

SCHOLARSHIP, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT

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This article traces the professionalization of student affairs assessment through the development of the assessment position and the progression of operations, functions and responsibilities. Evidence includes a review of various publications followed by an empirical examination of data from a professional Listserv. Findings identify how assessment in student affairs has evolved from a skillset to a professional field as well as consideration of the development of the campus professional. Ongoing and future trends are described and ways in which the field has developed and contributed evidence about the impact of student affairs by advancing data collection and reporting is included.

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Student affairs assessment has become increasingly easier and simultaneously more complex.” (Levy, Hess, & Thomas, 2018, p. 16)

Introduction

In the past decade, student affairs assessment has transitioned from a secondary job responsibility to a primary professional field. While assessment and evaluation in higher education has been a fundamental function linked to accreditation and more recently student learning outcomes movement, the distinct field of student affairs assessment is new. This rapid emergence might be linked to several different factors including a resurgent call for accountability in the early 2000s (McArthur, 2016; Schuh, 2003), a renewed emphasis on college relevancy (Arum & Roska, 2010), and continued calls for measurable outputs (Biddix, 2018; Henning & Roberts, 2016; Schuh, Biddix, Dean, & Kinzie, 2016). As a result, student affairs leaders recognized the need to legitimize their work and link it to the larger institutional mission (Elkins, 2015). The past two decades have seen a surge in scholarship, professional development, and consequently, development of positions and full professional staff on campus with primary responsibility for assessment directly relate to student affairs.

Assessment in student affairs has existed since emergence of the field in the 1920s, originating in the personnel department at Northwestern (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012). Student affairs assessment emerged as a separate community of practice and profession in the past three decades, growing from academic affairs, action research, the accountability movement (Erwin, 1991; Ewell, 2002; Schuh, 2015; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). More recently, the rise in professionalism (Malaney, 1999; Henning & Roberts, 2016) and expanded expectations for student affairs assessment data and reporting (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017) have emerged. Elkins (2015) questioned whether the field had “reached the pinnacle” asking if the work

was done and what might remain.

Student affairs assessment has emerged from an ancillary to a critical position in the field of student affairs. While the conceptual development of the profession can be traced from the beginnings of the field a century ago, it has only recently emerged in the past decade stemming from an emphasis in the scholarship, external pressures for relevancy and legitimacy, and a need for professional support and common standards. Although there are some accounts of this initial development from the scholarship (Henning, 2016) and professional development, (Elkins, 2015), there has not been consideration of the grassroots development of the profession from those who are doing the work. Understanding this development and evolution helps to reveal the role of an emergent community of practice in the codification of a field. Findings bear implications for the development of student affairs assessment as well as for other areas that develop, as the field evolves to meet contemporary needs and external pressures.

The purpose of this article is to identify and chronicle the scholarship, professional development, and community of practice in student affairs assessment. The authors identified three complementary trajectories. The first trajectory traces the initial development and progression of the field through published works including scholarly literature, books, and other writing. The second trajectory follows the growth of student affairs assessment from an institutional research-related function and focus on documenting learning through conferences and training opportunities. Included are results from various surveys chronicling the expansion of the field in terms of individuals doing the work, offices, their functions, and needs. The third trajectory concerns the contemporary emergence of a professional organization, the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) in the past decade serving as a community of practice. An empirical examination of conversations on the SAAL

listserv since its founding in 2008 provides a unique view of the continued progression and professionalization of the field. The article closes with discussion based on these three trajectories about the development of the field and how it might be posited in the future.

Professionalization through Scholarship

Several authors (Elkins, 2015; Henning, 2016; Schuh, 1996, 2015) chronicled the initial development and progression of student affairs assessment. Although similar in their opinions, each traces a slightly different path, highlighting different major contributions to contemporary practice. Schuh (2015) noted this variance results from the lack of one specific moment in the development of the field. Each seems to share his opinion that, “exactly when and why assessment in student affairs began is difficult to determine but there are certain historical documents that mark developments in the assessment movement” (p. 1).

