PROFESSIONALIZING STUDENT AFFAIRS: FIVE TENSIONS

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Scholars and practitioners have discussed the professionalization of student affairs almost since the birth of the field in 19th century. Professionalizing a field can improve its status and better serve members of an occupation and their clients (Pavalko, 1988). The purpose of this paper is to identify points of tension that illustrate efforts to professionalize and barriers to achieve professional status. As scholars and practitioners of student affairs, we offer five tensions: lack of specialized knowledge, lack of unified purpose and focus, divided professional community, diversity of student affairs credentialing, and lack of autonomy for student affairs practitioners at both the individual and organizational levels. We conclude with implications for practice and research.

Keywords: professionalization, profession, student affairs profession

*P*rofessionalization is a process whereby an "occupation transforms itself through the development of formal qualifications based upon education, apprenticeship, and examinations, the emergence of regulatory bodies with powers to admit and discipline members, and some degree of monopoly rights" (Bullock & Trombley, 1999, p. 689). A great deal is at stake for people working in areas that have not yet been *deemed* a profession because "professionals wield great power in determining what goes on in our society" (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 218). Professionalizing occupations is one means of improving reputation and public understanding of their work (Pavalko, 1988).

Professionalization has been systematically studied since the beginning of the twentieth century. Early in the twentieth century, Flexner (1915/2001) questioned if social work had met the criteria to be considered a "profession" and outlined the ways in which several occupations were or were not professions. Since the 1960s, the sociological literature has moved beyond discussing what constitutes a profession to matters of how occupations become professions and the process by which fields are professionalized. For instance, Pavalko (1988) developed a model from the study of occupations from the 1930s-1970s. In his model of professionalization, Pavalko (1988) described classical features of a profession including theory and intellectual technique, relevance to social values, training period, motivation, autonomy, commitment, sense of community, and codes of ethics. His model is concerned with "understanding the sources of occupational differentiation, the motivations and strategies used by occupational groups in the quest for power and prestige in the workplace, and the consequences of achievement or failing to achieve collective power and prestige" (Pavalko, 1988, pp. 11-12). He explored the various roles work plays in our lives—as a social role, link to the social structure, and source of identity—and ability a profession has to yield power in society through social stratification.

Scholars and practitioners have discussed the professionalization of student affairs almost since the birth of the field in 19th century (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). In the mid-20th century, scholars (Darley, 1949; Wrenn, 1949) assessed the professional status of student affairs against the following eight characteristics: professional consciousness and professional groups, a socially needed function, specialized knowledge and skills, code of ethics, application of standards of selection/training, definition of job titles and functions, standards of admission and performance, and legal recognition. Having only made progress in the first four of these realms, it was decided student affairs was not yet a profession. Penney (1969) wrote an often-cited critique, referring to student affairs as "a professional stillborn" (p. 958), and Shoben (1967) alleged the field had been obsessed with "housekeeping" tasks. In summation, up through the 1980s, key barriers to professionalization of student affairs were the lack of a theoretical base, consistent and rigorous training standards, the definition of the role of student affairs, and the field's impotence in addressing these matters properly (Carpenter et al., 1980).

Professionalization became a hotly contested issue among student affairs scholars during the 1980s. Rickard (1988) suggested, "unless alternative perspectives on the profession are explored, the field will be damned to push a boulder up the slope of professional legitimacy only to fail again and again" (p. 389). This debate came to the fore in 1988 with a special issue of *Journal of College Student Affairs* dedicated to discerning professionalization. Although the field of student affairs has academic journals (e.g., *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* and *Journal of College Student Development*) and professional associations (e.g., NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA: College Student Educators International), it still faces barriers to professionalization

such as a lack of clearly defined disciplinary boundaries and insufficient professional accountability, peer review, and intentionality of practice (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007).

Recently, Torres, Jones and Renn (2019) have characterized student affairs as "a low-consensus field" in which there are "diverse theoretical, epistemological, and philosophical perspectives" (Torres et al., 2019, p. 645). In discussing the theory-practice divide, they note: "there may be obstacles to engaging practitioners on topics about epistemological, methodological, generational, and professional role differences" (Torres et al., 2019, p. 655). Specifically, the authors offer (a) tensions between student development theoretical literature and actual student affairs practice; and (b) tensions within the research on college student development (e.g. student experiences and identity divorced from developmental processes, methodological issues, and topical foci of research). Thus, issues of scholarly unity, practitioner competencies, application of scholarship to practice—all matters of professionalization—are still pertinent to this day and require further examination.

