The University Quality Assurance and Student Services Relationship

A Case Study of the University of Oslo and Uppsala University

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Abstract

This study explores the factors that influence the relationship between university student services and quality assurance. In the European higher education community, quality assurance efforts have primarily focused on aspects of teaching and research while concerns over quality assurance processes in student services have typically taken a backseat. As higher education becomes more globalized and universities experience growing competitive pressures, quality assurance in student services has become a topic of growing importance. Therefore, this thesis presents an analysis of the university setting and the behavioral aspects of university administrators that contribute to the quality assurance-student services relationship at the University of Oslo in Norway and Uppsala University in Sweden. Actor-centered institutionalism is adapted to the higher education field and guides the structure and organization of this study. Through the analysis of documents and interviews with university administrators, the university setting and actor characteristics, such as capabilities, perceptions and preferences, and interactions, are analyzed. Finally, a discussion of the resultant data reveals that the organization of the university setting is a key element influencing the quality assurance-student services relationship. Additionally, other factors, such as competitive pressures, were found to influence and change this relationship. This is likely the first research of this kind within the Norwegian and Swedish context.

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Sincerely,

Aimee Haley

Abbreviations

ACI	Actor-centered institutionalism
ANSA	Association of Norwegian Students Abroad
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ERASMUS	European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	European Union
EUA	European Universities Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
HE	higher education
HEEM	European Master in Higher Education
HEI	higher education institutions
HSV	Högskoleverket (The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education)
ISU	International Students' Union of Norway
LMU	Learning Environment Committee
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
NSO	Norsk Studentorganisasjon
NSU	Norsk Studentunion
SiO	Foundation for Student Life in Oslo
QA	quality assurance
UiO	Universitet i Oslo (University of Oslo)
US	United States
UU	Uppsala Universitet (Uppsala University)

List of Figures

Table of Contents

8

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Centuries ago the university consisted of only a professor and his students. Through the process of social evolution, the faucets and roles of the university transformed to meet the needs of the environment in which it existed (Kerr, 1995). In light of globalization and increased competitiveness among higher education institutions (HEIs), an emphasis on student life within universities has risen in recent decades. With the increased mobility of students and pressures to attract the best and the brightest, universities worldwide have begun to embrace student services, as they can no longer rely entirely on academics and research to attract students, though this is still generally true (Kelo, Rogers, & Rumbley, 2010).

Student services provide assistance and tools to students outside the classroom, which facilitates their ability to achieve success in their academic programs. Moreover, students who receive adequate services are more likely to pass positive remarks about the HEI via 'word of mouth.' This has also been discovered as one of the most influential factors in a student's choice of a university or college (Kelo et. al., 2010).

While student services have come to play an important role in a university's quality assessment and thus competitiveness (Kelo et. al., 2010), many universities offer some form of student services, but European universities tend to lag behind in facilitating regular quality assessments of these services. Furthermore, there is great diversity across and within European nations regarding the organization and policies of quality assurance (QA) procedures for student services (European Universities' Association [EUA], 2007). This QA-student services relationship is the object of this explorative study.

In the current competitive higher education (HE) context, it is no surprise that universities feel a push to incorporate QA practices into their student services' units. This study further investigates the elements that influence decisions contributing to the selected QA-student services arrangement at one Norwegian university and one Swedish university. The elements for analysis include the university setting, university administrators, and other influential factors.

1.2 Motivation and Rationale

My motivation in choosing to research the relationship of QA and student services in two Nordic countries comes from a subjective personal interest in the topics, as well as an objective rationale stemming from HE rhetoric and current trends. I am currently a graduate student studying European HE in a joint degree program, so I have naturally become interested in the organization of the services that have facilitated my transition to each university in which I have studied. Throughout this educational journey, I have developed an interest in QA and the influencing agents that guide decisions regarding QA policy, organization, and implementation practices among universities. For these reasons, researching the QA-student services relationship in two Nordic countries enables me to dive further into my interests and bring forth a culmination of my findings into academia.

Additionally, my background and current experience have positioned me to undertake such research. For the past two years, I have studied at three universities in different countries within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which has exposed me to three different HE and student services' systems. Two of the universities were located in the Nordic region, thus providing me knowledge of the Nordic HE system and igniting my curiosity to learn more. Furthermore, as a student services professional in the USA prior to embarking on this educational path, I have witnessed the impact of student services on the educational outcomes of students in the American university and have become familiar with their quality expectations and processes. Through these experiences, I have developed a respect for student services and the role it plays in students' lives.

On the other hand, my objective rationale for choosing this research topic stems from HE discourse in the EHEA, which expresses a need for internal QA to play a greater role in European university student services. For instance, the following statement was made by the European Student's Union (ESU) in their list of key principles for work on QA relating to the social dimension.

"...ESU calls for the acknowledgement of the social dimension[1] as an integral part of various quality assurance processes and its underlying concepts as not as an additional burden... The social dimension needs to be improved on the institutional level through internal quality enhancement and assurance procedures" (2010).

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[1] The social dimension is a component of the Bologna Process, which includes two primary domains: access to HE and social support for students (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2003).

A statement was also made by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process. They indicated a need for adequate student services:

> *"We affirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services…"* (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2007, pg. 5).

This discourse demonstrates the importance of ensuring adequate student services are offered to students in European universities. The ESU (2010) has also recognized the diversity of HE and of student services systems present in the EHEA, which prompted my curiosity about the factors that might influence a particular QA arrangement for student services in different HE systems. To my knowledge, the QA-student services relationship is an under-researched area within the Nordic context and no previous research has been conducted on the factors that influence this relationship. As a result, I was driven to further investigate this interest.

1.3 Research Questions and Aims

The aim of this study is to examine and explore the relationship between QA and student services at the institutional level, particularly the role of the university setting and key university administrators. Since the social aspects of HE, including student services, have received relatively little attention from European HEIs until recently, there has been little analysis and research on this topic. Thus, this study is a unique contribution to HE research in the area of QA. With these considerations, the primary research question of this study is:

What is the relationship between student services and quality assurance in Norwegian and Swedish universities?

In order to further analyze this question, three sub-questions will also be addressed in sequential order:

1) *What is the role of the university setting in this relationship?*
2) *What is the role of university administrators in this relationship?*
3) *What other factors contribute to changing this relationship?*

The primary research question is addressed in Chapter 2 by the presentation of the adapted conceptual framework used to guide this study. This adapted model also shows how each of the sub-questions are linked to the main research question. The first sub-question is explored in Chapter 4 by describing the organization and structure of the selected case universities. Additionally, a table presenting a side-by-side analysis of the university setting for each of the cases is presented in Appendix B. The following two sub-questions are discussed in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the characteristics of the university administrators and their interactions with other administrators are first discussed (see Appendix C for a table outlining this analysis). Then the contributions of other factors are addressed. At the end of Chapter 5, the main research question is revisited and a holistic overview of the sub-questions is presented along with their conclusions.

1.4 Contextual Approach

The importance of establishing a context to understand the basis of exploring the relationship between QA and student services is imperative to setting the foundation for this study. The primary research question of this study was inspired by the relationship of quality and student services in the American context. While the United States' (US) government has little authority over the management and quality of American HEIs, education ministries in European countries have great authority over their HEIs. However, QA of student services in the US is generally the responsibility of universities and colleges, but this responsibility varies by system among European countries. Nevertheless, this section briefly describes the HE system of the US and the relationship between QA and student services in the American context. Following this description, an account of the broader European context is illustrated. In reviewing the relationship between these dimensions from a US context, one can begin to ponder the elements that might influence the relationship of these dimensions in another context, such as that of the northern-European context.

1.4.1 Higher Education in the United States

The US HE system is the largest and most diverse system (Dill, 2001) with about 6500 HEIs consisting of community colleges, public four-year universities and colleges, private non-profit HEIs, and for-profit HEIs (Eckel & King, 2004). Although the prestigious, private HEIs in the US receive a lot of attention domestically and abroad, about 75 percent of

students attend public colleges and universities. There are three major beliefs that have influenced US HE: the ideal of limited government and freedom of expression, capitalism and the belief in the rationality of markets, and commitment to equal opportunity and social mobility (Eckel & King, 2004).

In conjunction with the belief of limited government influence in education, the federal government possesses little control over HEIs, rather the power and control is delegated to the 50 states. This is also reflected in the Constitution, which lacks the word 'education' and implies little federal responsibility over education. This is atypical of many nations since most nations tend to have a Ministry of Education governing their system (Eckel & King, 2004; Dill, 2001). With exception of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which donated federal land to the states for use in building public universities, the federal government has not played a role in HE until the middle of the 20th century when federal funding was used for scientific research at HEIs to build military capacity. In addition, the 1960's brought slightly more control over the HE system to the federal government when student financial support was increased to include federal grants and loans (Eckel & King, 2004).

1.4.2 Quality Assurance and Student Services in the United States

While the federal government and states can and do impose quality standards, the process of conducting QA is left to universities and colleges. External QA in American HEIs is performed by accrediting agencies consisting of organizations of volunteers who work at colleges and universities and agree to assist other institutions through the process of peer review. While accrediting agencies evaluate areas including curricula, faculty qualifications, student learning outcomes, co-curricular student services, and financial health (Eckel & King, 2004), HEIs also conduct internal QA evaluations on many dimensions, including the assessment of student services. In the US, the term 'assessment' is often used in student services and describes "… any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness…" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, pg. 18).

To name a few, student services among US HEIs can include personal counseling, career advising, recreation and physical fitness, childcare, transportation, financial aid advising, healthcare, tutoring, law advising, and housing (Dungy, 2003; Eckel & King, 2004). Assessment of student services among US HEIs has grown considerably due to increased

pressure on HEIs to demonstrate their effectiveness to stakeholders and student affairs' units to demonstrate importance and worth due to rising competition and declining financial resources. The goal of these assessments is to illustrate the relationship between students' out-of-classroom experiences and use of student services and academic achievement and retention. There are many additional reasons to conduct assessments of student services, including the ability to gauge affordability and cost effectiveness, strategic planning, and to influence policies and decisions among stakeholders and HEIs (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

1.4.3 Higher Education in Europe

There are two main organizations shaping European Universities in this modern day. The first organization is the European Commission (EC). The role of the EC is to facilitate cooperation between member countries and not to create overarching education policy. Such initiatives to facilitate cooperation include the ERASMUS program for student mobility and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which facilitates the recognition of studies abroad with HEI's and countries involved in mobility programs (Mora & Felix, 2009). In addition, the European Council formed the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. The aim of this initiative was to transform the EU into "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council, 2000).

The second organization to shape European HE and universities are the ministers responsible for HE in European countries. Interactions among ministers of HE in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy sparked the emergence of the Bologna Process, which has since evolved into a movement that has swept 46 European countries since 2008 (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Rich, 2010). The Bologna Process was initially organized as a bottom-up approach to resolve the issue of differing degree structures between these four countries. The overarching goal of the Bologna Process was to encourage the development of a high quality and competitive system among European countries by the year 2010. While ministers for education and university leaders started the Bologna Process, the European Commission joined the Process later with the notion of enhancing the international competitiveness of European higher education and creating a EHEA (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

1.4.4 Quality Assurance and Student Services in Europe

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to QA assurance among European HEIs, the Bologna Process sparked the development of a set of standards and guidelines for QA that could be adapted by countries and across institutional types. Ministers of the nations participating in the Bologna Process at the Berlin communiqué of September 19, 2003 invited the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), the European Universities Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the ESU to develop a common set of standards and guidelines now known as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The ESG outlines the "underpinning values, expectations, and good practice" of QA shared by universities and agencies across the EHEA (European Association for Quality Assurance [ENQA], 2005).

Although the ESG guides standards of practice in internal and external QA systems relating to teaching and research, the ESG does not address issues that can be categorized under the social dimension of HE such as student support services, student retention, and equality in access to HE. In addition, many HEIs in the EHEA do not regularly assess the quality of their student support services even though many of them already have support services and learning resources in place (EUA, 2007). Since these services and resources vary in aim, structure, and administration across nations and institutional types, a strict set of guidelines could not be the same throughout HEIs in the EHEA (ENQA, 2005).

The ESU is the umbrella organization of 45 national student unions from 38 countries, which represents over 11 million students in Europe. Their aim is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic, and cultural interests of students at the European level. While they advocated for the inclusion of the social dimension in the ESG during its development, this element was not included in the final document. They have since published a statement online that distinguishes levels at which social support aspects should be evaluated for QA. As student numbers grow in many countries, the need for adequate student support structures and the provision of more flexible learning pathways also increases, thus the importance of QA in programs pertaining to the social aspects of HE is slowly gaining recognition and importance among European HE actors (ESU, 2010).

2. Literature and Conceptual Framework

This chapter begins by discussing the primary conceptual framework that forms the basis for this study, which is called actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) and the considerations in choosing this framework. ACI enables an analysis of the relationship between actors and the institution and actors amongst themselves and the relative influence of their interactions in decision-making processes. Second, institutional dimensions for analysis of the university setting are outlined. These dimensions are used to map the institutional setting in which the actors interact and make decisions. The defined dimensions are closely intertwined with the system organization of HE quality assurance and student services issues. Finally, using ACI as the base framework and the institutional dimensions for analysis, an adapted conceptual model is presented in section 2.4, which serves as the guide for this study. Following the presentation of the adapted model, definitions and the operationalization of concepts is outlined.

2.1 Selecting a Guiding Framework

As presented in section 1.3, this study and the outlined research questions focus primarily on two research perspectives: one emphasizing the structural and cultural aspects of the university and one emphasizing the human-behavioral aspects. In the sub-research questions, the query about the influence of the university setting reflects the emphasis on the structural and cultural aspects, and the second sub-question regarding the influence of the university administrators reflects an emphasis on the human-behavioral aspects. Given that the ambition of this study is to analyze the relationship between these two aspects, as well as the influence of other factors, institutional analysis can be used to explain why certain QA arrangements for student services are selected out of the variety of feasible options within the university and how different aspects of the context can influence these selected arrangements (Meyer & Rowan, 2006).

While traditional institutionalism theories focus on formal legal structures, a trend towards new institutionalism has taken wave in recent times. New institutionalism adds a new dimension to old institutionalism - the behavioral dimension. For instance, new institutionalism focuses on how people construct meaning from institutionalized settings through language and symbolic representations (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). In traditional institutionalism, people and their behaviors are not considered as influential factors.

In the search for a framework that gives equal attention to the structural elements and the human-behavioral elements, ACI was chosen as the guiding framework in this study for just that reason. Unlike other institutionalism frameworks, ACI enables the development of a framework with a balanced perspective in the analysis and understanding of the structural elements and the human-behavioral elements. ACI falls under this new institutionalism effort to come to an understanding of the relationship between actors and institutions (Scharpf, 1997) or in the case of this study, university administrators and the university setting. Additionally, ACI can be adapted and elaborated for the analysis of a university and its QA arrangement for student services.