Henning (2016) referred to student affairs assessment as a “young and emerging sub-field” of student affairs “The seeds for this work were planted almost 50 years ago” (p. 2). Henning provided a timeline of this development as Appendix II (pp.17-19) along with narrative explanations for each milestone. According to Henning, student affairs assessment began with alumni and enrolled student surveys in the 1930s. The authors of the 1937 *Student Personnel Point of View* (SPPV; American Council on Education) recommended studies designed to evaluate programs and services, which was reaffirmed in the 1949 statement (American Council on Education). Schuh (1996, 2015) affirmed this view, chronicling the development of assessment from both iterations of the SPPV, in which the authors articulated the need for evaluation in student affairs programs and services through publication. They recommended specific types of assessment to include student and faculty satisfaction, student use of services, staff

development and training, and relationships between those who work with students. Schuh (2015) further noted that if one takes the 1937 statement as the formal beginning of the profession:

It took at least 40 years before discussions of the centrality of assessment to professional practice emerged in the higher education literature. It took another 10-20 years before techniques and strategies emerged in mainstream literature and another 10 years before mainstream reports and practitioner-oriented literature routinely included an emphasis on the importance for student affairs educators to include assessment as an indispensable element of their professional practice. (p. 7)

Prior to the emergence and operationalization of student development theory in the late 1960s, assessment focused on attitudes, interests, and personality characteristics of traditional-aged college students (Banta & Associates, 2002). Schuh (2015) recognized Aulepp and Delworth’s (1976) monograph, *Training Manual for an Ecosystem Model*, as critical to the advancement of student affairs assessment thinking. In the work, the authors described the importance of the campus environment, a precursor to Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt’s (2010) influential work on creating environmental conditions to enhance student success. Also beginning in the 1970s and extending into the 1990s, Astin’s (1977, 1984, 1993) operationalization of student involvement as influential to student success affirmed through both theory and empirical evidence that co-curricular involvement, as developed, influenced, and facilitated by student affairs professionals, was as critical to student learning and was important for assessment considerations. Also, beginning in the 1970s and continuing to the present, was the introduction of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), focusing on quality assurance through program review and reflective self-study (Henning, 2016).

In 1991, Erwin called for student affairs professionals to take a more active and formalized role in assessment. A few years later, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) provided the first comprehensive guide for student affairs assessment that encompassed functional areas, *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners*. In 2000, Schuh and Upcraft added a practical guide, with chapters covering over 20 functional areas including student conduct and housing. These texts became a guide for practitioners interested in researching the effectiveness of their programs. Also during this time, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) released *The Student Learning Imperative* (1996), affirming the need for student affairs to be involved in institutional assessment efforts.

Sandeen and Barr (2006) noted that student affairs professionals had been conducting institutional studies to understand student characteristic, learning, diversity, needs, and satisfaction to improve their practice. However, as the field shifted to a student-learning paradigm with the development and publication of *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996), then *Learning Reconsidered 1* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006), a call to for greater alignment between programs and services and the evidence to demonstrate student learning in the context of institutional mission became essential. In short, student affairs was implored to demonstrate its active role and responsibility for student learning and development (Elkins, 2015). In considering the development of field through its publications, Roper (2015) summarized that scholars, "produced compelling scholarship describing both the importance of adopting comprehensive assessment practices in student affairs and the value such practices would have for the success, survival and growth of student affairs organizations and the profession" (p. 2).

Growth through Training and Development

In the early 2000s, professionalization of student affairs assessment advanced with the transition of ACPA's Commission for Research for Student Development to the Commission for Assessment and Evaluation in 2006. NASPA's Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community (AERKC) was formally established in 2005. Partially to bridge the assessment -focused professionals in both groups, the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) was founded in 2008 (Henning, 2016; Henning, Elling, Roberts, & Bentrin, 2013). While the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis began in 2000 with special sessions for student affairs professionals, it has since advanced to designate a track in student affairs programs and services.

