shared that their level of stress clouded their judgment. Looking back, they all reported they would have reached out to their professors ahead of time.

Perceived Lack of Time

Participants felt that if they had more time to study, write their paper, or complete their assignment, their academic integrity violation may never have occurred. A perceived lack of time to adequately complete their requirements, ironically, led to a violation. Regina, for example, felt she could never study enough to get a good grade on

her final exam, so she cheated. Rishi also made the decision to cheat on an exam because he didn't have time to properly study due to his work schedule. He described:

I had an internship over the summer [Monday to Friday], so I was really busy...I'd leave for my internship in the morning, it was in New York. And I'd get back around like 4:00pm or 5:00pm and then my classes were at 6:00pm...I didn't have the best time to really like focus in on the class.

Like Regina and Rishi, Wale was faced with an upcoming deadline. He was at an airport when he realized he forgot to turn in one assignment. He had to submit the assignment very quickly to meet the deadline, and he failed to cite properly. Each of these situations could have ended differently if the participants allocated more time to study and complete their assignments, or if they requested, and were granted, an extension from their course instructor.

Course Difficulty

Two of the participants cited the difficulty of the course as one aspect that led to committing a violation in that class. Regina discussed how the difficulty of that particular course, in addition to all of her other difficult classes, made it impossible to memorize everything in time for the exam.

Will found his course particularly difficult because it was his first time in the country, English was not his first language, and the “professor taught via PowerPoint and didn't check in to make sure the students, like foreign students, understood.” He felt that if he had the proper accommodations, such as extra time on exams, or if someone checked in with him to make sure he understood the material, he would have succeeded in the class the first time. However, it is unclear if Will requested reasonable academic accommodations, or if he went through the accommodations process through the Office of Disability Services at RUNB.

Family Situation

Each of the participants discussed their families in different contexts throughout their interviews. Alex and Will specifically mentioned their family situations playing a role in their academic misconduct. Alex showed her vulnerability by explaining, “And during that timeframe, this doesn't justify it but...I had just lost one uncle and then one was hospitalized for cancer and was dying in the same week. So I wasn't really fully there.” Will also explained that his family at home, including his brothers, was struggling. He couldn't help them while in another country, which added to the difficulty of the situation. It was emotionally trying times for both Alex and Will when they violated the academic integrity policy.

Lack of Citation Knowledge

Although Rutgers University requires all incoming undergraduate students to complete an online academic integrity module, as described in chapter 1, there is no similar requirement for graduate students. All three graduate students in this study said their lack of citation knowledge led to their misconduct. Will stated, “Rules are different in India.” He further explained, “In India it's all about exams, not papers, so citations didn't come into play unless you were reading or writing a book.” Even though he completed an undergraduate program in India, he was never taught how to cite. Alex, a graduate student who had earned an undergraduate degree in the United States, also said, “I think that maybe if I would have been more aware, I would have realized, okay, I should cite it.” She went on to say, “I may have not knowingly realized that I should have cited which now, till the very end, all I do is cite, cite cite so I don't have to go through this again.” Similarly, Wale, another graduate student who completed an undergraduate degree in the United States, said, “I knew cheating existed, but I didn't know this was

plagiarism. My problem was I didn't cite properly...like, I didn't even know [what] in-quote citations are and I'm a grad student.” While Alex and Wale completed their undergraduate programs within the United States, neither of them went to RUNB until their graduate program.

Sub-Question 3: How do previously suspended students describe the challenges and strengths of the academic integrity process?

The academic integrity process at RUNB is described at length in chapter 3 and will not be revisited in this section. Instead, the following information describes five critiques of the academic integrity process, from the participants’ point of views: inability to speak with their faculty member, length of time, pre-determining an outcome, not recommending a campus advisor, and the appeal process. The section concludes with a positive aspect of the academic integrity process; all the participants felt the process was fair.

Inability to Speak With Their Faculty Member

RUNB’s academic integrity policy outlines that separable offenses are handled by a student conduct staff member or an academic integrity facilitator within each specific school. However, all five of the participants wanted to speak to their professor directly. Alex wanted to speak with her professor but was told that was not possible because the case had been referred to the Office of Student Conduct. She described:

I was checking my grades...and it was like a partial credit and I was, like, confused. And then I checked a few days later and it was a zero and I was not sure what was happening. So then I reached out to the teacher and I asked her what was going on with my grades...she emailed me and told me that she can't tell me what happened, that she's gonna provide me with the information of a person that I have to speak to in regards to a violation that was done. And I was very confused because I didn't realize I did a violation.

Alex further opined, “I believe I should've been given an opportunity to talk to the teacher, or at least, she should have been present when I was supposed to go speak with [the adjudicator] that way we could have directly spoken about the situation.” She went on to say that she had certain expectations based on her field of study. She expected social work faculty members to understand that students, and people in general, make mistakes and that her academic misconduct was a mistake. She stated:

[At Rutgers] no explanation was given and no direct contact was given. I tried to reach out and explain to [the professor]. She didn't wanna hear it. It just felt very devastating at that moment because I thought we're supposed to be in the social work major, like, we're supposed to be understanding of one another in situations that happen. And it just didn't feel that way.

Alex explained that when she was an undergraduate student at another university, she was a leader for a group project when their work was flagged for a potential academic integrity violation. Her experience at her previous institution was much different than her experience at RUNB, though she's not sure if that was because of the difference in an undergraduate versus a graduate program, field of study, institution, faculty member, etc. She explained her situation at her undergraduate institution:

I remember the teacher emailing me because I was the team leader. She emailed me and told me, “I'm gonna send you back your project. I highlighted something because you guys gotta fix it now. You guys didn't cite it and I don't wanna report...plagiarism because I understand you guys had a lot and I'm giving you a chance to correct it.” She gave us the option and she directly reached out to me. She went out of her way to do that. She didn't have to, but like I said, we're in this social work environment. We should be able to work, come to an understanding that mistakes happen, and we should help each other with that. But that wasn't the experience I had at Rutgers and it was hard.

Rishi also checked his grades and a grade for one of his exams was missing. He said, “It took [the professor] maybe like three weeks to let me know...I replied to the professor but he never replied to me.” Rishi received an email from a student conduct staff member and then he worked directly with them. Rishi said the case adjudicator “explained [the

professor's] side and then I explained my side and then she was like, 'I'm gonna talk to them' and then we stopped having the meeting. And then we had another meeting maybe a week and a half later," where he was found responsible for academic misconduct. In this instance, the student conduct administrator acted as a broker between Rishi and the professor, instead of having them speak directly with one another.

Will also wanted to speak with his professor directly. When he received an email that he was accused of violating the academic integrity policy, he emailed his professor asking to fix his mistake and give an explanation about what had occurred. However, the professor directed him to the case adjudicator. Wale, on the other hand, had the opportunity to speak with his professor very briefly. The professor asked if Wale got help on his assignment and he said yes. She said, "You can't do that." Wale didn't understand why that was a violation and he wanted to speak to his professor more about it. He described, "The professor told me that it was out of her hands...she told me not to email her back [and] there's nothing more that needs to be said." Then he met with the case adjudicator who was an academic integrity facilitator within the school of social work. Like Wale, Regina was able to speak with her professor briefly. However, that conversation did not occur until the hearing process. During the hearing, her professor was able to share his side and Regina was able to share her side, though they did so in front of the other members of the hearing and not in a private conversation.

Length of Time

Regina felt anxious about the length of time it took to resolve her student conduct case. She described:

One of the things that really added to the difficulty was not knowing what was going to happen with my academic integrity violation. It was over a year before a hearing was even scheduled [due to a backlog of cases]. So...I basically

completed my entire year at Rutgers after that, and I was ready to graduate. I was going to take one more class in the summer and then [graduate]. So even after that class was over in the summer, I still didn't know what was going to happen with the academic integrity violation. So it was over a year later and it was just not knowing, something in the back of my head was like, "Oh, they haven't contacted you yet, so you don't have to worry about it." But I still saw that XF on my transcript....I was like, "Am I graduating this year? Am I not? I don't know."

While the other participants did not mention the length of time as a negative aspect of the academic integrity process, I also did not specifically ask about it. Although only brought up by one participant, it felt significant enough to mention because Regina was completing her senior year and preparing for graduation.

Pre-Determining an Outcome

The academic integrity policy clearly defines specific policy violations and outlines appropriate sanctions for those violations (see Appendix B). Even so, each individual student and situation is different and is handled independently. Some participants expressed concern that their fate was already decided before an adjudication meeting even took place. Alex described:

It felt as though when I walked in, they already had a decision. It was already decided that I was punished. It was like, "We're gonna go through the motions of letting you show us what you have, let you speak what you feel is your truth, but at the end of the day, you're wrong and this is the punishments that are gonna come."

Alex said she felt that way in part because they already had the paperwork filled out for her to sign when she entered the meeting. She added, "It really did not feel like the school had my side or had any interest to understand what I was going through. It just felt [like a] very quick decision. You're guilty and that's it."

Will also felt the adjudicator for his case did not care to discuss the matter with him in great detail. He explained that he met with the adjudicator several times to plead his case but they were not understanding of the cultural differences of academic integrity

and how that impacted his situation. Will described the meeting by saying, “It was very ‘Did you do this or not?’ and [they] didn’t care about the circumstances.” Will made sure to explain to me that he knew the adjudicator was acting within her role, but she was not taking his culture or context into consideration, which he felt was important.

Not Recommending a Campus Advisor

None of the five participants were familiar with the academic integrity process until they went through it themselves. However, four out of the five respondents did not reach out to a campus advisor to help guide them through the adjudication process. Rishi, Wale, and Regina did not know about their right to a campus advisor. Without someone there to guide him, Rishi felt like he was “going into the [student conduct] meeting blindly.” Wale similarly explained, “It would have helped me so much more to have someone explain to me what happened, explain to me what’s going on and let me know that I’m still being supported by Rutgers...I was just penalized and then that was it.”

Alex knew about the option to have a campus advisor present throughout the process, but she did not understand its importance at the time, and chose not to contact them. Alex wished the case adjudicator stressed “the importance of having someone there to guide you through this.” She was told to come to the meeting alone; however, as Alex stated:

I feel like it should have been required that I brought somebody with me, somebody to walk me through it, explaining to me my options in clarity versus me going by myself, scared, not sure of what to do, what to expect, feeling the whole time that I’m doing something wrong and I need to fix this.

Unlike the others, Will was explicitly told he could have someone there to advise him through the process and he did contact a campus advisor. He spoke with the campus advisor once, but he did not find the conversation helpful. Even after meeting with the

campus advisor, and although there was no language barrier, Will still did not fully understand the process. The participants agree that it is not only important for students to speak with a campus advisor, but it is equally as important for that person to be well-versed in the academic integrity process and know how to clearly explain the process to students.

Appeal Process

The five participants had very different feelings about the subsequent appeals process that students can initiate. Will, Regina, and Rishi all appealed their cases. In all three appeal decisions, the appeals committee upheld the finding and lowered their sanctions. Will stated the appeals committee lowered his suspension to one semester, but did not state his original sanction or give any further details of the appeals process. As a result of the appeals process, Regina's suspension was lowered from one year to one semester. While the appeals process kept Rishi's suspension at one year, it was postponed so he could complete his enrolled courses for the semester.

Wale and Alex were dissuaded from appealing entirely. Wale was too nervous to appeal because he was told by the case adjudicator that if he did appeal, the appeals board could increase his sanction from suspension to expulsion. He explained:

It wasn't a democratic process or anything like that. I was told that I could appeal it, but if I appeal it, I could not be let back into school [if the appeals board increased my sanction to expulsion]. And I'm like, "What the fuck?" like, "I paid for this school, I'd taken out loans, and I'm trying to better my life...and I didn't commit a crime." And I admitted it. I told everyone what happened, it's not like I tried to hide it.

He didn't understand how he could be penalized for trying to plead his case but ultimately decided not to appeal the decision, for fear the punishment would increase. Alex was also persuaded not to appeal. The case adjudicator said to Alex, "You have two options. You

can either 1) bring a lawyer and try to fight your case in front of the board and the teacher. Or you can 2) just accept that it was plagiarized [and take the sanctions].” Alex said about the adjudicator, “She was very honest with me. She said that the school usually wins.” Students are not required to hire a lawyer to appeal, so either the case adjudicator was mistaken or Alex misunderstood the process. Nevertheless, Alex further explained:

It wasn't gonna work out in my favor and it was gonna be extra bills that I was not going to be able to deal with. Paying for college was already enough and then having to add on debt of, like, paying for a lawyer that I might not even win, just didn't seem feasible at the time.

Like Wale, Alex did not appeal her case. Therefore, they do not know if an appeals committee would have altered the finding and/or the sanction of their cases.

The Process was Fair

While each participant had their own recommendations for improving the academic integrity process, everyone felt the process was generally fair. Regina said very honestly, “As much as I would want to say, like, ‘Oh no, I was in the right’...I think it was fair in terms of the hearing process and all of that.” Rishi, who received a longer suspension than some of the other participants, thought the academic integrity process was “probably as close as you can get” to being fair and equitable.