2.2 Actor-Centered Institutionalism

As discussed in the previous section, actor-centered institutionalism, which was developed by Mayntz and Scharpf (1997), is the guiding framework for this study. While ACI does not exclude institutional impact on actors, ACI focuses instead on the relationship between actors and changing institutions. Additionally, ACI is not just confined to political institutions (van Lieshout, 2008), but the framework has also been used to analyze processes in service sectors that have high state involvement (Scharpf, 1997). Therefore, the adaptability of this framework to the universities analyzed in this study is strong for two reasons: 1) student services and HE in general can be characterized as providing a service to students or society and 2) HE in Norway and Sweden is highly regulated by the government.

This framework offers a method to analyze actors and the interaction of actors among themselves and how and why a set of factors brings about a particular outcome or selection. As stated by Scharpf (1997), "the framework of actor-centered institutionalism emphasizes the influence of institutions on the perceptions, preferences, and capabilities of individual and corporate actors and on the modes of their interaction" (pg. 38). Additionally, the structure of the ACI framework fits well with this study since it emphasizes two of the three coordinating elements outlined in the research questions: university administrators (actors) and the university setting (the institution). Each of the elements outlined in ACI serves as a tool for locating and describing potential relationships between these factors. This function is needed in this study since the topic is under researched and there are no directly related theories. Thus, ACI highlights the elements that are important to analyze and provides direction for the organization of this study.

In ACI, equal weight is given to the actions and interactions of actors and to the shaping influences of institutional structures in regards to decision-making processes and the resulting decisions on policies and organizational arrangements. By not assuming a dominant role from either the actors or the institutions, the relationship between these two elements can be analyzed in an unbiased fashion, which is necessary in this research study since it analyzes the relationship of three primary elements: university administrators, the university setting, and other factors.

The remainder of this section describes and discusses the structure of ACI and its elements. The primary elements of Scharpf's actor-centered institutionalism framework include the following:

- Institutional setting (the influencing agent): possesses legal rules and social norms that structure the options for the action and behavior of actors. Actors depend on socially constructed rules and norms to orient their behavior, and the institution possesses those elements that drive actors' orientations and capabilities, actor constellations, and modes of interaction. Thus, the institution facilitates and constrains the choices of the actors involved (Scharpf, 1997).

- Policy Environment: denotes social, economic, and political factors that can necessitate, or make conceivable, policies to solve problems caused by environmental impact (Ying, 2009). Pressures deriving from the policy environment can influence the likelihood that certain issues will be perceived as problems and moved into the agenda setting domain.

- Problems: issues that are considered appropriate and achievable through decision-making and policy-making by actors who have the authority to initiate such processes (Ying, 2009).

(In ACI, the unit of analysis is the interactions that actually produce policy outcomes and decisions that are in need of explanation. This would include actor orientations and capabilities, actor constellations, and modes of interaction).

- Actor orientations (preferences and perceptions): are influenced by the institutional setting. Actor orientations are determined by the policy issue and refer to the desirable nature of the majority, to the causes of a perceived problem, and with the associated outcomes.

- Capabilities: refer to "all action resources that allow an actor to influence an outcome in certain respects and to a certain degree" (Scharpf, 1997, pg. 43). In policy research,

the most important capabilities are the ones influenced by the institutional rules, which involves defining competencies and determining actor participation (Scharpf, 1997).

- Actor constellations: have a game-theoretic representation and are used to map the policy problem onto the groups of policy actors involved. The constellations describe the actors involved, their strategy options, the outcomes associated with strategy combinations, and the preferences of the players over these outcomes.

- Modes of interaction: includes unilateral action, negotiated agreement, majority vote, and hierarchical direction. The modes of interaction are also shaped by institutional rules regulating their use and are affected by the setting in which they take place (Scharpf, 1997).

Scharpf's full actor-centered institutionalism framework is depicted below in Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 The Domain of Interaction-Oriented Policy Research
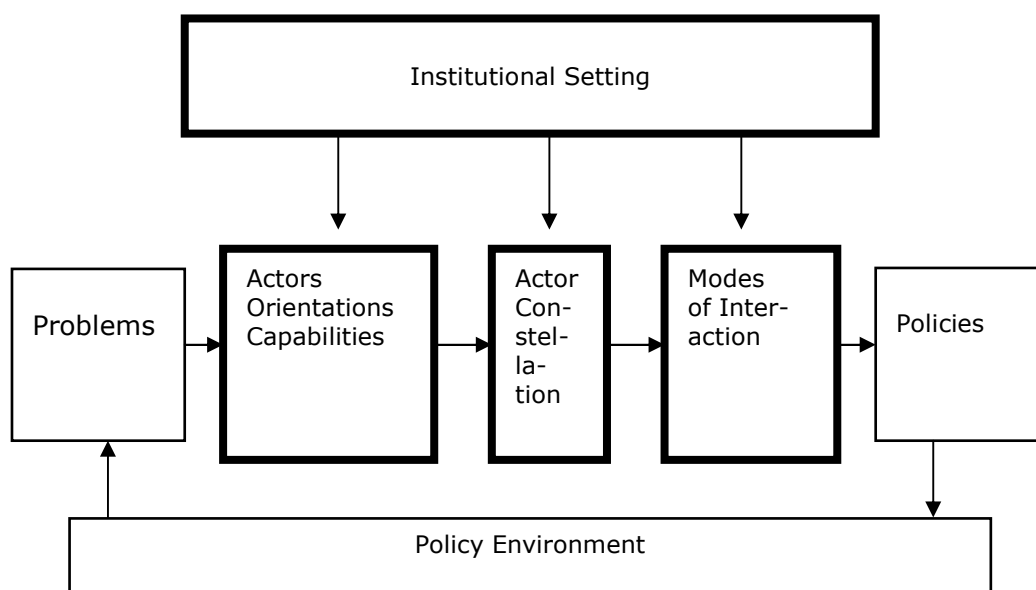
Source: Scharpf (1997), pg. 44

Since ACI is a framework and not a theory, less information content is included, which essentially means that less information is answered directly and more is answered empirically (Scharpf, 1997). This also means that the ACI framework provides a general outline for understanding a set of influences rather than providing principles for explaining situations. This also means that additional factors must be outlined to improve upon this basic

model and relate it more to HE and the topic of this study. Firstly, on part of the institution, a more defined account of the dimensions that constitute the university setting pertaining to student services is needed. This enables the institutional setting relative to the topic of this study to be mapped and analyzed for each case. Secondly, a more descriptive account of the policy environment is needed. In keeping with the exploratory nature of this research, the investigated dimensions of the policy environment are broadly outlined as internal and external factors. Sections 2.3 and 2.5.2 address the institutional or university setting dimension and section 2.5.4 addresses the policy environment or the other factors dimension.

2.2.1 Game Theory

The previous section touched on the game-theoretic nature of ACI, but this section further elaborates on the nature of game theory since its concepts are important to this study. Game theory is embodied in the actor constellations of ACI. The actor constellation is actually inspired by game theory. In game theory, information about actors and their interactions are contained in a two by two matrix and in a one-dimensional game between two players. By mapping actors via constellations, the way the involved actors diverge or converge and their different levels and types of conflict can be described (Scharpf, 1997). The three fundamental concepts of Game Theory are as described:

- Players: are equivalent to the actors as discussed in ACI. They can be individual or composite and are capable of making purposeful choices.
- Strategies: are courses of action or a sequence of moves that are available to an actor. A game exists if the strategies are interdependent, so the achieved payoff is affected by the choices of all players involved. Actor orientations and capabilities influence the available strategies and their subsequent courses of action.
- Payoffs: refer to the value placed on certain possible outcomes based on the preferences of the involved actors (Scharpf, 1997). Thus, the perceived payoff of certain actions ultimately influences actor decisions and choices regarding a particular policy or arrangement.

The matrix figure is best used for those games that are cooperative, which means that binding agreements are possible among actors prior to making their choices. In this instance, players are informed of all elements of the game, but individual players cannot know the strategic choice of other players until after they have determined their choice (Scharpf, 1997). The cooperative game is most representative of the decision-making strategies among

university administrators of the selected case universities in this study since committees of people with different roles and capabilities generally gather together and discuss options and strategies for various university issues before a policy is put into motion. However, the nature of this study does not allow for the use of such a matrix since this study is more complex and involves several different actors. However, the principles of game theory can be applied in the analysis of the actor constellations, which are discussed in Chapter 5. For instance, these principles help to determine actor interests and conflicts from how the decision-making process is managed within the bounds of QA of student services. Therefore, the game theoretical principles within ACI, in relation to understanding and portraying actor interactions and their decision-making processes, is crucial for understanding the data and achieving the knowledge desired from this study.

2.3 University Dimensions for Analysis

Now that the primary framework used in this study has been presented, the approach used for mapping the university setting can be outlined. To map the university setting for each case university, dimensions for analysis must be identified. As Scharpf (1997) stated, "once we know the institutional setting of interaction, we know a good deal about the actors involved, about their options, and about their perceptions and preferences" (pg. 41). In ACI, the institutional system serves as a reference for actors to ensure their decisions and behaviors match the valued actions of the institution.

Since ACI provides a basic structure or outline to understand the influence of structural and human-behavioral dimensions in relationship to a particular arrangement rather than a set of principles explaining this phenomenon, the ACI framework does not provide dimensions for analyzing the university setting with respect to the relationship between QA and student services. However, the flexibility of ACI allows for specific dimensions relating to this topic to be defined and used in this study. These dimensions specific to QA and student services are outlined in this section.

Within the ACI framework, the university setting dimensions are categorized under the 'institution' element. Each dimension represents a systematic element that may influence the selected arrangement for quality assessment and student services at the selected case universities. These structural elements could influence the capabilities, orientations, and interactions of actors who then make decisions about the arrangement. Thus, these dimensions are used to not only map the university setting but also to determine the

orientations of key administrators who work with QA and student services within the selected case universities. Their orientation towards these dimensions may indicate their level of support for quality assessment in student services. From this point, we can determine the relative influence of the administrators versus the university setting in determining the selected arrangement for the quality assurance of student services at a specific university.

This scenario is representative of ACI since the framework assumes an equal opportunity for the university setting and it's administrators to influence the policy decisions and practical arrangements of QA activities. Therefore, the university specific dimensions serve the following functions: 1) to map the key features of the university setting for each case and that are relevant to this study; 2) to identify the preferences and perceptions that guide university administrators in the policy and decision-making process regarding QA in student services; and 3) to judge possible convergence or divergence of processes in relation to the system characteristics. The dimensions were selected based on their relevance to influencing decisions on policy and practice of QA for student services within universities, and their ability to sufficiently characterize the university setting with reference to this study. Furthermore, they were selected based on the extent that they intertwine with the student services' structure. Hence, the remainder of this section focuses on explaining the selected dimensions for analysis. The selected dimensions of university setting includes:

- **Student Services' Governance**: In regards to this study, governance refers to the way responsibility and control of student services are distributed. For example, whether the initiatives are student-driven or university-run.

- **Student Services' Programs/Services**: Refers to the predominant goals of the student services' division, the type and variety of programs/services offered, and the intended student 'customer.' In other words, the intended student population the services and programs are geared towards. For example, whether or not the programs reach multiple demographics, including underrepresented student populations.

- **Student Services' Funding**: Refers to the way student services are monetarily supported, such as through tuition fees, government grants, and university support. Funding also refers to the way resources are allocated, such as based on the effectiveness, affordability, and need of specific programs and activities.

- **University Quality Assurance**: Regards the nature of the university QA system, such as the aims or mission statement, systematic processes, and the location of responsibility over the QA.

While national and institutional mandates may influence a university's student services' structure, the structure is also representative of widely held beliefs about the services necessary to complete HE programs and to become contributing, employed citizens. The variety of **services and programs** offered to students is also representative of the views as to which services are most important. Whether or not there are programs geared towards specific populations that are typically underrepresented in HE tells about the prominence of priorities among administrators. In relation to quality assurance, the variety of programs and services could be selected based on unbiased assessments. Quality assurance could ensure that the programs offered at a university reflect the student population and their needs. Quality assurance data could also be used to back-up proposals and decision-making.

The approach to **student services' governance** is representative of the general attitude towards the services. Depending on where governance of these services lies within the overall university structure and who initiated the programs is representative of their importance relative to the university mission and to its administrators. Those student services' systems that are student-driven may represent a lack of support from the university administration or they may represent a particular perception of students. For instance, the divide between perceiving students as individual adults and that of in loco parentis, which suggests that students require more guidance and supervision from a university. With regards to QA, prior studies have indicated that institutional control has been linked to variations in methods and forms of support for quality assessment (Peterson & Augustine, 2000). From this research, one can derive that the way student services' governance is arranged also might influence the type and extent of QA methods used in a particular division.

The **student services' funding** system expresses the value placed on such services as a whole. This is designated through resource allocation and by funding sources. The perceived benefits of student services influences the amount and source of monetary support the division receives from stakeholders. The connection between funding and QA is that assessment efforts can demonstrate the effectiveness and worth of services and programs and can link these services and programs to positive student experiences in the classroom as well as to student retention, which might influence perceptions of the benefits of such services. Furthermore, QA can measure the excellence of student services and determine whether there is a less expensive way of providing the same service or if a reduction in funding would also reduce quality (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Quality assessments can serve as a tool for identifying the best sources to obtain funding and the best places to allocate resources (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). University's that develop specific management policies, such as

resource allocation, based on assessment outcomes generally have greater support for the use of QA in student services' units (Peterson & Augustine, 2000). If this is true then administrators in student services divisions who make important budgetary decisions while taking under consideration quality assessment results may prove to provide more support for the QA-student services relationship.

Finally, the nature of a university's formal **quality assurance** system may highlight the units/functions of a university that are of greatest importance to university administrators and HE stakeholders. Units that are left out of the formal QA system may be viewed as less important, thus the quality is regulated less or not at all by the university. The roles and capabilities of the administrators responsible for a university's QA might also provide insight and explanation as to why student services may or may not be seen as a priority in a university's QA system. In essence, the relationship of the aims of the university QA system and its coordinating administrators may influence the synergy between institutional QA practices and student services.

Each of these dimensions correlates well with ACI since they all represent essential elements of an institutional or university setting. Specifically, the dimensions epitomize essential elements of the student services system within universities, which leads to the ability to map and compare and contrast the structural approach of the two case universities. Furthermore, each dimension can be used to gauge the perceptions of administrators with regards to the dimension's relative importance in determining the nature of the QA-student services relationship. In Chapter 4, a description of the cases based on these dimensions ensues, as well as, a description and analysis of administrators' perceptions of their influence on the quality assurance arrangement of student services in Chapter 5. This provides a more thorough exploration and understanding of the university setting and it's characteristics, which provides the source of reference for the key administrators in QA and student services in each case.