In a synthesis of the literature on the history of student affairs between 1996-2015, Hevel (2016) suggested to understand the threats to the professionalization of student affairs, future studies "could explicitly focus on the tensions between efforts to professionalize and the threats to professionalization. What does it mean for student affairs to be a profession, and when, if ever, was this achieved?" (p. 856). A focus on the process of professionalization and how a field can improve their professional status can only better serve the members of an occupation, and by extension, their clients (Pavalko, 1988). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to identify points of tension that illustrate efforts to professionalize student affairs and barriers to achieve professional status. As scholars and practitioners of student affairs, we offer five tensions: lack of specialized knowledge, lack of unified purpose and focus, divided professional com-

munity, diversity of student affairs credentialing, and lack of autonomy for student affairs practitioners at both the individual and organizational levels. We conclude with implications for practice and research designed to continue and further the discussion of the professional status of student affairs.

Tension 1: Lack of Specialized Knowledge

A key characteristic of professions is a specialized body of knowledge (Pavalko, 1988). To practice in the profession, a professional is expected to master the specialized methods for arriving at knowledge in a field and esoteric literature of the discipline. This knowledge base may be highly scientific or not. For instance, Pavalko (1988) contrasts medicine—which requires a high degree of specialized knowledge in biology, chemistry, physics, etc.—with the knowledge of law, which is a "highly elaborate and certainly esoteric body of knowledge" (p. 20), but not scientific. For a knowledge base to improve in a field, there must be people constructing it.

A specialized body of knowledge has been a much-contested area for student affairs scholars because of the quantity and meaningfulness of the literature, as well as the lack of distinct field boundaries (Canon, 1982; Stamatakos, 1981a). Up to the early 1980s, the literature was "superficial, eclectic, inconsistent, and lacking in professional distinction"; a small portion of literature was the "result of a deliberate and systematic research-based attempt to respond to the need for basic constructs, specific knowledge and its application in the work setting" (Stamatakos, 1981a, p. 110). With institutional structures becoming increasingly blended, one could question if work that embodies the essence of student affairs actually constitutes student affairs if it does not fall under the purview of student affairs at a particular institution.

Examining the curricula of graduate programs in a field provides a gauge of

the content of a field. A review of graduate programs in the early 1980s (Stamatakos, 1981a) revealed some were grounded in counseling-focused skills while others were largely based on administrative functions. With variety in graduate program content and focus areas, student affairs faced challenges in having a unified field of study (Rickard, 1985; Stamatakos, 1981a). Other scholars questioned whether student affairs was specialized enough to require unique graduate-level training (Carpenter, Miller, & Winston, 1980). To this day, student affairs has been characterized as a low-consensus field, the enduring nature of which, "perpetuates tensions and further highlights how past scholarship interacts with contemporary thinking" (Torres et al., 2019, p. 648).

The concern for the proper academic preparation of student affairs practitioners led to the formation of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) in 1979. The CAS standards detailed skills, education, and knowledge student affairs practitioners ought to have to be effective, providing a framework to evaluate the quality of the various functional areas within student affairs. Although it enhanced the field's professional mission (Paterson & Carpenter, 1989), the standards were merely recommendations and did not create a consistent approach to the hiring of student affairs practitioners.

Although the state of graduate programs in student affairs is far different than it was in the early 1980s, this interconnectedness between other-related academic programs and disciplines in higher education (e.g. higher education, adult education, counseling, educational administration, college student personnel and social justice) presents an obstacle to the professionalization of student affairs. To illustrate, NASPA (2017) listed 220 student affairs programs divided into seven areas of focus: administration ($n = 112$), counseling ($n = 21$), international education ($n = 4$), leadership ($n = 57$), policy ($n = 6$), student learning and development ($n = 95$), and other ($n = 63$). Some

of the programs have more than one focus and few concentrate exclusively on student affairs. Many programs are combined with another field or student affairs is a track of the program.