Other participants specifically mentioned their case adjudicators being fair. Alex thought the adjudicator of her case tried her best to help Alex throughout the process. During a student conduct meeting, the adjudicator for Wale’s case showed him where he failed to cite properly on his assignment. Reflecting on his knowledge before this meeting, Wale said, “This was all brand new to me; I didn’t understand it.” As mentioned previously, Will thought the adjudicator for his case should have taken his culture into

consideration when reaching a determination, but he did think she acted within her role at every step of the way.

Impact of Suspension: “I feel like I had an identity crisis.”

This section of the findings focuses on how the participants generally spent their time away from RUNB and what supports (or lack thereof) they had during their suspension. This section also explores how the respondents felt suspension did or could impact their future. All these areas factored into their later reintegration into RUNB, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Sub-Question 4: How do academic integrity violators spend their suspension?

The impact of suspension, and subsequent reintegration, could be affected by how a person spends their time away from their academic program. The participants in this study spent their time working, traveling, and/or caregiving for family. Rishi, who has yet to experience suspension, also hopes to work and/or travel during his time away from RUNB.

Working

Alex, Regina, and Will all worked during their period of suspension. Alex spent her suspension working and supporting her family. She explained, “I just worked full-time and I was just really helping my mom. At that time, I was dealing with her health because her losing two brothers made her fall into a deep depression and she was already sick, already having her own health issues.” While it was financially necessary for Alex, Regina had more of a choice to work and she ultimately did so to improve her transition. Regina spoke at length about the benefits of working during her suspension. She described:

I was doing two jobs at once. I was a statistical consultant part-time and I was working full-time as a data analyst. So I was being busy and I think something about staying busy and seeing money come into my account made me feel like I was a little bit more successful than I was giving myself credit for. “You know what? Screw Rutgers...They don't want me, I'm better off, I'm working, I'm fine.” But that year, kind of boosted my mental health a lot more... knowing that I am capable of stuff. I'm just not giving myself enough credit. And there's something about the environment at college that really breaks you down.

Working during her suspension improved Regina's sense of self, which led to her decision to transition back to RUNB after her suspension was complete. Regina stated matter-of-factly:

I think the suspension impacted me positively because I found a job and I got this experience under my belt. But I think that's very rare...I honestly think there would be a high chance of me not coming back if...my life didn't change for the better.

Regina ultimately quit her job before returning to RUNB so she would have more time to focus on her studies. Nevertheless, she credited the positive impact employment had on her, both financially and emotionally, with helping ease her transition back.

Will spent his suspension working for an internship he had held prior to his suspension. Not only was this a positive job for him, but his site supervisor was a source of emotional and legal support for him. She became like family to Will and agreed to sponsor him when he lost his educational visa status after being suspended. Will's experience at his internship will be discussed in further detail when answering the next research sub-question.

Traveling

When asked what he plans to do with his time away from RUNB, Rishi said, “I was hoping to maybe find a job.” If Rishi can't find a job during his suspension, his next plan is to travel. He said, “Maybe I'll just try to maybe move down south for the year...I just feel like kinda tired of the north and maybe I should, you know, live in new land.”

Rishi is hoping that a change of scenery will have a positive impact on the transition away from, and hopefully returning to, RUNB.

In describing his suspension, Wale said, “I traveled the world...I went to like six different countries.” Unlike others, Wale was not employed during his suspension. He said, “I didn’t work at all, I blew through my savings, so it was definitely a character building time for me...a lot of soul searching had to happen.” Wale explained that he was accepted into the Peace Corps at the same time as he was accepted into his graduate program at RUNB. Since Wale turned down the Peace Corps to gain a graduate degree, he thought there was no better time to travel than during his term of suspension. Although he spent his savings, Wale said the positive aspects of traveling, including necessary soul searching, aided positively in his transition back to RUNB.

Sub-Question 5: What support systems (institutional or otherwise) do suspended students have and what are the areas where support is lacking?

Research shows that persistence to graduation is especially difficult when suspended students are not provided with adequate resources and support (Schlossberg, 2011; Schrage & Giacomini, 2009). All five participants had support systems while suspended and all mentioned areas in which they felt support was lacking for them. The three common sources of support (or lack thereof) were friends and family, internship, and RUNB.

Friends and Family

Some participants chose to disclose the details of their suspension to their friends and family and were met with a great deal of support. Upon receiving notification of her academic integrity policy violation, Alex told her boyfriend about the situation. He was very supportive and even went to the student conduct hearing with her. This meant a lot

to Alex and helped to ease the transition away from RUNB for her. Similarly, Regina told her husband about the adjudication process, suspension, and reintegration. He was very supportive of her transitioning away from and back to RUNB.

Several of the participants did not know how to tell their families about their suspension. Alex said she couldn't tell anybody in her family about this situation because "a lot of the Hispanic culture doesn't like to acknowledge mistakes." She described further, "My mom always said, if I do something wrong, I have to take responsibility and handle it. And that's what I did. I took responsibility and handled it. But I didn't feel comfortable telling her." When Alex signed up to participate in this study, she told her mom about her violation and subsequent suspension. Her mom asked why she didn't tell her earlier and Alex said it was because she was ashamed. Her mom said, "You graduated. I'm proud of you."

Like Alex, Regina did not tell her parents about her academic misconduct and suspension, and she still hasn't. She explained, "My parents don't know about my suspension and my family doesn't know...they just thought that I was taking time off because I got a job and I wanted to focus on that, which is true, partly, but also I was suspended." Rishi also hasn't told anyone about his suspension yet, including his friends and family. When asked why he hasn't told anyone, Rishi said:

I don't know really know how to say it, and like, I'm not sure how someone may react to that. Mainly just my parents, how to word it, but... yeah, I just wouldn't know how they'd react to it...I think I'm gonna tell them, but like, as late as possible.

Similarly, Wale did not tell his family about his suspension right away because, as he described, "it was super embarrassing to tell them I got kicked out of school. There's nothing I could have said [that would] warrant my decision-making. You know, like, I

didn't wanna do my homework.” Like Alex, Wale ended up telling his mom and she thought it was dumb that he did something to get himself kicked out of school, but was proud of him for graduating. When I asked Wale who his biggest supporters were, he said, “myself and my roommates.” While no one else specifically counted themselves as among their supporters, it takes strength and dedication to come to terms with being suspended, choose to reintegrate into an academic program, and graduate.

Internship

Although Will did not have family and friends in the country, which, for many students is a key support system, he received strong support from his internship site supervisor. When Will was suspended from RUNB, it impacted his student visa and he was at risk of being deported. In order to keep him in the country, Will’s internship site supervisor became his sponsor. Will worked very closely with her throughout his suspension and during his reintegration process. He described her as “motherly” and a positive support for him during that stressful time. She became a friend and like a surrogate family member while his friends and family were all living in another country.

Wale gained an internship through his academic program at RUNB. He started off interning at the site every Tuesday and Thursday and he did so well, that the site hired him to work extra days. He began working there Monday through Friday; Tuesdays and Thursdays remained his internship days while Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays he was on the payroll. Wale found support in his internship and loved going to the site every day. Unfortunately, the site terminated both his internship and his employment when he was suspended. The internship site supervisor told Wale they wanted to keep him, but RUNB would not allow him to continue his internship since he lost student status. Wale stated, “My internship was so good for me, so when I got that taken away

from me, it destroyed me.” Wale further described, “That’s a big deal...you wake up tomorrow and your job tells you that you can’t come to your job [or school] for six months...how [do] you handle it?” Fortunately, Wale found encouragement in other ways, such as spending time traveling and leaning on his roommates for emotional support, which eased his time away from RUNB.

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Unfortunately, not a single participant said RUNB served as a support for them during their suspension. When I asked Regina if RUNB provided any support during her transition away and then returning, she said, “No. After [I was suspended], I didn’t really hear from Rutgers at all.” Wale opined about the lack of support from RUNB by saying, “They shouldn’t have you feel so alone. Like, I don’t know what the statistics are for people that come back or not, but I feel like they’d be higher if Rutgers gave more support.” Wale also said, “It was a lot of change happening [at] once with, like, absolutely zero support.” He continued, “No one in my family went to college, no one in my family went to high school, so I had no familial support to get it done. And then I’m looking for support from the school [and] they didn’t provide any of that either.” While an institution cannot make up for a lack of familial understanding or support, it could and certainly *should* aid in a student’s transition back to student status.

Sub-Question 6: What impact does suspension have on students who violate the academic integrity policy?

Suspension impacted each participant individually, yet, three themes emerged: 1) emotional impacts, 2) financial impacts, and 3) social impacts.

Emotional Impacts

Regina opened up by saying, “I feel like after taking some time off from the university, life changes so much more than you’d expect...it’s really hard to keep hope after something like suspension happens in college.” She went on to say, “Everyone close to me is excelling and I’m not. And I made this dumb mistake. And if I hadn’t, maybe a semester from now, I could be graduating too. But I’m not.” Like Regina, suspension also impacted Alex emotionally. Alex said her academic integrity violation and subsequent suspension “felt like one of those dirty little secrets. And [I] just didn’t want it to be publicized or anything like that.” The suspension took huge tolls on her mental, emotional, and physical health. She described:

I couldn’t sleep. For a time, I was struggling with eating. I was very depressed for a while. I punished myself deeper than I was supposed to because of how it was handled because the way...[the case adjudicator] made it seem, it really felt heavy on me, very weighted.

Wale lost his sense of self during his period of suspension. He explained, “I feel like I had an identity crisis...Am I gonna go back to school? Am I meant for school? Is this the end of the line for me?” He continued: “This was definitely traumatic...[It’s easy to] break in times of hardship. Make sure that what you want is worth what you’re going through...you gotta be resilient.” In hindsight, all participants showed emotional resilience throughout their suspension and reintegration experiences.

Emotional impacts were acute for Will, since he did not know a single person coming to the United States, and his suspension occurred during the second semester of his graduate program. All of his family and friends were back in his home country, made Will feel isolated. Getting suspended made him want to leave the country. Will said he often thought to himself, “Why did I come here?” In addition to feeling alone, Will also discussed the emotional toll of having to repeat the class had on him. He said, “It was

hard sitting in the same class with the same professor and the same assignments again.” He went on to say that it would have been “easier to put on a [metaphorical] mask and forget what happened,” but that was impossible as a graduate student completing the same required course for the second time.

Unlike some of the other participants, Rishi anticipates that his suspension period will have a positive emotional impact on him. He said the adjudication experience served as a needed wake-up call for him, saying plainly, “I need to get my life together.” Rishi hopes that his suspension will lead to positive life changes.

Financial Impacts

Some of the respondents lost tuition money because of their suspension. Alex lost tuition money for the semester she was suspended. Then, withdrawing for an extra semester after her one semester suspension impacted her financial aid. Alex said, “Once I withdrew, they took the financial aid away which wasn't really much. I had to take loans out anyway.” Not only did Will forfeit tuition for the entire semester he was suspended, but he also had to pay to retake the course he failed due to his misconduct, since it was a program requirement. Wale and Regina also forfeited tuition. Wale stated: “I can't get my money back. Like, I wasted a whole semester of school.”

Students suspended from RUNB not only lose their student status but are also banned from campus during that time period. This means that suspended students cannot attend events on campus, enter University buildings, or utilize University services, even if they already paid for them; they are also not eligible for a refund. Often times, suspended students lose money on things other than just tuition, like pre-paid on-campus housing, meal plans, and various other student fees.

Unlike other respondents who already registered and paid for classes and therefore forfeited that term's tuition money when they were suspended, Rishi's suspension was delayed on appeal and he was able to complete the courses he was enrolled in that semester. He was also able to keep his meal plan and on-campus housing for that semester. At this point, Rishi does not think suspension will negatively impact his finances.

Social Impacts

As stated in the previous section, suspended students cannot step foot on campus during their period of suspension. Wale thinks this should change. He said, "I didn't feel like I was suspended, I felt like I was completely expelled." He described feeling like the University didn't want him there as a student, even though that's when he needed the campus the most. He understands the need for being suspended from class, but not from being suspended from "Rutgers as a whole."

Alex similarly felt disconnected from the campus, even after she returned. Ultimately, Alex decided to transfer to an online degree program at RUNB as opposed to her previous in-person program. She made this decision, in part, to continue working. However, she also decided to switch to an online program because she felt socially disconnected from the campus. She explained, "Sometimes it was hard but I guess after the situation, I just felt disconnected from the whole experience and I just wanted to be finished. So I just completely transitioned as an online student." Alex went on to say, "Till this day, when I try to associate Rutgers...I sometimes have a sour taste in my mouth. Like I don't really connect it with too many good things." Luckily, both she and Wale had social support systems outside of just their friends who they would meet up with on RUNB's campus, which helped aid in their transitions.

Sub-Question 7: What impact does suspension have on a student's future?

