



Custodian Impact on Student Success

by

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Introduction - Focus and Framing

Custodial operations are the key to many things happening in the workplace—health, attendance, performance, morale (Liljenquist, Zhong, & Galinsky, 2010). In the higher education world, custodial services play a small but key part in the story of student success that campuses should be aware of.

Regrettably, the custodian's story is one that is often overlooked and undervalued. Custodians have a unique place on campus and a unique position to assist student success. They work in every place, and they see every face on campus, in the classrooms and hallways of academic buildings, and in the living and lounging areas of the residence halls where those students are more vulnerable and open to and, possibly, in need of influence. It is the custodian's unique role that allows them to be overlooked, as well as place them into a unique position to help students in need.

When speaking of students, there is the greater academic need in which the custodian has their main role. The reference of the custodian's unique role isn't toward assisting all students, or a particular cadre of students. This reference is regarding *a* student, as in singular. These singular instances can have an impact felt beyond the classroom.

Some of the obvious aspects of the custodial story and impact are related to the cleaning of those mentioned areas in the buildings that students use daily. There have been reports and research into how cleaning impacts many things, including attendance, morale, work performance, and health (Campbell & Bigger, 2008) (Liljenquist, Zhong, & Galinsky, 2010) (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). These are obvious, key parts to the custodial story where it relates to student success.

From my observations of being in the cleaning industry almost two decades, custodians have some overlooked and undervalued behaviors that also contribute to student success beyond their cleaning duties. One of the main reasons why these behaviors are overlooked and undervalued is the general perception of cleaning behaviors and the custodians to which they are attached. The goal of this project is to highlight behaviors of custodians that positively impact student success. The following is the problem, purpose, and question used in shaping this research project.

Problem

The role of custodial personnel is often overlooked and undervalued in the equation for student success.

Purpose

Identify behaviors of custodial personnel that have a potential positive impact on student success.

Question

What role behaviors are presented by custodial personnel that impact student success in university settings?

The main purpose of this study is to add to the research that supports understanding the role of the custodian within the higher education setting. This project is looking to complement the research that identifies non-typical (beyond cleaning) role behaviors that custodians perform that impact student success. By identifying and validating those behaviors, the hope is that the perceived role of the custodian can change and therefore receive heightened recognition by

others within the university setting. By identifying those behaviors, appropriate training and professional development can be provided to boost the impact custodians are already giving toward student success.

This is a qualitative research project. Understanding the different approach qualitative research uses versus the more commonly known quantitative research is helpful in grasping the intent behind this research. One of the main differences between the two is how data is collected and, subsequently, analyzed and interpreted. Qualitative focuses more on the how, why, and what of certain behaviors. This data is often collected via focus groups and individual interviews and observations. These methods of collections lead to smaller numbers for data with a deeper understanding of what lead to the observed behavior. Quantitative research is based on sheer numbers and can be counted and measured. Its numbers are used to find averages and patterns, make predictions. The research quantitative research provides can be analyzed using math, algorithms, and statistical tests. Qualitative research has smaller sample sizes is more subjective, narrative, and includes observations while quantitative research's strength comes from large data sets and is considered more objective.

Literature Review

For this project, a literature review was the start, and the base, of the research. A literature review provides a summary of published research, focusing on a specific topic or field of study. The results of the literature review help justify and support the research questions, and the subsequent gaps that have not been fully researched or developed.

Previous studies into custodian behavior in university settings relating to student success are rather limited, though they do exist. There are numerous studies that delve into how cleanliness impacts general organizational performance. There are studies that touch on the support role of the custodian but not many studies investigate the custodian and university student interaction. This lack of research highlights how custodial, a key element within a higher education institution, is perceived and the lack of importance generally placed on it.

There are research projects that investigate blue-collar workers and the associated role they play within an organization. In such projects, the custodian is generally grouped with other manual laborers, such as carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. These studies show how the blue-collar worker, though different than their white-collar colleague, add to and improve the overall performance of the organization (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2014). One of the common thread concepts found in the blue-collar studies is that the custodian's role is one that is often challenging. Their role is sometimes transient as the typical custodial moves from task to task, and at times employer to employer (Ayllon, 2013).

One study of university custodians was able to identify the fear and despair custodians feel while performing their work (Magolda & Delman, Campus custodians in the corporate university: Courage, castes, crossing-borders and critical consciousness, 2014). The report shared how institutional policies shape and sometimes force custodians into roles that consist of being separated from the rest of the campus community, as well as fuel injustice. The study states that the increase of business practices in university settings has discouraged custodians' courageous acts, amplified caste differences, and made it harder for custodians to cross subculture borders (Magolda & Delman, Campus custodians in the corporate university: Courage, castes, crossing-borders and critical consciousness, 2014). This focus on business practices negatively impacts

the university custodian, repeatedly pushing them aside. Often, those means and efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness get in the way of a university's economic justice and equity goals, particularly to undervalued and overlooked custodians (Magolda, 2014).

Several of the studies emphasize the perceived role of the custodian in the campus community. Those perceived role traits of a custodian include being ignored or overlooked, and limiting engagement and contact with others unless there is a business need to reach out (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2014).

One study provided guidance to identifying impactful custodial behaviors as it looked qualitatively into the custodian-student interactions within a university housing setting (Reed, 2015). My study expanded on his studies by taking the research from the residence hall into the classroom, collegiate athletic buildings to determine the resulting custodian interactions with university students. In a key finding, Reed's study clarified the difference between institutionally assigned duties and employee assumed duties. Each set of duties has related tasks that the custodian performs along with the social perception of those tasks.

The institutionally assigned duties focus on the cleaning and maintenance tasks generally associated with being a custodian. These are the tasks the employee was specifically hired to perform and upon which performance reviews can be based. These tasks typically carry with them the negative stigma of cleaning up after others (Magolda & Delman, 2014). Those tasks can also lead to negative self-esteem by those who carry out those tasks (Reed, 2015). It is his assertion that these tasks indirectly support the university mission of student success. While meaningful and helpful to learning, these institutionally assigned tasks are performed away from the intended recipient, the student.

In fact, many universities perform their cleaning during “off hours” when the students are not present. While done for the convenience, safety, and health of both the custodian and the student, the unintended result is a separation of the two groups that can add to the perception of the nameless and faceless custodian (Ghidina, 1992) (Magolda & Delman, 2014). The student, unable to connect the result (cleaning) with the person performing the work (custodian) fails to connect the two, which can lead to a lack of understanding and appreciation of what is being provided (Cowan & Bochantin, 2011). In brief, the separation of the custodian from the customer dehumanizes the custodian and reinforces the negative perception of the custodian, i.e., the worker must be “bad” if they can’t be around me (Magolda & Delman, 2014).

The other set of duties identified by Reed are the employee-assumed duties. Without direction or approval, custodians assume these duties willingly, in service to the student. This perspective is also supported in blue-collar research by Ashforth and Kreiner. It is these duties that generally provide the job satisfaction and positive self-esteem for the custodian (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Such duties assumed by the employee directly impact the university mission of student success. Reed identified these duties as **student mentoring** (role modeling, mentoring, advising) and **support interactions** (comforting, participatory, remembering, nurturing). These duties should be considered allies to education and the educator (Reed, 2015). Here, Reed is not asserting that custodians can take the place of a PhD-level professor, only insisting that each has a needed role in student success.

These employee-assumed duties should be enhanced through additional training that provide broader context and understanding to the custodian. Custodians need to recognize certain red flags that troubled students exhibit. More importantly, custodians need to know what campus resources are available when a student needs help and how to start the process. Engaging the

student life areas of campus as a partner and a resource connects the line between students and help. Doing so raises the value of the custodian on campus and in how they perceive the purpose of their work.

The perceived role of the custodian can aid them in interacting with students. In circumstances of minority students, the custodian becomes a role model on navigating life. The literature shows that minority students are greatly impacted by minority custodians and see them as life mentors. In turn, minority custodians see themselves as an institutional agent that can speak directly to minority students. Often, the two groups come from similar cultural backgrounds and can relate on different levels (Museus & Neville, 2012). Here is an opportunity to partner with student organizations to find additional ways of connecting custodian and student.

Many custodians choose to place themselves in a support role—of emotional or mental support to students. The custodians do this through participating, protecting—or looking out for the students with whom they come into contact, observing and nurturing. These support interactions can range from a custodian showing up at an event (such as athletic, fine arts, or a graduation) a student participates in (Reed, 2015). Sometimes it is the custodian talking with a student before, during, or after a big exam or project—times when a student could use a more familial support system.