With more specialized literature, the field can continue to professionalize. Scholars called for researchers to substantiate student affairs' existence through robust projects that demonstrate the impact of student affairs work. Scholars feared technology may overtake the work of practitioners if clear data correlating student affairs practice with student success was not produced (Carpenter et al., 1980). More recently, Carpenter and Stimpson (2007) argued, "there is a lack of systematic and detailed scholarship in the field that follows an agenda from start to wherever it leads, or better, several agendas" (p. 272).

Tension 2: Lack of Unified Purpose and Focus

Since the early 1980s, scholars have questioned if the purpose of student affairs was merely to serve the immediate needs of students and the institutions (a purpose that would characterize student affairs primarily as service-oriented), or if there truly was a widely-recognized responsibility to develop and educate the student (a purpose that would characterize student affairs primarily as education-oriented) (Stamatakos, 1981b). If the latter, there is more responsibility to assess the outcomes of student affairs work. Potentially problematic is the "lack of consensus about the core functions and purposes that define student affairs as a profession and the knowledge and expertise required for effective practice" (Dalton & Crosby, 2011, p. 3).

Contributing to the notion of a lack of unified purpose is the variety of roles in different functional areas under the student affairs umbrella. The variety of roles exacerbates the field's inability to agree on a central mission uniting all practitioners (Paterson & Carpenter, 1989; Porterfield et al., 2011; Stamatakos, 1981b). The "unity"

view assumes "that all professionals in student affairs are members of one profession" (Rickard, 1988, p. 388). Although it is clear student affairs shares one general purpose and mission—"concern for the holistic development and general welfare of students" (Dalton & Crosby, 2011, p. 3)—the disparate roles in student affairs "share only cursory connections" (p. 2) and function mostly independently. As such, some scholars posited student affairs could never be one profession. With "tremendous eclecticism, inconsistency and wide variance of philosophies and practices" (Stamatakos, 1981a, p. 107), the field is far too loosely defined "for it to qualify as a whole" (Bloland, 1992, para 6). Indeed, "A tension thus arises between professional values related to inclusion and openness and values related to some semblance of uniform knowledge of theory in service to students" (Torres et al., 2019, p. 648).

Blimling (2001) argued student affairs has outgrown one common purpose and that instead, there are four communities of practice (COP). Those oriented in *student administration*, "focus heavily on procedures, policies, and processes" (p. 388). In the *student services* COP, the focus is on providing "high-quality student services that are cost-efficient and result in student satisfaction" (p. 389). Arguing "their work is equal to that of the classroom," s*tudent development-oriented* COP "facilitate the psychosocial and cognitive growth and development of students" (p. 389). The fourth COP—*student learning*—is chiefly concerned with "engaging students in various forms of active learning…that result in skills and knowledge consistent with the learning mission of higher education" (p. 390). Although these are four disparate COPs, certain student affairs units on a campus may encompass more than one. Having different COPs may not result in organizational dissonance, but it does call into question the unifying mission of the field. These communities "are separated by differing contextual assumptions about the nature and purpose of stu-

dent affairs work" (p. 388).

Without an explicit overarching purpose for its existence encompassing all functional areas—shared by those working within the field—student affairs will not be able to gain public acceptance (Houle, 1980) and therefore will continue to face obstacles towards recognition as a profession. For instance, the lack of unity can cause problems with how university stakeholders perceive the field:

> If student affairs is viewed by presidents and other senior administrators as primarily a collection of offices and departments, how is it any different from some other administrative or academic section of the campus? There is nothing permanent about the current arrangement of how student affairs is organized on a campus; any of the offices and departments in student affairs could be assigned to another division of the institution…Who will articulate the 'reason' for a student affairs division in a way that makes it essential to the institution? (Sandeen, 2011, p. 5)

The culmination of the tensions discussed thus far is that people do not understand what student affairs practitioners do, both within and outside of the field. The matter is not helped by the number of different titles found within student affairs. Rickard (1985) found 86 different titles of chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) (down from almost 300 in the 1940s), but the "lack of agreement on a single name to encompass over 20 diverse functional areas is neither surprising nor troubling" (Rickard, 1988, p. 389). Still, the standardization of titles and clarifying and condensing the functional roles within student affairs can bring some cohesion to the field and help lessen the mystique around higher education. Although it is expected for there to be many different specialties within student affairs, combining similar roles, standardizing job titles, and reorganizing structures "according to shared purposes and expanded missions" (Porterfield et al., 2011, p. 3)

within and across institutions will help unify the field (Stamatakos, 1981a). People not in higher education might be able to better understand what people do in universities if titles were very similar across the board. A clearer understanding from the public about what student affairs is and its professional purpose can lead to greater public acceptance, a hallmark of professionalization (Houle, 1980).