Suspension can have lasting effects on a student. As noted, it can be extremely difficult emotionally, financially, and socially during a period of suspension. Oftentimes, it is still an uphill battle, even after overcoming those challenges and successfully completing a term of suspension. Two things still daunt some previously suspended students: graduation and the XF course grade.

Graduation

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, three participants have graduated with their master's degrees and two are currently working towards their bachelor's degrees. However, Alex was nervous about graduation up until she received her diploma. No one, including anyone in RUNB's Office of Student Conduct, followed up with her to confirm she had completed her sanction requirements. Alex herself did not reach out to anyone to verify her sanction requirements were complete, though she did not go into detail about why she made this decision. As a result of the lack of communication, she was worried something would come up later down the road and impact her graduation. The academic integrity policy at RUNB states that sanctions "may have an impact on financial aid, scholarship, or fellowship eligibility, or scholastic standing," yet does not mention how a student will know if any of those things will be impacted, including graduation (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a, p. 8).

The XF

A grade of "XF" for a course, is typically a permanent entry on the student transcript. Even if a student subsequently passes that same class, which they would have to do if it's a prerequisite for another class or a specific graduation requirement, the XF remains. Will, Rishi, and Regina all received XFs as part of their sanction for academic

misconduct. At the time of their interviews, all of their XFs remained on their transcripts, even though Will did successfully retake the course. Alex and Wale received failing grades for the courses in which the misconduct occurred, but they did not receive XFs as part of their sanctioning.

Will talked about wanting to further his education but he is nervous to apply to doctoral programs because of the XF on his transcript. Although “academic misconduct” itself is not noted, Will is unsure how this incident of academic misconduct may negatively impact his future education. As stated in chapter 3, the academic integrity policy at RUNB says an XF can be removed from a student’s transcript if their request is approved (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2020a, p. 9). However, this process may not be discussed in detail with students before, during, or after their adjudication process.

Reintegration Experience: “I’m gonna do this.”

The participants in this study went through several transitions as a result of violating the academic integrity policy. Four of the participants, not including Rishi, experienced an *unanticipated* transition when they were found responsible and then sanctioned. For those that had already returned to RUNB, their reintegration was an *anticipated*, though not entirely easy or straightforward, transition. The findings in this section detail the reasons behind these respondent’s decisions to return to their home institution and the barriers they experienced during their reintegration. This section concludes with the participants’ recommendations for improving the reintegration experience for future suspended students at RUNB.

Sub-Question 8: Why do suspended students choose to re-enroll in or at RUNB?

Rutgers University-New Brunswick students have a plethora of options after their term of suspension is complete. Namely, they could decide not to return to RUNB, they could apply and enroll in an undergraduate/graduate program at another institution, or they could return to RUNB to complete their degree. Four out of the five participants in this study returned to RUNB after their suspension. The fifth participant, Rishi, has yet to complete his suspension, but plans to return to RUNB after doing so. This section explains their rationales for re-enrolling.

Individual and Familial Identities

All five of the participants described feeling pressure to persist through hardship to obtain their degree, especially being first-generation, non-white students. Wale explained, “You feel like, ‘[Parents] went through all this hardship for you to come here, so you gotta figure it out.’” Wale also described feeling like he was responsible for being a model black student:

There's not a lot of black kids in college, or at least in the college I went to and in my classes. I don't wanna say it was 100% imposter syndrome, but it was like real life. Like, I looked around and I'm the only person that looks like me in this class. Like, am I supposed to be here? Or is there, like, something stopping other people like me that are supposed to be here? I don't feel, like, overly exceptional, so I feel like people that look like me should be in these classes as well...I always felt like I had to be my best representation for people that look like me.

Similarly to Wale, Will also felt pressure to succeed for his family because of his own identities. In his case, the pressure came from being an international student in the United States for the first time. He wanted to prove to his family back home that he could earn a master's degree from an American university.

Alex and Wale also talked about wanting to be the first person in their families to graduate with a master's degree, after being the first in their families to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Wale specifically said, “Having your family dependent on the fact that

you're gonna graduate is super stressful.” Regina, also a first-generation student, talked about the large amount of support, and a bit of pressure, she received from her family. She said, “My parents...my family... and my husband... they're all like, you know, you got to finish that...so I was like, I'm going to do it, the first opportunity I get.” In looking towards the future, Regina mentioned that finishing her bachelor’s degree now would be easier than when she starts her own family. She described:

I have this experience under my belt. I don't have many financial responsibilities right now. I don't have any kids. I don't have an expensive house. I live a pretty simple life, so I think I should [complete my degree] now while I still can... the longer you're away from [any] university, the harder it is to sit down and study.

With education being a pillar in his family’s core values, Rishi felt pressure to live up to his family name. He explained, “Education is very important in my family. They were like, ‘There's no option, you're going to college.’” This was extra difficult because his older sister also went to Rutgers University: “She’s like really smart so...she would get amazing grades and like she got on top of her class and all that stuff...my parents told the same expectations to me and then I tried to...keep up with her.” Rishi knows that he needs to leave RUNB with a bachelor’s degree, so as not to let himself or his family down. However, he has yet to tell his family about his suspension, for fear of disappointing them.

Regina also has a sister who went to college and education is very important in her family. She explained, “When my parents were looking to buy a house...they wanted to get one where [my sister and I] could commute [to college].” Alex also related to familial pressure like Rishi and Regina. She explained:

I'm the oldest and that comes with that pressure of kind of trying to be perfect. Not perfect, but like a role model [to younger siblings] and try to not get in trouble, not do things you're not supposed to. And I was ashamed. I didn't even

tell my mom [about the suspension] right away because I didn't want her to think badly of me.

As the participants described, it is difficult being the first (or second) person in your family to graduate with a bachelor's or master's degree, especially after overcoming a term of suspension. Whether their reasoning stemmed from wanting success for themselves and/or their family, identity played a role in all of the respondents' decisions to return to RUNB post-suspension.

Proving to Themselves They Can Do It

Several participants said their own self-motivation led to them re-enrolling at RUNB. Will wanted to come back and graduate to prove to himself, and to the University, that he could do it. Wale felt similarly. He reflected on his experience and said:

Am I gonna be the kid that got suspended or am I gonna be the kid that graduated? Even if I started another school and graduated from there, I would feel left out. Like, for Rutgers, I had a personal vendetta against, so I'm like, "I'm gonna graduate" and "They think they're better than me and they're not. I'm gonna do this."

Along the same lines, Alex stated:

I just took a year...I didn't wanna take too long because I know a lot of people if they take too long from school then they don't go back. And I really wanted to finish. I had already invested so much time and I was excited to have a master's in social work. I didn't wanna give that up even though the experience wasn't great. I just needed some time to reflect on the situation and just come back and complete it.

She added, "The more time I was away from school, I was becoming a little overwhelmed. I'd wanted to go back. I just had to mentally prepare myself to come back." Like Will and Wale, Alex did mentally prepare herself to come back and complete her degree.

Regina talked about how returning to RUNB, and doing well, actually increased her motivation to complete her undergraduate degree. She said, “I feel like when you see yourself doing better, there's also encouragement to continue doing better.” At the time of her interview, Regina was still actively working towards her bachelor’s degree and hoped to graduate in the near future.

Wants/Needs the Degree

In their own way, every participant said earning a degree from RUNB was worth the pain of the suspension and reintegration experience. Will wants to get his Ph.D. in social work in the future, so he knew he had to complete his master’s degree, and continuing at RUNB made sense for him. Rishi knows an undergraduate degree will help him find a better job once he enters the job market. He explained, “It's better to...get a job with a degree and stuff like that, so I'd rather just finish it than, like, kinda just start from the bottom.” Rishi started his undergraduate degree at RUNB, and he wants to continue at RUNB after his suspension. Wale said his desire for a graduate degree helped him overcome the hurdle of suspension reintegration. He said, “The only thing that helped me get through was [thinking] 'I need to graduate. I decided to go to grad school...no matter what happens, I need to finish.’” At the time of their interviews, Will and Wale had both earned their master’s degrees while Rishi was working towards completing his bachelor’s degree.

Two participants felt their specific programs at RUNB were noteworthy and worth the difficulties of returning to the same campus. Alex described, “So I went to Rutgers for social work because when I did my research...Rutgers had the longest running program for social work and I really wanted a program that's been developed for a long time.” Rishi similarly shared, “I've already, like, spent most of my time at Rutgers.

I'm only three semesters away, so might as well just finish here. And plus, the Rutgers engineering school was pretty good, so I'm not gonna take that for granted.” The reputation and prestige of the programs at RUNB were a factor in the students’ decisions to enroll there in the first place, and it continued to be a factor in their choosing to re-enroll there.

Didn’t See Another Option Outside of RUNB

Alex and Wale both felt that applying to another IHE wasn’t feasible. Alex talked about the financial aspect of gaining a master’s degree played into her decision to return to RUNB. She said:

Financially, I would look at the debt that I had already accumulated from school and I was like, yeah, I need to finish because I already have this accumulation of money that I have to pay the school. I can't just say, oh I'm gonna quit. I don't wanna do it anymore. Because I already have to pay that money. So I had already known I was going to have to finish eventually. I just needed some time.

Even though Alex felt tied to RUNB because of the debt, she tried to transfer to another institution. She described, “I just couldn't focus. I felt like I didn't wanna go back. I felt so ashamed...I even tried to transfer to a different school, but multiple schools rejected me because of that F.” Wale also said he thought about transferring to another institution, because he got into the four schools he applied to, but he knew they would ask about why he was suspended. He felt his suspension held him back from attending another institution.

Sub-Question 9: What are the barriers to reintegration?

Although it may have been challenging to relive, the respondents were ready and willing to discuss the barriers they faced when reintegrating into their academic programs at RUNB. After suspension, the participants expected to return to RUNB without

complication. However, one theme emerged as a frustration: the redundancy of the re-enrollment process.

Participants felt re-applying and re-enrolling to RUNB after their suspension was an unnecessary barrier. Alex described, “When I finally decided to go back to school, I had to reapply to Rutgers and that on its own was very shocking that I had to reapply to a school that I was already in...I had to re-enroll like a new student.” Regina also had to re-enroll following her suspension. She stated her frustrations with that process by explaining:

Well, first of all, I didn't know that I had to re-enroll again, I just tried to sign in and my NetID wasn't working and I tried to reach out to literally every single department, [administrators within different departments were] like, “Reach out to them,” “Reach out to them,” “Reach out to this department,” “Reach out to financial aid, maybe they have something to do with this.” “Reach out to OIT maybe they have something,” and they would just go in a circle and nothing ever worked. And then I submitted a one-stop [inquiry⁴], but they take 10 days to get back to you. So over those 10 days, I was just contacting so many different departments and nobody was telling me why my NetID wasn't working. And I had to sign up for classes or the add/drop period was going to end and I wouldn't be able to sign up again. Um, so I wish there was better communication in that sense.

Unfortunately, Regina ultimately missed the re-enrollment deadline for that semester. She then decided to extend her time away from the University, and she was able to successfully complete the re-enrollment process the following year. When Regina submitted an application of re-enrollment to the School of Arts and sciences at RUNB, she had to explain how she spent her time away. She described:

I had to do the re-enrollment process and like I mentioned, I took an extra semester off after I was suspended. So when I did the re-enrollment process, I basically just explained everything that I've been up to and why I took time off and all of that.

⁴ According to the Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (2020c) website, “The One Stop is an integrated and coordinated cross-functional service in the areas of financial aid, student accounts, and registration.”

She went on to say, “I wasn't sure I'd get [back] in...I just explained my situation, how my mental health then and how I've improved now and I'm ready to complete my bachelor's." Fortunately, the School of Arts and Sciences accepted her back into her program at RUNB.

Will also had to re-apply to RUNB following his suspension. He said, “applying again caused unnecessary stress.” He, like Alex and Regina, feels that after a student's suspension is complete, they should automatically be re-admitted. Unlike the others, Wale did not have to re-apply after his suspension; he could register for classes as normal. This could be because he did not take additional time off before returning to RUNB and thus was only gone for one semester. Alex, Regina, and Wale were all “inactive” student status for a full year. At the time of the interview, Rishi had not served his term of suspension yet, so he's unsure if he'll have to re-apply when he's eligible to return to RUNB.

Sub-Question 10: How could RUNB improve the reintegration experience for suspended students?

In general, retention to degree is a priority for colleges and universities, and numerous staff implement a range of programs to aid in the students' transitions into, through, and out of their college or university. Rutgers University-New Brunswick is no different. However, the participants in this study recommended changes for RUNB to improve the reintegration experience of previously suspended students specifically. Common themes included more education, empathetic adjudicators, reintegration meeting, meeting with an academic advisor, meeting with previously suspended students, and mental and emotional health support.

More Education

When specifically asked how they knew about the concept of academic integrity, four out of the five respondents did not cite gaining any knowledge from RUNB. The fifth participant, Rishi, did say he knew about academic integrity from the required online module he completed right after his RUNB orientation. However, that did not prevent him from subsequently violating the academic integrity policy semesters later.