In circumstances involving out of state/country students, or just homesickness, custodians become surrogate parents helping to support the student mentally, emotionally, and when needed, challenging them to do their best and carry on through the tougher periods that the process of going to college presents. It is with the custodian that the university can see satisfied the purpose of social justice and life fulfillment for the student (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Such employee-assumed duties can lead to the educational experience being humanized (Museus &

Neville, 2012). These interactions also impact the custodians by providing occupational esteem and great sense of purpose at work for them.

The custodian has two factors that help with impacting student success, perceived role, and access. Compared to other groups on campus (faculty, staff, and even students), the custodian has little to no perceived authority. This lack of authority can assist the custodian when interacting with students, especially those students who are in need mentally and emotionally (Nora & Crisp, 2007). This non-authority allows students to interact, share, and receive without threat or putting up defensive walls. Additionally, the perspective of a custodian is one that is different than what the average student has been exposed to before. The perspective isn't from a peer, from an educator or staff with authority but from someone outside their normal circles. The perspective can provide a fresh approach to something that seems overwhelming and a reminder that, while circumstances can be all consuming, they don't need to be (Healy, Lancaster, Liddell, & Lazarus Stewart, 2012).

The second factor is custodian access. Custodians are in places that most other staff are not found. Yet, these places are common to the students. By being in places that most in authority are not, the custodian is granted more personal access to the student. These common places are just that, common. They are not the typical bastions where authority is housed, the office or the classroom. Often this personal access allows the custodian to bear witness to activities that most highlight a student in need (Magolda, 2014). Overall the custodian can provide an effective impact to student success, beyond that of just cleaning, by being present.

Methodology

The main theory used for this study is Role Theory. In summary, Role Theory states that most of our activity is the acting out of defined roles (i.e., social, cultural, organizational, familial) in which we find ourselves placed (i.e., rich/poor, black/white, custodial/faculty, mother/daughter). Those roles are based on assumed obligations, expectations, and actions that a person is expected to perform (Biddle, 1979). Conformity is meeting those expectations and non-conformity is often met with moral indignation (i.e., “who do they think they are?”). Each role, or social position, comes with its own set of expectations for behavior, for example, doctors heal, custodians clean. So, as we think of roles, it is this social positioning that we are thinking of (Biddle, 1979). It is to this role that we then associate behaviors and assumed identities. These expectations are applied towards an individual or a group of individuals with the same classification, i.e., custodians, or teachers.

As we project those expectations onto others, those expectations are picked up and then acted upon by others. Over time, these shared expectations by the holder and the responder, become part of the social system and set the expected appropriate behavior for a member of that position. Expectations are not neutral regarding what they discuss or reference. Expectations create, anticipate, insist, devalue, prescribe, and describe. Expectations provide a reaction and expose a desire that is not neutral. Expectations reveal the intention of the holder of those expectations (Biddle, 1979).

This interaction between the holder and responder reflects the overall cultural expectation for their respective roles yet there is an allowance for some individual actions if those other actions still fit within an expected context of treatment (Biddle, 1979). Roles are not isolated from the larger social system to which they belong. Typically, differentiation of roles creates the

larger social system as each role has its own set of behaviors to act out and perform. These differentiated roles allow for the greater social system to be effective by creating specialized focus and interdependence on each other through independent tasks and complementary toward a common goal (Biddle, 1979). If enough individuals within a subgroup begin to perform similar behaviors that have not historically been associated with their role, a new role and subgroup are formed, along with new behaviors and expectations. It is from unmet expectations and unexpected behaviors that new expectations are created and new paradigms for interactions are created (Biddle, 1979).

The project itself is a qualitative study incorporating feedback and comments from various user groups on campus. The groups participating were the custodians, students, faculty, and staff. Established questions were used to guide the feedback to ensure similar structure for each interaction. Once the feedback was gathered, it was sorted into themed categories to gauge what type of responses were provided. The categories assisted in identifying the types of behaviors being performed by the custodians that are impacting student success. The questions helped to establish the perceived role of the custodian on campus and to understand how best to affect changing that role's perception. The research was conceived, developed, and conducted during a short window in the first half of a fall semester to meet the requirements of the class.

Position of the Researcher

Action Research calls for the researcher to be unobtrusive as possible to not influence the outcome of the investigation (Stringer, 2014). I have been involved with the field of custodial for almost two decades and have performed cleaning duties myself including being a director of a custodial services department at a Midwestern research university. I am vested and far from

unobtrusive when interacting with custodians and others around campus. I thought I “knew” the answers the custodians were going to give, only to be surprised when they provided their responses. I restrained myself by remaining silent and not asking leading questions or prompting the participant to give responses I felt were appropriate or more accurate. I also found the responses by some of the custodian participants quite interesting and, at times, wondered if they were answering truthfully or because it was something they thought I wanted to hear. Being their supervisor, they could have felt the need to “impress” me or provide me a desired result. That said, I felt most custodians were truthful in their answering of questions from the consistency of the answers being provided by all of them.

Participants and Information Gathering

Custodians

For the project, ten custodians participated. Four of them were selected through intentional selection on my part. Those few were chosen based on personal observation of their student interactions with the hopes of providing meaningful insight into those interactions. These custodians consciously pursued those interactions with the intent of providing support and mentorship. The other custodians were chosen by recommendation of their peers who already participated. The custodians’ demographics included male and female; ages mid-20s through mid-60s; and African American and Caucasian ethnicities participated. The service years of the custodians ranged from three up to forty years of service on campus. These demographics are a good representation of the custodian demographics that make up Custodial Services at my university. The overall mood of the custodians for participating in the study was one of optimism and eagerness, because they seemed to understand the intention of the study and wanted to

contribute to raising the perception and awareness of custodians on campus. The questions used with the custodians along with their responses are included in the appendix. They are structured after the questions used by Reed in his study with the hopes that continuity could be looked at and provide greater validity with additional numbers of participants.

Faculty and Staff

Looking to expand on Reed's study, which only looked at custodian-student interactions in a residence hall setting, there was a desire to add perspectives from other defined groups on campus, two of those groups being the faculty and staff. Five from each group participated for a total of ten. Those who participated from the faculty and staff group were identified from my personal interactions with them around campus. To get the best response and participation rate, I felt it best to reach out to those whom I knew and interacted with on a semi-regular basis.

The demographics of the faculty and staff group included: male and female, administrative support to a manager and a director, full tenured professors, and department heads. I am not aware of the specific service years of the participants and did not ask. From prior conversations, the minimum years of service for the group was 10. The goal of including faculty and staff was to help validate any data provided by the custodians. I was surprised and slightly disappointed by the number of "no responses." A few said no directly, which I appreciated and could understand as this would be in addition to their regular job duties. The questions and their respective responses, along with the request letter used with faculty and staff, can be found in the appendix. The questions are structured like those from Reed's study in the desire of wanting to expand on present research.

Students

Involvement of the students in this study was with similar goals to the faculty and staff involvement and the validation of custodian data. There was a total of five students who participated. Identifying the students to reach out to was initially a tentative process as I don't know many students on a personal basis. The students who participated were students who worked within facilities management in the physical plant building for the various departments including engineering, landscaping, maintenance services, landscape services, and custodial services. The students ranged from sophomores to seniors and included male and female participants.

Research Outcomes and Findings

The research outcomes and findings were provided in four groupings of responses including custodian, student, faculty, and staff. The combined data from the four groups proved helpful in confirming the custodian role as perceived by others on campus. In general, the data from students, faculty, and staff showed that custodians and the work they perform are not typically given much thought, unless there was an immediate cleaning need or facility support function that was expected. Examples include providing supplies (i.e., paper goods, can liners, soap) or cleaning up messes (i.e., spilt drinks, dirty restrooms).

The general interactions between students, staff, and custodians are cordial, professional, and friendly. Occasionally, those interactions reach into some personal information but the general cursory items of weather, weekend activities, and basic family information were the limit of interaction. Although a few staff members made a point to interact with the custodian on a

more personal level, and share genuine concern for them, that seemed be more of the exception than the common practice.

There was a concern about student employees in Facilities Management (FM) being too familiar with custodial, which could lead to interactions with the custodians not representative of the rest of the students. However, this was not the case. Working within FM, though aware of custodial in general, the students had limited to no interactions with custodians in their FM position. Their custodian interactions were relegated to the academic areas where they went to class and studied.

Overall, the student, faculty, and staff interactions with custodians were more business-oriented, and occasionally bordered formality. As the data played out from the student, faculty, and staff groups, minus a few comments, it did not validate the custodian data as much as it did Role Theory and the perceived role of the custodians on campus.