2.4 Adapted Model

Finally, the adapted model, which uses the two aforementioned components, is presented in this section. The essential elements of this adapted approach are discussed, as well as their function in the adapted framework and in their application to this study. First, actor-centered institutionalism, which was presented in section 2.1, assumes that institutional characteristics influence the policy-making decisions of key actors. In relation to the research

topic of this study, this model could be interpreted to imply that characteristics of the university setting influence the decision-making behaviors of key university administrators at the university level who work in the areas of QA and student services. The ACI framework also breaks the study into two areas worthy of analysis: the institution (university setting) and actors (university administrators). These two areas represent the first two sub-research questions respectively. As illustrated in Figure 2-2, the university setting and university administrators contribute towards influencing the selected QA-student services arrangement. While ACI identifies the policy environment, this element is represented by the third sub-research question regarding the influence of other factors in changing the relationship between QA and student services. This aspect is also included in the adapted framework.

ACI serves as a map for analyzing university administrators' interactions, orientations, capabilities, and constellations; however, university dimensions for analysis that are specific to QA and student services of HE are not provided in the ACI model. The dimensions of the university setting that were discussed in section 2.3 are used to fill this gap. The following figure is the adapted model that is used to guide this study:

Figure 2-2 Adapted Framework
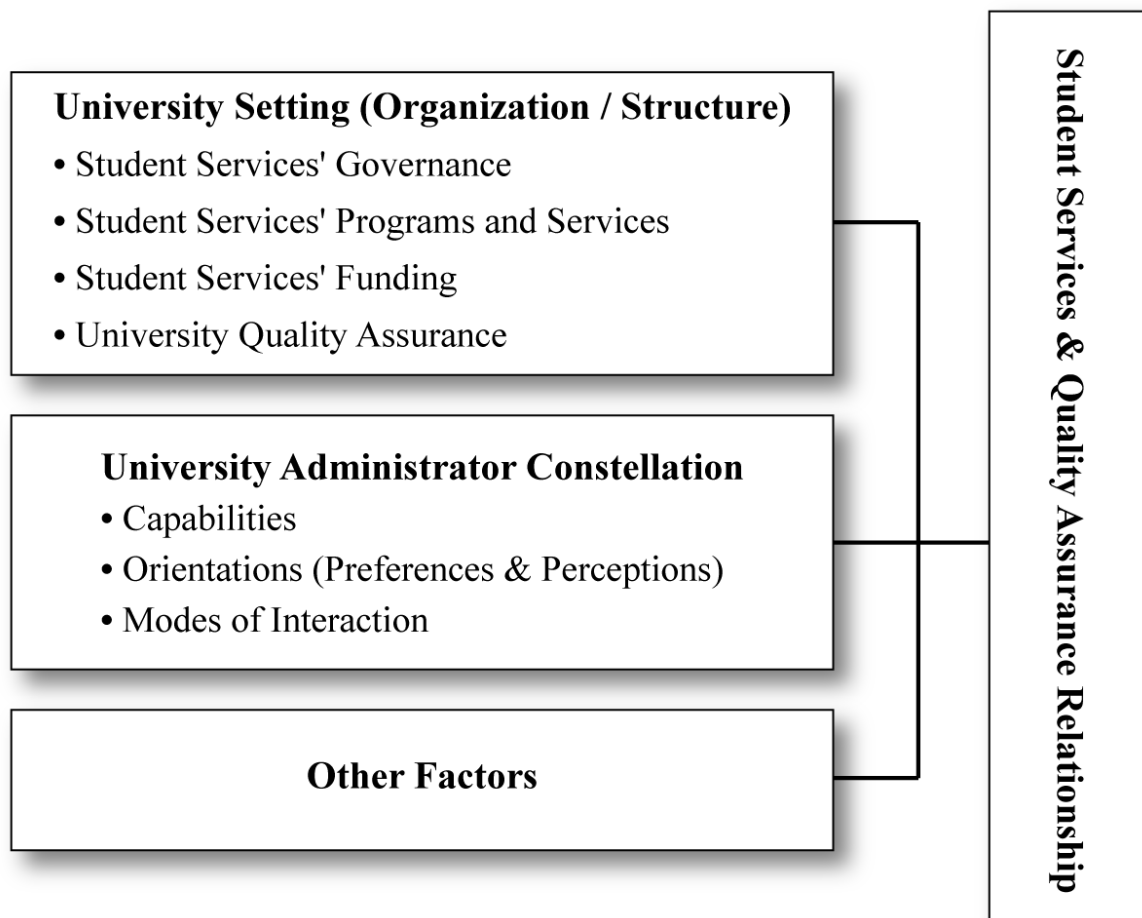
This adapted framework enables this study's research questions to be framed in a model that is used to guide the university case studies, questionnaire formulation, and comparative analysis. Furthermore, the adapted framework corresponds directly with the presented research questions in section 1.3. The framework in its entirety illustrates the primary research question. The three boxes - university setting, university administrator constellation, and other factors - represents each of the three sub-questions. Additionally, the relationship of these elements to the QA-student services relationship is also shown.

ACI also contributes to this adapted framework by providing a map for addressing the analysis of the university administrators and provides bounds from which to map and characterize the university setting of each case. Additionally, the ACI framework inspires this adapted framework to be balanced and considers both structural and human-behavioral aspects and their contribution towards a selected university QA-student services arrangement.

This adapted framework is also an operationalization of Scharpf's ACI framework (see Figure 2-1). The "University Setting" dimension of the adapted framework

operationalizes the "Institutional Setting" domain of Scharpf's model by detailing four elements with which to explore the university setting of each case university. These elements pertain to the organization and structure of university student services and QA. While Scharpf's model does not elaborate on specific units of analysis for the university setting, the adapted model utilizes the concepts of Scharpf's model and adapts them to student services and QA in HE.

The "University Administrator Constellation" in the adapted model operationalizes the human-behavioral aspects illustrated in Scharpf's model that were outlined in three boxes: actor orientations and capabilities, actor constellation, and modes of interaction. In the adapted model, each of these elements are represented under one box since the constellation presents the group-level view of capabilities, orientations, and interactions, which is of interest in this study. The concepts of this dimension, as noted by Scharpf, are used in this adapted model but are elaborated in section 2.5.3 to suit the particulars of university administrators.

The "Other Factors" dimension is a loose operationalization of Scharpf's "Policy Environment" dimension. Specific units for analysis of other factors are not specified in the adapted model because this allows for the flexibility of responses from the interview participants, thus maintaining the exploratory nature of the study. However, the idea presented by Scharpf that other, environmental factors might influence the relationship between the institution and actors was transferred to this adapted model.

Additionally, Scharpf's model is more cyclic in nature and culminates with "Policies" as the outcome of the interactions between the institution and actors and the influences of the policy environment. On the other hand, the adapted model is more static in nature and culminates in describing how the relationship or arrangement of student services and QA in universities is formed. Scharpf's notion that there are three primary dimensions that may influence a particular policy or situation is maintained in this adapted model and illustrated in Figure 2-2.

2.4.1 Treating Student Services and Quality Assurance Units as Actors

Mayntz and Scharpf discuss how organizations composed of individuals can be regarded as actors (Scharpf, 1997). Their argument is that relevant individuals typically work within the bounds of an institutional framework and are therefore influenced by the

institution's resources and the type of communications and information that flows through the institution. Thus, the individuals work on behalf of their institutions.

In reference to this study and the adapted framework, the university administrators working in student services and QA related units are representative of their particular unit. Therefore, their perceptions and preferences are equated to those of their unit. While the student services and QA divisions as a whole are referred to throughout this study and this thesis, university administrators working within these divisions provided perceptions and preferences based on their unit in its entirety. While treating individuals in this manner coincides with Mayntz and Scharpf's ACI framework, considering the possibility that an individual may act and reflect personal interests is also important to keep in mind. In situations such as this, the analysis would have to consider these accounts individually rather than as representative of the unit.

2.5 Operationalization of Concepts

To begin this section, key terms are defined. Then, the discussion on the operationalization of concepts follows the university setting, university administrator, and other factors structure, which form the basis for the adapted conceptual framework (see figure 2-2).

2.5.1 Definitions of Key Terms

The terms "student services" and "quality assurance" are often very elusive concepts. Their definitions often vary across university systems and with the type of HEI. A university is defined as an educational institution designed for teaching and research and the awarding of graduate degrees. Student services are often a part of the administration within these HEIs and can include any advising, counseling management, or administrative service or program in a HEI that supports students outside the classroom and that follows the institutional mission statement (Love, 2003). To further define the concept of student services, it includes information and orientation, activities to support the integration of students, housing, support for families, and career and internship support (Kelo et. al., 2010). Student support, student services, and student affairs may have different implications in different countries and in different academic contexts (Kelo et. al., 2010), but the three terms are considered equivalent for the purposes of this study. The term "quality" also often connotes different meanings in various contexts. In this study, the term "quality assurance" is defined as the methods for

assessing "value, conformance to specifications, conformance to requirements, fitness for use, loss avoidance, or meeting and/or exceeding customer expectations" (Stensaker, 2007, pg. 99) in a university.

2.5.2 University-Related Concepts

The university-related concepts are used for mapping the university setting with regards to student services and QA for each case university and for obtaining an understanding of the existing policies and arrangements that influence administrators' decisions regarding the use of QA in student services' settings. I operationalize the university setting as rules, policies, and other forms of regulation, as well as, structures and organization in the context of QA and student services.

In section 2.3, I identified four institutional dimensions of the university setting in relation to student services. Figure 2-3 outlines sub-dimensions of these institutional dimensions, which are used to operationalize their concept. The sub-dimensions were selected based on literature review and their ability to inform a comparative analysis between the university student services' systems.

Figure 2-3 Operationalization of Dimensions Within the University Setting

Institutional Dimensions	Sub-dimensions
Student Services' Governance	- Organization of the system - Location of responsibility/authority in the system
Student Services' Programs/Services	- Type of programs/services offered - Diversity of programs/services offered
Student Services' Funding	- Funding sources of student services' function - Method of resource allocation
University Quality Assurance	- Aims of quality assurance system - Responsible bodies of the university quality assurance system

2.5.3 Administrator-Related Concepts

The second set of concepts that must be defined and operationalized are the university administrator-related concepts. Since there is no defined criteria for key administrators in university QA-student services, the administrators selected for this study were based on 1) their relevance as representative units in relation to the QA-student services relationship 2) their influence on QA and student services decisions and 3) their ability to be comparable

between the selected Norwegian and Swedish universities. Since each of these concepts have been broadly defined in section 2.2, this section focuses on narrowing their definition and describing the operationalization of the concepts. Figure 2-4 outlines the operationalization of the university administrator concepts.

Capabilities refer to the competencies and roles of university administrators as defined by laws, statutes, and inherited relationships, as well as, their financial and personnel resources (Scharpf, 1997). To identify administrator capabilities, I analyze data collected through interviews to determine their tasks, decision-making processes, relationships with other administrators, and their role in the QA-student services' decision-making process.

Preferences and Perceptions constitute the actor orientations in ACI. Scharpf distinguishes four aspects of preferences: interests (self-interests), norms, identities, and interaction orientations. Due to time and resource constraints, it is beyond the scope of this study to identify specifics for each of these aspects for every administrator interviewed for this study. Therefore, the terms 'motives' and 'interests' are used to loosely describe preferences based on self-interest and norms and a combination of the two. For instance, a particular groups' interest in QA processes for student services and their motivation or reason for being interested (or not) in this type of engagement.

Scharpf (1997) suggests shared perceptions of administrators can be a starting point for the identification of their individual perceptions. He also mentions that shared perceptions are generally well documented in the media and accessible reports. "Generally the data can be obtained relatively easily from public records and qualified newspaper reports correspond remarkably well with inside information that could only be gained through access to operative documents, confidential interviews, and participant observation (Scharpf, 1997, pg. 63). This is applicable to this study insofar as the documents are available in English. While some reports and statements are available in English, many other documents may only available in the country's local language. For this reason, interviews fill the gaps where documents cannot.

The interview questions seek after information regarding administrator orientations that are conditioned by the university setting and other factors and that are widely shared among the administrators. Interview participants are specifically asked about their preferences and perceptions regarding the four institutional dimensions and on the relative influence of other factors on their preferences and perceptions. Now that I have defined the dimensions of administrators - capabilities, preferences, and perceptions - I now discuss the

relationship and interaction among administrators involved in QA-student services' decision-making.

The **Administrator Constellation** is the full picture of the preferences, perceptions, and capabilities of individual administrators when they are all viewed together. I used this concept in the analysis to draw a general picture from the individual administrator's preferences, perceptions, and capabilities. I also analyze the level of conflict implied in the differences between the administrators' preferences and perceptions and their capability of influencing QA-student services decisions.

While university administrator constellations illustrate the static picture of administrator's relations towards a certain QA-student services' arrangement, the **Mode of Interaction** specifies how decisions regarding that arrangement are made. Through interview data I analyze the predominant modes of interaction between the administrators, such as supportive, collaborative, negotiated, hierarchical, or if they are left uncoordinated. I do this by inquiring about administrators' participation in the QA policy formulation process and ask them to characterize the QA policy formulation process at their university (ie. mode of interaction).

Further definitions of the modes of interaction are as follows. While unilateral action does not require a strong organizational context, negotiation action requires the existence of an organizational network. Negotiation systems can require that certain decisions be undertaken only on the basis of negotiated agreement or unanimous vote. These are called joint decision negotiations. Hierarchic systems generally view negotiation as constituting a permanent threat of the hierarchy in case no agreement is reached, which creates a strong incentive to reach an agreement. Majority vote occurs when there are too many actors for negotiation to work properly. This means that there are collective binding agreements even if they are against the interests of some actors. Hierarchical action pertains to a situation where one person is able to specify someone else's choices or decision foundations based on their capacity to offer rewards or threaten deprivations or on their legitimate hierarchical authority (Witte, 2006; Scharpf, 1997).