Tension 3: Divided Professional Community

One of the most obvious markers of a professional community is having at least one professional association. Members of a profession are part of a community of practitioners in which there is a "common identity and common destiny" (Pavalko, 1988, p. 27). Cultural norms and connections between people often extend past the professional boundaries into non-work life/social activities.

The two largest student affairs associations—NASPA: Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA)—trace their roots to the early 20th century. Some scholars felt having two major associations—with different structures and organizations—weakened the field (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Knock, 1988). Almost a decade ago, members of NASPA and ACPA voted not to combine as one (Grasgreen, 2011). Due to the growing number of functional areas in student affairs, there has been a proliferation of professional associations (e.g., The Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education [NODA] or the Higher Education Case Managers Association [HECMA]) (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). Scholars noted the issue of *allied professionals* (Creamer et al., 1992), practitioners identifying more with their functional area than with student affairs at large (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Rickard, 1988; Williams, 1988). Included in this identity are specialized professional associations with attributes of individual professions (disciplinary

journals, codes of ethics, etc.) (Carpenter, 2003). According to some scholars, if student affairs is to advance as a profession, practitioners need to identify unequivocally as student affairs practitioners (Knock, 1988). Practitioners who participate more with their specialized association rather than the two prominent associations in the field, NASPA or ACPA, present a problem of unity to the professionalization of student affairs. When a profession's cohesion is splintered, "the ability of the group to exercise control over its members is also lessened" (Pavalko, 1988, p. 41). Even more problematic is that membership in any professional organization is not a prerequisite or requirement for employment in student affairs. Furthermore, membership in any of the student affairs professional organizations does not require enforceable adherence to any set of professional standards.

Tension 4: Diversity of Student Affairs Credentialing

The fourth tension is that student affairs practitioners come from a variety of academic backgrounds and no specific degree is generally required to do student affairs work. In more traditional professions, only those with sufficient, knowledge, expertise, and training can perform the work (Pavalko, 1988). Requiring a specific degree creates an exclusion criterion for individual workers: only those with some form of credential can practice (sanctioned by the occupational group and sometimes, the government; see van Loo & Rocco, 2006). Thus, training of professionals differs from non-professionals in four ways: long tertiary periods of training; higher degree of required specialized knowledge; heavier focus on conceptual aspects rather than technical skills; and training beyond job functions, including norms, values, socialization, and learning the culture (Pavalko, 1988). In short, in traditional professions, "training" is what you learn in the pre-requisite degree to hold the job.

The variety of credentials often considered for student affairs work presents an

obstacle to professionalization because it diminishes the currency of student affairs graduate preparation programs and their degrees: "we have observed that hiring requirements for entry-level student affairs positions vary widely historically, ranging from bachelor's degrees to master's degrees in various fields to specifying degrees in higher education and student affairs" (Torres et al., 2019, p. 646). Without a consistent standard body of knowledge on which all practitioners are trained, selected, and hired, some scholars feel student affairs does not meet this criteria to be considered a profession (Carpenter, 2003).

Scholars note the problem with job postings being intentionally vague about requirements (Torres et al., 2019). For example, when institutions write job requirements by stating a master's degree in student affairs, higher education, counseling *or any* related field would suffice, they imply there is very little in the way of specialized knowledge required to do the work of the profession. The "well-established professions would *never* violate their professional status and insult their programs of professional education by considering applicants with degrees from *related* [emphasis added] fields" (Knock, 1988, p. 396). Allowing any type of degree may be viewed as problematic when even the highest level of chief student affairs officers can acquire positions without the commiserate experience or education (Young, 1988). On the other hand, some might argue not only is it possible but actually preferable for someone working in certain functional areas of student affairs to have a different credential (e.g. an MBA or doctorate in leadership).

Student development theory is rarely taught outside of student affairs graduate programs. Someone coming to student affairs practice without such a degree is unlikely to have studied student development theory. If they are hired in spite of this, the implication is that an understanding of student development is *optional* for performing student affairs work (Torres et al., 2019).