The first ACPA-sponsored Student Affairs Assessment Institute was held in 2003 while NASPA's Assessment and Retention Conference began in 2004. The conference has undergone two name changes and is currently the NASPA Assessment, Persistence, and Data Analytics Conference. In 2006, ACPA's Commission for Assessment and Evaluation published the *Assessment Skills and Knowledge (ASK) Standards* for professionals. Also in this year, CAS published standards for student affairs assessment offices. In 2008, NASPA's AERKC published the Assessment Education Framework. These documents provided standards for practice in the field, including recommended assessment skills and knowledge for new and continuing professionals. In 2015, ACPA and NASPA published an updated version of professional competencies, including assessment, evaluation, and research (AER). Despite these varying opportunities, there was not a specific training program or certification for assessment professionals in student affairs, which shifted the responsibility for learning to the individual and/or the institution for enabling professional development (Levy, Hess, & Thomas, 2018).

The beginning of the 21st century saw

the emergence of formalized professional development and training opportunities, first as program track and workshops at conferences, then later as tracks within other assessment. Organizations devoted to the assessment of student learning emerged, including the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education, Association for Higher Education Effectiveness, and National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA); and conferences and institutes designed to expand assessment skills proliferated including the ACPA Student Affairs Assessment Institute, NASPA Assessment and Persistence Conference, Assessment Conference at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis, and Texas A&M University Assessment Conference.

The early 2000s saw the development of offices and positions dedicated to student affairs assessment, staffed by institutional researchers or student affairs professionals with expertise in assessment, evaluation, and research methods (Elkins, 2015; Livingston & Zerulik, 2013). Kinzie and Kuh surveyed chief academic officers (CAOs) in 2009, 2013, and 2017 about their campus assessment practices. The results of all three surveys were similar, although small changes were identified. CAOs reported accreditation as the most significant driver of assessment in higher education in all three surveys, while institutional commitment to improve became more important between 2009 and 2017 (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). A 2013 survey of ACPA and NASPA members identified 77 individuals whose position titles fit the description as student affairs assessment professionals (Elling & Bentrin, 2013).

In 2013, Elling and Bentrin also conducted a study of Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) members, finding 233 professionals whose daily work encompassed student affairs assessment. Elling and Bentrin reported SAAL membership had increased its membership from 40 individuals in 2009 to 322 in 2013. Out of

86 respondents to their survey, 46 indicated that 76% - 100% of their role consisted of assessment functions (Elling & Bentrin, 2013). Combs and Rose (2016, June) found that external pressure or influence was the most common reason for creating or expanding assessment position. Their findings revealed that of the 377 respondents, the majority worked in centralized offices or units (51%), most often in the office of the provost or VP for academics (78%). Over half, 51.81%, of respondents reported having the title of executive director/director.

In 2014, 166 individuals from the SAAL and NASPA Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community listservs responded to a survey created by The Ohio State University's Center for the Study of Student Life addressing the landscape of student affairs assessment (2015). Their report highlighted a general lack of experience within student affairs assessment, with 83.4% of respondents reporting 10 years or fewer, 50.3% reporting less than 5 years, and only 5.2% reporting working more than 15 years in student affairs assessment. The most common title was director (37.4%). Respondents reported that the greatest barriers to assessment were lack of staff knowledge on ways to assess student learning (86.7%), amount of time/work needed to assess (85.8%), and lack of financial resources to commit to assessment (57.5%). Most assessment offices in student affairs (52.3%) consisted of one dedicated full-time staff member, while 15.6% had three or more staff members. More than half (56.6%) reported their budget was under \$50,000, with 47.8% reporting their budget was under \$25,000.

During this time of expansion of professional development, some student affairs master's programs also focused on providing graduate students a strong assessment foundation. While not all master's programs have a required course, some include assessment and/or research methods as a portion of the curriculum. These new professionals bring those skills to their work

environment, regardless of their functional area, which continues to advance student affairs assessment in practice.

Advancement through a Community of Practice

In reflecting on the development of the field, Roper (2015) noted that the development and proliferation of scholarship, combined with a surge in organizational commitment through professional associations as well as individual institutions for student affairs assessment practice, resulted in the instrumental development of a "community of practice." He noted that, this newly formed community of practice began to provide support, guidance and learning opportunities for its members and in the process strengthened the potential for success.