Both Will and Wale discussed the need for more education surrounding the topic of academic integrity. Will aptly stated, “Prevention is better. Prevention is [the] cure.” He suggested, “Warn students what happens if you commit a violation, put it in your syllabus, but also talk about it [in class] so students are clear.” Will went on to say, “[I] wasn't told a reminder or warning about policies and consequences.” He feels faculty of each individual course should give verbal and written explanations of academic integrity, along with warnings of what would occur if students violated policy. However, he also understands that graduate students, like himself, are held to a higher standard of academic integrity than undergraduates, and they should educate themselves on university policy.

Wale suggested incorporating more learning into the academic integrity process. In specifically talking about post-suspension education, which consisted of writing a scholarly article on plagiarism and attending an in-person ethics workshop for graduate and undergraduate academic integrity violators, Wale stated, “I felt like [RUNB’s] point was to punish me, not for me to really learn anything.” Although he did successfully complete the in-person ethics workshop, he did not feel it increased his knowledge of academic integrity, which he assumed was the goal and expected outcome.

Empathetic Adjudicators

Several participants expressed the need for empathy, or at least support, from staff working within the adjudication process. Will begs academic integrity policy adjudicators to have compassion towards students, and international students in particular. He cried during his meeting with the academic integrity adjudicator because he felt “very discriminated against.” Will felt the professor and the dean who adjudicated his case should have considered the fact that he was an international student and had little prior knowledge of American standards of academic integrity as a mitigating factor when it came to sanctioning. He also felt the sanction of suspension disproportionately affected him compared to domestic students because it put him at risk of deportation.

Wale and Alex also felt RUNB administrators should have been more supportive. Wale said, “I didn't even commit a crime, so I felt like I should have been supported a little bit more.” He added, “The empathy is just not there.” Not only was the process lacking support for Alex, but she felt criminalized throughout the academic integrity adjudication process and subsequent sanction. She said, “It felt completely awful to walk out those doors [of the adjudication meeting] and feel like a criminal...throughout the whole entire experience, I couldn't help but feel so criminalized...I just had to take it and be labeled.” Alex did not feel any support even after the academic integrity adjudication process was over. In talking about the in-person ethics workshop she received as a sanction, Alex stated:

They make you feel like you're a criminal the entire time. You walk in the workshop, you feel as if people are looking down on you when you're waiting. It just doesn't feel great. It's like they're making sure you're punished, like, they're making sure, “Hey, you did something wrong and you need to know you did something wrong.” We already know from the process that we got there we did something wrong, but the constant reminder just didn't feel great. It didn't feel like we were supported, it didn't feel like anybody really understood what was happening.

Alex summed up her feelings by saying, “I was very confused...the field we're in is social work. We're supposed to be one of the most understanding people and it, and that did not feel that way. It felt like I intentionally did something wrong and I got caught for it. And that's not what happened.” From her perspective, she unintentionally violated the academic integrity policy and believes that her lack of intention should have been considered by the case adjudicator when determining sanctions. She, along with Will and Wale, urges any administrator working with suspended students to have compassion for their individual situations.

Reintegration Meeting

As stated in previous chapters, some IHEs have a required meeting when students return from their suspension. While RUNB does not currently have the option for a reintegration meeting, several participants recommend RUNB adopt that practice to better support their students. Reflecting on his experience in high school, Wale recalled:

When I was in high school I used to get suspended all the time. When you come back, there's a meeting before you even go to your first class. Telling you, “We supported you throughout and the suspension wasn't to punish you...it's a consequence of your actions. it's not because we hate you or want you to fail...,” and I think that would have been perfect [at Rutgers].

He added, “Having Rutgers tell students, ‘We want you to come back, we're willing to accept you when you come back, and nothing has changed. And we're gonna do what we can to help you recover the lost time’ would have been helpful.” In reality, there was no follow-up conversation, and Wale did not feel supported by RUNB at all. Alex reflected on her reintegration experience at RUNB and shared similar recommendations:

I honestly thought...somebody was going to follow up with me about it or ask me how the experience was or kind of check in to see if I'm actually adjusting well after being away from it... because in their eyes, it was a serious situation so if it was that serious to punish me, then I feel like it should've been that serious to follow up. I don't think they understand the amount of, it causes a trauma to a

person, especially if it's never happened to them before. It creates anxiety and super stress and depression and I feel like they should have at least followed up one time. Or given me a call or an email just to say, "Hey you're coming back, I hope the same thing doesn't repeat itself" or something of that nature to acknowledge that it happened.

Alex added, "The same way they were able to have us all sign up for the workshop and they knew exactly which one of us did what, they could've just followed up the same way...even if it was a generic message, it [would have been] something." Although only Wale and Alex specifically spoke about wanting a reintegration meeting, all five participants confirmed that the option for a reintegration meeting was not presented to them by RUNB.

Wale also mentioned the benefits of having a meeting after a student knows they're suspended, but before their actual suspension commences. In his opinion, this allows for RUNB administrators to ask students things like, "How do you feel? What are you scared of? What do you want when you come back?" By hearing students' responses to those questions, University administrators could then provide the appropriate support for when they return from suspension. Wale's ideal recommendation is for RUNB to meet with students prior to and immediately following their suspension.

Meeting With an Academic Advisor

Participants discussed many benefits of requiring suspended students to speak with an academic advisor upon their return to RUNB. When discussing his academic situation post-suspension, Wale said very frankly, "It was a terrible transition back." He was originally in a weekend intensive masters of social work program. However, during his suspension, the entire cohort progressed without him. Wale returned to RUNB in the regular masters of social work program, but did not know much about it. Due to his lack of knowledge of that program, he missed the deadline to sign up for classes. He stressed

how helpful it would have been to speak with an academic advisor when he returned to RUNB, especially since he chose (on his own volition) to switch to a differently structured academic program.

Some participants discussed other benefits of meeting with an academic advisor during their reintegration process. Rishi thought talking to an academic advisor upon his return to RUNB could help him get back into the habit of doing work and learn time management tips. Regina agreed that time management in college, and at RUNB specifically, is difficult. She said:

It was just difficult for me to manage my time, you know, getting off one bus going on another and then going to all these classes and then still having time to study and put in all the effort. I think all of those things, they kind of make learning a little bit inconvenient.

Although Regina had difficulty managing her time while taking in-person classes, she also found it difficult to prioritize online coursework. At the time of the interview, Regina was enrolled in her final class. She decided to complete the class online so that she could continue to manage household responsibilities without worrying about commuting to campus. She described the difficulty of managing her time when completing schoolwork from home, explaining:

Life is so different now. And when you're at school, when you're at Rutgers physically, you got to study because that's what you're there to do. When you're at home, you're at home, this is where you relax. This is where you do the dishes and make dinner and stuff. And you get used to this way of life. And there's like in the back of your head, wait, you have a whole class to take, don't forget that. And it's so difficult to just sit down and take that because you've gotten into the groove of working and it's just different when you're working versus when you're studying.

Regina also mentioned the many benefits of choosing the right major for you, which is something an academic advisor could help students with. She said, "Finding the right major [post-suspension] uplifted my spirit. I tried to do better and I actually did...when

you see yourself doing better, there's also encouragement to continue doing better.” From the perspective of suspended students, meeting with an academic advisor during reintegration can have many benefits.

Meeting With Previously Suspended Students

In addition to meeting with an academic advisor, participants thought speaking with other suspended students, either through informal discussions or formal peer mentoring, would aid in their transition. Regina thought connecting with other suspended students would have been helpful for her reintegration into RUNB. While she was suspended, Regina read stories about other suspended students’ experiences online so she wouldn’t feel alone. Wale said he would have “loved to speak to students [or former students] going through this.” Even if RUNB did not mandate meetings, Wale thought it would be a good option for students looking for “peer support.” Rishi also thought talking to previously suspended students upon his return to RUNB could help him gain advice on how to finish strong.

Alex connected with suspended students at her required in-person ethics workshop. That particular sanction helped her make meaningful connections with other students (both graduates and undergraduates) in a similar situation as herself, which she found to be beneficial. In addition to speaking with peers at the required workshop, Alex also described informally spoke with other suspended students:

Along the way I've met other students that have had similar experiences and they've also shared that it wasn't positive. It didn't really feel that we were supported. No one ever checked in on us to see how we were doing after [coming back to RUNB]. Because [suspension] can create trauma for you. You're being criminalized for something that you were not even aware you did wrong.

Regina, Wale, Rishi, and Alex all felt they could benefit from peer support as part of their reintegration process.

Mental and Emotional Health Support

During a student's term of suspension, they do not have access to University services and they are banned from the physical campus. This may result in students not having access to free or reduced-price mental health support—specifically aimed at college students—when they need it the most. Wale, Alex, and Regina explicitly said formally involving counseling services in a reintegration process would have helped them. Wale explained that a requirement to meet with counseling services after the adjudication process, and as part of reintegration, would have been helpful because having school “ripped from underneath you is a lot to deal with.” He added, “I struggled a lot. Not grade-wise, my grades were good, but just mentally, like, the stress of it was a lot to deal with.” Alex also wished she met with counseling services because the suspension and subsequent reintegration brought her a lot of stress. She said, “I couldn't sleep because...after the whole situation, I was punishing myself because I was ashamed.” Regina agreed by saying, “I think counseling services would be helpful in the beginning [of the suspension] so that students have some sort of direction on where to go.” She described her experience:

My mental health was pretty broken down after I heard about the results of the hearing and that appeal and all of that. I thought like...I'm never going to graduate. I'm such a failure. I spent like all of my 20s here. I spent all my time here and I've taken on a great deal of loans and I have gained nothing.

While Will did not explicitly mention counseling services, he did say that RUNB lacked support for his transition back and that this situation caused him a great deal of stress. When talking about suspended students, he said, “psychologically, we are down.” Given this information, it's likely that Will, Regina, Alex, and Wale, all could have benefited from counseling services before their time away and/or upon their return to RUNB.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented findings based on the experiences of five Rutgers University-New Brunswick students who violated the academic integrity policy, were suspended, and subsequently planned to or did re-enroll. Although faced with difficulties and challenges, four of the five participants successfully re-enrolled and reintegrated into the RUNB campus community following their suspension. At the time of the interview, the fifth participant was preparing for his term of suspension and had plans to return to RUNB once allowed. By speaking with these five individuals, insight was gained into their transitional experience, how suspension impacted them, and how post-suspension reintegration at RUNB can improve. More specifically, the participants shared details of the situation that resulted in their suspension, described how they used their term of suspension, discussed what support (or lack of support) they had, talked through what made them want to return to RUNB to complete their degree, and shed light onto what readers could learn from their experiences. These findings inform recommendations for higher education professionals, specifically those responsible for academic integrity policy enforcement and/or the process of suspension reintegration at RUNB. With this study being the first of its kind, there are also multiple implications for future research within higher education.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

The following chapter is divided into five parts. Part one summarizes the key findings of this study. Part two describes theoretical reflections and observations. Part three discusses the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. Part four examines implications and recommendations for practice, both at RUNB and beyond. Finally, part five concludes the chapter and the study as a whole.

Summary of Key Findings

Several themes were common among all five individuals. At the time of their academic misconduct, not every participant categorized their actions as a violation of RUNB's academic integrity policy. However, after going through the adjudication process, they all understood their missteps. The participants explained they did not violate the academic integrity policy for fun or to be intentionally deviant. Though not a successful defense against a policy violation, they each stated their own individual reasons for academic misconduct, which can collectively be described as feeling like they had no other option at the time. The participants reported feeling stressed, under pressure to succeed, and not knowing another way to achieve success at the time of their violations.

Overall, the participants felt RUNB's adjudication process was fair, but they also had some common critiques. They collectively felt they would have benefited from having someone walk them through the adjudication process in advance and during their adjudication meetings. Though every respondent had the opportunity to speak with a campus advisor, some were not aware of their right to do so. One respondent did speak with a campus advisor but did not find them to be as knowledgeable regarding the process as necessary. Many participants also wanted the opportunity to speak with the

professor of the class where the violation occurred and were not given that opportunity by the professor/instructor. Finally, RUNB's academic integrity appeals process created concern among the participants. Some did not want to appeal their case for fear of the sanction getting increased to a longer suspension or even expulsion. Some did choose to appeal but did not feel fully prepared for what that process looked like, which is another aspect of the process that could benefit from campus advisor participation.

Once suspended, all the participants rode an emotional rollercoaster. They all spent their time away from RUNB either working, traveling, or doing both. Some had extensive support systems and others were navigating suspension alone. Collectively, the participants felt suspension affected them emotionally, financially, and socially. Nevertheless, even after a difficult time away, each person decided to return to RUNB to complete their degree. Mostly, the participants wanted to prove to themselves and their families they could do it. Some also didn't see a viable option outside of RUNB and/or felt they needed that degree to succeed in life after RUNB.