The student, faculty, and staff combined data only touched on the various behaviors custodians employ when interacting with university students. Each group's data shared a little different insight into how the custodian-student interaction plays out. Some of the comments mentioned custodians acting "parental" towards students or looking out for their safety. The comments supported Reed's research by confirming custodians act as **encouragers** and **emotional supporters** for some of the students.

From the custodial data, it is easier to see where and how the custodian-student interaction impacts the student. Since they were the ones performing the behavior, the custodian was the best source for helping to identify behaviors impactful toward student success. Overall, the responses from the custodians fit into and validated the categories (**student mentoring** and

support interactions) of employee-assumed duties mentioned by Reed. To measure the true effect of those interactions and continue the research, more in-depth interviews with those students who were affected needs to take place. With the custodial responses, we are only able to speculate as to the effect their interactions had on the students. Due to the limited time available, this project was unable to conduct more in-depth research.

Speaking to how the custodians' interactions are received among students, the comments from the custodians include:

- custodians feel like counselors with the students
- students seek them out before and after exams
- students seek a custodian out in another building to say hi and visit
- students seek out custodians, so their parents can meet them
- custodians seek students out at alumni events (to visit) and sporting events (to encourage and support during a big game)
- sharing gifts from custodian to student and from student to custodian

Role Theory does have a segment that explains the rationale behind why this apparent discrepancy exists between the custodian data and the faculty, staff, and student data. Role Theory states some of the preconditions for behavioral impact. To be influenced and aware of behavior, it needs to be performed in the presence of others. If "others" do not see or experience directly, they can only guess and assume the behavior and the impact (Biddle, 1979). Because most faculty, staff, and students do not directly take part of these meaningful custodian-student interactions, they either do not have knowledge of the encounter, or if they are aware, they can only speculate as to its impact. A way around this gap in data collection is to obtain names of

students from the custodians themselves. By going directly to the students impacted, true validation can be obtained from those the university is seeking to serve.

Conclusion

Going back to the initial question, “What role behaviors are presented by custodial personnel that impact student success in university settings?” the answer is provided through the employee-assumed duties of **student mentoring** and **support interactions**. These behaviors can have a positive impact on the student and their success.

From my own personal experience or supervising custodians who experienced this, I have seen custodians intervene with students in many situations. There were students who were distressed from general loneliness, homesickness, and stress from exams and research papers. Custodians have been the first to see those extreme situations, discovering and then directing students to recovery assistance from alcohol abuse, helping students suffering through and hiding eating disorders, and even dealing with suicide attempts. Custodians are there to see and know homeless students living in the woods or out of a vehicle while going to class. They are the ones who see students losing their hair due to the stress of exams and projects. With a lack of perceived authority, the custodians can present themselves as approachable. With genuine concern and proper training, they can assist students get the help they need.

Evaluating the results of the study, it is easy to see the opportunities custodians have to positively impact university student success. The custodians’ current role needs to be reassessed. This expected role of “only a cleaner” limits how the custodian can impact. By expanding on the perceived role to make it more acceptable for custodians and students to interact, the university

can provide for a more well-rounded educational experience that prepares students for life outside of, and beyond, the university and not “just a job” following graduation.

One of the requirements to having an impactful custodial staff will be in proper training. Custodians should be trained not just in proper cleaning techniques and procedures but in customer service, recognition of, and response to, concerned students. Like earlier comments, the desire is not in making custodians counselors but in training custodians how to recognize a student in need and then connecting the student in need to campus resources.

Additional qualitative research is recommended to help strengthen the observations made by this study and by Reed’s. Targeting the actual students, the custodians know they have interactions with will help in identifying behaviors that are most impactful as well as the approach that is appropriate. By having specific questions (for all groups involved) directed toward those identified behaviors in the employee-assumed duties, clarification can be gained regarding the extent those behaviors are impactful and which ones can be replicated among a group of custodians. A more neutral interviewer could also assist in gaining more information from the custodians. While there was good intention behind my involvement, my role as director and supervisor of the custodians may have limited how the custodians responded. With a skilled, neutral interviewer, additional insight could be gained.

Additional awareness and challenge to the perceived role of the custodian will also be needed to allow them the best chance to impact students with these new behaviors. This will need to be accomplished by the custodians themselves. While performing the research for this project, I read a book by the Arbinger Institute called *The Outward Mindset*. The book shares that to lead others, it begins by first understanding our role in the problem. If custodians are expected to look beyond the low expectations people have of them and be able to assist students

in need, they need to have the proper awareness of how they participate in those exchanges. By increasing the custodian's awareness and subsequent response, custodians can begin to change the expectations associated with their role on campus. By challenging the standard role expectation with new behaviors, new roles and perceptions can be defined.

Additional support from myself and administration in sharing and promoting these stories will become important to helping the custodians and the rest of campus rewrite those expectations. It is through rewriting these expectations that the university's goal of student success can be implemented beyond the classroom. To help sum up, a comment from a custodian has stuck with me. "I see students every day. Some days they seem lost, and no one sees them, they are nobody. But I am somebody to them and they can be somebody to me."

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Data Collected—Custodian

1. What words come to mind when you think of college students?

- a. Distracted- headphones, smartphones
- b. Personable- some talk, some don't
- c. Intelligent
- d. Leaders of tomorrow
- e. The future
- f. They'll make a big difference and big impact
- g. They look at cleaning people a different way, interact and understand them better
- h. Fun
- i. Messy
- j. Stressed from being a college student
- k. Messy
- l. Playful
- m. Fun
- n. Cranky
- o. Hardworking
- p. Ambitious
- q. Entitled
- r. Learning minds, party nights
- s. Determined
- t. Stressed
- u. Procrastinators

- v. Thinkers
- w. Studious
- x. Driven
- y. Kind
- z. Talented
- aa. Fun
- bb. Crazy
- cc. Adventurous

dd. Summary of comments-

Overall tone – custodians hold positive perspectives about students. With the top words being (in order of use): fun, messy, stressed, big, ambitious, learning, hardworking, entitled, playful, talented, adventurous.

2. What are your impressions of the college students who visit the building(s) in which you work?

- a. Passing through
- b. On a mission- eating, meeting, sitting, reading, going to class
- c. They're all gorgeous and unique, from other countries that I now want to explore and visit because of the way they act. It's like I'm on a cruise ship, very friendly people
- d. Very nice and respectful most of the time
- e. Some are helpful by cleaning up after themselves
- f. Smelly, athletic

- g. They are athletic
- h. Conscientious
- i. Ambitious
- j. Athletic
- k. Busy
- l. They are usually respectful
- m. They all are busy looking at their phone or other electronics or studying
- n. Very friendly and jokesters
- o. Always laughing and having fun

p. Summary of Comments-

Again the comments reflective positive perceptions of the students and what they do and are involved with (activities, athletics).

3. How would you describe the lives of college students?

- a. Busy
- b. Involved a lot with activities and organizations and classes
- c. They struggle. It's hard but they keep persevering because they know it's worth it to receive that piece of paper (diploma). To know they've arrived
- d. No clue
- e. Busy
- f. Hard
- g. Busy
- h. Busy

- i. Crazy
- j. Stressful

k. Summary of Comments- The general impression custodians have of college students is that they are busy with lots of activities and schoolwork.
--

4. When you do interact with college students, what kinds of things do you usually talk about?

- a. Usually focus on classes, major
- b. Work, if they've shared what they do or that they work
- c. Weekend activities
- d. Families
- e. Where they are from
- f. I've been told, "you sound like my dad" because I encourage them and say "you'll get there, be happy, it'll happen, you'll be very successful. You wouldn't be here if you weren't smart. Keep on going. I can see you in your big house, big car. You're not like the rest of them. You can do it. Don't let others discourage you
- g. I think I'm a counselor at times
- h. Sometimes their lives and how hard college can be
- i. The parties or sports they are in
- j. Where they are from
- k. Hockey games

- l. Injuries (custodian works in an athletic building where injuries are a common and frustrating occurrence for students)
- m. Some call me “Mom at college” because I ask how they are doing, keeping up with studies, eating well
- n. Their home life
- o. Directions (to a classroom, restroom, office, another building)
- p. Fielding complaints (about building)
- q. Directions, weather
- r. They ask for directions
- s. Ask how they are doing
- t. When coming and going from practice we talk about hockey

u. Summary of Comments-

The common focus with the custodians’ interactions with the college students is one of small talk- current events, weather- and then starts in on more personal matters of family, hometown, major, how studies are going. There are a few instances of deeper connections being made between the custodian and student. Connections that imply a mentorship, an encourager role and even a parental type role. These behaviors are beyond the typical expectation of a cleaner and show a deeper connection to the purpose of the institution through the desire to help and support.