Figure 2-4 Operationalization of University Administrator Concepts

Administrator Concepts	Example Indicators
Capabilities	- Financial resources - Personnel resources - Position roles / duties - Relationships with individuals of high position / authority in the university
Orientations (Preferences & Perceptions)	- Written statements and publications pertaining to the QA-student services relationship - Presentations pertaining to the QA-student services relationship - Level of interest in QA issues of student services - Motivation for engaging (or not) in QA practices in student services - Goals related to quality and student services - Participation in organizations / associations / boards
Actor Constellation	- Participation in similar boards / decision-making bodies - Divergent or shared orientations across divisions / organizations
Mode of Interaction	- Characteristics / methods of the university policy formulation process - Participation and role in the QA formulation process

2.5.4 Other Factors

Since the "other factors" research question is meant to be more exploratory, distinct concepts are not outlined for this element as they were for the university setting and the university administrator dimensions. However, it is important to note the potential influence of this element on administrators' decisions and on the QA-student services relationship since the primary conceptual framework in this study recognizes that HEIs have historically rooted values and cultural features that may be challenged by other environmental influences. One such environmental influence kept under consideration through this study is the influence of external or internal competitive factors experienced by university administrators. Although this study does not delve into identifying the amount of pressure exerted by these factors, the understanding that these factors might have some impact on the QA-student services relationship at universities is maintained throughout this study.

Chapter 1 discussed globalization in relation to American HE and the resulting competitive pressures felt by the European HE system, which have led to macro-level changes in policy and programs. Globalization pressures can also be felt at the university level via multiple channels. For instance, HE globalization pressures may stem from

internationalized HEIs, the nation-state, and international agencies, such as UNESCO, OECD, and the World Bank (Vaira, 2004). Globalization pressures could make original QA policies or student services' arrangements outdated or they could highlight internal drawbacks or inconsistencies of policies or in the universities themselves (Ying, 2009). Whether or not these issues are perceived as problems and enter the process of agenda setting at a specified university is determined by the perceptions of the relative university administrators who have this authority.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design by analyzing relationships of student services and QA at one Norwegian university and one Swedish university. The qualitative case study is typical for education research and for situations that require holistic descriptions and explanations (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, this research design is particularly suited for gaining "…an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998, pg. 19). Since this study focuses on describing and exploring the idiosyncrasies of the QA-student services relationship at a particular university that lead to a particular arrangement, this method of research is specifically appropriate. In this study, the purpose of the case study is to determine causal relationships with reference to the particular university, which can provide some insight and general inferences with regards to the research questions. This coincides with Merriam's (1998) statement about the relevance of case study research - "The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (pg. 19).

An additional aspect that influenced the choice of research method and design was the nature of the data to be collected. As previously mentioned, this topic is under-researched so this study takes on an exploratory nature with some descriptive features. The main purpose of such an approach is to describe the QA-student services arrangements at the two universities and explore the influencing agents, which led to their particular arrangement or relationship. The findings may offer insight on the elements that influence the QA-student services arrangement at similar universities and might inform future policy that may support coordinating university QA-student services arrangements.

To further specify the design used in this study, the number of units of analysis and cases are considered. Because this study investigates two cases - the University of Oslo and Uppsala University, one can say that the study takes on a multiple-case design. Yin (2009) differentiates between multiple case designs and holistic and embedded designs. The difference among the designs pertains to the number of units of analysis. Since this study examines both the student services arrangement and the university QA arrangement at two universities, this study employs an embedded multiple-case study design because there are two units of analysis within two universities.

3.1.1 Case Selection

Two similar cases were selected for this study because they could provide the strongest basis for the development of theoretical ideologies or assumptions that could be generalized for use in analyzing other similar cases. However, generalizability still proves difficult given that only two universities are examined and that there is often great variation among internal approaches to student services and QA. Regardless, this study hopes to provide some insights into the relevant workings within the Norwegian and Swedish sphere. Thus, two considerations guided the selection of universities: practicability and background relevance.

First, practical considerations influenced my choice of cases. Since I have lived and studied at the UiO, I had some initial familiarity of the system. Additionally, I have some understanding of written Norwegian text as I have studied the language during the course of this program. This proved helpful when trying to understand websites and some documents that were only available in the local language. Contrary to the perception of many, several documents are only available in the local language and thus proved difficult to read, particularly some Swedish documents. In addition, financial and time resources also influenced my choice. Since Norway and Sweden are geographic neighbors, traveling between the two countries was easy and within a reasonable budget.

The background relevance of the two systems also influenced their selection as cases for this study. As of fall 2011, Swedish universities began charging international students tuition fees. Prior to this time, tuition was not charged to any students at the UiO or UU. Also, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) implemented new procedures for assessing the internal QA of HEIs. The new Swedish QA process focuses on outcomes rather than prerequisites and processes while Norway's HE QA system seems to focus on the system structure and processes. Despite these differences and beginning with the initial knowledge of both systems and chosen case universities, these two systems and the selected HEIs, are similar in a number of background variables. This assumption is based on the following characteristics:

- Both HE systems were built from Humboldtian ideology.
- Both universities are located in Northern European countries, so they likely share similar political, economic, and social elements.
- Both universities have decentralized student services and QA systems.
- Both universities have strong systems of student governance.

- Both have internationalization as part of their goals or institutional values.

Therefore, beginning with the consideration of these factors, the study is approached in an explorative manner with the goal of identifying and examining the influential factors of university QA-student services arrangements.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection for this study was formatted in two stages: an initial investigation of relevant documents and in-depth interviews with key administrators. The purpose of collecting and analyzing documents was to identify and map relevant characteristics of the systematic QA and student services processes at each university. The sources used for this mapping included:

- Policy documents related to the university setting (government legislation, university/organization rules, acts, and decisions)
- Secondary sources (books, journal articles, and websites)

In addition to these sources, information gathered from the in-depth interviews served to help clarify and supplement the information found in the documents.

While this first stage of data collection allowed for an initial understanding of the QA and student services' systems and processes, the actor interviews served to provide insight into university administrator networks, capabilities, and perceptions of these systems and processes. Eight key university administrators participated in in-depth interviews, including four administrators from UiO and four from UU.

The initial administrators were purposely selected based on their knowledge and role of QA and student services at their respective universities. In addition, a form of snowball sampling was used as the initially selected participants identified further potential interview participants. All of the participants represented either student services divisions, quality assurance divisions, or student government organizations. Representatives from student government organizations were included in this study because their work aligned with student services and QA at both universities, and analyzing their participation was integral to understanding this relationship. At each university, I spoke with administrators from each division.

Six of the eight interviews were conducted in-person while the other two were conducted via the telephone over the internet. Unfortunately some scheduling conflicts

occurred, so not all participants were able to meet in-person. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes and was conducted in English.

Since this is an explorative study, a semi-structured interview approach was imposed. This allowed for the structure of the issues under analysis to be handled in a more open environment, which was needed to explore patterns and trends. This also enabled me to probe and explore emerging and important issues during the interview. The interview guideline designed and used in each of the interviews for this study can be found in the Appendix A. The interview guideline was designed to contain open-ended and theory-driven questions as per the ACI framework.

3.3 Limitations

Several factors limit this study; four of which are discussed in this section - time, scope of the research, limited prior research in this area, and case study as the chosen methodology. First, the allotted time to complete this study was limited since this is a master thesis for the European Master in Higher Education program (HEEM). To keep within the allotted time frame, this study was limited from a more holistic and comprehensive approach to data collection, interpretation, and analysis. This also bleeds into limitations regarding the scope of the research.

Given the timeframe and scope of this project, not all aspects that might influence the QA-student services relationship could be investigated. The influence of the nation-state is one area that could be further examined, as well as the arrangement for QA of administrative student services functions housed within the academic departments. While these aspects might be interesting to investigate in a future study, the range of influencing agents explored were limited in this study. Furthermore, the idiosyncrasies of the university systems and processes are often varied to a high degree. Although control was attempted in the area of background characteristics to find two similar HEIs, unique idiosyncrasies contributing to the QA-student services arrangement may have been left undiscovered given the scope of this study.

Additionally, there has been limited prior research in this topic area. As far as I am aware, there have been no previous studies attempting to understand and link the influential factors in the determination of a particular QA-student services relationship in Europe. This presented a challenge since there was no previous study or literature to refer to when choosing and developing a framework and methodology to follow. While there have been

studies of this kind analyzing the broader university QA systems and institutional developments, this has not been narrowed to the level of student services' QA systems.

Finally, the case study method is not without challenges and limitations. In this research method, there is little basis for generalizations to populations; however, they are generalizable to theoretical propositions. Additionally, case studies cannot directly address the issue of causal relationships because it is a non-experimental method. Finally, the researcher may find it difficult to abstain from biased views that could influence the analysis and ultimately the conclusions drawn. As a previous student services practitioner in the US and a current higher education master student, there is a natural tendency to apply one's personal lens to the collected data, which may be seen as a barrier to an un-biased data analysis and interpretation and ultimately the research quality (Yin, 2009).

3.4 Research Quality

The concepts of validity and reliability have derived from quantitative research methodology, but they also have importance in qualitative methods and studies. Both of these terms refer to steps or tests that can ensure the quality of a study. This is important because it enables anyone who reads this thesis to have the ability to gauge the thoroughness and rigor of this research and of the methodology used.

3.4.1 Validity

According to Janesick (2000), "validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description" (pg. 393). Hammersley (1992) stated that since qualitative research relies on the researcher's presentation and interpretation of data, validity is therefore characterized in concepts of the truth (as cited in Chambers, 2000). Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that "establishing the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability" (as cited in Seale, 1999, pg. 467).

In qualitative research, there has been much debate on the relevance of some terms that have come from quantitative research, so efforts have been made by some researchers to further define how to assess and identify quality in qualitative studies. One such incidence of differentiating validity in quantitative and qualitative methodologies was the development of sub-concepts of validity (Seale, 1999). In qualitative research, such concepts include construct validity, internal validity, and external validity.

Construct validity refers to the appropriate operationalization of concepts that are at the focus of the study (Yin, 2009). In this study, construct validity was considered through the use of HE literature and a conceptual framework to define and assign parameters to the key concepts or terms. Additionally, these steps were modeled in the development of the empirical tools used for data collection.

Internal validity regards establishing causal relationships between the variables being studied. This form of validity is most relevant for explanatory and causal studies (Yin, 2009). Since the current study is exploratory in nature, a more elaborated discussion of internal validity is excluded.

External validity pertains to the generalizability of the study's findings to a particular domain (Yin, 2009). Although achieving external validity is difficult given the limited number of cases and time allotted for the completion of this thesis, the empirical tools, coding outlines, and the presentation of the results and analyses are consistent across both universities and the framework developed in this thesis. This procedure ensured a simplified method for examining the same features at both universities and identifying convergent or divergent characteristics across the features.

3.4.2 Reliability

Reliability is determined when it is demonstrated that a study can be repeated and with the same results (Yin, 2000). In other words, this form of quality check seeks to ensure there are no personal perspectives or biases of the researcher being reflected in the results or analysis. Sometimes researchers attempt to view the data through a certain lens so as to come to a particular conclusion because they are supportive or unsupportive of the current topic based on their own experiences and judgments (Janesick, 2000).

In order to strengthen the reliability of the resultant data, the interviews in this study were recorded and transcribed so interpretation was easier. This also enabled the option of returning to the original interview to ensure the data was relayed correctly in this thesis. Furthermore, all interviews were organized in the same fashion and used the same interview outline (see Appendix A). Moreover, in the interviews, some probing of answers was used to strengthen the reliability of the responses achieved and to reduce misunderstandings between the interviewer and the study participant.

In addition to these tactics, the mapping of the university setting for both the UiO and UU aided in achieving reliability in this study. This mapping not only presented a

background and description of the QA-student services arrangements currently in place at the universities, but the mapping also enables reviewers of this thesis to relocate the documents used to form an understanding of the university settings of the selected cases. From this point, reviewers can draw their own conclusions based on the documents and compare them with the contents of this thesis. The choice to analyze documents in this thesis also increased the validity of this study since data was obtained from two sources: interviews and documents. Thus, the trustworthiness of the data and analyses presented in this thesis was increased.

With regards to the representativeness of the case studies presented in this thesis, the goal was not to generalize the results to all universities or even to all universities in Norway and Sweden. There are too many variables across HEIs, which makes generalization of this form extremely difficult. Nevertheless, with limited reliability, reviewers of this thesis may be able to generalize the results to cases that have been identified as having similar features based on the concepts outlined in the operationalization and framework portions of this study. In terms of practical application, the contents of this study may be useful as a jumping off point for identifying opportunities to increase support for a coordinated QA arrangement in university student services.

3.5 Challenges and Choices

This section discusses reflections of challenges and choices made in the theoretical and methodological aspects of this study that were imperative to the subsequent data and analysis. This section is divided respectively.

3.5.1 Theoretical Reflections

In HE literature, particularly European HE literature, there is a lack of research on QA issues in student services, especially regarding the determination of its arrangement. Since there is no perfect-fit theoretical framework for this topic at this time, this posed a challenge in the initial selection of an appropriate guiding framework for this study. ACI was ultimately selected based on its ability to allow for flexibility and adaptation to the HE context and enabled the research to be organized and analyzed in two streams: influences of the structure or organization and human-behavioral influences. In terms of addressing the research questions of this study, ACI proved satisfactory because it focuses on elements that enable a balanced perspective of this topic and focuses on elements that are at the heart of HEIs: its

cultural and traditional aspects and the people involved with its mission. The use of ACI in this study was essential in capturing the nature of the QA-student services relationship. However, in retrospect, adopting this framework to guide this study posed some challenges that required careful choices.

One such challenge was to decide how to differentiate between administrator capabilities and the university setting since some characteristics can overlap. For example, "leadership" could be categorized under actor capabilities as a way of characterizing the extent of power or influence. On the other hand, "leadership structure" could be placed under the university setting dimension. According to Mayntz and Scharpf, the actor capabilities (or university administrator capabilities) belong to the actor (administrator)-related domain of the framework. To maintain a division between these two aspects, I kept the actor capabilities in the administrator-related domain but confined them to elements that decide the rules by which can alter the university setting, such as the administrators' relationships with individuals of authority and their duties related to their role at the university. Thus, the university setting is confined to the static organizational and structural elements of the university, particularly that of student services and QA.

3.5.2 Methodological Reflections

This study analyzes the interaction of divisional rather than individual administrators. I chose this approach based on the new-institutionalism belief that an individual's perspective is greatly influenced by the organization or unit within which he or she works. Additionally, I selected this approach to reduce complexity when analyzing across the universities and attempting to draw conclusions. It is far simpler to view administrators as departments of people: QA administrators, student services administrators, and student government administrators.

While this approach captured the main administrators' perceptions well, it presented some limitations too. Through the interviews, it was clear that some administrators did not always speak on behalf of their division but rather from their personal perspective, even if they were asked not to do so. However, this did not jeopardize the data since I took care in distinguishing between the two. I meticulously analyzed the interview transcriptions to ensure that I understood from which perspective the administrators were speaking.

I thought of some reasons why the administrators spoke from an individual perspective rather than a collective perspective. Perhaps they spoke from their individual

perspective because they saw their roles differently from the rest of the units', or they are engaged with other administrators locally or internationally that give them a different perspective. For instance, student representatives who often meet with multiple different groups inside and outside the university may develop a more multi-versed perspective than their colleagues who are not as involved in such interactions.