Discussion about SAAL began at the 2008 NASPA International Assessment and Retention Conference (now Assessment, Persistence, and Data Analytics Conference). Gavin Henning and Erin Bentrin discussed the need for professional support and development for student affairs assessment. During the next few months, continued discussion led to a conference call in September with interested professionals across the country. During the call, the group identified needs, considered an organizational structure, and discussed outcomes. Several of those who attended the call met in person in December 4-5 and articulated an initial goal to "provide the opportunity for full-time student affairs assessment professionals to discuss issues to improve their work." After brainstorming, everyone agreed on the name, Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL). A board of directors was formed and information meetings at professional conferences were used to recruit members. A listserv was created that continues to be a primary way new professionals with assessment responsibilities find support in the field as well as a means for existing professionals to seek and share resources. In May of 2009, SAAL started its first formal professional development activities called

"structured conversations," or conference calls structured around a topic of interest solicited from members.

As its first and arguably most influential action, the SAAL listserv continues to be a place for student affairs assessment professionals to learn about and understand the role as it developed, to discuss emergent ideas and trends in the field, and to share job opportunities. The listserv initially included 73 assessment professionals working in various student affairs assessment roles ranging from a few professionals whose full-time job was assessment to a greater majority whose job responsibilities featured or included assessment responsibilities. In the subsequent decade, the SAAL listserv has expanded to include over 1,000 members who have participated in over 5,700 conversations. Over time, the membership criteria expanded to include a broader range of people, including faculty, graduate students, and student affairs professionals interested in assessment.

The SAAL listserv has served a critical role in the community of practice that developed around student affairs assessment. Posts, and especially those that evolved into conversations chronicle how student affairs assessment has evolved in the last decade. A review of messages shows how a few full-time professionals with a small (if any) office staff, limited direction, and insufficient professional resources developed and continue to advance. Curious to trace the development of this emergent and evolving field, the authors reviewed the listserv archives, which serve as an example of how the field has developed.

Analysis of SAAL Listserv Conversations

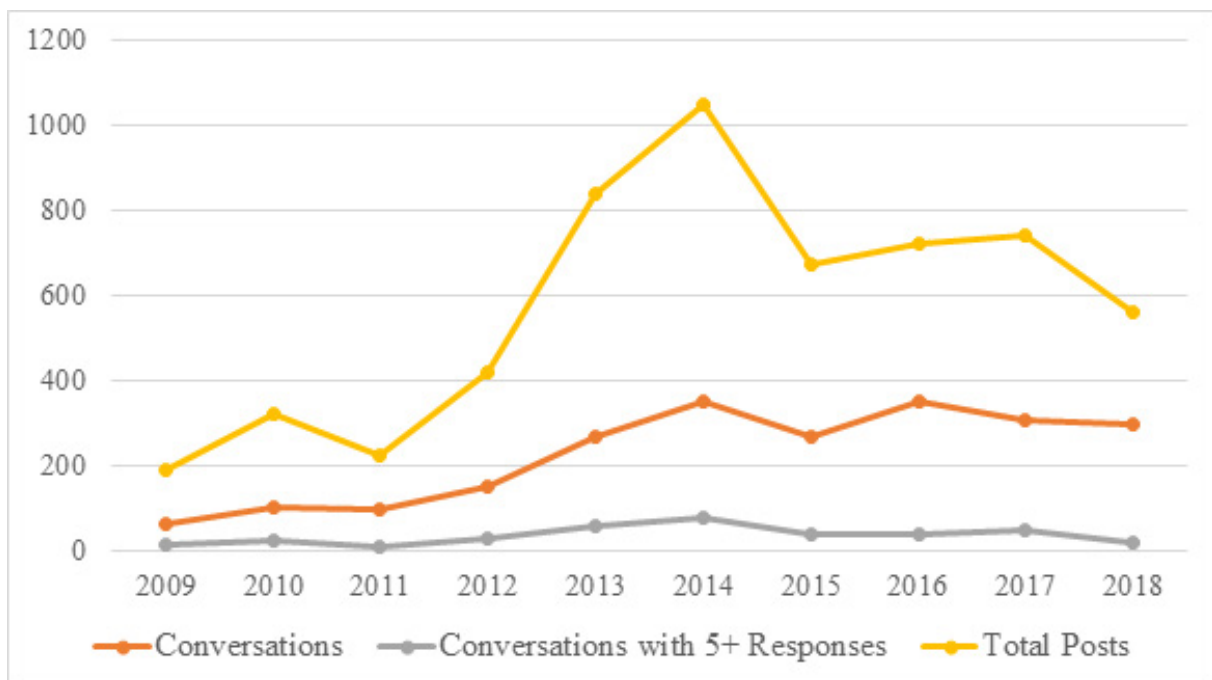
In January 2019, a decade after the initial post to the SAAL listserv, the authors accessed the archives to analyze electronic conversations created through posts and