5. Think of young people, like members of your family, that you know outside of work.

In what ways are today’s college students similar to them and not similar to them?

- a. Similar- entwined with technology
- b. Sim- they grew up with technology
- c. Sim- focused on a few things (school, friends)
- d. Sim- need to watch where they are going, watching phones
- e. Sim- My family all went to college and the kids remind me of them
- f. Sim- I see the students as my family. I see them every day and want them to make it. I'm proud of them
- g. Sim- It's hard. It's a struggle. You've got to really buckle down and not give up
- h. Sim- active
- i. Sim- everything online
- j. Sim- glued to their phone
- k. Sim- they always want instant gratification and always need technology for everything

1. Summary of Comments- similarities

Custodians see many similarities between the people they know and college students from being entwined with technology and smart phone use to general activities and struggles with everyday life.

- m. Dissimilar- not so similar in the fact that their life is planned out for them with schedules. Outside of school, you plan it out for yourself
- n. Dis- many of the young people I now are starting families, living paycheck to paycheck. College students are still supported by their parents
- o. Dis- our family seems to lessen technology

- p. Dis-common sense, smart
- q. Dis- can't think of any

r. Summary of Comments- dissimilar

For the most part, custodians don't see college students as being dissimilar to folks they know. Two comments stand out. The assumed comment about college students being supported by their parents, which is said in a seemingly begrudgingly way and the comment about not planning a schedule for yourself, implying that college students are unable to do so on their own. Both comments speak to the assumption that college students are handed things instead of earned. Possible something that some blue-collar workers may not relate too or see as weak.

6. Are there any college students who know things about your life outside of work- your family, friends, and hobbies? If so, what do they know about you?

- a. Know about my children, where they live, what they do
- b. That I have farm animals- horse, calves, chickens looking to get turkeys
- c. Some college students are easier to talk to than others
- d. A few know things I like to do- hobbies
- e. What I want to do when I retire, travel
- f. Some live down the street and in the same neighborhood as I do. I see them at the store
- g. I had one young lady babysit my kids when they were young
- h. One young man was my mechanic but has since moved away

- i. They know I am a mom, have two children
- j. Go to Florida every year
- k. Ride side by sides (off-road, utility vehicle)
- l. Yes, they know I like to bake and feed them! Haha
- m. No
- n. No
- o. Yes, the kicker on the football team knows me and my family. We talk about his upcoming wedding and family

p. Summary of Comments-

Many interactions focus on small talk. A few interactions build into relationships that reach beyond the normal business interactions and become something more personal. Some comments highlight and show the affection that custodians have for the students.

7. If you didn't interact with college students as much as you do, would you enjoy your job more or less?

- a. Less- that's my work here, I care for the kids. I would want my kids to know that people care, to not feel like everyone is a robot. That we care. Some remind me of my kids who aren't here (physically). I miss them. (*tears up a bit, cries some)
- b. Less- as I work I like to talk and visit with people, makes the day better, faster. When they stop to talk to me I feel acknowledged and appreciated
- c. Less- I like to have some sort of relationship with the students. When we do, they respect us more

- d. Way less- the students are way far the best part
- e. Much less
- f. Less. During the summer when most students are gone, it gets to be too quiet on campus
- g. Less, much less
- h. Students are the best part of the job!

i. Summary of Comments-
 Unanimously, the custodians agree that their job without the students would be less enjoyable.

8. Do you ever hear from students after they leave the building you work in? After the semester ends? After they graduate?

- a. Yes. They will stop by to visit if they are on campus. I've even come to campus (she lives 20 miles out of town) on a weekend just to say hi to one that was visiting campus to see her brother graduate
- b. I text with a few on a regular basis
- c. Yes. One is a Saudi prince and one is from Turkey. The Saudi prince texted me at the end of the semester saying he's heading home and thanking me for making friends with him. His father flew in and wanted to meet with me. I missed him so we skyped. He thanked me for being nice to his son and taking care of him
- d. Yes a few. Some have gotten married, some have babies
- e. Yes. I hear and see a few of them from time to time
- f. Occasionally, not often

- g. No
- h. No, not in this building but in other buildings I have kept touch with a few for a while

i. Summary of Comments-

Expanding on the types of relationships that are built between custodians and students. While not common, it does occur and highlights the impact custodians have into students' lives through emotional and mental support that may not always be present elsewhere.

9. If you could change one thing about college students who visit your building to make your work easier, what would it be?

- a. I don't know
- b. Nothing
- c. If their garbage doesn't make it in the garbage can, pick it up and put it in
- d. To teach them to all wipe their feet when they come into a building
- e. Only that they would be more observant
- f. I would like an announcement made in class regarding sticking gum to desks and chairs. It is really time consuming to remove all of it
- g. Cleaner! Ha ha

h. Summary of Comments-

Relatively few comments towards improving student behavior, from the perspective of the custodian. Not surprisingly, a few comments about wishing the students would pick up after themselves. Yet, the comments weren't said as

if it is a major complaint about the messiness of students and having to clean up after them. The comments are delivered in a way that says that the custodian wishes they would be a bit more responsible and be more adult. Sounds a lot like a parent talking about their child. I think there is also an understanding that if the students picked up and cleaned up after themselves, the custodian could be without work, or at least less work to do.

10. What do you think the college students in your building think of FM custodial staff?

- a. They think we're funny (as in enjoyable, not to laugh at)
- b. That we take care of them
- c. That we do what we're supposed to do, that this is our job of cleaning
- d. Good things. They say thank you for keeping the building clean
- e. They appreciate us. We try our best to keep it (the building) clean
- f. I think, in most part, they like us and notice when are not here
- g. Mostly we are respected but more as elders than custodians
- h. Most appreciated the work we do
- i. They like us
- j. They thank us for cleaning
- k. They are generally polite
- l. I think they like us very well
- m. They love telling us stories about the game and seeing us at the game supporting them

n. Summary of Comments-

The custodians' thoughts on the student's perspective of them are positive.

They feel appreciation and acknowledgment from the students for the work being performed in the buildings. In some cases, there is involvement beyond the casual contact while working in the buildings- e.g., going to games (athletic events to see them perform).

11. Do you think that college students think about the work that you do?

- a. Yes. I've been getting more thank-yous in the last year than in years before
- b. Oh yeah. They acknowledge that students tear up the building. Most work in restaurants and have to clean there or clean their house. They know
- c. Some do, majority of campus, no. Although, people come from all over campus to use our bathrooms, they say they are the cleanest
- d. I think some do
- e. Nope
- f. No
- g. Slightly. If restrooms weren't clean, they would think about us then
- h. They appreciate us every day and always are thanking us
- i. Sometimes offer to help
- j. The building occupants and students treat us like family, always inviting us to eat lunch with them, invite us to be in team pictures and invite us to the team awards banquet night every year. The coach is a real leader and always treats us with such

respect. This makes us feel appreciated and makes us want to do the best we can for them

k. Summary of Comments-

The custodians' perspective on whether students think about cleaning work range from not at all to one of respect and appreciation. The athletes seem to have more involvement with the custodians in the athletic buildings likely due to a couple of reasons: the amount of time spent in the building on a daily basis- both custodians and athletes; coaches teaching and demanding respect for everyone the athletes interact with. Both of those situations lead to custodians wanting to go beyond the normal cleaning expectation which leads to more recognition and awareness and the cycle of positive interactions continues.

12. Has a student ever given you anything? Like a gift or a keepsake? Have you received a gift or a keepsake from a student?

- a. Yes, bakery type items (cookies, muffins, cupcakes, bagels)
- b. No
- c. Yes, a long time ago when I worked in the dorms
- d. No
- e. Yes
- f. No
- g. No
- h. Just selfies and autographs! LOL

i. Summary of Comments-

The responses show that some receiving of gifts and keepsakes from students occur. The gifts are mostly minor, but tokens of appreciation.

13. Do you feel like your supervisors are supportive of you talking with students while you perform your work duties?

- a. Yes
- b. Yes
- c. Not all, mine directly, yes
- d. Yes
- e. Yes
- f. Yes
- g. Yes, I do think so

h. Summary of Comments-

While the focus of the custodian should be on the assigned tasks, there is an awareness that having brief, friendly conversations with students is acceptable and even lightly encouraged by supervision. With most of the supervisors coming from the custodian position, they understand and appreciate how those interactions can feed the enjoyment of the job.