Another methodological challenge that I encountered was that of obtaining a full-time administrative representative from the Foundation for Student Life in Oslo (SiO). Unfortunately, after much effort, a participant from SiO, which is the student services organization affiliated with UiO, was unable to be obtained. To overcome this obstacle, I interviewed a student representative who works on the SiO board and is engaged with administrators from this organization. Therefore, this person is familiar with the views and arguments of the leading administrators from this organization. This decision also required me to further define the term "university administrator" beyond that of a full-time university administrative employee. Thus, this term refers to any person working in a paid or elected position in their unit, division, or organization that is part of the university or affiliated with its purposes.

4. Structural Descriptions and Mapping

Before beginning the administrator analysis, a description of the QA and student services structure of both countries and the universities is necessary. This chapter provides the reader with information that is necessary to understand the administrator analysis. First, a brief description of the HE system in Norway is discussed. Second, the general structure for QA processes in Norway is presented, which is followed by an overview of the QA structure at UiO. Third, the Norwegian system of providing student services is discussed, which is also followed by an overview of the policies and structure implemented at UiO. Following the description of the Norwegian system, a description of the Swedish system and UU follows in the same fashion. The information detailed in this chapter considers the sub-dimensions that were outlined in Figure 2-3. An overall comparison chart of the information presented in this chapter can be found in Appendix B.

4.1 Higher Education in Norway

In 1989, the University and College Act formed Norwegian HEIs under one common, legal framework, which ultimately formed the Norwegian HE system (Bleiklie, 2009). Currently the system is binary in nature, as it consists of universities and university colleges (høgskolen). Currently there are seven public universities, five public specialized universities, one private specialized university, twenty-four public university colleges, two private university colleges, and 25 additional private HEIs receiving public funding (Ministry of Education). While the universities and specialized universities are responsible for the majority of graduate education and research training, the university colleges are responsible for professional and vocational programs (Kyvik, 2008). In 2004, there were nearly 209,000 students in this HE system and about 25,000 of those students attended private institutions (Bleiklie, 2009). All of these institutions fall under the authority of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

4.1.1 Quality Assurance in Norway

Since Norway's participation in the Bologna Process indicated a commitment to QA methods in HE, a Quality Reform ensued. Up until the early 2000's the Ministry of Education and Research recognized new programs of study. Then in 2003 the Norwegian Agency for

QA in Education (NOKUT), which is an accreditation body, was formed (Haugland, 2006). NOKUT holds four purposes in the QA of HE: to ensure that the quality of HE is at a high international level and can develop towards further improvement (Haugland, 2006), to reveal cases of deficient quality and to detect good and bad quality, to provide HEI's with a basis for self-assessment and change, and to develop a strong quality culture (Lycke, 2004).

In conjunction with these purposes, NOKUT evaluates and recognizes new programs of study as well as evaluates HEIs' internal QA system. NOKUT's evaluation of internal systems of QA includes the structure of the system, QA documentation produced, and the assessment of education quality conducted by the HEI. In addition to NOKUT's standards for HEIs, the ESG and the Ministry of Education and Research also provide the basis for the evaluation of internal QA systems among Norwegian HEIs (Haugland, 2006).

4.1.2 Quality Assurance at the University of Oslo

While NOKUT evaluates the internal QA system at UiO, the internal QA system at UiO evaluates all processes that are related to the quality of education programs. This ranges from information provided to prospective students through to their graduation. As detailed by UiO, there are three aims of the university's QA system.

> *The purposes of UiO's quality assurance system are:*
> - *To contribute to the achievement of the goals defined for the educational activities and the learning environment.*
> - *To reveal flaws and recognize the strong points of instruction and training.*
> - *To serve as a tool for systematic efforts for quality assurance and quality improvement.* (University of Oslo [UiO], 2010a, pg. 2).

'Quality of education' is emphasized in the sense that it relates to the students' learning processes and the outcome of their studies. The concept of 'quality of education' is sub-divided by the University to more clearly outline their definition of the term. The sub-divisions of 'quality of education' are listed below and include a description of the QA elements they represent:

1. Entrance quality - students' knowledge and skills prior to entering UiO

2. Quality of material and immaterial resources - academic staff and other human resources, physical facilities, other factors essential for a good study environment

3. Program quality - program description and organization of the learning process

4. Teaching quality - the facilitation of the learning process, ability of academic staff to organize teaching and supervision duties

5. Result quality - students' learning outcomes, personal development, and study progression

6. Management quality - the institution's ability to manage its own QA and quality improvement processes (UiO, 2010a)

As for the governance of these processes, the University emphasizes decentralized responsibility and authority; however, the University Board holds the final responsibility of maintaining a satisfactory and well-document QA system. In addition to the University Board, five committees contribute to the maintenance of QA at UiO. These committees and their respective responsibilities include the following:

1. University's Studies Committee and the University's Committee for Research and Research Training - monitoring, developing, and priority setting in the QA system

2. Learning Environment Committee - improve material and immaterial resources related to the learning environment

3. Faculty Board - ensure quality in the faculty, programs, and departments and that it is developed with the needs and capacity of the faculty members in mind

4. Departments - course quality within respective departments, develop procedures for the QA of the courses that comply with the joint requirement for UiO, the requirement of the faculties, and the department's own QA goals

5. Centers - centers that offer courses have the same requirements as departments (UiO, 2010a).

Furthermore, additional groups of people also may participate in UiO's QA and facilitate this process. For instance, students and doctoral candidates submit evaluations and are represented on UiO councils and committees. Administrative and support functions are responsible for providing many services, material resources, and environmental pre-conditions that are critical for the development of a quality educational context. Academic staff, external peers and interested parties may also participate in QA processes at UiO (UiO, 2010a).

4.1.3 Student Services in Norway

There is no overarching authority over student services in Norway; however, HEIs are required to be affiliated with a student welfare organization. The only exception to this rule is for private HEIs that have some other satisfactory student welfare arrangement (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). The financing of student welfare organizations consists of

public allocations, semester fees, and income from their own sources. The intent of the student welfare organizations is to ensure that students' welfare needs are secured by advocating these needs to public authorities. The welfare organizations also must be the primary provider of student housing, which should be offered to students at market-regulated prices (Studentenes Landsforbund, 2006).

In regards to libraries and the physical learning environment, a Learning Environment Committee (LMU) is appointed within universities to handle these matters. The LMU works with issues pertaining to the general study environment and students' social, pedagogical, and learning environment. LMU is responsible for ensuring the quality of these areas and is required to submit reports of poor physical conditions to the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority (Arbeidstilsynet). HEIs also must offer health and counseling services to students (Studentenes Landsforbund, 2006).

In addition to student welfare organizations and the initiatives taken by the HEI, there are also student-run associations that advocate for student's rights and welfare. These organizations have recently undergone a re-organization. In April 2010, the Norsk Studentunion (NSU) merged with Studentes Landsfobund (StL) and formed a new organization as of June 1, 2010 called Norsk Studentorganisasjon (NSO). Thus, three organizations recognized by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research represent all students at HEIs in Norway: NSO, the International Student's Union of Norway (ISU), and the Association of Norwegian Students Abroad (ANSA) (International Students Union of Norway [ISU], 2010).

4.1.4 Student Services at the University of Oslo

In collaboration between UiO and the Foundation for Student Life in Oslo (SiO), UiO students receive welfare services. SiO was established in 1939 and is Norway's oldest student welfare association. They provide approximately 55,000 students at 23 HEIs in Oslo and Akershus with student welfare services. Their primary goal is to offer students products and services that "aid effective learning and a stimulating student experience," "promote high quality of studies," and "facilitate conditions for student welfare." A second aim is to "assist the associated higher education institution to maintain the country's most attractive learning environment" (SiO, 2011).

The University Board has final responsibility for the student learning environment, in cooperation with SiO. In the Service Declaration produced by the University, UiO should

have an appropriate physical learning environment, including clean and safe premises and equipment, as well as, an appropriate psychosocial learning environment that is inclusive and anti-discriminatory. While the University primarily addresses functions and services directly related to learning and studying, SiO supports students with services that aid in the success of their studies. For instance, UiO offers the library, ensures access to course literature, offers buildings to learn and study, facilitates the use of ICT in teaching and learning, and follows-up on complaints against the social and physical learning environment (UiO, 2010b). SiO, on the other hand, offers cafeteria services, provides student housing and information on private housing, offers general health services, psychological services, dental services at reduced costs, physical exercise and sports activities, daycare facilities, facilitates voluntary activities, and strives to adapt services for students with disabilities (SiO, 2011).

One major contributor to student services at the UiO is the Student Welfare Council (Velferdstinget). While SiO is the service provider of student services, students essentially run SiO. The decision-making body of SiO consists of a General Board - five student representatives, two representatives from SiO, and two representatives from the HEIs. Thus, students hold the majority vote in decisions pertaining to student services delivered by SiO (Velferdstinget, 2011).

4.2 Higher Education in Sweden

Unlike the Norwegian system of HE, the Swedish system is unitary in nature. There are 52 HEIs in Sweden, most of which are public institutions that receive funding from the government. There are four types of institutions: universities, university colleges, university colleges of arts, and independent organizations with programs in psychotherapy. The universities grant university diplomas, bachelor degrees, one and two-year master degrees, and licentiate and doctoral degrees. The university colleges can only award university diplomas, bachelor degrees, and one-year master degrees; however, they can apply for approval to grant two-year master degrees from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) (Högskoleverket). Enrolled in these institutions are approximately 384,000 students. The Swedish government has the overriding responsibility for HE (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education [HSV], 2010b).

4.2.1 Quality Assurance in Sweden

The HSV holds the responsibility of reviewing the quality of HE in Sweden. They evaluate fields of study and study programs in addition to granting HEIs with degree-granting authority. The stated purposes for QA include the following: the right for students to have high standards in their courses and programs of study, employers needs for highly trained graduates, accountability to the general public that their taxes result in high standards, and the need to maintain high standards for Sweden's competition in the global HE market (HSV, 2010a).

This year the HSV began a new process of conducting national QA of HEIs. From 2001 to 2010, the Agency conducted evaluations of all fields and study programs at HEIs focusing on prerequisites and processes. The new QA process focuses on program outcomes. Criteria for assessing these outcomes include students' degree projects, the self-evaluations of HEIs and site visits, and questionnaires sent to alumni. The Agency now evaluates programs based on a three-grade scale. Those HEIs that receive the highest marks receive additional funding while those with continuous low marks might have their authority to grant degrees revoked. With this new QA system, the HEI holds the responsibility of investigating the reasons behind their results. The Swedish national QA policy is developed in accordance with ENQA and the ESG (HSV, 2010a).

4.2.2 Quality Assurance at Uppsala University

At UU, the overarching responsibility of QA lies with the university management, which includes the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, University Director, and the Dean of the Faculty of Educational Sciences. A central quality committee advises the Vice Chancellor in long-term quality work. Within academic departments, a faculty board is responsible for the quality of education and research within their respective department. In addition, the University Administration has an Office of Quality and Evaluation, which supports departments and boards in their quality efforts (Uppsala University [UU], 2008). This QA unit is also available to assist student services units and student organizations with QA work.

As stated in Uppsala's Programme for Quality Work, the aim of the QA system at UU is to "stimulate quality work and to contribute to continuous developmental work throughout the University and to ensure that this is done in such a way as to make it possible to take

action should any quality issues occur" (UU, 2008, pg. 5). QA supports internal and external demands from the government and other stakeholders as well as aids in the university maintaining its goals and standards. The following strategies are used to contribute to the maintenance of these university and QA goals and standards:

1. Systematic follow-ups at various levels of activities must include a factual basis for improvements in education, research, and cooperation

2. Clear leadership to promote a good quality culture and conditions for quality work

3. Employee and student involvement in assessments of the activities in which they are involved

4. Support functions such as management systems, administration, libraries, external and internal communication, premises, and other infrastructures are to provide support for UU's primary activities and quality work. These support functions must be kept updated with demands and be cost effective and of good quality (UU, 2008).

4.2.3 Student Services in Sweden

In Sweden, universities have the primary responsibility for student services activities that directly pertain to the study situation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009). For instance, HEIs should provide students with information about admissions, the selection process, the appeal process, and study program requirements. Their role is also to provide students with healthcare, a good study environment, and other welfare activities to support their studies and transition to the labor market (HSV, 2011b).

In addition to the services provided by the HEI, student unions can also provide student welfare services. The primary mission of the student union is to monitor and participate in the development of courses, programs, and institutional study conditions. For many years, student union membership was obligatory, but this was abolished on July 1, 2010. The reason for this abolishment being the ability to have freedom of association, and the government believes that voluntary membership will strengthen the legitimacy of the student unions, as well as student influence (HSV, 2011a; Government Offices of Sweden, 2009). After this decision, HEI's were given the right to determine their own internal organization, and they were also given greater responsibility for student welfare issues (HSV, 2011a).

As for the financing of student unions, the Swedish government allocates approximately 30 million Swedish kroners among the student unions to ensure that the

structure for the participation of students in QA procedures at the HEI remains (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009). While the government may offer some support, student unions receive monetary funds from other sources as well. For instance, approximately 10 percent of unions said their operations relied entirely on the membership fees from students, and about 60 percent of unions have said that they have received large revenues from their respective HEI (HSV, 2011a). Others have also said that they receive revenues from companies and local authorities (HSV, 2011a). Moreover, student unions do not pay any income tax, real estate tax, or real estate charge (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009).

4.2.4 Student Services at Uppsala University

In UU, the university Student Affairs and Academic Registry Division, individual faculties, and the student nations and unions share responsibility over student services. The Student Affairs and Academic Registry Division provide services to students before, during, and after their studies. These services are arranged in six offices: admissions, graduation, international, study counselors and career, student records, and disability support for students (Lauritzen, 2011).

At UU, there are 13 student nations. Some of these nations originated in the 17th century and have a long history of representing particular regions in Sweden. Historically, students from the different regions joined their respective student nation. Now international students who attend UU can join any nation that suits them; however, students must be a member of a nation to have access to its activities and resources (Lundqvist, 2010). In 1849, the student nations formed the first student union at UU in order to address concerns that applied to all students (Uppsala Studentkår, 2011a).

Now there are two student unions at UU: Uppsala Student Union (Uppsala Studentkår) and the Pharmaceutical Student Union (Farmaceutiska Studentkår). The student unions are responsible for student welfare and handle educational, financial, health care, housing, and recreational matters (Lundqvist, 2010). While the primary focus of the unions is on education monitoring and student influence, they can also offer support for students who need advice or help (Uppsala Studentkår, 2011a).