Instead of rigidly requiring all practitioners hold graduate degrees in student affairs, an alternative solution posed in the literature was to develop robust professional development programs for those with no student affairs background (Canon, 1982; Carpenter, 2003). Professional development programs are important to help practitioners stay abreast of the most recent research (Paterson & Carpenter, 1989; van Loo & Rocco, 2006).

Licensure as a credential for all student affairs practitioners has been an additional discussion point (Stamatakos, 1981b; Carpenter, 2003). Opponents of licensure say that given the varied number of roles within student affairs, licensure is inappropriate since there would be too many functional areas that would have to be assessed. Scholars also argued licensure was a bad substitution for good professional development of practitioners and the implementation of standards and procedures in student affairs practice (Stamatakos, 1981a). Although licensure is at the bedrock of more established professions, by itself, "is not enough to assure professional status" (Carpenter, 2003, p. 577).

Licensure was widely discussed in the 1980s, but by the early 2000s, student affairs practitioners felt it was neither practical, nor desirable at any time in the future (Carpenter, 2003). Rather, professional associations guide members on appropriate "knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of all student affairs educators, regardless of functional area or specialization within the field" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 7). Torres, Jones and Renn (2019) have critiqued the way in which the *ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) imply consensus, "yet the omission of specific relevant theories may indicate an openness to diverse perspectives, an avoidance of committing to particular perspectives, an inability to agree, or possibly some combination" (p. 647). Some might ask if knowledge of student development theory

is a necessary background to perform the work. If so, questions may arise regarding an essential credential to ensure this background for those performing student affairs work. This tension is far from resolved and requires more discussion in the scholarly literature base, at local, national and international conferences, and within individual campuses.

Tension 5: Lack of Professional (Organizational and Individual) Autonomy

Autonomy is one of the most important elements of the sociology of professionalization (Pavalko, 1988). There are two levels of autonomy: of the occupational group and of the individual. On the group level, autonomy denotes that only those with sufficient knowledge, expertise, training, and credential (whatever is required by the occupational group) can perform the work, creating an exclusion criterion for individual workers. In terms of individual autonomy, a professional is expected to be self-driven and motivated, able to perform work without constant supervision, and to have the necessary credibility to make professional judgments independently (Houle, 1980). Student affairs scholars discussed autonomy in relation to the field's independence from higher education. Because the very existence of student affairs is to serve the students and the institution, it:

> has no independent existence in American higher education; it is always a part of an institution and, more importantly, is always established to serve that institution's educational mission. Thus, any attempt to define a unifying purpose for "student affairs" is made very difficult by the wide variation in institutional purposes. (Sandeen, 2011, p. 4)

Student affairs will always be situated within higher education, and therefore, never enjoy true professional autonomy. Autonomy is associated with self-regulation and self-control, which allow a profession "the freedom and power…to regulate their own work behavior and working conditions"

(Pavalko, 1988, p. 25). Although professions certainly exist within organizations, those organizations do not determine the language the profession uses to define or describe itself. Higher education institutions as individual organizations define and describe roles and responsibilities within the institution according to the administrative hierarchy's vision and organizational chart—an organizational chart that frequently changes with each new administration. The relationship of student affairs to higher education "calls into play the concept of professionals in bureaucracies… student affairs workers never operate in an atmosphere of unbounded autonomy, regardless of their status as professionals" (Carpenter, 1991, p. 258).

Implications

The implications we present here are designed to continue and further the discussion of the professional status of student affairs. While we may believe student affairs might be better situated to influence student learning and development and institutional and national policy if and when it achieves professional status, these tensions need to be further explored and consensus reached before professional status is a reality.

We return to Hevel's (2016) question that framed this paper: "What does it mean for student affairs to be a profession, and when, if ever, was this achieved?" Sparked by a debate in an issue of J*ournal of College Student Development*, Kuk (1988) proclaimed, "The issue is not whether or not we are a profession. We are a profession. The real issues are how we see ourselves as a profession, how others see us as a profession, and how we organize our efforts and set priorities as a profession" (p. 398). This debate frustrated some (Kuk, 1988; Moore, 1988) but for others was "a sign of vigorous health" (Sandeen, 2011, p. 5). We contend the question is not so much a matter of whether or not a field of knowledge and practice constitutes a profession, but rather, how can a marginalized profession continue

to professionalize.