14. What messages, if any, are you sent by supervisors and administrators about keeping costs down?

- a. Don't really get that message, but it is how I think, trying to keep costs down

- b. Some message, regarding trash bags, why not reuse if we're able to
- c. No
- d. None
- e. Not sure
- f. Not much

g. Summary of Comments-

This question did not generate much response or relevant information.

15. How do you stay informed of what students are up to in the building?

- a. I ask the building information desk. Sometimes you can tell from the setup and activities that are already happening when I come in for work
- b. I hear from the building coordinator. She usually lets me know
- c. The building coordinator gives us a building schedule and if needed tells us
- d. We get a sheet from the office (building office) as to what is going on
- e. I ask. I also receive building schedules via email
- f. By observing and asking. Faculty and staff will let us know if anything extra is needed
- g. Coaches and building administrators

h. Summary of Comments-

It would be expected that the custodians would receive the bulk of their information from their supervisors. However, the custodians take the initiative to reach out to building occupants to obtain the needed building activity information.

16. How would you describe your interactions/relationship with FM maintenance staff?

- a. Good
- b. They're good. They do a good job
- c. We all have different ways of doing our job. We try to make it fun for one another
- d. Pretty good
- e. My position is different than most. But I do feel respected for the most part. We also have good communication with our electricians
- f. Good
- g. I think for the most part; I have a good relationship with them

h. Summary of Comments-

The interactions with maintenance staff are decent and not received in a negative manner.

17. How do you feel about students wearing headphones or using smartphones when they walk around?

- a. It is OK to a point but do wish they'd pay a little more attention. Especially in the men's restrooms when I go to clean. I'll knock and announce I'm coming in, get no response and someone is there but can't hear me because of the headphones
- b. I don't care. That's their stuff. Sometimes when I clean the restroom, they don't hear me announce that I'm coming in
- c. Don't care. It has become a huge part of what they do in today's world, so it's not a big deal

- d. Doesn't bother me
- e. It's a bad practice as it can be dangerous
- f. Need to keep one ear open
- g. Personally, I used to dislike it, but have come accustomed to them wearing them.

It doesn't bother me

- h. I think it can be dangerous sometimes but for the most part I don't mind. It is harder to communicate with them when they do

i. Summary of Comments-

Most custodians have become accustomed to the student's wearing headphones and being immersed in their phones. There were quite a few comments that showed a concern for the safety of the students as they seemed to be unaware of their environment and sometimes the job the custodians needed to perform. The concern was often shared in a parental type of way and not done in a mocking manner.

18. Do you ever feel judged by friends/family for being a custodian? By students?

- a. No, I haven't encountered it from my family or the students
- b. No. I'm working, getting a paycheck. It's an honest living. I'm not hooking (prostitute)
- c. Family judges if I don't give them any money
- d. No
- e. No because I take pride in myself and what I do

- f. Friends- I'm judged by some, same with family. Student's somewhat judged but getting better than it was
- g. Sometimes yes- especially from some employees around campus. Example: was in the store and passed by a retired maintenance person. He turned his nose as soon as he saw my custodial uniform
- h. My friends think I'm a little crazy for wanting to work the shift, 5am-1:30pm. Students don't ever judge that I can sense
- i. No. I wouldn't care if they did. This job doesn't define who I am or my success in life. The only time I feel judged is by our own management team

j. Summary of comments

There were mixed responses about feeling judged for being a custodian. Generally, the custodians did not feel judgment from students. Many of the responses showed the custodians taking pride in their job choice and comparing it less respectful manners of earning money- i.e., hooking- and even commenting that family asks for the money being earned.

19. Do you feel like your supervisors are open to feedback about the ways that your job could be improved? Can you think of an example when a supervisor did listen to your feedback? A time when they didn't listen to your feedback?

- a. Yes
- b. Yes, very good about listening
- c. Open, no. demanding how it will be done, yes

- d. My supervisor listens to us but it all depends on what comes down from above him as to what he can listen to. I feel he is the one working our buildings so he should have the right to manage us the way he feels is best
- e. They listen to feedback but that is it. We work as we are trained to do the job. The university wants us to think our feedback is important, but the final decision is not ours
- f. I think the supervisors are very open for the most part. We always tell them about upcoming events in our area. One time I called the office because our supervisor was out, to tell them about a huge skate tournament with over 20 schools and needed the bleachers done but got a lot of hassle getting help

g. Summary of Comments-

In general, the custodian feels listened to by their supervision. That said, the custodians feel that there are times supervision will listen to feedback and not change. Reasoning behind the decision, or lack of decision, isn't communicated back to the custodian.

20. Comments

- a. Glad that I had this opportunity to meet people from all over the country, the world. Helps me appreciate what I have and what others have. I'm honored to serve them. It's a good thing
- b. Gotta be a people person and have a good attitude to be a custodian

c. These comments were received after the end of the questions and were not in direct response to a question.

d. Overall summary of custodians' comments on college students

In general, the custodians hold the students in a positive light. They recognize the endeavor the students have undertaken by going to college. The students are recognized for doing something more, with the hope of gaining something more. The custodians feel appreciated, acknowledged by the students. Most importantly, the custodians feel that they are there to help and support the students in their journey. The cleaning is viewed just a small portion of the equation, but an important one. The custodians often see the students as if they are their own children, or an extension of their family. Some custodians work on building relationships, offering advice and guidance, and providing needed mental and emotional support, especially to those who are from out of state or international.

Guiding Interview Questions—Student

1. What words come to mind when you think of custodian?

- a. Caretakers of the buildings
- b. Cleaning crew
- c. Maintain the environment of a specific building or something
- d. Cleaner
- e. Employee
- f. Helpful
- g. Quiet
- h. Service
- i. Maintenance
- j. Cleaning
- k. Cleaning
- l. Friendly
- m. Productive

n. Summary of Comments-

The student responses seem to show that student perspectives of custodian fit into the expected role of the custodian- cleaning, cleaner, employee, productive. Some responses showed a more personal take on the custodian as a person and not just a doer of tasks. These words were helpful, quiet, service, friendly.

2. What are your impressions of the custodians who clean the building(s) in which you visit- attend class/meetings, not residential areas?

- a. Positive. I spend a lot of time in north Korhman Hall and have interacted with the custodian who cleans my studio
- b. Even though I do not know how much they receive (pay), I feel like they receive very little for so much work they do
- c. They all seem pleasant
- d. I mostly see them just quietly working but sometimes I see friendly interactions with students
- e. I don't have an impression
- f. Some impressions, you can tell that some are very friendly and have had conversations. But some can have mean demeanor

g. Summary of Comments-

The students hold positive views of the custodians. The students show some awareness of the potential little pay for the work that is done.

3. How would you describe the lives of custodians?

- a. Normal. Come to work then go home
- b. I would say they have to work very hard to receive the amount of payment sufficient to take care of their families
- c. Likely average. Not especially different than the lives of other people in other professions. Though they live on different schedules and work can be physically tiring

- d. Monotonous
- e. I would describe the lives of custodians as the everyday American trying to work and provide for their families

f. Summary of Comments-

The students' comments hold a relatively neutral view on the lives of the custodians with some comments looking beyond the work life to a personal and home life and seeing them as not much different than the one their families have. One comment does speak to their work lives being monotonous with the everyday routine being the same.

4. When you do interact with custodians, what kinds of things do you usually talk about?

- a. Sometimes quick, small talk but mostly about something related to custodial work
- b. I have not interacted much with them. Usually, I just greet them when I see them
- c. Small talk- hi, how are you?
- d. We just greet, say hello. Not so much interaction
- e. I mostly interact with the female custodians and sometimes talk about our days or even hair

f. Summary of Comments-

The students' perspective on their interactions with custodians is one of

being personable and friendly. One student says that her and the custodian discuss hair.

5. Think of people, such as members of your family, that you know outside of work. In what ways are custodians similar to them and not similar to them?

- a. Similar- in ways they work, same shift schedule
- b. Sim- very hard working
- c. Sim- they hold a job
- d. Sim- they work with coworkers
- e. Sim- have a life outside of work
- f. Sim- they have a regular life after work.
- g. Sim- just by simply providing for their family, just like my family would

h. Summary of Comments-

Again, the students' comments hold a relatively neutral view on the lives of the custodians with some comments looking beyond the work life to a personal and home life and seeing them as not much different than the one their families have.