Within the Uppsala Student Union, there is an Executive Committee, which consists of the following positions: President, Vice President for Student Welfare, and Vice President for Education Policy. The President maintains overall responsibility and participates in university administration meetings. The Vice President for Student Welfare works with

issues pertaining to the study environment. The Vice President for Education Policy ensures the monitoring of educational quality, which is one of the most important tasks of the Student Union. This person also monitors policy developments and the national and institutional levels and is a member of the University Quality Committee (Uppsala Studentkår, 2011b).

5. Empirical Analysis

This chapter begins by presenting the findings and themes from the administrator interviews at the University of Oslo and Uppsala University. They are presented in such a fashion that they mirror the administrator categories that were adapted in the ACI conceptual framework, which was presented in section 2.3. A table illustrating these themes for both the University of Oslo and Uppsala University can be found in Appendix C. The second part of this chapter presents a more holistic perspective of the findings and considers the influence of the university setting and actors, as well as other factors. With all three of these dimensions under consideration, the most significant patterns appearing to influence the QA-student services relationship are highlighted.

5.1 University of Oslo

Administrator Capabilities

During the interviews, one theme emerged with regards to administrator capabilities and their influence on the QA-student services relationship. This theme was the nature of the administrators' role and their relationship to individuals and groups with authority. While the ultimate responsibility over QA belongs with the University Board, the internal QA unit at UiO coordinates the QA system at the university level (a small team within the Department of Student Affairs and a QA network with administrative representatives from the faculties). This team works closely with the University Board on quality issues. Student representatives are also included in these meetings and discussions with the Board. Within the university there is a close connection between students and the University Board and the UiO quality unit and the Board. However, these discussions primarily concern the QA of academic programs and teaching. SiO is also present in UiO quality discussions through the Student Environment Advisory Board.

In the case of student services, UiO also coordinates with SiO, but according to the student government, they take on more of a periphery role. Student representatives from the student government organizations also coordinate with SiO; however, they are more of a team player with SiO but also advocate for the needs of students from SiO and the municipality. In the case of electing authority figures, student representatives participate in electing representatives for the primary SiO boards and the individual unit boards (ex. boards

representing the student cafeterias and bookstore). Additionally, representatives from UiO are present on SiO's boards.

Recently, the influence of student governance in regards to student welfare has been challenged by the nation-state. The nation-state wanted to govern 'control mechanisms' in that they wanted to ensure that student welfare was economical and delivered appropriately by changing the way important decisions were approved, thus limiting student influence. Representatives from UiO wrote a letter in support of student governance and against these proposed changes.

From the interviews, the administrators acknowledged that the university size and breadth of student services offerings, as well as the role of the administrators and their relationship with authority or decision-makers in QA matters, influence the QA-student services relationship. Although this may be more descriptive of the university setting, these aspects are also important to note under "Administrator Capabilities" because they influence the extent of the administrator's capabilities. Administrators from UiO and the Student Welfare Committee acknowledged that size and scope of the university and its auxiliary operations (SiO) create a challenge when trying to coordinate QA efforts among student services.

Administrator Orientations

To begin, it is important to acknowledge the goals of each unit since the goals outline the basic foundation of thought within the unit. As mentioned in section 4.1.2, the UiO quality unit aims to develop a joint framework that comprises all processes related to the quality of education (educational activities and the learning environment), provide systematic documentation, and emphasize quality improvement and development. SiO aims to "…be an exceptional service company for its users and to assist the associated educational institutions to maintain the country's most attractive learning environments" (SiO, 2011). The Student Welfare Committee aims to ensure awareness within SiO of student wants and needs in terms of student services. Knowledge of these goals can be used to better understand the interests, motivations, and actions of responsibility taken by each unit.

While the UiO QA division believes that the QA of student services is an important topic, they also believe that the quality of academic programs and teaching should take precedence in UiO's internal QA scheme. The Student Welfare Committee, on the other hand, believes that while others may share the view of the UiO QA division, they feel strongly about ensuring the quality of student services. Their perceptions of the importance of student

services' QA also coincide with perceptions of responsibility over the QA of student services. The UiO QA system strongly focuses on the evaluation of programs and studies; however, the learning environment is included in the annual survey, but they cannot reference the quality of the student services specifically. On the other hand, the student government organizations perceive that it is part of their duty to ensure the quality of services from SiO.

At UiO, the interview participants discussed their participation and the participation of other university bodies in relevant QA and student services' boards and groups. Representatives from the student government, faculties, UiO administration, and SiO all seem to converse and collaborate on a number of levels. Additionally, the faculties report to the Student Environment Advisory Board if they have received any student complaints about the social or physical learning environment. While QA of student services may take a backseat to the quality of academic programs and teaching, there is still actor participation in discussions of these topics at the various levels of influence at UiO.

Administrator Constellation

Given the nature of the communication and board structures at UiO and SiO, all units should have shared levels of participation in the decision-making processes with respect to QA and student services within UiO and SiO. Thus, they should also have shared capabilities of influencing decisions that are made among these boards and in the units. These participatory roles seem to influence a shared perception in terms of responsibility of student services and QA. This does not mean that they all feel responsible over the QA of student services but rather they all recognize and understand the divergence of responsibility among the units. This means that each unit knows their role in QA and student services arrangements and the other units are also aware of this distribution of responsibility.

With respect to game theoretical principles, the major areas of conflict or disagreement are the goals of each unit and the variance of responsibility for the QA of student services across the units. To a large extent the goals of each unit do not overlap despite such shared participation and communication within meetings and among boards. This variance of goals may therefore influence the divergence of roles of responsibility among the three units in relation to managing the QA-student services arrangement. Furthermore, these goals appear to reflect the relative perception of the importance of QA-student services of each unit. A unit's role, as far as responsibility, also influences their role in the participation of decision-making boards and groups.

Mode of Interaction

As one might presume from the previous sections, there is great collaboration between student government representatives, SiO, and the UiO QA unit in regards to the overall university QA development and procedures. Student representatives can influence the quality work through the process of elections. SiO is also part of the Student Learning Environment Advisory Board, which contributes annual reports for input on goals and strategies for the QA work. Additionally, this board can submit proposals for measures in the annual plan and budgets in conjunction with the University Studies Council. Within the Student Learning Environment Advisory Board, the types of student services the university should have are also discussed.

Since UiO has a focus on the learning environment, they dialogue with SiO to ensure that they share similar goals. For instance, SiO tells UiO when there is a need, so they communicate to ensure that student needs are being met. SiO also has a board and UiO is represented in this board as well. The annual report from this board is actually included in part of UiO's annual quality of education report. These interactions imply that the process of developing the university's QA plan is coordinated and democratic in nature.

The process of QA for student services is handled differently, however. While UiO includes some information about these services in their annual report, it is not conclusive. They refer to SiO as the responsible unit for the QA of the services they provide. Although SiO uses a standard satisfaction survey, they do not have a systematic method to assess student needs or their services, so reports from boards (UiO and the Student Welfare Committee) and individual service units are used to determine these aspects and possibly influence decisions made with regards to the student services arrangement. As mentioned above, SiO also has a board and student representatives also participate in these boards to ensure SiO understands the needs and wants of the students it serves. With these indicators one can infer that the development and procedures over the QA of student services is more student-driven and left uncoordinated by UiO and SiO.

5.2 Uppsala University

Administrator Capabilities

The nature of the actors' role and their relationship to individuals and groups with authority is one theme found to influence the QA-student services relationship. While the ultimate responsibility of the quality work at UU is oversaw by the University Board, the

University Quality Committee, with support from the QA unit, develops the quality scheme. The student unions participate through a student representative system. While some actors from the Department of Academic and Student Affairs may participate in university groups that develop goals and strategies for the university, which can be used in QA goal setting conversations and documents, it seems that this department takes on more of a peripheral role in regards to decision-making within the broader university QA system.

In the case of QA of student services, there is no singular deciding body with regards to the process. All university units, departments, and student organizations, including the student unions, can seek assistance from the QA unit on the development and implementation of QA efforts within their respective units. Therefore, each unit or organization chooses whether or not to participate in QA efforts. This structure implies that both the Uppsala Student Union and the Department of Academic and Student Affairs have equal opportunities to gain information and assistance with QA and thus implement QA schemes within their divisions.

Similar to UiO, administrators acknowledged that the decentralized and large size of the university as a cause for hardship when trying to develop relationships across the university with regards to conducting QA of student services. One administrator indicated that this might influence the variance of effort taken by different units and departments in the university with regards to taking care of students and taking QA actions towards these services. Such a distributed system with many actors may encourage some student services units to decide against participating in QA efforts because there is no one directing these efforts or their unit's actions in QA.

Administrator Orientations

Following suit with the organization of the previous section on the University of Oslo, the goals for each unit are first highlighted under this dimension. As stated in section 4.2.2, the goal of the university's QA program is to "stimulate quality work and to contribute to continuous developmental work throughout the university and to ensure that it is done in such a way as to make it possible to take action should any quality issues occur" (UU, 2008, pg. 5). The Uppsala Student Union aims to ensure that student interests are protected through education monitoring and student influence while also serving as a support center for students (Uppsala Studentkår, 2011a). Through the interviews, the primary focus of the Department of Academic and Student Affairs appeared to be to conduct student services activities within

UU and cooperate with the student unions while also participating in university, national, and international efforts in student services' QA.

All interviewed administrators held the same perspective in terms of importance of the QA of student services topic - that the QA work is very important but not as important as academics and teaching. The QA unit even mentioned that this aspect of university QA efforts is often neglected. As mentioned in the previous section, one method of managing the QA of student services, even though these quality assessments are perceived as less important than assessments pertaining to the academic aspects, is to integrate questions related to student services into the assessments that focus on academic aspects. This is one way that the university QA unit can manage this QA work. While this perspective of importance rang true throughout the units, the Uppsala Student Union mentioned that needs assessments are being used to get to know the student population better, so the university can adapt. The Union also said that the university wants to adapt and to know how and where to change in order to improve its support for students.

This perception of importance of QA of student services also coincides with the similarities of goals across the units and with the perceptions of responsibility over the QA of student services. The perception of actual responsibility is similar across all the analyzed dvisions. They each appear to understand that they can and should play a role in the quality work of student services. However, there is some divergence in terms of desired responsibility. For instance, while the Student Union discussed a desire for a more centralized approach to conducting QA of student services, the Department of Academic and Student Affairs mentioned that centralizing authority from the top may not be favorable because the daily interest of the individual departments and units may be lost. This divergence may be caused due to the unsteady nature of the student representative system and organization of the student unions. Since they are student-run, turnover of representatives occurs often, so they may not have the time to organize themselves and exert the same amount of effort and knowledge as some of the other units who prefer the decentralized approach to QA of student services.

Although not discussed as much by the Student Union, the Department of Academic and Student Affairs discussed a supportive and collaborative relationship with the QA unit. The QA unit is available to assist all units in QA efforts, but most interest has originated from the academic departments. In recent years, there has been growing interest and use by the student services units, but the biggest challenge is to build bridges between the supporting units and the QA unit. This is due in part to the size and scope of the university.

Administrator Constellation

Given the nature of the QA unit at UU, all academic and student services units should have similar opportunities for assistance in engaging in QA and implementing QA work in their respective units. While this does not mean that they have equal opportunities to participate in policy and decision-making processes in the broader university context, they should be similar as far as knowledge of QA development and implementation, which can be used in their units. Additional similarities among the units are their goals and aims. Each unit places some emphasis on QA or education monitoring. These shared goals relate to the shared perceptions of importance regarding the QA-student services topic across the units.

With respect to game theory, there were a few areas where the units conflicted or diverged. The first is a divergence in capabilities to influence the UU QA decisions. As discussed under "Administrator Capabilities," not all units have an equal part in this process. However, this limitation of capabilities is not the same in terms of student services' QA. Secondly, there are divergent perceptions of desired responsibility for QA-student services. From the interviews, the Uppsala Student Union acknowledged concern over the feasibility of their participation in the QA-student services arrangement. These perceptions reflect the capabilities of the units. While the students expressed concern due to their limited capabilities stemming from the nature of the student union system and the lack of longevity of representatives, the perceptions of the other units reflected their more stable staff structure and ability to contribute to the QA process.

Finally, there are divergent roles in the responsibility of the QA-student services process at UU. For instance, the QA unit maintains a supportive role, which is similar to their role in the broader university QA scheme. On the other hand, the Department of Academic and Student Affairs and the Uppsala Student Union maintain a role that reflects that of a participant and collaborator.

Mode of Interaction

As one can infer from the previous sections, there is great support for quality work across institutional units at UU. In regards to decision-making in the broader university QA arrangement, there is great participation and collaboration from student representatives with the University Quality Committee and support provided by the QA unit. The Uppsala Student Union has great involvement with student services and is invited to be a part of any group that is developing a new program or goals for the university. These efforts are well coordinated and supported by the university.

While the broader university QA arrangement is well coordinated, QA work for student services is not as regulated or monitored. The QA unit is available to provide support and assistance with conducting QA assessments to all academic departments and administrative units, including the student unions and other organizations; however, cooperation with the QA unit is not mandated, so units can choose whether or not they want to seek such support. This means that the QA process for student services is unit-driven. The Department of Academic and Student Affairs appears to be engaged in QA efforts with the support of the QA unit. This is evidenced by their involvement in peer reviews with other Swedish universities and their collaboration with the QA unit since they have communicated in the form of meetings.

In addition to the QA unit acting as a support mechanism, they can also conduct quality assessments of student services themselves, even though the larger responsibility lies with the individual units. Often times this means that student services aspects are integrated with other assessments that focus more on the academic aspects of the university. One such QA effort was the unit's involvement in coordinating interviews with university drop-outs to see if there were any implications for student services.

5.3 Application of Adapted Model to Results and Discussion

This section uses the adapted ACI conceptual framework, which was presented in section 2.4, to analyze the significant features and relationships leading to the establishment of the present QA-student services relationship or arrangement at the University of Oslo and Uppsala University. Each university is analyzed according to its structural features, administrative influences, and other faced factors or pressures.

5.3.1 University of Oslo

After reviewing documents and analyzing the interviews with key administrators from the University of Oslo, the findings indicate that UiO has a decentralized QA and student services system and a loose QA-student services relationship. To support this argument, the following sub-sections present an analysis of the features that guide this relationship and that are in congruence with the adapted conceptual framework.

University Setting

In the University of Oslo, there appears to be two primary systematic features that influence the QA-student services relationship: the outsourcing of most student services to an organization outside the university and organized student governance. Additionally, the primary mission of UiO has been teaching and research, so providing student services has not been a main focus. For these reasons, the UiO QA efforts have focused on the teaching and research missions. Because SiO is subcontracted to provide student services to UiO students, the university does not assume responsibility for monitoring the QA of individual student services that are offered by SiO. Thus, the responsibility is left to SiO, but they do not have a complete systematic method of assessing student needs and their services.