Once their suspension was over and they had made the decision to return to RUNB, the participants faced additional barriers with little to no support from the University. All respondents had to re-enroll in their academic program upon return to RUNB. However, some respondents had to re-apply to RUNB before they were eligible to re-enroll in their academic program. Neither the re-enrollment nor the re-application process involving meeting with a University administrator. Not a single participant had a meeting with anyone at RUNB about their time away or what to expect moving forward, either at RUNB's request or their own. All four respondents who returned to RUNB post-suspension felt the University should have supported them more once they returned.

Without that anticipated support, the respondents felt they were left to fend for themselves.

When asked to reflect on their experiences, the participants voiced recommendations and expectations that, in retrospect, would have facilitated their reentry: more education on the topic of academic integrity, enlist empathetic adjudicators, a mandated reintegration meeting of some sort, and availability of mental and emotional health support throughout the entire experience. The findings, in conjunction with the theoretical frame and literature, lent themselves to recommendations for practice and future research.

Theoretical Reflections and Observations

While the theoretical framework for this study centered around Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and accompanying model, aspects of restorative justice and the CoSA model were also considered. The two models complemented and enriched each other. As explained below, overlaying transition theory and restorative justice, and both of their associated models, allowed for a fuller and deeper understanding of the findings.

This study aptly centered around the three major components of Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and accompanying model: categorizing the event (anticipated, unanticipated, or nonevent), identifying potential resources, and preparing for a change process to occur after the event. The research questions for this study were developed in line with transition theory and helped to address each component of the model. Transition theory illuminated the findings; none of the findings were contrary to transition theory provisions.

The findings showed how the nature of the event (anticipated or unanticipated) affected a person's transition. For example, one respondent was able to complete the semester he was attempting at the time, and therefore anticipated his suspension. Due to him being able to anticipate the event, he felt his time away from the university and reintegration post-suspension would not have as negative of an impact on him as the other respondents. Every respondent also spoke to resources available to them during their change process and how those resources eased their transition, during and after suspension. Where transition theory falls short is examining the impact reintegration has on the change process associated with this particular transition.

Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory and accompanying model was not developed specifically for this population. As such, while it is useful in generally understanding a person's change process, it does not include information on how a person experiences reintegration or re-joining a status/group after experiencing a major life event. Restorative justice, including CoSAs (Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017), have a specific focus on helping an offender repair the harm they have caused, as a way to rebuild trust and community (Karp, 2015). Without reconciliation as a part of the reintegration process, students may feel labeled and never fully a part of the campus community post-suspension, as some respondents reported. This may leave certain negative emotions unresolved, which could impact whether a student persists until graduation. Therefore, rebuilding trust and community as part of a previously suspended student's reintegration can make for a more satisfactory post-suspension experience.

For students, suspension is an unanticipated event; however, student suspensions are anticipated by IHEs. It is not within a college or university's control to prevent academic integrity violations and subsequent suspensions, but it is within their control to

plan for them. Embracing a restorative philosophy to suspension reintegration provides a systematic structure for students to be suspended, reintegrate, and advance to graduation while also preparing them for life post-graduation.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This is a single institution study and provides valuable information to Rutgers University-New Brunswick. However, additional research could benefit from interviewing participants at different institutions across the country. Suspension reintegration may look and feel different at public vs private IHEs, four-year vs two-year IHEs, larger vs smaller campuses, and so forth. It would be particularly interesting to understand the differences in student experience and outcomes (e.g. graduation) of those who attended IHEs with and without a formalized reintegration process. While this is a single-site study, representatives of other IHEs may examine this study's findings and recommendations and determine potential for transferability in line with their own academic integrity policy and suspension reintegration processes.

Future research could benefit from speaking with a greater number of participants. Although phenomenology does not require a minimum number of participants (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000), the sample size for this study was relatively small compared to the population size. This study began with a focus on undergraduate students and, due to a low number of respondents, expanded to include graduate students. With five total respondents, the differences in experience and outcomes among undergraduate students compared to graduate students could not be explored fully. Similarly, the data could not be assessed by selected demographic characteristics. Do first generation students experience this phenomenon differently, for example, than non-first generation students?

Students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds? People of differing gender identities?

In order to understand this phenomenon on a more micro level, future research could recruit suspended students from a particular school. For example, the sample may be limited to graduate students from the school of social work or undergraduate business majors. This allows for the researcher to explore that particular school's expectations of academic integrity and professional conduct. The door is open for future research to explore suspension reintegration experiences using a variety of approaches.

The length of time between the individuals' suspension and invitation to participate in the study also added complications. First, by the time the recruitment information was emailed, many potential participants were likely no longer checking their University email address. Second, respondents had to reflect on their suspension and reintegration, which for some, occurred several years in the past. When a long period of time has passed by, it may be difficult for a person to remember exactly what they experienced and how they felt at the time of the phenomenon, potentially affecting the quality and accuracy of the data. In order to minimize the risk of misremembering details, and to maximize study recruitment efforts, outreach should occur shortly after the conclusion of a suspension reintegration process.

Future researchers must continue to address this topic with humility, empathy, and cultural competence. It is difficult for people to talk about a past disciplinary process, especially one that resulted in their suspension from an academic program. This difficulty is then compounded by the power differential between the interviewer and the respondent, any cultural differences present, potential language barriers, and other identity-based concerns. In order for respondents to be vulnerable, they must feel

comfortable with the researcher. It is imperative that researchers approach the topic of suspension reintegration with a high level of care, in order to connect with respondents and gain a thorough insight of this phenomenon.

Building an honest and genuine rapport with respondents, from the beginning, is critical to yielding rich data. The interviewer and respondent relationship begins at the initial point of contact. From that point forward, the interviewer needs to thoroughly explain how they will protect the privacy of the respondents, sometimes beyond the requirements set by an institutional review board. It is critical the respondents know, prior to an interview, that their responses will be anonymized, they will be given a pseudonym, and their participation will not impact their past or current (if applicable) academic record. Respondents may not be as forthcoming in an interview if they feel their responses, or the study in general, could impact where they are now in their lives. It is the responsibility of the researcher to explain the extent taken to protect their privacy.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The following section develops the following implications and recommendations for practice. First is an acknowledgement of the importance of providing education on academic integrity at various touchpoints throughout a student's academic journey. Second is a recommendation to handle each academic integrity violation on a case-by-case basis. Third is a suggestion to assign campus advisors, or their equivalent, to each student accused of academic misconduct who could be facing suspension. Fourth is an exploration of the benefits of formalizing the post-suspension reintegration process, including by utilizing circles of support and accountability.

There are structural considerations when determining the feasibility of adopting these recommendations for practice. While IHEs appear to agree on the importance of

upholding the values of academic integrity, the appropriate consequences for someone who does not do so is debatable. Some faculty and staff may enthusiastically welcome suspended students back to campus, while others may disagree on their readmittance entirely. The ethos of suspension reintegration will likely vary depending on institutional leadership, the academic school where the violation occurred, and whether the adjudication process is centralized or decentralized, among other factors. Regardless of an institution's approach to academic integrity discipline or suspension reintegration, all colleges and universities are dedicated to student success. The recommendations outlined in this study are focused on improving the student experience, retaining students up until graduation, and preparing students for life after graduation. By incorporating some or all of these recommendations for practice, IHEs are investing in student success and the student experience.

Providing More Education on Academic Integrity

IHEs should provide academic integrity education to both undergraduate and graduate students on a continuous basis. Although some students may be well-versed on the concept of academic integrity, IHEs cannot rely on tacit knowledge and should assume students are hearing this information for the first time. All new students (including transfers) should be required to complete (and pass) an online module on academic integrity prior to the first day of classes. Colleges and universities should ensure the online module(s) contains relevant and updated information, provides clear examples of misconduct, and includes campus-specific information on how to access the academic integrity policy. The module should also include a warning about the disciplinary process, should a student choose to violate the institution's academic integrity policy. Ideally, the education is also engaging for students and free for them to

complete. Completion should be tracked either by each individual academic department or one specific unit within academic or student affairs. Consequences, such as a hold on course registration, should occur for non-compliant students.

Like many other colleges and universities, RUNB requires all undergraduate students to complete an online tutorial on academic integrity immediately prior to the first day of classes. A similar tutorial should also be required for all graduate students to complete. Graduate students may not be aware of the cultural nuances and seriousness of academic integrity, especially if their undergraduate institutions did not require education on the topic or if they attended an undergraduate program outside of the United States. Even if students are already aware of academic integrity concepts, a required educational online module serves as a good reminder prior to starting their graduate program. A graduate-specific module or modules should be created by a collaboration of faculty and administrators from schools of graduate studies and/or graduate academic departments to ensure relevancy.

Incoming international students should have equal access to academic integrity information. Colleges and universities should partner with their international student offices to ensure that all incoming international students complete the required modules. IHEs should also consider translating academic integrity information, including the required module, the academic integrity policy, and any disciplinary or suspension-related information to the most commonly used languages among students. For many IHEs, it would be beneficial to translate the academic integrity policy and all related information to Spanish and Mandarin, but allow for students to request translations for other languages as well.

Once classes begin, the importance of academic integrity should be reinforced. Professors should cite the academic integrity policy on all syllabi, and orally explain academic integrity expectations during the first week of classes as well as citation systems used in the specific discipline. It should not be assumed that students are coming into their degree programs with prior, sufficient knowledge of these topics, even as transfer students, upper-class students, or graduate students. Faculty, in collaboration with departmental colleagues or alone, should consider utilizing real-life examples of each of the policy violations, so students may more clearly understand actions that constitute misconduct. It should also be made clear that students will be held responsible for their actions, regardless of their intention to violate policy. Therefore, students should be extra diligent on following expectations as it relates to academic integrity (i.e. proper citations, ensuring they understand assignment/exam instructions and restrictions, etc.).

Many IHEs require an honor pledge to be written on the top of an exam or assignment and then signed by the student(s), affirming they did not receive or give unauthorized assistance (McCabe & Pavela, 2000). This serves two distinct purposes. First, it serves as a reminder of expectations for students. Second, it passively holds students accountable for their actions. If it is later determined that a student did in fact receive or give unauthorized assistance on that particular exam or assignment, the situation will be documented and referred for adjudication. During the disciplinary process, the case adjudicator should ask the student why they signed the honor pledge when violating policy and how they plan to uphold the values of academic integrity in the future. The adjudicator will also determine appropriate sanctions for the student, on a case-by-case basis.

Case-by-case Adjudication Process

RUNB, like other IHEs, allow for individual disciplinary meetings with students accused of academic misconduct, prior to the adjudicator making a determination of responsibility. Some IHEs, on the other hand, allow for a determination to be made based solely on the initial report from the referring faculty member (or TA). As a result, an accused student may receive an email stating they were found responsible for academic misconduct, without a prior meeting. The findings from this study serve to discourage that practice. Policy transparency may allow for pre-determined outcomes, but due process may not be properly served in the absence of a meeting/hearing. Additionally, in student discipline matters, including academic integrity, context matters. An adjudicator may not have the full picture of what occurred unless they speak with the accused student directly.

Some of the participants in this study felt their “fate” was determined before they had the opportunity to speak with their case adjudicator face-to-face. This was emphasized by one participant upon realizing the paperwork to sign (to accept their policy violation and sanctions) had been completed and printed out prior to the initial adjudication meeting. The student felt the adjudicator had already decided to find the student responsible for violating policy and assigned sanctions prior to speaking with the student at all. Even if adjudicators have an abundance of information available to them at the time of receiving the case, they should not make a determination of responsibility, let alone sanctioning, prior to speaking with the student accused of the misconduct.

Academic integrity policies should include specific sanction determination criteria in order to serve as a guide for adjudicators and provide transparency to accused students. RUNB, for example, should consider adapting the six sanction determination criteria listed in the code of student conduct (as outlined in chapter 3) to be included in the

academic integrity policy. First is the nature of the offense. This ensures that the context of the situation is taken into consideration and allows for different sanctions depending on the allegation. One respondent discussed feeling like their sanction for plagiarism, which they categorized as accidental, was worse than if they were suspected of illicit drug use. This first criterion allows for the decision-maker to take factors such as intentionality and nature of the policy violation into consideration. Second is the precedent established by previous sanctions. This ensures a level of consistency among similar allegations. Third is the previous disciplinary history of the student. It is common practice that sanctions become progressively more severe for repeat offenders, especially if the same policy is violated again. Fourth states that aggravating and mitigating circumstances will be considered. For example, a second semester undergraduate student who plagiarized a term paper could (and arguably should) receive different sanctions than a doctoral candidate who plagiarized in their dissertation. Likewise, the implications of suspending an international student could differ greatly from suspending a domestic student, depending on individual circumstances. Fifth ensures the adjudicator weighs the development needs of the student. Six, and finally, states the safety and well-being of the community will be considered. While academic misconduct may not be a safety concern, it certainly affects the integrity and prestige of the institutional degree, which could reasonably be a factor in sanctioning.