- i. Dissimilar- by what they do for a living
- j. Dis- unlike people I know, custodians have a very physical job, unusual work hours
- k. Dis- in a way they are not doing the same job

- l. Dis- the responsibilities they have would be different
- m. Dis- the differ in the tasks they do

n. Summary of Comments-

The role of the custodian is addressed more in these comments. Where the similarities focused on the custodian as a person and life away. The comments on dissimilarity homed in on the work the custodian performs and how that is different than what they know or are familiar with.

6. Are there any custodians who know things about your life outside of work- your family, friends, and hobbies? If so, what do they know about you?

- a. I do not know anything about custodians' lives after work
- b. None
- c. No, not in the classroom buildings. But I work in the physical plant and the custodians know about- my family, food I like, travel, we have some common topics between us
- d. Yes, they know where I am from and what I do- work and in college

e. Summary of Comments-

The student responses mirror closely the content of the conversations. These students share that knowledge about personal items aren't generally known by custodians.

**7. Do you ever hear from custodians after you leave the building they work in?
After the semester ends?**

- a. No
- b. Usually, some of them work during the night, especially in computer labs and in some buildings on campus
- c. No
- d. No
- e. No, I do not

f. Summary of Comments-

The interactions between students and custodians are left to the buildings in which the custodians work. Interactions occurring outside those buildings aren't occurring.

8. What do you think the college students think of custodial staff?

- a. Most students I would say would not have an opinion
- b. I do not see a lot of interaction
- c. I think the students would define it (custodian work) as an unskilled labor
- d. I think the students' views are probably a mixed bag. Some likely think of them as helpful assets that maintain the campus and respect them. Others might have preconceived notions about them that aren't as positive
- e. I can't think of anything
- f. I think the majority of the college students do not pay attention to them

g. Summary of Comments-

Even when asked directly, the students' responses show the lack of general

awareness or given thought toward custodial staff. The custodians are part of the buildings and environment.

9. Do you think that college students think about the work that custodians do?

- a. Most, I would say do not think about custodian work
- b. Very few are thoughtful of that
- c. I think some might, especially if they witness the custodian doing the work or taking care of something gross
- d. No
- e. College students don't think about the work they do

f. Summary of Comments-

Again, the lack of general awareness and given thought toward custodians is acknowledged.

10. Has a student ever given a custodian anything? Like a gift or a keepsake? Have you received a gift or a keepsake from a custodian?

- a. I have not, nor have I heard of others giving or receiving things from a custodian
- b. No
- c. Not that I'm aware of
- d. No. I haven't seen that or haven't received a gift
- e. I haven't heard or witnessed a student give a custodian anything. I personally received a gift from a custodian but that was back in high school

f. Summary of Comments-

The interactions between college student and custodian are left to small talk and does not go into the realm gift giving and receiving.

11. Do you ever feel custodians are judged by students?

- a. Sure, I think with anything comes stereotyping certain job fields. Ultimately, I feel it comes down to the lack of respect or understanding students might have towards the job custodians do
- b. Yes. Sometimes I do feel like they are being judged by students
- c. I'm sure students do judge them, both positively and negatively. Though there's likely a larger group of students that don't think about them at all
- d. No. I just feel there's no interaction. So if there's no interaction, then no judgment.
- e. Yes, I do. I think students think custodians are less than them because of their work

f. Summary of Comments-

Lack of general awareness or given thought continues in the students' perception about custodians being judged by students. Most admit that they believe some judgment is occurring but not something they've witnessed. Even the assumption that because there are no interactions witnessed, no judgment has occurred demonstrates that one is necessitated on the other.

Guiding Interview Questions—Staff

1. What words come to mind when you think of custodian?

- a. Stewardship of facility/building, keeper of the keys
- b. General awareness
- c. Support
- d. Primary support personnel
- e. Friendly
- f. Quiet
- g. High school grad
- h. Under appreciated
- i. Taken for granted
- j. Helper
- k. Cleaning
- l. Vern and Charlie (custodians)- they are the stewards of our interior space, just as landscape services takes care of our outdoor space
- m. Folks that are hired to come in and help clean and handle daily cleaning for buildings on campus.

n. Summary of Comments-

The staff's thoughts towards custodians exhibit some attributes typically associated with the role of the custodian. One comment mentions the custodians by name, wanting to give them credit for the work they perform. Some of the comments seem to elevate the role of the custodian beyond just "cleaner" to one of steward, typically reserved for one that is more familial and known.

2. What are your impressions of the custodians who clean the building(s) in which you work and attend meetings, not residential areas?

- a. Variables constantly change
- b. They do a great job
- c. Big challenge and huge scope of work
- d. Unforgiving and constant rework
- e. Work is often seen as lowly work
- f. Extremely polite
- g. Nice and hard working
- h. Wanting to work with us on different cleaning issues to help improve the building
- i. Our custodians are such great people. So friendly and wanting to do a good job.
Positive and caring
- j. A good impression for me is seeing them when I come into the buildings. I think it is important to have them out and working in bigger areas like Sangren to show people they are working and cleaning at all times. That they should not all break at the same time, so that it leaves people available and assessable if needed

k. Summary of Comments-

The general impression of the known custodian(s) that work in the staff's building acknowledges not just the cleaning but the intention of service and good will behind the cleaning. The hard, physical work of the custodian is recognized.

3. How would you describe the lives of custodians?

- a. Potentially unforgiving, in regard to work tasks- bio, hazards, unsanitary
- b. It is honorable
- c. The role is significant and beyond what we realize
- d. Could be defined any number of ways
- e. Tired and hurried
- f. Hard working
- g. May need to work more than one job
- h. I cannot guess how they would be different from mine—we are all people and humans doing our jobs to the best of our abilities. I would imagine that they probably have less respect during the workday from most executives- and some faculty, student and staff as well—because of the common misperception that custodians are less educated and not qualified for other kinds of employment
- i. I would assume they have lives just like most of us
- j. I don't look at them any different than I am when it comes to how they live or what their life is like

k. Summary of Comments-

When looking at the work life of a custodian, the recognition of the physical demands is very present. There is some acknowledgment about the low pay and potential for low respect. Yet, one comment calls out the honor of the work in service to others.

4. When you do interact with custodians, what kinds of things do you usually talk about?

- a. More personal- how's your day?
- b. Will engage about tasks- how is work?
- c. See them as colleague and coworker
- d. Basic- "hellos", "how is your day going?" "are you doing anything fun for the holiday/weekend?" "how is your baby/child/grandchildren, garden, second job?"
- e. I ask them how their families are. Vern and I chat about nerd things—Marvel comics, movies, and video games
- f. I make a point every day, if I see the staff, to always say hello and ask if they had a good weekend
- g. If I know someone has been gone awhile and I see them I make sure they are okay and welcome them back
- h. I do not get a lot of time to socialize in the work that I do and the demands I have on my job

i. Summary of Comments-

The conversations between staff and custodian typically revolve around small talk or service needs of staff as customer. Some staff do make a point of intentionally acknowledging the custodians out of professional courtesy and respect.

5. Think of people, like members of your family, that you know outside of work. In what ways are custodians similar to them and not similar to them?

- a. Similar- the tasks exist at home, is the primary similarity. We are all housekeepers and cleaners of our own environment
- b. Sim- need a job
- c. Sim- don't necessarily like the job they have but need to pay bills
- d. Sim- need benefits
- e. Sim- have a family that they care for and love
- f. Sim- have a life outside work
- g. Sim- plan for the future, vacations, education, retirement, normal life stresses
- h. Sim- just live the people I see around me all day
- i. Sim- we are all custodians outside of work, if you think about it. I have friends that are stay-at-home and are in charge of their family and their home. We all have homes and yards or even apartments to take care of; messes to clean up, day-to-day stuff that they do both at work and at home

j. Summary of Comments-

The similarity between staff and custodian focuses on the need for a job- even one that they don't like- to provide for a family. Most staff can look at custodians' lives as similar to their own.

- k. Dissimilar- not similar would be having different hobbies, they may not like the same thing as the other person
- l. Dis- the custodians are more sincere than those with PhDs

- m. Dis- level of education
- n. Dis- level, or amount, of finances/economics, I can't really say
- o. Dis- the amount of time focused on cleaning tasks- custodians do the tasks all day, where I might just clean Saturday morning at home

p. Summary of Comments-

Here, some of the dissimilarities look at the individual – i.e., having different hobbies. While some of the comments are looking at the attributes of the general role of the custodian – i.e., education level, pay and finances.

6. Are there any custodians who know things about your life outside of work- your family, friends, and hobbies? If so, what do they know about you?