Since SiO is more of a business than an educational institution or body, they may have other concerns than those of a university. For instance, they may be more interested in customer service, as indicated by the implementation of a satisfaction survey, rather than on assessing how their services contribute to the learning process and student development. In essence, SiO's approach to QA may be different from UiO's due to their business-like nature, which influences the language of QA and the perception and approach to QA.

While there appears to be a crack in the system when QA of student services is referenced, the crack seems to be partially mended due to strong student government participation among UiO students. For instance, the Student Welfare Council consists of student representatives from each university affiliated with SiO, and these representatives participate in the political decision-making process in regards to SiO's services. While they communicate the wants and needs of students towards SiO's services, they may, in a sense, be contributing to the QA efforts of SiO since they provide SiO insight into the desires and views of the students that they serve.

Whereas strong student government may appear to mend the crack, it may also be a detriment to achieving a complete quality system for student services within SiO or in collaboration with UiO. Since student representatives change often, there may not be continuity of ideas, needs, and mission, which may influence the perceived quality level of student services and thus the advocated and performed quality work. This brings to question - whether or not students should govern their own student services and if this form of governance works. This responsibility over QA-student services is also an important factor in the university administration aspect.

Ultimately, the disconnect between student services and QA stems from the organization of student services at UiO. Since most of the services are not housed within the

university itself, this poses a challenge for the university administrators to monitor for quality. This organizational structure sets the limits for administrators' capabilities, sets the parameters for the interactions of student services and QA administrators, and influences their perceptions and preferences with regards to this topic. Therefore, the feasibility of this organizational pattern for universities that wish to successfully engage in QA-student services work is questionable.

University Administrators

The perception of where the responsibility over QA-student services should be located and the coordination and communication approach among affiliated administrative units are key features in the university administration dimension that influences the QA-student services relationship. While the importance of this relationship is gaining more clout among UiO administrators, UiO still seems to assume the responsibility of QA-student services belongs with SiO. However, SiO does not have a systematic QA scheme for the student services they offer, so to ensure that student needs and desires are being met and that good services are provided, student government groups take on the responsibility. Perhaps if UiO recognized greater responsibility for the QA of student services then a more systematic quality approach might be designed as a collaborative venture between SiO, UiO, and the student government groups.

Presently a more loosely coordinated and communicative approach to QA occurs among the three entities. Throughout the year, boards and representatives from UiO and the student government groups meet with SiO to discuss problems, align goals, and share assessment findings, which is also conducted through report sharing. Although this format might positively influence the distribution of student services, it may negatively impact the perceived need for a more comprehensive QA scheme for student services among SiO administrators because they already receive some quality information from outside constituents. This postulation would need to be further investigated with the cooperation of SiO.

Even though the UiO quality unit might be part of conversations with SiO and the student government organizations with regards to student services and QA of such services, they may take on a more peripheral role due to their overarching goals. The goals of SiO and the student organizations may also influence their actual roles in the arrangement and their perception of the importance of the QA of student services.

Other Factors

At UiO there are internal and external pressures that appear to affect the QA-student services relationship based on the administrator interviews. First, UiO has an internal pressure to maintain its prestige by upholding its goals and missions towards being a leading international university. This means that UiO has certain values that they also must anticipate SiO will have too. Promising international students a place in student housing if they apply within designated deadlines is one such example where the two organizations must coordinate to ensure UiOs goals are being met. On the other hand, SiO must communicate with UiO when there might be issues in meeting their goals. This pressure to ensure coordination of goals might facilitate interest on UiO's behalf in a more comprehensive QA scheme, especially in regards to the student services that reflect their goals.

A second indicated factor that influences the QA-student services relationship is the recent event of student service provider mergers. Since SiO now serves several HEIs and not only the UiO, SiO's ability to provide the services UiO needs to maintain their goals may be limited. This too may further influence UiO's interest in a comprehensive QA scheme in the future. Further investigation into the impact of the mergers would need to be held at a later time since their advent was quite recent.

5.3.2 Uppsala University

Just as the University of Oslo has a decentralized system of QA and student services, Uppsala University does as well. However, there are some differing characteristics and themes that have influenced a different arrangement of QA and student services at UU. These key characteristics and themes are discussed in this section and follow the pattern set by the framework that is used to guide this study.

University Setting

The two characteristics in the Uppsala University setting that appear to have the greatest influence on the university's QA-student services relationship is the decentralized nature of the student services and QA governance structure and the existence of a central QA unit with services available to all academic departments, administrative units, and student organizations. This means that even though the work is distributed among many organizations and units within and outside the university, there is still a central QA division willing and able to assist any person or group with QA work. This implies that the amount

and type of student services' quality work completed is greatly dependent on the orientations of those administrators working in the units and organizations - whether they are interested in pursuing QA work or not - as well as on the actual organizational structure of student services and QA. This organizational pattern poses the greatest limitations on QA work in student services even though UU has a QA unit in place that is available to help student services units with QA matters.

To further support the quality work of student services internally, the university could enforce policies or goals for service units to engage in QA work within their local units or organizations. However, enforcing such goals may be more difficult in the case of student unions or other organizations external to the university. Without required participation in quality efforts by the university or nation-state, one is left with assuming QA work will occur based on contrived interest and perceived benefits of such work. Even if there is strong interest in QA efforts in student services and perceived benefits to the work, these opportunities may not be enough for those administrators and organization leaders who are already stretched thin with a number of duties on their plate. They may need the extra push via policy to feel a real need or drive to engage in QA efforts.

Despite the system being decentralized and the inevitable opportunity for quality work to fall between the cracks in such a system, there is a support structure in place at UU for those organizations and units, including the student unions and other student service units, that want to seize the opportunity to use it. One example of the type of decentralized QA activities that occur within the UU student affairs department is the peer reviews. This is a pilot project that was carried out in 2010 among 15 universities. The object of this peer-based review was for the student affairs divisions "to assist and support each other in their ongoing quality and development work" (Lauritzen, Danielsson, & Isacson, 2011, pg. 1). Additionally, this process was used to learn from each other and receive comments from other colleagues in order to create a valuable component in the quality work of each student services division. In the future, the leaders of the student affairs divisions in the Swedish universities hope to create a regular peer review process.

University Administrators

Two administrator characteristics that indicated the greatest influence on the QA-student services relationship at UU were the administrators' mode of interaction and their perception of the importance and location of responsibility of student services. As alluded to in the previous section, the QA unit at UU acts as a more consultative and supportive

facilitator of methods rather than an enforcer. In this sense, the QA unit can be perceived as more of a peer unit rather than an authoritarian unit that can determine decisions made within the units. Several student service units have sought the assistance of the QA unit including the disability services unit and the administrative student affairs division. While the assistance of the QA unit was previously purely descriptive, they now try to highlight the most important elements from the QA work and make suggestions for improvement to the units seeking their assistance.

The importance and location of responsibility over student services and its QA appears to be perceived similarly among the student unions, the UU student affairs division, and the UU QA unit. While the university administrators believe that the right to provide student services belongs to the student because that is how it has been organized historically, they also believe that student services are important. This is evidenced by the university wanting to help coordinate (through the support of the student affairs division) and provide QA support through the UU's QA unit.

The interviewed administrator from the QA unit mentioned that five to ten years ago the academic departments were the units primarily seeking QA assistance, but now more student services units are seeking such assistance; however, the greatest QA efforts are still focused around academic programs and teaching. This indicates that the interest and importance of student services, and more importantly the provision of quality student services, is increasing within UU. Another UU administrator even mentioned how the university would have to provide greater support and coordination for student services if the student unions and nations did not provide such support to students. This could partly be due to competitive forces, which may facilitate the need for such services to attract and retain international students.

Other Factors

Similar to UiO, the interviewed administrators at UU indicated both internal and external pressures as influencing the QA-student services relationship. The first pressure regards pressure originating internally. This internal pressure seeks to maintain the competitiveness and prestige of the university. The administrators want to provide a good student experience and maintain the respect of the oldest Swedish university. This is one pressure that may influence greater participation in student services and QA in recent years.

A second but external pressure derives from other universities that are competing globally for students. The QA unit at UU has interviewed international students who say that

they are more taken care of at their home universities and are expected to make more arrangements themselves while studying at UU. This implies that UU must continue to develop its student services in order to remain competitive among other universities. Additionally, the recent implementation of tuition fees for international students has led to greater scrutiny of teaching and the administration, including student services. This has influenced the adaptation of student services to accommodate for these pressures and influenced a more focused approach to QA.

5.4   Holistic Analysis and Conclusions

Now that I have mapped each university's setting of QA and student services, presented the data collected from the administrator interviews, and applied the adapted ACI model to the results, this section summarizes the overall results and draws conclusions with reference to the research questions. First, I examine the role of the university setting in the QA-student services relationship. Next, I investigate the role of the university administrators in this relationship. Then I explore the influence of other factors that may contribute to changing this relationship. Finally, I return to the overarching research question "What is the relationship between student services and quality assurance in Norwegian and Swedish universities?"

5.4.1 The Role of the University Setting

The university setting sets the bounds under which the university administrators work and make decisions with regards to managing QA and student services. For both universities, the organization of QA and student services set the parameters under which all other decisions were determined. In the interviews, this organizational pattern was often first discussed as a prelude to their responses. In the case of both universities, the system was decentralized. Another important characteristic of this system is the location of responsibility over student services and QA. The structure of this responsibility is where the two universities diverged. While both universities have an overarching university quality committee or board, the UU has a QA unit available to assist student services units and organizations, but UiO leaves the responsibility to SiO. Neither of the universities have a regular structure for QA work in student services nor is this practice mandated at either university. This leads to another dimension of divergence - the location of responsibility for student services.

At both universities, the academic departments and the administration offer some services, but some other student services are housed outside the university. In UU, they are located in student unions and nations that are student-run. At UiO, they are located within SiO, which is a student welfare organization serving universities and colleges in the greater Oslo and Akerskus region.

In returning to the research question "What is the role of the university setting in this relationship?," the role of the university setting sets the stage and gives context for the administrators' interactions. The organizational setting can positively orient the university towards a QA structure for student services or it can prove a hindrance. In the case of these two universities and their decentralized systems with many actors and units managing student services (and outside the bounds of the university in some cases), the organizational structure negatively influences QA of student services. When there are many people in different areas of the university (or outside the university) juggling student services and QA, it is easy for people to lose motivation towards QA and it is more difficult to coordinate and collaborate on efforts. However, the university administrators themselves and other factors may influence actions with the purpose of supporting QA of student services. While the structure may not be ideal for managing and organizing QA work in student services, the actual arrangement and perceptions of the work is determined by a triangulation of factors, including the role of administrators and other contextual factors.

5.4.2 The Role of the University Administrators

With the traditions, values, and structures prevalent in the university setting, university administrators make decisions, act, and interact as representatives of their university. The setting in which they work informs their behaviors. Therefore, there are some areas of divergence and convergence between UU and UiO since their organization of QA and student services are similar in some aspects.

One influential aspect in both of the universities is the administrators' perception of importance of the QA of student services. In both universities, administrators indicated that although this form of QA is important, it does not receive the same attention or importance as teaching and academics. This reflects the universities' strong stance in their mission statements towards the development of quality teaching and research rather than the development of the student into an adult. Another influential aspect across both universities is

the administrators' perceptions of responsibility - whether they believe it is a shared responsibility among multiple units or if the responsibility belongs to a single unit.

Finally, a third influential aspect is the nature of the administrators' interactions - whether they take on roles of collaborator or supporter or whether the interaction is coordinated or uncoordinated. While coordinated interactions lead to more defined and organized plans of action with regards to QA, uncoordinated interactions leave room for administrators to neglect involvement in QA collaborations in regards to student services. As previously mentioned, in both universities, interactions regarding the overall QA of the university, specifically that of academics and teaching, are more coordinated, structured, and planned. While the QA of student services may be included in these QA efforts, the inclusion is on a small scale. Thus, the QA of student services is left to the interest and motivation of the individual service units and organizations and the administrators who work within these divisions.

The role of administrators at UU and UiO is pertinent to the determined QA-student services arrangement. They determine if and how the QA of student services should be managed at their university; however, they do this through the lens of their university. Furthermore, their actions determine the influence students should have in monitoring and ensuring the quality of services that affects their overall education experience. On the other hand, the involvement of students in this arrangement influences the involvement of the university administration. For instance, if one group were more involved than the other, the other group would likely take on a more peripheral role, whether that is the students' involvement or that of the administration. Additionally, the university administrators interpret contextual factors through the lens of their university and translate their university's values and capabilities into their actions regarding the QA of student services.

5.4.3 The Contribution of Other Factors

Other factors that contribute to influencing the QA-student services relationship at the two universities include both internal and external influences. One common factor between the universities is the internal pressure to maintain the universities' prestige. This is a pressure that produces a positive influence on administrators to develop and implement QA processes with regards to student services.

Administrators at UU also indicated competitiveness in the global sphere as an influential factor. Although this was not specifically indicated by administrators at UiO,

given the university's interest and strategic plan towards embracing internationalization within the university, I suspect that this is also a factor. However, if competitive pressures from other universities are influential with regards to QA of student services, it may be at a different level than that of UU. Since UiO does not charge international students tuition fees and this was recently introduced to international students attending Swedish HEIs, UU may experience more pressure from prospective international students to have quality student services if they are paying students. Now that international students at UU must pay for their education, in order to continue attracting them, UU will need to ensure all aspects of the university are top-notch so as to compete with other HEIs that may charge less tuition or be tuition free. These factors may contribute towards changing the QA-student services relationship at UU.

Several environmental factors can influence the QA-student services arrangement in universities. Whether or not and how these factors will be acted upon depend largely on the perceptions of the administrators, whom are also influenced by the characteristics of the university in which they work. These factors can positively influence towards a more coordinated QA effort of student services or they could be disregarded depending on the governance structure of the university student services and QA units and the relative values and capabilities of the university and its employees.

5.4.4 The Student Services and Quality Assurance Relationship

To understand the relationship between student services and QA at a given university, all three dimensions - the university setting, university administrators, and other environmental factors - must be examined together. If they were examined separately, key elements would be missing from the equation. The relationship between student services and QA at UiO and UU are fairly similar despite some differences in the organization of the arrangement of QA.

In both universities, the primary responsibility for the QA of student services is left to the service units or organizations themselves. Interest in and importance of this area of QA is growing among administrators in both universities and among student organizations, but the primary focus of university quality efforts still remain on academics and research. In both universities, the primary driver of QA of student services is expected to originate from the employees and leaders of the service units or organizations themselves.