As with any other disciplinary matter, adjudicators (including hearing boards and appeals officers) for academic misconduct matters should be trained on how to weigh evidence to determine responsibility and use their discretion to determine appropriate sanctions. As part of that training, adjudicators should be given sanction guidelines that

include a minimum and maximum range for each policy violation. A sanction guide, in lieu of prescribed sanctions for specific violations, allows for the case adjudicator to consider the context of the situation while also weighing past precedent. Pre-determining sanctions based on the violation alone does not allow for the flexibility needed for an equitable process.

Finally, students and IHEs could benefit from handling academic integrity violations with restorative practices. As the findings from this study suggest, attendance at a mandated workshop on academic integrity may help one student and be a waste of resources and time for another. Including the student in their sanctioning ensures they are engaged in a more educational process and increases the likelihood of them completing the requirements and finding them helpful. As described in chapter 2, The University of Minnesota and several other institutions have found success with handling lower-level academic integrity violations with a restorative justice process (Strange & Kuecker-Grotjohn, 2018; Lakehead University, 2022; University of British Columbia, 2022). This process involves the accused student and their faculty member, or someone from a pool of trained faculty volunteers, determining consequences for their misconduct together. If the student successfully completes their requirements, their disciplinary record is expunged and thus, does not impact their GPA, transcript, or any future education. Traditional adjudication models do not involve the accused student in determining outcomes of their behavior. This often results in standard sanctioning as opposed to sanctioning tailored to the situation.

Assigning Campus Advisors

Many IHEs, including RUNB, allow for and even encourage students to have someone with them at all disciplinary meetings and hearings. RUNB has a pool of trained

campus advisors whose purpose is to guide students through the adjudication process. However, four out of the five respondents in this study did not contact a campus advisor: one person felt discouraged from doing so and the other three people did not know how to do so. If this information had been provided to them, they did not remember it. While the right to have a campus advisor is listed in RUNB's code of student conduct and on that office's website, it is missing from the academic integrity policy. IHEs, and RUNB in particular, should include information about campus advisors in the academic integrity policy.

For separable academic integrity offenses, IHEs should consider assigning a campus advisor to *every* accused student, prior to their initial meeting with the case adjudicator. When students are notified in writing of a potential violation, that documentation should include the name and contact information for their assigned campus advisor, that advisor will be cc'd on the notification, and a link to the list of advisors will be provided. Accused students in separable cases are automatically connected with someone trained to guide them through the adjudication process. The student could choose a different advisor if they wish, or if the student does not want a campus advisor, they can choose to waive that right.

One respondent in this study contacted a campus advisor, but felt they were not knowledgeable about the academic integrity process. To ensure their efficacy, campus advisors should be trained by the Office of Student or Academic Affairs (whoever oversees the IHE's academic integrity policy) annually—or, at a minimum—whenever the college or university's academic integrity policy is updated. Experienced advisors would be valuable co-presenters and could serve as a resource for newer campus advisors. Training should include information on each step of the academic integrity process, what

is expected of students throughout the process, accused student rights, and—ideally to be presented by more seasoned campus advisors— common questions or frustrations from students, along with how to best navigate those situations.

Formalized Reintegration Process

Anticipating an event and immediately connecting a person with resources, to the extent possible, helps them manage stress and anxiety typically associated with transitions (Schlossberg, 1981). For this reason, though a suspended student's reintegration process technically begins when they re-enroll, it should begin when they *decide* to re-enroll. Many times, a student knows they want to return to their college or university at the time of their suspension becoming final. Therefore, information on how a student can support themselves through suspension and how they can return to their academic program post-suspension should be given in conjunction with the adjudicator's decision to suspend them.

Transition theory and its accompanying model states that situation, self, support, and strategies all impact how an individual copes with transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). In line with transition theory, how the respondent spent their suspension impacted their situation, support, and sense of self, which all led to them deciding to transition back to RUNB post-suspension. When a student is told they are suspended for academic misconduct, they should be given resources to help them during their time away. This should include recommending they speak with a mental health counselor and connecting them with financial aid if they have concerns regarding the impact suspension has on their financial aid package. Students should also be referred to the Dean of Students if they have concerns regarding their access to basic needs such as a safe living environment and adequate food, during their period of suspension.

When students are suspended for academic misconduct, they should be given specific information on 1) how to re-apply or re-enroll and 2) what is expected of them when they return. The information the respondents of this study received directed them to check their school's re-enrollment policy by contacting an academic advisor or the dean of their academic department. In order to better help the student, the initial letter should include contact information or a link to reenrollment information specific to each student's department or school.

Every respondent was required to complete other sanctions in addition to serving a term of suspension. However, at least one respondent was confused and concerned about whether they successfully fulfilled their sanction requirements. Whenever a student successfully completes a portion of their sanction, or at least when all of their requirements have been met, it should be confirmed in writing to the student. Most databases used to adjudicate and track student conduct cases, such as Maxient database used by RUNB and many other IHEs, make it very easy for administrators to send a pre-written email whenever a student does or does not meet their sanction requirements by the given deadline. This would clear up any confusion as to whether a student satisfied all of their sanction requirements to the office of student conduct's satisfaction.

Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) describe the change after a transition as a "new way of life" (p. 39) and a formalized reintegration process may help to prepare students for their new way of life post-suspension by rebuilding trust and a sense of community. Upon returning to campus, previously suspended students can feel isolated, labeled, and unsure of how to navigate campus life after this transition. Specific areas of campus life that could pose difficulty are re-acclimating to the social aspects of campus, re-acclimating to the academic aspects of campus, such as effective time management,

and having proper support for mental and emotional aspects of this transition. A common theme among all participants was the need for at least one reintegration meeting to help with their transition back to campus.

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs)

IHEs should explore a formalized reintegration model to help students transition back to campus post-suspension and persist until graduation. Suspended students could benefit greatly from having a formalized reintegration process and IHEs should consider using CoSAs as a vessel to do so. The focus of this process is to reintegrate students into their campus communities, in hopes of positively impacting their academic progress and lessening recidivism. More specifically, the CoSA process should hold the offender accountable for their actions, help them repair the harm their actions caused, and support them to academic success (Zinsstag & Keenan, 2017).

When a student is suspended for academic misconduct and given information on how to re-enroll, they should also be given information on how to begin their CoSA process upon returning. The CoSA process should be mandatory and begin as soon as the student re-enrolls to their academic program. Given the mental and emotional toll post-suspension reintegration can have on a student, free and confidential mental health counseling should also be encouraged to each CoSA participant.

Following a traditional CoSA model, a trained facilitator and several volunteers should regularly meet with a previously suspended student. The process would benefit from participation from the faculty member (or TA) for the course in which a student's misconduct occurred. However, if that specific faculty member (or TA) is unavailable or uninterested in participating, the volunteers can be faculty (and/or TAs) from the same department, or even outside of their discipline. When a graduate student is suspended,

their CoSA process should include at least one faculty member and at least one graduate student volunteer within graduate studies and/or a graduate academic department. Due to graduate programs often being smaller and more close-knit, and in an effort to maintain a certain level of privacy, it may be beneficial for any graduate student volunteers to be outside of the suspended student's academic program.

Respondents of this study found interacting with other suspended students to be helpful. While traditional CoSAs center around one offender, a CoSA could also easily and effectively involve multiple students returning from suspension at the same time. The offender(s), volunteers, and trained facilitator(s) would meet regularly, perhaps bi-weekly for one semester or monthly for one full academic year (depending on the facts of the case, the length of the suspension, and individual factors), and discuss how to move forward from the misconduct and persist until graduation. In this context, speaking with peers could help previously suspended students feel less stigmatized and isolated. It may also provide them with a peer network to rely on for emotional support and tips for success as they navigate campus life post-suspension. There are potential drawbacks of this approach from both the staff and student perspectives. First, more participants means more schedules to consider. Scheduling an ongoing CoSA process with one or more facilitators, several volunteers, and multiple students may be difficult. Second, students may feel uncomfortable opening up in front of peers. In order to encourage open and honest dialogue, participants should be told at the start of the CoSA process that the information shared during CoSA meetings is private and not be shared with anyone outside of the group.

Traditional CoSAs occur in person; however, as a result of several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, restorative justice practices have been successfully

completed virtually (Das, Macbeth, & Elsaesser, 2019; Velez, Butler, Hahn, & Latham, 2021). All of the elements of a traditional CoSA process remain, such as asking reflective questions and having each participant speak one at a time. Instead of physically sitting in a circle facing one another, each participant in a virtual process should turn their cameras on so they can be seen by everyone. Since a talking piece cannot be used virtually, participants in a virtual process should keep their microphones muted until it is their time to speak. While it is not always ideal, students can still be held accountable, feel supported, and build community through a virtual CoSA process.

The cost of implementing CoSAs into existing academic integrity processes is minimal and no extra staffing is necessary. Since knowledge of restorative justice is increasing at IHEs, an existing employee may already be trained in or have a professional degree in restorative practices. That person could facilitate the CoSA process for students suspended of academic misconduct. Or, if those duties are outside of their job description, they could serve as a resource and trainer for other individuals looking to facilitate CoSA processes. If no existing employees are trained in RJ, numerous professional organizations or consulting practices offer training of various lengths and for various costs. See, for example: University of San Diego's Center for Restorative Justice (University of San Diego, 2022), the International Institute for Restorative Practices (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2022), the National Center on Restorative Justice (Vermont Law School, 2022), New Zealand's Resolution Institute (Resolution Institute 2022) and the Te Ngāpara Centre for Restorative Practice (Victoria University of Wellington, 2022).

If IHE's are interested in exploring the benefit of incorporating restorative justice into their organization but are not ready to commit to funding formal RJ training, a good starting point is to read *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Colleges & Universities* by Dr. David Karp, listen to podcast episodes centering around restorative practices on college campuses, watch YouTube videos on how RJ has been utilized in higher education settings, or engage in other free forms of education. There are many other free or low-cost resources available to learn more about restorative justice. The Restorative Justice Initiative's (2022) website offers a wide-ranging list of web-based resources, media resources, and books about restorative justice. While the lists are not all-inclusive, they are certainly a good start to increasing knowledge of RJ. College and university administrators interested in RJ resources should also consider joining the "Campus RJ" email listserve, and can do so through the University of San Diego's (2022) website.

While budgeting may not allow for extensive training in restorative practices for everyone involved in a CoSA process, higher education administrators should not facilitate a restorative justice process without prior training from one or more vetted sources. It is critical for staff members to complete appropriate RJ training prior to facilitating their first CoSA. Namely, CoSA facilitators need to stay true to the principles of restorative practices and cannot do so if they do not have the proper training to cultivate their knowledge of RJ. For example, CoSA facilitators need to know to use a talking piece, to hold the meeting in a circle (unless run virtually), and how to successfully tailor the process to the individual needs of the participants. CoSA volunteers, on the other hand, could come from any area within the college or university and, while it may be helpful for them to be trained in restorative practices, it is not required.

Ideally, one or more consistent staff members within the Office of Student Conduct oversee and coordinate the post-suspension CoSA processes at any IHE. The primary responsibilities of this person or persons include recruiting volunteers, retaining volunteers, and coordinating a CoSA process when one or more students return to campus after their disciplinary suspension (due to academic misconduct or otherwise). Some IHEs already have one or more full-time Restorative Justice Coordinators responsible for employing restorative practices on their campus. In those cases, the RJ Coordinator should serve as the CoSA facilitator for returning students suspended for academic misconduct. However, they should do so in collaboration with student conduct staff members.

The effectiveness of this process relies on both support and accountability for the student. Intentionally selecting and retaining those volunteers is crucial. Someone who only believes in punitive processes would not be appropriate—and likely would not volunteer to assist with CoSAs in the first place. Given the results of this study, CoSA volunteers should have broad knowledge of academic advising and a range of campus (perhaps also community) resources, or know how to connect students to other employees with this working knowledge. Most importantly, CoSA volunteers need to feel comfortable listening to a suspended student's story and help to support them the best they can, while also challenging their behavior that violated policy. The process will not be beneficial for the participant(s) if the volunteers are judgmental, dishonest, insincere, and/or disinterested in their success as a student. In a successful CoSA process, the participant(s) will feel heard, recognize their missteps, commit to not repeating their misconduct, and feel supported, which includes being connected to appropriate resources to aid in their success as a student.

The success and effectiveness of a CoSA process is also consistent with the educational mission of student conduct offices. Utilizing restorative practices, including CoSAs, not only allows for a smoother reentry and increases the likelihood of retention. It also teaches students life skills that will be useful beyond graduation. CoSAs encourage students to take accountability for their actions and think about how their behavior impacts a community. It can be difficult for a person of any age and educational level to address conflict, take responsibility for their actions, and actively make amends. Restorative practices, and CoSAs in particular, require that students practice those skills which will then, ideally, make them more productive members of society, which extends beyond the confines of their campus community.

Conclusion

IHEs are consistently exploring new ways to improve student retention. One traditionally understudied population of students are undergraduates and graduates temporarily suspended for academic misconduct, and IHEs do not typically have formal processes to assist with their post-suspension transitions to campus. If left to fend for themselves when returning from a period of suspension, academic integrity violators may decide not to re-enroll or be at higher risk for not persisting to degree. This study explored the phenomenon of suspension reintegration by speaking with students who experienced it firsthand.