- a. Yes, they know about my passion for music and social justice
- b. Yes, that I have children
- c. I like to bike, swim, be on the water
- d. Some know where I live
- e. That I have a dog
- f. Where I used to work
- g. They know about my son, movies we've seen, all kinds of things. I love our custodial team. I miss Jody (custodian who transferred to another zone) by the way!!
- h. I have a couple of them that I know more on a personal level. They know how many kids I have, how many times I have been married, my ups and downs. They

are my friends that I can talk to about those types of things, and they can talk to me

i. Summary of Comments-

The staff's interactions with custodians show a willingness of most staff to share and interact on a personal level. Some sharing some rudimentary elements of number of children and animals to the number of divorces and the ups and downs the staff member experiences.

7. Do you ever hear from custodians after you leave the building they work in?

- a. Almost never but I tend to keep work and personal life separate
- b. Yes, Frank made me some awesome chocolate cookies when I first moved into my new office. He stopped by to congratulate me
- c. No. I don't hang out with people from work typically. But they have been invited to our staff functions
- d. Yes, in fact, one of them just came to see me the other day. She was in the building and came out of her way to find me. We spend a few minutes together and I told her that she made my day

e. Summary of Comments-

Here the staff seem to treat custodians as every other coworker. A couple comments show that staff view custodians as closer "work friends" than the typical coworker. One staff member received cookies, one custodian went out of her way to say "hello" to a staff member.

8. What do you think the college students think of custodial staff?

- a. Deep down there is a primary appreciation. In general, students see custodians as lower level
- b. The students can be inconsiderate, create messes knowing that custodians will clean it up
- c. The students' awareness of the custodian's position is not always positive
- d. Some are compassionate and realize they (students) need to pick up after themselves. Others are not so nice and feel it's the custodian's job to pick up after them
- e. Sadly, I think many college students think custodial staff is "the help" or someone who is beneath them in status and education. I think that most students in our office have a kinder view because we treat custodians as another staff person
- f. I think some of them respect them and others look down on them
- g. I have no problem putting those students in their place (in a nice way) if I hear them tell me that it is their (custodian) job to pick up after them. I tell them what I tell my own kids. No one cleans up after you; you take care of your mess, no matter where you are

h. Summary of Comments-

The staff's comments on the student's thoughts concerning custodians tend to range toward a low level of judgment to the students showing proper respect to the willingness of a staff member to put a student in their place should they disrespect a custodian.

9. Do you think that college students think about the work that custodians do?

- a. Not generally
- b. Basic awareness that the cleaning and the work happen
- c. More expectation that the work happens, not as much appreciation or understanding of the scope of training for the work to occur- biohazard, disinfection, chemical awareness
- d. Not really
- e. I would venture to guess that most students think custodial work is dirty and for those that cannot do better. But I don't think that is all students... I can only generalize based on commonly held assumptions. I have no data to support this
- f. I do think some of them do. I work with many student groups that are using this building and I make sure they contact custodial for brute barrels and tell them what they need to clean up after an event
- g. They (custodians) are all very good about saying no problem and they know they need to do it. Therefore, I think for the most part they (students) do appreciate them (custodians)

h. Summary of Comments-

Generally there is a perception that students don't think about the work custodians perform. If the work is thought about it, it is thought about as being low paid dirty work. One staff member even acknowledged that his thoughts are based on broad assumptions.

10. Do you think that faculty and staff think about the work that custodians do?

- a. Yes, more awareness than students
- b. General assumption is that the custodians are here to do work for us
- c. Some see custodian as here to help out
- d. I think a lot of staff/faculty are lazy and don't want to do basic things like emptying their own recycle bin. They seem to feel entitled. I believe there are some that do not treat the custodial staff with basic respect
- e. As I said before, I imagine there is a common misperception that custodians are less educated and not qualified for other kinds of employment. I think specifically in academia respect is associated with the type of degree one has. I know that this is often the case in our office—although, it would be hotly denied if anyone said that out loud. There is a level of hypocrisy that I cannot get my own head around with treatment of employees in my department related to “walking your talk” when it comes to issues of ethics and social justice
- f. I think they do
- g. I (as a building coordinator) know I have had some run around with few of the faculty that do not feel they should have to clean up and that it's Custodial's job
- h. You have a lot in this building that respect them very much and appreciate how nice they care for the building

i. Summary of Comments-

Staff's thoughts concerning custodians range from an awareness of their presence to an assumption that custodians are present to clean up after them. Some staff work to gain the cooperation of custodial staff to help maintain the

buildings. One commenter vented some frustration about the perception that academia is inclusive and treats all people as individuals, yet academia holds onto the perceived role of custodians as having less education and less qualifications than other jobs at the university.

11. Has a student ever given a custodian anything? Like a gift or a keepsake? Have you received a gift or a keepsake from a custodian?

- a. Pretty sure but not aware of the specifics (re student giving a custodian a gift)
- b. I have seen custodians give gifts to some staff and vice-versa
- c. There seems to be a gift-giving protocol- where it is more typical to give “up” the food chain but not down the food chain
- d. Yes, cookies from Frank (custodian)
- e. Yes, a picture from a custodial supervisor
- f. Our custodian and one of our students have definitely exchanged gifts. I think Charlie (custodian) feels like Dave (student) is a son to him. I know Charlie feels paternal toward some students on campus
- g. I have never seen a student give them (custodians) anything
- h. I can tell you that staff, as well as I, have given them gifts
- i. The custodians are included in our (college’s) potlucks
- j. I have received several things over the years from custodial staff. I even had a couple of them attend my baby shower at work that was in the old building

k. Summary of Comments-

In general, there are some guesses that gifts are exchanged from custodian to student and vice-versa. A few instances where the exchange has been observed or shared, often around potlucks or holiday parties. It was interesting that one of the staff mentions an unmentioned gift-giving protocol where it is accepted and expected (to a degree) of gifts (cards) being giving “up” the food chain supervisors, others perceived at a higher societal status, but it isn’t as accepted for items to be given down the chain. The comment reinforces the held perceptions about how roles play out within various cultures.

The comments about a custodian feeling parental towards students and giving one a gift highlights the care and concern custodians can have toward students. It also provides insight into how custodians perceive themselves and their work in relation to students.

12. How would you describe your interactions/relationship with custodial staff?

- a. Pretty positive, constructive in some ways
- b. Hope to be a resource to them and an ally
- c. Work to be pleasant with them, helpful, offer assistance
- d. Positive
- e. They (custodians) know a lot and can help you when you need it
- f. It’s a working relationship, built on trust and respect
- g. I like to chat and make jokes with them because I imagine they probably get the cold shoulder in many places on campus

- h. I think I have a good relationship with the custodial staff
- i. I get upset when I have to talk to a supervisor about a complaint and it is taken back in the wrong manner
- j. I think they feel they can talk to me and trust me. I always listen to them and know there are two sides to every story

k. Summary of Comments-

By most staff, there is a true appreciation for the work custodians perform and how they perform it. The staff describe their custodian interactions in positive and supportive manner. One commenter enters the custodian interactions with the intention of being pleasant and bringing some humor to what they perceive to be a possibly humorless position.

13. Do you ever feel custodians are judged by students?

- a. Yes, more general and generic. This person is a custodian and only a custodian
- b. Not seen as an equal partner on campus to help accomplish learning and promote education
- c. Probably
- d. Yes. However, I have not witnessed this personally
- e. Unfortunately, yes. I feel they can be badly judges by all of us at times. I think we all deal with that no matter what our job involves
- f. First impression, especially how someone looks or what they are doing, can make people think less of someone

- g. People need to take the time and get to know someone, because sometimes after you have talked to that person, you think, wow, this person is not at all what I thought

h. Summary of Comments-

The staff see the custodians being judged by students. Though most have not witnessed it, they have a sense that it is occurring in general and, mostly, unintentional ways—this person is a custodian and only a custodian. There is also acknowledgment that judgment occurs no matter the position or job.

14. Additional comments

- a. If the president was gone for 4 weeks, no one would likely know. No custodians for a day, everyone knows. Everyone is impacted by them and the work they do
- b. Custodians have a great presence on campus, they are the only ones who go everywhere on a regular basis

c. Summary of Comments-

The additional comments were not provided to any specific question and added as extra comments. They are included because they provide additional insight.

The importance of the work is highlighted with these comments. The first because it speaks to the daily reliance the campus community has on the work the custodians perform and what would occur should it not be performed. The other comment speaks to the omnipresence of the custodians as they are everywhere.