Recognized professions may still encounter obstacles despite attaining some degree of status as a result of the dynamic and fluid process of attaining that status (Pavalko, 1988). Working toward professionalization, occupational groups encounter many obstacles from internal and external entities. These might include: a knowledge base borrowed or shared with similar fields; a knowledge base that favors technical knowledge that can be learned by employees on the job rather than theoretical or conceptual knowledge; occupational duties or purpose that is difficult to explain to laypeople and thus, mask the public's ability to utilize the professional service; lack of internal agreement between the people working in the occupation regarding the purpose of function of the profession; and insufficient resources to move the field forward (Cooper, 2012).

Some obstacles come from within the occupational group: the nature of the knowledge base (technical versus esoteric/theoretical/conceptual) and the level of agreement about occupational purpose/function within the group. But many of the obstacles are external: bureaucracies controlling the fates of occupational groups, knowledge bases that are reliant upon other fields, occupational purposes/functions that are difficult to convey to the public and having enough support (e.g. financial resources and personnel) to move an occupational group beyond the periphery. Occupational groups need to navigate and negotiate these obstacles within their groups and outside of them to professionalize (Cooper, 2012).

Some scholars suggest student affairs needs to produce more field-specific literature to create a claim of an established knowledge base known to those practicing in the field (Torres et al., 2019). More literature demonstrating the impact of student affairs work elevates its professional status within the academy. For instance, clearly demonstrating how learning in student affairs work is assessed will improve its perception as an essential part of the learning mission of the institution. As resource allocation is critical for the advancement of student affairs, research conducted needs to demonstrate impact and effectiveness to stakeholders. How can we best communicate with stakeholders about the core functions of student affairs? Standardizing ways to measure key performance indicators and return on investments based on the core functions and purposes could give practitioners common language to communicate the value of their work, not only to senior level university administrators, but also those who exist outside of higher education who do not understand the work of student affairs.

Although a profession should have a set of shared goals, the many roles under student affairs make it difficult to formulate one overarching purpose (Bloland, 1992; Rickard, 1988; Sandeen, 2011) and "no single administrative, theoretical, or intellectual model can serve all institutions equally well" (Sandeen, 2011, p. 5). NASPA (2017) includes almost 40 functional areas, ranging from disability support services and GLBT student services to commuter student services and recreational sports. With so many different functional areas, some scholars questioned whether there was enough commonality in terms of core beliefs to justify having one field (Bloland, 1992; Rickard, 1988). With "erosion of the professional community" (Pavalko, 1988, p. 40) comes the splintering of newer, more nuanced specialized areas. These "internal divisions based on specialization represent a potential threat to the integrity and cohesion of the professional community" (Pavalko, 1988, p. 40). An examination of the different functional areas might reveal a categorization scheme that could support an overarching purpose.

Research could examine how the lack of standardization among titles manifests in practice at institutions (Tull & Freeman, 2008). Does the profession have a role in the names of these titles? Or is it all driven locally by institutional HR? If the latter, how does this contribute to the lack of shared vi-

sion, purpose, and focus for the profession? Further, research could examine undergraduate student's perceptions of the work of student affairs professionals. Do students who are less/more engaged in campus understand the work of the profession? Do students see the functional areas as disparate offices? More importantly, do these tensions within student affairs affect student learning and development, which is the purpose of higher education?

Professional associations can also serve as a cultural center for an occupational group or a community of practice for practitioners. They can guide members on appropriate knowledge, skills, and best practices. Future research might consider how the multitude of professional associations contribute to the unity (or lack thereof) of the profession. How much of the student affairs workforce identifies with a professional association? Do *generalist* (e.g., ACPA or NASPA) or *specialty* (e.g., NACADA) professional associations (Evans & Ranero, 2009) divide the profession? Practitioners participating more with their specialized association rather than the two umbrella associations in the field, NASPA or ACPA, could present a problem of unity to the professionalization of student affairs.

What is the affinity among practitioners for professional associations specifically geared toward specific functional areas? How do professional associations contribute to the development of the field and individual professionals? While clearly describing the importance of professional associations in the socialization of new practitioners to the profession, Duran and Allen (2019) cautioned "student affairs practitioners can easily function in an echo chamber, gravitating toward information that solidify what they already know" (p. 13).