Using a phenomenological lens, this study captured the transitional experiences of five students suspended for academic misconduct who chose to return with the intention of completing their degrees. This study's participants spoke of the challenges, pitfalls, and shortcomings of their transitional experiences, with a specific focus on the lack of support they felt they received from the University. Consequently, the students' self-

determination, initiative, and resilience were necessary to transitioning and navigating campus life post-suspension. These findings also lend support to strategies that hold academic integrity violators responsible for their behavior while also supporting them throughout their suspension and reintegration. If students are appropriately challenged and adequately supported, a positive step toward student persistence can be taken.

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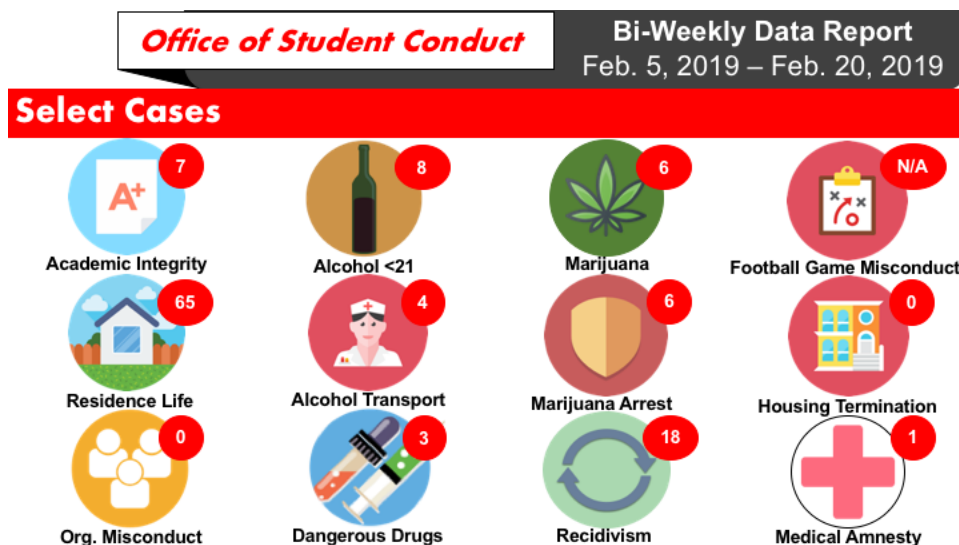
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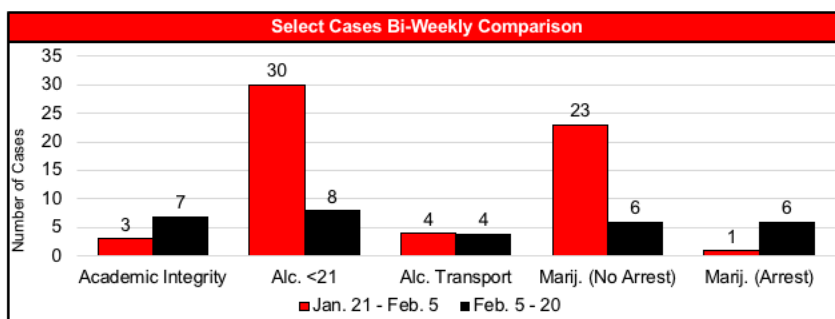
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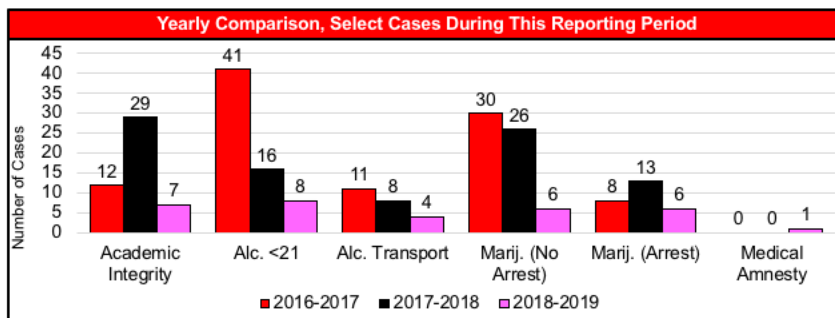
Appendix A: Student Conduct Infographic



Semester Stats



Yearly Stats



*Information presented in this report is based on data available at the time of creation. Information is updated accordingly as new reports arrive to the Office of Student Conduct



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OF NEW JERSEY

Appendix B: Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy



UNIVERSITY POLICY

Policy Name:	Academic Integrity Policy				
Section #:	10.2.13	Section Title:	Academic: Student Academic Regulations & Policies	Formerly Book:	N/A
Approval Authority:	Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs	Adopted:	09/02/2008	Reviewed:	06/02/2020
Responsible Executive:	Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs	Revised:	04/01/2010 Updated administrative offices; 09/01/2011; 09/01/2013; 06/02/2020		
Responsible Office:	Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs	Contact:	svpaa@rutgers.edu		

1. Policy Statement

This Policy defines violations of academic integrity and outlines the potential penalties for such violations and the process for adjudicating alleged violations. This Academic Integrity Policy applies to all schools and academic units of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

2. Reason for Policy

To inform faculty, staff, and students of the University community's standards of academic integrity and the process for adjudicating alleged violations of those standards.

3. Who Should Read This Policy

All members of the Rutgers University community.

4. Resources

[University Policy 10.2.11: Code of Student Conduct](#)

[Procedures for Adjudicating Alleged Academic Integrity Violations](#)

[Procedures for Adjudicating Alleged Violations of Academic Integrity for Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences \(RBHS\) Schools](#)

[Academic Integrity Education Recommendations](#)

5. Definitions

Academic Sabotage - deliberately impeding the academic progress of others. **Cheating** - the use or possession of inappropriate or prohibited materials, information, sources, or aids in any academic exercise. Cheating also includes submitting papers, research results or reports, analyses, and other textual or visual material and media as one's own work when others prepared them.

Fabrication - the invention or falsification of sources, citations, data, or results, and recording or reporting them in any academic exercise.

Facilitation of Dishonesty - deliberately or carelessly allowing one's work to be used by other students without prior approval of the instructor or otherwise aiding others in committing violations of academic integrity.

Plagiarism - the use of another person's words, ideas, images, or results, no matter the form or media, without giving that person appropriate credit.

Violations Involving Potentially Criminal Activity - Violations in this category include theft, fraud, forgery, or distribution of illicitly obtained materials committed as part of an act of academic dishonesty.

6. The Policy

1. Academic Integrity

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational, research, and clinical missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

The principles of academic integrity require that a student:

- make sure that all work submitted in a course, academic research, or

other activity is the student's own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations.

- properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, images, or words of others.
- properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work.
- obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with the student's interpretation or conclusions.
- treat all other students ethically, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This principle requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress.
- uphold the ethical standards and professional code of conduct in the field for which the student is preparing.

Adherence to these principles is necessary to ensure that:

- proper credit for ideas, words, images, results, and other scholarly work, no matter the form or media, is attributed to the appropriate individual(s).
- all student research and work are fairly evaluated, and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others.
- the academic and ethical development of all students is fostered.
- the reputation of the University for integrity, ethics, scholarship, and professionalism is maintained and enhanced.

Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member of the University community, therefore, bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld.

To uphold these principles, the University administration is responsible for:

- working with faculty, staff, and students to foster a strong institutional culture of academic integrity,
- providing effective educational programs that create an understanding of and commitment to academic integrity, and
- establishing equitable and effective procedures to deal with allegations of violations of academic integrity.

All members of the University share the collegial responsibility for educating students about the importance and principles of academic integrity. Faculty members are expected to inform students of the particular requirements regarding academic integrity within their specific courses, to make reasonable efforts to minimize academic dishonesty, and to respond appropriately to violations of academic integrity. Additionally, faculty members are strongly encouraged to provide a statement concerning academic integrity and a link to the Academic Integrity Policy on their course syllabi.

Students are responsible for understanding the principles of academic integrity and abiding by them in all aspects of their work at the University. Students are also encouraged to help educate fellow students about academic integrity and to bring all alleged violations of academic integrity they encounter to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

To create a strong culture that promotes academic integrity, Rutgers has adopted the following honor pledge to be written and signed on examinations and major course assignments submitted for grading: ***On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment).***

Some professional schools may have codes of professional conduct that impose additional requirements such as requiring students to report observed violations of academic integrity by others and to self-report such violations.

The University may require that students:

- write and sign this pledge on examinations and major assignments submitted for grading;
- take an online academic integrity tutorial and pass an online examination on academic integrity in their first semester at Rutgers; and
- affirm that they understand the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy and will abide by it in all of their academic work.

II. Applicability of the Policy

This Academic Integrity Policy applies to all schools and academic units of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Also, most professional schools have codes of professional conduct that students are required to follow. The code of professional conduct for a particular professional school can be found in the student handbook or equivalent document of that school. Each professional school has the responsibility to educate its students about its code of professional conduct and the penalties for violations. Students are responsible for understanding and adhering to the requirements of this policy and the code of professional conduct for the particular professional school in which they are enrolled.

Academic Integrity Violations

A. Types of Violations

This section describes various ways in which the principles of academic integrity can be violated. Examples of each type of violation are provided in this policy. However, neither the types of violations nor the lists of examples are exhaustive.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the use of another person's words, ideas, images, or

results, no matter the form or media, without giving that person appropriate credit. To avoid plagiarism, a student must identify every direct quotation using quotation marks or appropriate indentation and cite both direct quotation and paraphrasing properly according to the accepted format for the particular discipline or as required by the instructor in a course. Some common examples of plagiarism are:

- Copying word for word (i.e. quoting directly) from an oral, printed, or electronic source without proper attribution.
- Paraphrasing without proper attribution, i.e., presenting in one's own words another person's written words or ideas as if they were one's own, regardless of the nature of the assignment.
- Incorporating into one's work graphs, drawings, photographs, diagrams, tables, spreadsheets, computer programs, or other non-textual material from other sources, regardless of format, without proper attribution.

Cheating: Cheating is the use or possession of inappropriate or prohibited materials, information, sources, or aids in any academic exercise. Cheating also includes submitting papers, research results or reports, analyses, and other textual or visual material and media as one's own work when others prepared them. Some common examples are:

- Prohibited collaboration: receiving research, programming, data collection, or analytical assistance from others or working with another student on an assignment where such help is not permitted.
- Copying another student's work or answers on a quiz or examination.
- Using or having access to books, notes, calculators, cell phones, technology, or other prohibited devices or materials during a quiz or examination.
- Submitting the same work or major portions thereof to satisfy the requirements of more than one course without permission from the instructors involved.
- Preprogramming a calculator or other device to contain answers, formulas, or other unauthorized information for use during a quiz or examination.
- Acquiring a copy of an examination from an unauthorized source before the examination.
- Having a substitute take an examination in one's place.
- Submitting a purchased or downloaded term paper or other materials to satisfy a course requirement.
- Submitting as one's own work a term paper or other assignment prepared, in whole or in part, by someone else.

Fabrication: Fabrication is the invention or falsification of sources, citations, data, or results, and recording or reporting them in any academic exercise. Some

examples include the following:

- Citing a source that does not exist.
- Making up or falsifying evidence or data or other source materials.
- Falsifying research papers, reports, or other documents by selectively omitting or altering data that do not support one's conclusions or claimed experimental precision.
- Falsifying patient or client records.
- Falsely documenting experiential and/or internship opportunities that did not occur.
- Providing falsified excuses, documents, or other information to excuse late or missed assignments, or to justify regrading.

Facilitation of Dishonesty: Facilitation of dishonesty is deliberately or carelessly allowing one's work to be used by other students without prior approval of the instructor or otherwise aiding others in committing violations of academic integrity. A student who deliberately facilitates a violation of academic integrity can be subject to the same sanctions as the student who receives the impermissible assistance, even if the facilitator does not benefit personally from the violation. Some examples are:

- Collaborating before a quiz or examination to develop methods of exchanging information.
- Knowingly allowing others to copy answers to complete a quiz or examination or assisting others to do so.
- Distributing an examination from an unauthorized source before the examination.
- Distributing or selling a term paper to other students.
- Taking an examination for another student.
- Allowing other students access to your work in violation of course policies.

Academic Sabotage: Academic sabotage is deliberately impeding the academic progress of others. Some examples are:

- Intentionally destroying or obstructing another student's work.
- Stealing or defacing books, journals, or other library or University materials.
- Altering computer files that contain data, reports, or assignments belonging to another student.
- Removing posted or reserve material or otherwise preventing other students' access to it.
- Misrepresenting the contributions of others in the group to give more credit to one particular student for one's gain.

Violation of Research or Professional Ethics: Violations in this category include both violations of the code of ethics specific to a particular profession and violations of more generally applicable ethical requirements for the acquisition, analysis, and reporting of research data and the preparation and submission of scholarly work for

publication.