responses. After obtaining permission from both the SAAL listserv host and the current leadership of the organization, the authors gained institutional review board (IRB) exempted approval to conduct the data review. Although very few of the conversations the team reviewed would place contributors at more than minimal risk if linked to identities or institutions, the authors still chose to de-identify responses for data reporting purposes. The authors had a discussion and with IRB about including representative quotations, since members (individuals with approval to post on the listserv) could follow the same process to identify who posted the comment. Ultimately, the authors decided on a middle-ground approach, by paraphrasing representative quotations instead of using direct quotations and not including posting dates. This helped to address credibility while also maintaining a commitment to reducing risk to participants.

Procedurally, the authors accessed all posts from the listserv from January 2009 to January 2019. Next, the authors downloaded all posts, and organized them by “conversations” or posts with five or more responses, by year. The authors chose five or more after considering averages by year. There was a noticeable decline in the frequency of threads with less than five or more than six responses. Figure 1 displays a summary of the data by year, total posts, and conversations. Total conversations, conversations with five or more responses, and total posts steadily increased from 2009 – 2014. However, from 2015 – 2019 there was a steep drop-off in conversations with five or more responses, while total posts and conversations saw less severe decreases.

The authors used a basic thematic coding approach (Biddix, 2018) to generate codes and then organize these into themes. To address concerns for rigor and quality (Shenton, 2004), the authors considered

Figure 1. Summary of SAAL Listserv Data, January 2009 to January 2019



dependability (consistency in coding), credibility (believable from the perspective of the participants), and confirmability (verification by others). The authors addressed dependability by coding the results independently and then comparing codes and themes. This resulted in some minor label and wording revisions and the decision to group themes chronologically. The authors addressed credibility by creating a blog post of the initial results and inviting the community to review the summary results. This resulted in some conversation about the findings, but not changes. Finally, the authors addressed confirmability by having a member of SAAL who has served in various leadership roles since the founding of the organization review expanded results appearing in this article. This generated a few questions about organization that the authors found were easily defensible, which helped to validate the process and findings.

In addition to possible limitations related to coding, there is some potential for selection bias. Not all assessment professionals engage in the SAAL listserv and even among those who do, fewer post than join. It is likely that the authors missed some of the trends in the broader field, though the authors feel that including scholarship and training trends prior to this analysis helps to reflect a larger view of the field and address this concern. Further, setting a cut-off for themes at 5+ posts likely resulted in a lack of minor themes or a more diversity of discussion. For example, the listserv has become a major source for job postings, but since those tend to be single posts, they were not reflected in this analysis. The authors intend to explore these trends in a future article. Following is a summary of findings, with an overview of the major conversations organized by theme and year. Thread titles (initial posts) are denoted by *italics*.

Development of the Field, Functions, and Tools (2009 to 2010)

Early discussions involved the process of developing an assessment office and

centralizing functions. Robust conversations included *assessment team roles and responsibilities, developing research protocols, managing data requests for outside research, and the benefits to incentives in assessment*. Conversations such as these suggest that as higher education institutions broadened assessment initiatives to include student affairs functions, those tasked with coordinating the development of student affairs assessment offices may have benefited from access to a listserv which allowed them to communicate with professionals already working in established assessment offices.

For example, in a response to the *developing research protocols* listserv thread, one director of assessment and planning noted that they did not have a formal process but had encountered some resistance when submitting ideas to a campus-wide committee. Others responded similarly, stating that their student affairs assessment office or team did not have formal processes at their institution. However, responses from individuals who worked within established student affairs assessment offices often provided support and direction; their responses often included their institutions formalized processes and encouraged others to contact them to discuss further.