Guiding Interview Questions—Faculty

1. What words come to mind when you think of custodian?

- a. Person with hopes, dreams and challenges, just like me
- b. Critical to a pleasant and effective working environment
- c. Hard working
- d. Probably under-compensated
- e. Very good souls whose work often goes unrecognized
- f. Unappreciated
- g. Often unnoticed
- h. Individuals who keep our buildings clean

i. Summary of Comments-

The faculty comments about custodians range from the general “those who clean” to identifying with them as an individual. The work they perform is associated with the initial thoughts.

2. What are your impressions of the custodians who clean the building(s) in which you work and attend meetings, not residential areas?

- a. Kind
- b. Dedicated staff with great attention to detail
- c. Deep commitment to the university and our work
- d. Helpful
- e. Engaging
- f. Wanting to do what they can to make our workspaces work for us

- g. Friendly
- h. Hardworking
- i. Masters at being invisible
- j. Typically, don't talk unless spoken to first
- k. Professional
- l. Thoughtful
- m. Very pleasant and helpful individuals

n. Summary of Comments-

The faculty seem to recognize the effort custodians put forth in their expected cleaning tasks and add that the custodians look to go above and beyond just the cleaning to being pleasant and helpful while cleaning.

3. How would you describe the lives of custodians?

- a. First, I have to admit that I do not have close friends who are custodians. Based on inviting the custodians of our building to office events, I imagine they are filled with happiness, sadness, love, loss, challenges, etc., just like anyone else. That said, I suspect that they are ignored a lot around campus. And I imagine this poses all sorts of challenges, as they contribute in so many important and positive ways to delivering a good experience for our students
- b. I really don't have much experience with this. I know they work hard
- c. Probably a bit challenged in that many people don't always notice or appreciate the work that they do
- d. Probably overlooked and undervalued

e. Summary of Comments-

The faculty's responses to the lives of custodian reveal that the custodians aren't thought of on a regular basis as there is a lot of guessing into what they do and how they feel.

4. When you do interact with custodians, what kinds of things do you usually talk about?

- a. Current events, state of the world
- b. Mentoring young people
- c. Their families
- d. Problems that they have noticed, problems that we have noticed
- e. Requests for assistance
- f. I always greet them when I see them
- g. The weather
- h. Our children/families
- i. Recent events on the news
- j. Holiday plans
- k. I always greet individuals with custodial services when I see them and wish them a good day. At times, I have requested help with acquiring cleaning materials for my lab

l. Summary of Comments-

The faculty's conversations with custodians hover around the general small talk typically associated with the office environment. Some individuals do converse

about more personal matters and several of the faculty do make a point to greet the custodians and say hello when they are noticed.

5. Think of people, such as members of your family, that you know outside of work. In what ways are custodians similar to them and not similar to them?

- a. Similar- they are on our team, what they do is important. I treat them as my colleagues in the department
- b. Sim- All ways (respondent didn't clarify but assumed answer is referencing custodians being similar to everyone else!)
- c. Sim- helpful
- d. Sim- courteous
- e. Sim- always seems interested
- f. Sim- We are all humans and should be valued as humans. I used to talk with the lead of custodian in Haenicke Hall, Mike, on a regular basis

g. Summary of Comments-
the perceived similarities between custodians the people faculty are familiar with are general and basic assumptions, who we/they are- we are all humans, they are on our team- and the attitude and performance towards others- helpful, courteous.

- h. Dissimilar- custodians are a bit more shy

i. Summary of Comments-
The faculty did not respond much to this question, except for the one comment

about custodians being shy. The lack of response could likely be interpreted in several different directions. I am choosing not to provide an interpretation without further research or insight into their comments.

6. Are there any custodians who know things about your life outside of work- your family, friends, and hobbies? If so, what do they know about you?

- a. As much as any other staff
- b. I think a few know that I am an astronomer, which is a bit unusual and I guess intrinsically interesting to them
- c. That I am a person of faith
- d. That I have 3 children
- e. Not any more than when compared to other coworkers

f. Summary of Comments-
The faculty will share some personal items with the custodians- family, hobbies. This does not seem to any different than other coworker situations.

7. Do you ever hear from custodians after you leave the building they work in?

- a. Rarely—when they come to office events or when I ride my bike by Charlie’s (a custodian) house and he is out, then I say “hi”
- b. No, other than from their supervisor on email (work related)
- c. Yes, I ran into a custodian this fall who used to work in my building. She asked about my daughter who graduated from in 2012. She even remembered her name. I was quite moved! They remember better than I do

- d. As building coordinator, I will frequently get emails from individuals in custodial services

e. Summary of Comments-

Here the answers show that the typical contact is relatively limited for after work hours, or if a custodian relocates to another building on campus. In one of the cases, the faculty member ran into a custodian outside of work and was surprised and pleased by how much the custodian remembered from the conversations they shared from years prior.

8. What do you think the college students think of custodial staff?

- a. I'm not sure about college students in general but in our office, we try to create a culture of respect and inclusion. Here, many students have personal relationships with Charlie and Vern (custodians). Charlie and Vern take an interest in them and their success and vice-versa
- b. I do not have experience with this. Unsure
- c. Quiet
- d. Friendly
- e. I think many students don't notice the custodians or their work
- f. I imagine they don't think about them very often

g. Summary of Comments-

The general impression of faculty is that college students don't think about custodians. In one case, where the office works to create a more inclusive

environment and facilitate discussion among the different roles, the custodians do interact with the students in a positive manner.

9. Do you think that college students think about the work that custodians do?

- a. I sure hope so. We definitely emphasize to our students what a positive impact Charlie and Vern (custodians) make on helping us all to do our jobs and make the department beautifully presentable to the public
- b. I'm pretty sure they value it, if they give it a minute's thought
- c. Only when a space isn't clean. I think the students take the work that custodians do for granted
- d. Clean

e. Summary of Comments-
"Only when custodians are absent, or their work is lacking, do students think about custodians" is the comment highlighting the thoughts that students don't give much thought toward custodians and the work they do.

10. Do you think that faculty and staff think about the work that custodians do?

- a. Probably some, but my sense is that they might be as closely integrated and intimate as we are here with Charlie and Vern (custodians)
- b. Yes, some more than others, I imagine. (if they give it a minute's thought)
- c. Slightly more than students
- d. Overtime, as the faculty see the custodians regularly, I think faculty come to appreciate them more

e. Some are very appreciative, others less so

f. Summary of Comments-

Overall, it feels that faculty feel that other faculty don't think much about the work being performed by the custodians. When they do give it some thought, there is a general sense of appreciation.

11. Has a student ever given a custodian anything? Like a gift or a keepsake? Have you received a gift or a keepsake from a custodian?

a. Yes. Charlie and Vern (custodians) are wise and thoughtful—they take a keen interest in our (collectively) students. They look out for them and the students reciprocate. We give Vern and Charlie gifts at the holidays and also give gifts to Vern's baby

b. Not that I am aware of, and no, I haven't received any gifts or keepsakes from a custodian. Honestly, thinking back, I should have given some thought to giving them a gift card or something. The supervisor and his crew in our building are super!

c. Not that I am aware of. No, I haven't received a gift or keepsake from a custodian

d. I don't know. No

e. Summary of Comments-

The practice of custodians and students exchanging or giving gifts and keepsakes to one another is not typically observed by faculty.

12. How would you describe your interactions/relationship with custodial staff?

- a. Friendly
- b. Cordial
- c. Respectful
- d. Appreciative
- e. Friendly
- f. Collegial
- g. Teammates, or at least I try to make it so
- h. Friendly
- i. Cordial
- j. I hope they know I care about them and am interested in them
- k. Good

<p>l. Summary of Comments-</p> <p>The relationships and interactions between faculty and custodians are positive.</p> <p>The custodians are thought of as coworkers and friendly and come across as professional.</p>

13. Do you ever feel custodians are judged by students?

- a. Yes, sadly
- b. I have never witnessed students interacting with custodial staff, so I do not know.
I hope they are respected
- c. I think it's the opposite direction—that students feel guilty that someone cleans up after them

d. Not sure, probably by some

e. Summary of Comments-

By some faculty, the custodians are perceived as being judged by students, though not witnessed. One faculty member believes that the students feel guilty about the custodians cleaning up after them.

14. Additional comments

a. A couple of years ago, the custodians were the ones who surfaced the concern about gender-identity and restroom usage.

b. Summary of Comments-

One faculty member highlighted that the custodians were the ones who brought up the concern about gender-identity and restroom usage to the administration a few years ago. This had an impression on the faculty member and helped that individual to see that custodians have a greater awareness of social concerns than previously thought.