Considering the diversity of student affairs credentialing, studies might also look at job postings by different functional areas to find trends in terms of preferred and required qualifications, degrees, etc. What are the required educational credentials?

Is a degree in student affairs always preferred or required? Is student affairs specialized enough to require unique graduate-level training? To address the concern of the overlap between higher education and student affairs, a future study could sample articles from journals in both fields and through content analysis, indicate how much overlap exists between the two bodies of literature and suggest if student affairs constitutes a substantially different body of literature independent from higher education. Similarly, future research should examine if graduate programs in higher education are unique from those in student affairs, if the two fields differ substantially from each other, and if they are preparing practitioners for similar work roles.

What do professional development programs look like for people with no academic background in higher education/student affairs? How do those without a degree in student affairs learn in the workplace? We submit that student affairs as a profession and the principle student affairs professional associations could do more to encourage and support a comprehensive and intentional approaches to continued professional education at the institutional and individual levels. We believe the profession of student affairs should have its own system of CPE. Future research could examine the experiences of student affairs practitioners without a degree in higher education and what they do for CPE.

How many student affairs practitioners keep abreast of the literature from the flagship journals? How widely is this literature applied to practice? As a profession, we need to create a culture of research and scholarship or risk being viewed only as a service provider (Hatfield & Wise, 2015). In addition to knowledge about higher education environments, student characteristics and behaviors, human development and relational skills (Canon, 1982), those working in student affairs should also be trained in research and evaluation so they can better assess practice and contribute to the knowl-

edge base through publication (Paterson & Carpenter, 1989).

In the current higher education climate with increasing obligations of accountability and assessment, it is useful to cultivate strong writing and research skills in student affairs practitioners. Expectations for writing and presenting are generally not embedded into student affairs job roles, and even in those instances where they may be, support or resources are often lacking. Although it is not critical for all student affairs practitioners to publish, those who do show interest could form writing groups. Resources such as *A Guide to Becoming a Scholarly Practitioner in Student Affairs* (Hatfield & Wise, 2015) can be used to expose student affairs professionals to scholarly presentation and publication activities. Although writing groups are helpful, professionals must have intrinsic motivation to write, particularly because most writing takes place outside of work hours. If the profession does not create a culture for research and scholarship, "student affairs professionals will continue to be viewed as service providers rather than educators, and their work considered superfluous to the academic experience" (Hatfield & Wise, 2015, p. 73). How will student affairs professionals be convinced it is in their best interest to contribute to a culture of research and scholarship?

The matter of professional (organizational and individual) autonomy is critical to the field's professionalization. Student affairs practitioners grapple with their roles in relation to their multiple clients: the student, the institution, and/or higher education in general. To serve the best interests of their students, student affairs practitioners, in some instances, may go against what is best for the institution (Carpenter, 2003). However, the tension of whom to serve always exists on several levels. This presents an ethical dilemma because as employees working for an institution, they are not fully autonomous. Future research might examine issues of organizational and personal autonomy within student affairs: How much control do student affairs officers exert on the practice of student affairs on campuses? How does this change based on whether the leader comes from within student affairs or from within academic affairs? What role do institutional politics play? Does membership in one professional organization versus another influence autonomy?

Related to autonomy is the issue of professional identity. How do student affairs practitioners describe their professional identity (Pittman & Foubert, 2016)? Studies in other fields have used instruments built on Hall's (1968) attitudinal attributes of professionalization to gauge how practitioners in a field view their work. These attributes are the use of a professional organization as a major reference; belief in service to the public; belief in self-regulation; sense of calling to the field; and autonomy. Studies about why practitioners chose to enter student affairs and why they choose to stay could help to elucidate the meaning professionals give to their work. Such studies might seek a wide swath of practitioners working in a variety of settings to determine how they view the professionalization of student affairs.

Is student affairs a "new kind of profession?" (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007, p. 270). We are not concerned with an oversimplified dichotomy of whether an occupation is or is not deemed a profession. Instead, what can we do to move our field forward? Can we advance our work on behalf of and with college students without becoming a profession in the sociological sense? Old paradigm or new, low-consensus or high, the discussion of professionalization ultimately "matters because policy, practice, and rewards are at stake" (Huggett, 2000, p. 50).

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