Another subset of conversations centered around assessing specific initiatives such as *campus climate surveys, wellness assessment, and evaluations of conduct/judicial procedure*, and methodological conversations including *surveying pre-college factors*, and using *Twitter in assessment*. While these conversations were not as prevalent as office development, they suggest that practitioners from established assessment offices were beginning to consider data collection and methodological questions.

Discussions in these early years paralleled larger conversations about assessment in student affairs. Although assessment was not a new function for practitioners, emphasis on the role as a separate field was emerging. The SAAL listserv provided a

snapshot of the field during this time. New offices were established and utilized the listserv as an external source for support and direction, while other student affairs assessment leaders began to both broaden their reach and become more specialized in their methods.

Expanding Scope and Refining Methods (2011 to 2012)

Conversations in both 2011 and 2012 showed assessment in student affairs continued to evolve and expand in terms of scope; specifically, discussion extended to what assessment entailed and what could be assessed. Prevalent conversations centered around *non-cognitive assessments*, *assessing a students of concern committee*, and *assessing campus recreation and intramurals*. These conversations reflected the increased push for student affairs professionals to prove their worth on college campuses.

The conversation around *non-cognitive assessments* provides an example of how SAAL members were attempting to broaden the scope of student affairs work. The initial message asked whether anyone knew of or used non-cognitive assessments that would measure commitment to college, social engagement, metacognition skills, and career interests. Responses to the post were ample; an assessment leader at a large university suggested using a major strengths inventory to target students for various interventions/program/services based on results, while another shared an article focusing on assisting students in assessing their own skills and knowledge. Responders displayed both how professionals in the field were using more rigorous methods to identify at risk students and how ideas originally situated in academic affairs, such as metacognition, were beginning to be utilized by student affairs professionals.

Data collection tools and recommendations for software and hardware gained prominence during this time. The most robust and continuing conversations involved

card swipe tracking system, *developing a social media survey instrument*, and *qualitative software for assessment*. The increased focus on technology centered around data collection suggests the field was adapting to increased technology use by students and moving beyond traditional data collection and analysis methodology.

Diversity of Functions, Growth of the Field (2013 to 2014)

The 2013 to 2014 years were the most active listserv and facilitated the most diverse array of conversations. Prevalent discussions focused on specific sections of student affairs included *assessing living-learning communities* and *assessing campus police departments*. While the scope of student affairs assessment continued to expand, the importance of the work conducted also appeared to grow. For example, a response to the *assessing campus police departments* thread from a director stated that they had worked with their police department on an assessment that they needed for accreditation.

Conversations also reflected the increased awareness of social justice in student affairs. High reply social justice-related posts included *assessment/research terminology and inclusive language*, *campus climate survey for diversity*, *approaches to asking about gender on surveys*, and *assessing self-efficacy of student employees in working with diverse others*. The conversation centered on the use of the term "sub-population" in assessment work was particularly reflective of many conversations regarding social justice in higher education. The initial question prompted a response from a member who cited an article and stated that "learning outcomes/evidence based learning" are used as a "tool of colonization." This conversation suggested divisive discourse had permeated the SAAL listserv.

An expansion of data collection and analysis considerations is also notable. For example, there were robust replies to con-

versations on *communicating with students: Twitter, big data analytics in student affairs, survey apps, adding demographic variables to OrgSync, and informed consent for card swiping/tracking student participation*. Parallel conversations during this time, such as *acceptable responses rates* and *preventing survey/assessment fatigue*, suggest a sustained focus on identifying new ways to collect data.

Assessing Environments and Outcomes, Methodology, Career Development (2015 to 2016)

The 2015 and 2016 years exhibited a depth in the level of individual topics; further, some discussions were revisited several times under the same or slightly revised topics. Campus climate surveys (*EAB Campus Climate Survey* and *Campus climate assessment instruments*) reflect a continued interest in understanding how the college environment affects students. Additional threads about *outcomes and assessment for conduct process, campus climate surveys re: sexual assault, and sense of community and sense of belonging scales* further demonstrate this emphasis. Interest in campus climate surveys extended into 2016.