Some examples are:

- Violating a canon of the ethical code of the profession for which a student is preparing.
- Using unethical or improper means of acquiring, analyzing, or reporting data in a course research project, a senior thesis project, a master's or doctoral research project, grant-funded research, or research submitted for publication.
- Misuse of grant or institutional funds.
- Violating professional ethics in performing one's duties as a Teaching Assistant or Graduate Assistant.

Violations Involving Potentially Criminal Activity: Violations in this category include theft, fraud, forgery, or distribution of illicitly obtained materials committed as part of an act of academic dishonesty. Some examples are:

- Unauthorized acquisition of an examination from a faculty member or electronic files.
- Selling, buying, or distributing an examination.
- Forging a change-of-grade form.
- Falsifying a University transcript.

B. Levels of Violations

Violations of academic integrity are generally divided into three categories: Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3.

- Level 1 violations may occur as a result of inexperience or lack of malicious intent by the person committing the violation.
- Level 2 violations include misconduct of a more serious character or misconduct that affects a major, significant, or essential portion of work done to meet course requirements. These violations demonstrate premeditation or may have posed harm to others. The student alleged to have committed the violation may have one or more previous violations.
- Level 3 violations represent the most serious breaches of conduct. They may involve a serious violation of a professional code of conduct; may include extreme cases of dishonesty and maliciousness or violations of law; and/or are likely to cause direct harm to others.

The procedures for adjudicating alleged violations of academic integrity are different for Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 violations. The following examples of violations are not exhaustive. Classification of a given violation is heavily dependent on the exact facts and circumstances of the violation as determined by the Academic Integrity Facilitator (who is appointed in each School to investigate and adjudicate alleged

academic integrity) in consultation with the campus Office of Student Conduct or equivalent.

1. *Level 1 Violations*

Level 1 violations are less serious violations of academic integrity. They may occur because of inexperience or lack of understanding of the principles of academic integrity and are often characterized by a relatively low degree of premeditation or planning on the part of the student committing the violation. These violations are generally quite limited in extent, occur on a minor assignment or quiz, or constitute a small portion of a major assignment and/or represent a small percentage of the total course work. Below are a few examples of violations that are most often considered Level 1, at least when committed by an undergraduate student as a first-time offense.

- Plagiarism on a minor assignment or a very limited portion of a major assignment.
- Unpremeditated cheating on a quiz or minor examination.
- Prohibited collaboration with another student on a homework assignment.
- Unauthorized sharing of course materials.
- Citing a source that does not exist or that one has not read on a minor assignment.
- Signing in for another student via attendance sheet or clicker in a course where attendance is graded.

2. *Level 2 Violations*

Level 2 violations are serious violations of academic integrity that affect a more significant portion of the course work compared to Level 1 violations or are an alleged second violation of this policy. Level 2 violations are often characterized by substantial premeditation or planning and clearly dishonest or malicious intent on the part of the student committing the violation. Below are some examples of violations that are most often considered Level 2.

- A second violation.
- Substantial plagiarism on a major assignment.
- Copying or using unauthorized materials, devices, or collaboration on a major exam.
- Making up or falsifying evidence or data or other source materials for a major assignment, including falsification by selectively omitting or altering data that do not support one's claims or conclusions.
- Distribution of course materials for financial gain.
- Facilitating dishonesty by another student on a major exam or assignment.
- Intentionally obstructing another student's work.
- Participating in an organized cheating scheme.

3. *Level 3 Violations*

Level 3 violations are serious breaches of conduct, may involve a serious violation of a professional code of conduct, may include extreme cases of dishonesty and maliciousness, violation of law, and/or are likely to cause direct harm to others. Below are some examples of violations that are most often considered Level 3.

- Any violation involving potentially criminal activity.
- Coordinating an organized cheating scheme.
- Having a substitute take an examination.
- Cheating and/or plagiarism on a capstone project, thesis, or dissertation.
- Intentionally destroying another student's work.
- Falsifying patient or client records.

When a student is accused of one or more Level 3 violations that include alleged violations of law or a professional code of conduct, or when it is reasonable to believe that the student is likely to cause direct harm to others, they may be removed from a course, clinical, or internship setting on an interim basis, with the approval of the dean of the school. The student shall be immediately informed in writing of any interim removal and has the right to appeal to the campus Chief Academic Integrity Officer (who is responsible for administering the Academic Integrity Policy on each campus).

III. Sanctions

Any violation of academic integrity is a serious offense subject to appropriate sanctions or penalties. Violations of academic integrity may result in academic penalties, educational sanctions, and/or disciplinary sanctions, and are not limited to the examples below.

A. Academic Penalties

- Requirement to re-submit the assignment or complete an alternate assignment.
- A grade reduction for assignment or course.
- A failing grade for the assignment.
- A grade of F in the course.
- A grade of XF in the course, where applicable.

B. Educational Sanctions

- An assigned paper or research project related to ethics or academic integrity.
- Participation in a workshop or seminar.
- Service to the University community.

C. Disciplinary Sanctions

- Disciplinary reprimand.
- Disciplinary probation.
- Dismissal from a departmental or school program.
- Denial of access to internships or research programs.
- Loss of appointment to academic positions.
- Loss of departmental/graduate program/school endorsements for internal and external fellowship support and employment opportunities.
- Removal of fellowship or assistantship support.
- Suspension for one or more semesters.
- Requiring a delay in the completion of a professional program.
- Dismissal from a graduate or professional program.
- Expulsion from the University with a permanent notation of disciplinary expulsion on the student's transcript.
- Degree or certificate revocation.

Note: Any of these sanctions may have an impact on financial aid, scholarship, or fellowship eligibility, or scholastic standing.

IV. Policies for Addressing Alleged Violations of Academic Integrity

A. Standard of Proof

The standard of proof in academic integrity cases is by the preponderance of the evidence, which means that the person or hearing panel deciding the case finds that it is more likely than not that the accused student is responsible for the alleged violation.

B. Reporting and Adjudicating Alleged Violations

Procedures for adjudicating alleged violations of academic integrity are described at academicintegrity.rutgers.edu.

C. Withdrawal and Assignment of Grades during the Disciplinary Process

Once a student has been notified of an alleged violation of academic integrity related to a course, the student may not drop the course until the disciplinary process is completed. Students may request permission to withdraw retroactively from the course after the disciplinary process is completed unless the sanction issued includes an F or XF grade in the course, or a C grade for graduate students.

If the student wishes to withdraw from all courses while a case is pending, that request must be approved by the Dean of the school in which the student is enrolled, in consultation with the Academic Integrity Facilitator.

If a faculty member must submit a final course grade before the disciplinary process for an alleged violation of academic integrity is completed, the accused student shall be given a TZ grade or similar (e.g., Incomplete) until the disciplinary process is completed.

D. Removal of an XF Grade

Requests for removal of the X from an XF grade must be submitted in writing to the appropriate Campus Appeals Committee. Such requests will not be considered until at least 18 months from the time of the violation that resulted in the XF. In order for the request to be granted, the student, at a minimum, following the original violation, must have an exemplary record with respect to academic integrity, must have completed a Rutgers academic integrity workshop or seminar, and must satisfactorily answer a required series of essay questions on why the X should be removed. The Campus Appeals Committee shall make the final decision concerning the request. If the request is denied, the student must wait another year to submit another request.

The [Procedures for Adjudicating Alleged Academic Integrity Violations](#), the [Procedures for Adjudicating Alleged Violations of Academic Integrity for RBHS Schools](#), and the [Academic Integrity Education Recommendations](#) can be found at <https://academicaffairs.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy-and-procedures>.

All policies are subject to amendment. Please refer to the Rutgers University Policy Library website (policies.rutgers.edu) for the official, most recent version.

Appendix C: Recruitment Text

Consider participating in the important research study:

“Exploring the Reentry Experience for Suspended Students”

We are seeking participation from people who (1) were suspended from Rutgers New Brunswick via the academic integrity process, and (2) later re-enrolled at Rutgers New Brunswick.

We are interested in learning about your experiences and perspectives regarding the institutional factors that impacted your reentry experience.

By sharing your perspective, you may potentially influence positive change within the Office of Student Conduct at Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

If you are interested in participating or learning more about the study, contact:

Amy Miele (amy.miele@rutgers.edu)

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Tell me how you chose to attend Rutgers New Brunswick.

Could you briefly describe the academic integrity process you went through?

What do you think is the purpose of having suspension as a sanction option?

Describe your reaction when you were told that you were being suspended.

- Did you understand what suspension meant?
- Did you understand what re-enrollment would entail?
- What informational material did you receive regarding your suspension?

Why did you choose to re-enroll to Rutgers New Brunswick?

- What does re-enrollment mean to you?

Did anyone from the University follow up with you either right before or after you returned to Rutgers?

What/who helped most in your re-enrollment and/or reintegration process to this University?

Perceptions of the institution's commitment to reintegrating previously suspended students into the University community

What did you find easy or challenging about re-enrollment? OR What was the best part about returning to Rutgers? AND What are some challenges you faced when you returned to Rutgers?

Do you feel academically successful?

- What/who are most important to your academic success, or trouble, thus far?

Do you know other previously suspended students? Please describe interactions.

How can the University improve their re-enrollment/reintegration process for suspended students?

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Amy Miele, who is a student in the Ph.D. in Higher Education program at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of students who were disciplinarily suspended via the academic integrity process from Rutgers University-New Brunswick and then re-enrolled after their period of suspension was complete.

Approximately 15 subjects will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately 1 hour. Participation in this study will involve one in-person interview.

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes your name, your disciplinary history at Rutgers University, your GPA at the time of any conduct-related incidents, demographic information, and anything stated during the interview.

The researcher, Amy Miele, is also an administrator in the Office of Student Affairs Compliance at Rutgers University, however, she is in the capacity as a student for the purposes of this study. Please understand that your responses will never be shared or disclosed to any person or official in the Office of Student Conduct and your participation, or lack of participation, will have no influence on their school record.

Furthermore, the researcher will keep your information confidential by limiting access to the research data and keeping it on a password protected computer. The researcher, her faculty advisor(s), and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, pseudonyms will be used. All study data will be retained for 6 years after the study is completed.

There may be risks to participation in this study. For instance, you may exhibit distress and/or embarrassment while talking about your past incident of suspension. If you exhibit distress, reveal imminent danger, or report suicidal ideation or depression, the researcher will refer you to Rutgers Counseling Services (CAPS) and will offer to accompany you to CAPS if desired.

The benefits of taking part in this study may include being able to share your story and potentially influencing positive change in the Office of Student Conduct at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact the researcher Amy Miele at:

2 Richardson St
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 848-932-0629
Email: Amy.Miele@rutgers.edu

You may also contact her faculty advisor for this project Dr. Florence A. Hamrick at:

10 Seminary Place; 336 GSE
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 848-932-0844
Email: florence.hamrick@gse.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-2866
Email: human-subjects@ored.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject (Signature) _____ Date

Principal Investigator _____ Date

Appendix F: Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: “Exploring the Reentry Experience for Suspended Students” conducted by Amy Miele. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (sound) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team.

The recording(s) will include your name and anything you say as a part of the interview. If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the recording and record over such information OR you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts.

The recording(s) will be stored on a password protected computer. The recordings will be retained for 6 years after the study is completed.

Your signature on this form grants the researcher Amy Miele permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The researcher will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject (Signature) _____ Date

Principal Investigator _____ Date

Appendix G: IRB Approval

Rutgers eIRB: IRB Approval issued for: Modification 1 for IRB Study #Pro2018002842 by Amy Miele

eIRB@ored.rutgers.edu <eIRB@ored.rutgers.edu>

Wed 3/18/2020 4:03 PM

To: Florence Hamrick <florence.hamrick@gse.rutgers.edu>; amy.miele@rutgers.edu <amy.miele@rutgers.edu>

Cc: Michelle Watkinson <michelle.watkinson@ored.rutgers.edu>



RUTGERS
eIRB

**Arts & Sciences IRB -
New Brunswick**

335 George Street
Suite 3100, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-2866

**Health Sciences IRB -
New Brunswick/Piscataway**

335 George Street
Suite 3100, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-9806

**Health Sciences IRB -
Newark**

65 Bergen Street
Suite 511, 5th Floor
Newark, NJ 07107
Phone: 973-972-3608

DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier:

FWA00003913

IRB Chair Person: Beverly Tepper

IRB Director: Michelle Watkinson

Effective Date: 3/18/2020

Study Expiration Date: 1/6/2021

eIRB Notice of Approval for Modification 1 for IRB Study #Pro2018002842

STUDY PROFILE

Study ID: [Pro2018002842](#)

Title: Exploring the Reentry Experience for Suspended Students

Principal Investigator: [Amy Miele](#)

Study Coordinator: [Amy Miele](#)

Co-Investigator(s): N/A

Other Study Staff: Florence Hamrick

Sponsor: N/A

Approval Cycle: Twelve Months

Risk Determination: Minimal Risk

Device Determination: N/A

Review Type: Expedited

Expedited Category:

(6)
(7)
(mm)

Exempt Category:

N/A