The reasons why QA of student services is conducted varies, but it appears that most of the quality assessments pertain to student satisfaction and needs. There was some evidence from UU of the beginnings of a shift towards inquiring about how student services influenced the total academic experience of students through the assessment of drop-outs and alumni. While some elements pertaining to the QA of student services are included in annual reports of QA, there is generally no system as to when or how these quality assessments should be conducted.

In summary, the relationship between student services and QA at UiO and UU is developing. In recent years, the universities have experienced competitive pressures to maintain their prestige and compete with universities across the globe. These factors have certainly contributed to the current QA-student services arrangement at these universities. Even though the universities are still in the developmental stages of arranging QA work in the student services sector, awareness and interest in these issues have been increased, thus facilitating greater involvement in developing and implementing QA practices in student services.

6. Conclusions and Reflections

To support the shift towards a global perspective and global ideals, HEIs in Norway and Sweden are beginning to expand their vision of internal QA and the units that should be considered in these efforts. While university student services have often taken a backseat to teaching and research, as far as QA is concerned, positive perceptions and actions towards supporting QA-student services arrangements are beginning to occur, as evidenced through interviews with university administrators and current university activities. The results of this study illustrate how these QA efforts in student services are an emerging trend at the UiO and UU.

Thus, the main objectives and structure of this study are revisited. The overall objective of this study investigated and illustrated the primary influential factors determining the QA-student services relationship at UiO and UU, using a conceptual framework and an explorative approach. First, a general overview of HE, QA, and student services in Europe was relayed along with a general description of the system in the US, which sparked the initial interest in this research area. Next, the conceptual framework was presented, as well as an adapted framework for the study of QA and student services in the university, in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the foundation and logic behind the methodology used in this study was discussed. Then, in Chapter 4, descriptions of the university setting for both UiO and UU were presented, followed by a description of the administrators working with QA and student services in both universities in Chapter 5. This chapter also presented the heart of the analysis, using the conceptual framework and collected data in combination with addressing the research questions. The characteristics of each university and of the involved administrators were infused into the adapted conceptual framework, which is used to explore and illustrate the influential factors in determining the QA-student services relationship at the respective universities. By adapting the ACI framework and constructing it to suit the characteristics of the university, including the characteristics of the university's administrators, the collected data came to life as themes in the data emerged.

The first and overarching theme to take shape was that of the importance of the organization of the university setting in influencing the QA-student services relationship. At UiO and UU, the university setting followed a decentralized organizational pattern, which proved not to support the QA-student services relationship. In both universities, responsibilities over these efforts are spread across the university and are at the mercy of

multiple administrators, thus increasing the opportunity for the QA of student services to fall between the cracks. Consequently, this organization of the university setting also does not support administrators collaborating together to support this quality work or developing it cooperatively. These implications are in-line with Scharpf's (1997) vision that the institutional setting contains elements that influence actor constellations and modes of interaction. Although the organization of both universities does not support a QA-student services relationship, some administrators in each university act as the glue in the QA-student services relationship at their respective university.

This notion of administrators acting as glue in the QA-student services relationship opens to the second theme - the importance of the university administrators' perceptions in shaping the QA-student services relationship. Administrators at both universities acknowledged the importance of conducting quality assessments within the student services sector in order to ensure students receive adequate services and services that they need, as well as to ensure the overall quality of the HEI. While teaching and research have historically been the primary focus of QA in these universities, the QA of student services is gaining interest and attention from administrators. Lack of support for the QA of student services not only originates from the roots of academia or the organization of the HEI but also from international discourse on QA such as the ESG (ESU, 2010). Therefore, administrators' perceptions of importance in favor of a QA-student services arrangement are the real drivers of QA work in student services at both UiO and UU despite the university setting supporting a different quality agenda. In addition to the university setting, these perceptions are also influenced by competitive pressures originating from within and outside the university, which is the third theme.

Since the organization of the university setting does not support the QA of student services, the concept of importance with regards to QA and student services must originate elsewhere. Administrators from both universities acknowledged the influence of competitive pressures originating from within and outside the university. This was often associated with upholding the prestige of the university and maintaining competitiveness in attracting new students (particularly international students) to the university. According to ACI, the policy environment, in addition to the institutional setting, influences the perceptions and interactions of actors, thus contributing to change (Scharpf, 1997). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) take this notion a step further and express how the context of leadership can facilitate QA practices in student services. "For student affairs, assessment needs might drastically change as a result of new leadership that requires different evidence of effectiveness, or sees new

problems, or devalues old problems" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, pg. 6-7). In the cases of UiO and UU, administrators may see new visions in the area of QA as the competitive pressures from outside the university swell. While the acknowledgement of new problems or a vision of change might originate internally, perceptions could also originate from outside the university.

6.1 Recommendations

From the data and resultant themes, several recommendations for the UiO and UU are identified to increase support for the student services and QA relationship at these HEIs. Given that the organization of student services is the primary indicator of how and to what extent these services are included in QA efforts at the UiO and UU, the primary recommendation derived from this study pertains to the organization of student services. The most favorable approach to the organization of student services is one where it is managed and organized by the university, rather than outsourced to another local organization. This structure reduces reliance on students to manage their own services and the quality of these services, and such an organization would thus encourage full-time university administrators to become more engaged in student services and QA. Additionally, this organization enables the university to have more control over the QA of student services and legitimizes student services to be included in regular QA efforts at the university.

In conjunction with changing the organizational pattern of student services' to one that is owned and operated by the university, an additional recommendation is for the university to further define and impart ownership of student services through its communications with faculty, administrators, students, and the community. For instance, the university could link student development and student services and include this as part of the university's mission. Policies or a system of rewards could also be instigated to encourage administrators to participate in QA efforts of student services. While changing the organizational pattern of student services would likely influence perceptions of responsibility, these additional alterations should also influence the perceptions of university administrators.

An additional recommendation is for the university and the student services divisions to provide support and encouragement for student services administrators in becoming involved with peer networks. As was presented in the data regarding UU, the head of the Student Affairs and Academic Registry division is involved in developing peer review

networks with leaders of student services administrative units at other Swedish universities. While this is somewhat of an external approach towards including student services in QA efforts, the approach has its merits. Through encouraging student services administrators to develop and become involved in such networks, administrators of these services can develop more of an identity for their profession and gain insights into different approaches to the QA of student services in their particular region and elsewhere and bring these ideas back to their home university. Moreover, student services administrators should be encouraged to become involved with regional and international professional associations, such as the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) or other similar associations. Participation in these networks would further broaden administrators' perspectives on an array of student services topics, including QA, and potentially contribute to the design of new approaches to the QA of student services at the universities of those administrators who participate in these communities.

6.2 Contributions and Avenues for Further Research

This study contributes to our understanding of the QA and student services relationship in a number of ways. First, this study contributes to our theoretical understanding by integrating and investigating two important elements in the QA-student services relationship: the structural or organizational aspects and the human-behavioral aspects. Not only is the topic of this study under researched in the European context, but this study analyzes and presents a dual perspective, which is important for understanding the broader picture of the relationship. Secondly this study employed ACI to the HE field, and particularly to student services and QA. Thus, the choices made to develop and apply this framework to the aims of this study and HE provides a starting place for future studies on similar issues. Furthermore, this study highlights the intricacies of the university setting, actor orientations and interactions, and sources of pressures that may drive change in the QA-student services relationship. The analysis of these aspects provides a basis for understanding current and future developments in QA and student services.

Finally, the discussions and recommendations presented in this thesis could be of interest to those HE administrators involved in QA and student services issues since this thesis offers general insights into the development of QA-student services relationships in two Nordic university settings. As this was an exploratory study, more questions and

hypotheses arose as the study and analysis progressed. These hypotheses could direct future research in the areas of university QA and student services. Potential hypotheses for future investigation and analysis include the following:

- The greater the number of fee-paying students, the more coordinated the relationship between university quality assurance and student services.
- The more internationalized a university (in terms of goals, ideals, position in global higher education discussions and participation in distance education, and number of international students), the more coordinated the relationship between university quality assurance and student services.
- The more entry, mid, and senior level student services administrators are involved in professional networks, the more likely that they will participate in quality assurance work of student services.

In addition to these hypotheses, more in-depth case study research should be conducted to further analyze influential factors in the QA-student services relationship. Additional topics worthwhile of further investigation include the influence of the nation-state's policies and national level HE administrators working with issues of QA, HE access, and the greater social dimension of HE. Additional exploratory interviews would need to occur with these administrators from the national level. A second relevant area for further exploration regards a more thorough study into the type of assessments used in student services and the factors that influence these choices. Finally, a more thorough analysis of the university setting should be conducted in addition to a broadened spectrum of the type of HEI researched. HEIs with a variety of missions (i.e. vocation-oriented, undergraduate focused colleges) should be explored in future research in addition to research-oriented universities. To provide this type of in-depth research and analysis, a more limited case study approach may be necessary, such as focusing on HEIs in one country. While this may limit generalizability across nations, this approach might provide a generalizable model for a single nation's system of HE QA and student services in different types of national universities and colleges.

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Appendix A

Interview Guideline

- Explain my role

- Explain my research

- Explain confidentiality and ask permission to audio record

- Discuss further proceeding of the interview

Introduction

1. How do you see the role of your division with respect to QA and student services?

2. How do you see your personal role in the work on quality assurance and student services in your university?

3. How important is the topic "QA of student services" for your division? Compared to other topics?

Preferences and Perceptions

1. From your perspective, what are the main reasons for your division to be in favor of/opposed to the QA of student services?
   Probe: What are the major opportunities/risks from the perspective of your division?

2. I would like to go into more detail and ask questions about a number of aspects. What opportunities and risks do you see in a relationship between QA and student services with regards to the following dimensions?

   Governance (probes: the way responsibility and control of QA and student services is distributed and organized - student driven vs. university run)

   Mission and Goals (probes: mission of student services; type and variety of services offered)

   Funding (probes: funding sources; method of resource allocation and cost cutting - based on effectiveness, efficiency, need?)

Actor Constellations, Modes of Interaction

1. In which bodies regarding QA policy formulation have you participated? How have you participated in the policy formulation process?

2. In your view, which divisions have crucially shaped the patterns of QA at this university?

3. How would you characterize the policy formulation process on QA of student services in your university? (ie. Most issues decided unilaterally by the university

quality committee or the student services' provider, by negotiation between the university and student services' provider, or left uncoordinated?)

Other Pressures

1. What other elements do you perceive as influencing the relationship of QA and student services at your university? (Probes: national agenda, professional and international organizations, flow of international students, competiveness among universities)

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you want to add or emphasize with respect to the topic of QA in student services?

Appendix B

University Setting Comparison Table

Characteristic	University of Oslo	Uppsala University
Location of Authority for Student Services	The University Board in cooperation with SiO	The University Student Affairs and Academic Registry Division, individual faculties, and the student unions and nations
Types of Services Offered	1) UiO: library, physical buildings, facilitates the use of ICT, provides access to course literature 2) SiO: cafeterias, student housing and information on private housing, health services, psychological services, dental services, sports activities, daycare, facilitates voluntary activities, disability services, career services	1) UU: admissions, graduation, student records and international student information, study counselors and career guidance, disability services 2) Student Unions: housing, social activities, health services, financial and educational matters
Student Services' Agenda	1) UiO serves needs directly related to studying and learning 2) SiO serves needs related to services that aid in the success of students' studies	1) UU serves needs before, during, and after studies 2) Student Unions focus on monitoring and student influence but can provide some student advisement
Funding Sources	Public allocations, semester fees, surplus from commercial activities, SiO receives rent-free buildings from UiO	Student Unions - government support, student union fees; possibly support from the University and local companies and authorities
Aims of QA System	Focuses on contributing to the achievement of goals for educational activities and the learning environment, illustrating strengths and weaknesses of instruction and training, and serving as a tool for QA and improvement	Focuses on stimulating quality work, contributing to continuous developmental work, and ensuring that this work is done in so as to make it possible to take action should any quality issues occur
Location of QA Responsibility	Decentralized, but University Board holds the final responsibility	Decentralized, but there is an Office of Quality and Evaluation that supports divisions in their quality efforts. The University management holds the final responsibility

Appendix C

University Administrator Comparison Table

Actor Characteristics	University of Oslo	Uppsala University
Capabilities	- Role and relationship to QA decision-making bodies (Close relationship among the University Board, administration, and students) but there may be different relationships among these groups with respect to SiO	- Role and relationship to QA decision-making bodies varies - Similar opportunities to participate in QA of student services efforts
Orientations (Preferences & Perceptions)	- Perceived location of responsibility for student services QA (SiO, student government) - Perceived importance of student services-QA (UiO-high, but lower than academics) - Goals vary with each unit - Participation in UiO boards (University Board, Student Environment Advisory Board) and SiO boards	- Perceived location of responsibility (Shared perspective across levels with regards to actual responsibility but differing views with regards to desired responsibility) - Perceived importance (high, but lower than academics) - Similar goals across units - Participation in national and international QA efforts (UU Department of Student Affairs) - Collaborative participation between students* and the Department of Student Affairs; QA unit plays supportive role to both
Actor Constellation	- Shared participatory opportunities in decision-making processes with regards to QA and student services - Shared capabilities of influencing the decisions with regards to QA and student services - Shared perception of the actual responsibility for student services-QA	- Shared opportunities to participate in QA of student services efforts - Shared goals across the units (all place some concern over QA or education monitoring) may influence the similar perception of importance regarding student services-QA

	- Divergent goals across units influence divergent roles in the student services-QA arrangement - Divergent goals influence the relative perception of the importance of student services-QA	- Divergent capabilities of influencing the UU decision-making processes to UU QA - Divergent perception of desired responsibility for student services-QA - Divergent roles in the student services-QA process

Mode of Interaction	*University QA Development*
	- Actor roles in decisions (UiO QA unit- coordinator/ collaborator; Students*- advocate; SiO- collaborator)
	- Type of interaction (coordinative and democratic)
	Student Services' QA Development
	  - Actor roles in decisions (UiO QA unit- peripheral; Students- driver; SiO- peripheral)
	  - Type of interaction (uncoordinated**, student-driven)
		University QA Development
		- Actor roles in decisions (QA unit- supporter; Students*- collaborator w/ UU Quality Committee; Student Affairs- peripheral
		- Type of interaction (coordinative and supportive)
		Student Services' QA Development
		- Actor roles in decisions (QA unit-consultant/supporter, Students*-initiator/collaborator, Department of Student Affairs-initiator/collaborator)
		- Type of interaction (uncoordinated**, unit-driven w/ support from the QA unit)

* Refers to student representatives from student government organizations or student unions.

** Uncoordinated refers to an arrangement that does not have a systematic process for conducting quality assurance efforts but may be driven by a particular unit or group in a fashion that is more unregulated and irregular than a coordinated system.