Writing, using, and teaching about learning outcomes gained prevalence, reflective of a shift in the field of assessment from transactional and attitudes, values, and beliefs to understanding what and how students learn through their interactions with student affairs. Prominent topics included: *co-curricular SLOs?, using rubrics in co-curricular activities to assess students' skill, calling all co-curricular rubrics!, outcomes and assessment for conduct process, how outcomes are achieved--what do you call it?*. Rubrics were also an important topic, occupying several different discussions for a total of 20 posts.

Continued expansion of methodological considerations was a prominent theme as well, with discussions about the integrating qualitative data collection and specifically

the *impact of qualitative research/assessment, and the use of photo data and focus groups* and software for qualitative data analysis/coding. More specific to quantitative data collection, there were a variety of topics on survey response rates, as well as specific questions such as race/ethnicity, investigating population segments, response scales, and a long discussion on SPSS licenses.

The continued increase in assessment office scope and functional responsibility is reflected in multiple posts during this time. Personnel discussions shifted from *assessment office staffing, extending resources to others through colleges/universities with an assessment champion (decentralized structure)*. Conversations about professional development and training (*assessment related professional development, keynote recommendation request, assessment skills*) also emerged along with career-based discussions (*other duties as assigned - your story wanted!, career question about assessment positions, what would YOU recommend for someone in a new leading assessment role?*).

From Learning to Teaching (2017 to 2018)

The past two years of discussion have extended conversation about the reach and educational functions assessment professionals offer including *professional development/capacity (assessment retreats), statistics/research methods course, survey design workshop templates, practical student affairs projects in graduate courses, goal writing worksheet, and logic models*. While posts solicited advice for training and professional development, a key difference was the emergence of advice for teaching or finding help for others about assessment. This trend suggests a shift from learning about foundation as part of professional development to a teaching function as a job responsibility.

Specifically in 2017, data collection was the subject of multiple discussions. Topics

included: alcohol and drug assessment, athletics and career services, assessment of assessment offices, food service quality, as well as requests for examples of exit, departure, and graduate/new alumni surveys. Two specific prominent discussions focused on *methods for assessing food insecurity on campus* and *post-judicial assessment*. In 2018, there were far fewer specific requests, although two areas were prominent: evaluation of weeks of welcome programs and health promotion assessment. The final prominent topic was a request for recommendations for a list of student engagement platforms.

In terms of methodological considerations, the most prominent discussion was a series of new topics focused on data reporting: *student success dashboard, using Tableau in SA, student affairs annual reports, student organization categories and reporting, assessment report samples, division-dashboards, infographic software/platforms, and templates for assessment and communication division wide*. The majority of these discussions took place in 2017.

Summary of Minor and Major Trends

A broader view of listserv discussion revealed two minor trends. A consistent thread over the past decade has been in tracking systems such as card swipe technologies. In addition, there has been an emphasis on assessing campus climate and the environment. Neither topic has reached major recommendations or conclusions, so these will continue to emerge as fiscal accountability and retention/graduation remain important topics for student affairs. Two major trends, as demonstrated by consistent postings, replies, and solicitations for information also emerged: professionalization of student affairs assessment and advancement in data collection, use, and reporting.

With regard to professionalization, a broad view of the listserv conversations suggests assessment in student affairs has evolved from a skillset to a field since 2009.

While there are some notable exceptions of full-time assessment professionals prior to this time, the codification, evolution, and expansion of the field in the past decade is reflected in much of the listserv discussion. The authors identified four major chronological trends as establishing an office and defining the scope of work, followed by professional development and skill building, then staffing structure/organization and refining the scope and responsibilities, and finally, extending capacity among staff and providing training and workshops. Three ongoing considerations included conducting program reviews, developing strategic plans and working with vendors selecting surveys and hardware.

While data reporting, dashboards, and formatting have been consistent topics throughout nearly a decade of discussion, the prior two years (and 2017 in particular) included the most discussion around these topics. The shift in methodological discussions in prior years from professional development in terms of building capacity, skills, and expanding data collection to reporting suggests that as a field, data collection methods and requisite skills have become more systemized and perhaps codified across the field. These discussions suggest the next evolution of the field in terms of methodology is in data reporting. Assessment in student affairs has also shifted toward learning as primary demonstrable outcomes of participation in student affairs, as reflected in the emphasis on learning metrics and rubrics that evolved in listserv discussions.

Discussion and Implications

The field of student affairs assessment has grown exponentially in the past two decades, although some student affairs divisions are just beginning to focus on any assessment efforts. Student affairs assessment professionals used to have extensive experience in other functional areas and/or institutional researchers who focused on student affairs divisions. As student affairs

assessment services grow on campuses, there is more opportunity for younger professionals to move into corresponding roles, rather than being reserved for more seasoned professionals. They gain assessment experience in their graduate programs, as well as within functional areas who have recognized the need to assess their programs and services. Some student affairs departments hire full-time assessment professionals, rather than having the assessment role solely at the division level.

Over time, as student affairs assessment matures and is ingrained in units, student affairs assessment offices and staff need to develop processes and plans to be able to accomplish the increasing responsibility and workload. This can include selecting and training on survey and statistical analysis software; creating templates and timeframes for assessment plans, individual projects, and annual reports; using project management tools and software to manage the work; and contributing to the larger assessment work on campus. This developmental time is an opportunity to collaborate with others across campus in data sharing, answering "big" questions about the student experience, and contributing to accreditation efforts.

Student affairs divisions still face accountability, even more so than in the past. Student affairs/services is/should be included in accreditation processes, reports, and reviews. Budget decisions are being made based on assessment because higher education funding sources continue to change and/or decrease. Stakeholders want to know the contribution that student affairs is making to the mission of the institution and student success. There need to be qualified, well-informed assessment professionals who can show accurate contributions to student success, as well as consistent use of assessment results to create improvements.

The future will only become more complex as student affairs assessment results yield more complex questions, as institutions re-envision their futures, and as technolo-

gy expands in ways not yet comprehended. This complexity provides opportunities for collaboration with academic affairs, institutional effectiveness/research, information technology offices, and other campus partners. If not already occurring, assessment, evaluation, and research representatives need to create shared definitions, processes for accessing and analyzing data, and determining delegation of duties. These conversations can be challenging when staff have ownership of their data and processes, but creating consistency and partnerships can yield valuable results.

Technology and data will continue to drive the field. What data do we currently have? What do we need? How can we collect it? How do we report it? How do we keep data secure? The listserv discussions about survey technology and card swipe data indicate that campuses will continue to grapple with new technologies, their cost, and their functionality. Most institutions have been siloed in their data collection and storage. Combining data from a multitude of software platforms can be a challenge. Stakeholders expect instant access to data on a user-friendly website, but most campuses do not have the infrastructure to meet all of those demands in a short period of time.

The need for professional development and training still exists. Some preparation programs have a semester or year of assessment and research methods, but not all do. Some staff get it added as "other duties as assigned" and do not have any foundation in the field. Campuses, professional associations, and individuals have responsibility to develop skills and competencies. The ACPA/NASPA assessment, evaluation, and research competencies, ASK Standards and the CAS Standards related to assessment services provide a basic roadmap for individuals and units with assessment responsibilities. Campuses and professional organizations can help fill the void with conferences, webinars, and consultant visits.

Over time, the topics of student affairs assessment have become more complex.

In the early days, student affairs assessment professionals focused on satisfaction and needs, then moved to how to assess co-curricular learning in a meaningful, manageable way. Today's student affairs assessment professionals commonly grapple with campus climate related to diversity and inclusion, sexual misconduct/Title IX, hazing, mental health, food and housing insecurity, gender identity, and more. While student affairs assessment professionals may coordinate the data collection, they may not be the people who use the data for improvement. Before data collection, the student affairs assessment professional has the responsibility to talk to the appropriate staff about how the data will be collected, used, shared, and analyzed. Those can be tough conversations, but need to happen early in the process to avoid confusion, frustration, and harm.

As the field becomes more complex, it is important to pay close attention to ethics and politics. This can be a revelation to even seasoned professionals. This area moves beyond the day-to-day assessment work and focuses on the broader issues. How are people using student affairs assessment data? Do student affairs assessment staff operate under a code of ethics? How can they decide on and communicate their standards to avoid getting into ethical dilemmas? Who has power in decision-making? The value of assessment continues to unfold. Division and campus leadership need to continue to champion assessment in a thoughtful way.

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