# Work, Relationships, and Rewards in Student Affairs: Differences by Institutional Type

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*The differences among students who attend different types of colleges and universities are well documented in the literature. Variations in faculty roles by institutional type have also been examined. Yet disparities in the worklife of student affairs administrators have remained largely unexplored. Responses from a national sample of professionals suggest significant differences in the nature of the work they do, the relationships they have with constituencies, and the rewards they value based on where they work.*

The literature on constituency groups and institutional classifications in higher education reflects some interesting patterns. Consider the issue of students. There is ample evidence that different types of students enroll at different types of institutions. Older and minority students enroll in disproportionately larger numbers at community colleges, for example, while traditional aged (18-24) and White students dominate at public and private four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

A second major constituency on campus is the faculty. The differences in faculty roles by institutional type are also fairly well documented. Those at research institutions are expected to produce and disseminate new knowledge while those at liberal arts institutions and community colleges exert greater efforts in instruction and service. Indeed, there are conceptual models that describe the differences in faculty life by institutional type (Bergquist, 1992) and studies on the relationship between faculty productivity and type of institution (Finnegan & Gamson, 1996; Smart, Kuh, & Tierney, 1997).

Given the extent of the literature on students and faculty, it might be presumed that information about the third major constituency in institutions of higher education, administrators, would be equally as prevalent. Such is not the case, however. Johnsrud's (2002) summary of the research on administrators over the past 19 years reveals only 11 such studies. This is somewhat surprising since the number of administrative staff has grown at a rate much higher than the number of faculty members in recent years (Gumport & Pusser, 1995) and

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at times administrators have outnumbered faculty members by as much as two to one (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999).

The scholarship on higher education administrators can be categorized in three groups: descriptive studies, studies that explore attitudes, and those that explore behaviors (Johnsrud, 2002). Descriptive studies dominate this body of work. For example, scholars have identified the functions administrators fulfill on campus and have described the roles they assume in managing campus policies and procedures (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999). Others have examined the process of administrative promotion (Johnsrud, Sagaria, & Heck, 1992; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988, 1992).

The focus of the second group of studies is attitudinal factors of administrators. Johnsrud and Rosser (1999) examined the issue of morale among mid-level administrators. Issues of role conflict and role ambiguity have also been explored (Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). The research on behavioral issues among administrators is the most limited in scope. The behavior most frequently examined is intent to leave the job (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000).

The administrators included in these studies, however, are typically academic administrators (Johnsrud, Sagaria, & Heck, 1992; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992) who are mid- to high-level professionals (Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). Research on student affairs administrators has taken a somewhat different approach: studies have focused on the status of the profession and the skills and characteristics of successful professionals.

The body of work on the status of student affairs can be conceptualized in several groups. The first includes commentaries about the degree to which student affairs administration can be considered a profession. This question has been debated for decades with some scholars denying student affairs professional status (Bloland, 1992; Canon, 1982) and others confirming the occupation's limited compliance with definitions of "profession" (Stamatakos, 1981a; 1981b; Rogers, 1995). Another group of work describes the historic evolution of the profession and the roles that student affairs administrators have assumed over time (Rentz, 1996). A third segment focuses on the characteristics of the labor pool (Turrentine & Conley, 2001), attrition among professionals (Burns, 1982; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998) and the connections between characteristics and attrition (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998). The work on the profession also is rich with studies of the skills and abilities needed to succeed as a student affairs administrator (Dalton & Gardner, 2002; Estanek, 1999; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Thomas, 2002). Included in this collection are studies that focus on the role of leadership in the profession (Reisser, 2002).

It would seem, therefore, that there is ample literature about the people who comprise the student affairs profession and the abilities they need in order to succeed. Professionals practice in any number of environments, however (e.g., liberal arts institutions, community colleges, research universities). Only recently has the influence of institutional type on the practice of student affairs administration been considered. Scholars have noted the need to explore whether graduate programs are preparing future student affairs professionals to succeed in different types of environments (Lorden, 1998). They have exhorted professionals to understand the core mission of the institution at which they practice so that their actions contribute to achieving that mission (Kuk, 2002). Yet there is very little research on how professional practice varies due to the different environments at colleges and universities or how administrators are socialized to those environments. Socialization to the work environment is of fundamental importance to the issues that confront administrators, and that socialization occurs through the daily routines in which professionals engage, the people with whom they work, and the rewards they receive (Tierney, 1997). We sought to address this gap in the existing body of literature by investigating the distinctions in student affairs administration at different types of institutions.

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of professional life for student affairs administrators. Professional life was defined as the nature of work, the nature of relationships, the nature of rewards, and the nature of the campus. Student affairs professionals were defined as those who provided non-academic services to students or who supervised others who provided such services. Additionally, we examined differences in professional life for administrators at different types of institutions. Respondents included administrators at research universities, comprehensive universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges.

## Method

We elicited information about professional life from a national sample of student affairs administrators. Data were collected via an instrument posted on the Internet. Respondents were anonymous.

### *Sample*

The sample included professionals in student affairs positions at four-year and two-year institutions. We used the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) membership directory to identify participants. Of the 7100 names listed in the directory, we eliminated all those individuals we could identify from directory information as not meeting selection criteria; that is, those who were not student affairs administrators (e.g., faculty members, graduate students). Next we selected all administrators at community colleges as they are

underrepresented in the association so we included all of them in the sample. That left just over 4000 individuals remaining in the potential pool. We then drew a random sample of those so the final sample included 1551 individuals at 4-year institutions and 153 at 2-year institutions ($N$=1704). Of the 1704 professionals we contacted, 541 completed the survey for a response rate of 32%.

Respondents were reasonably distributed across three institutional types: 36% worked at liberal arts colleges, 34% at research universities, and 23% at comprehensive universities. As might be expected given their limited numbers in the association, community college administrators were underrepresented among participants (6%). Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) were females which is consistent with the gender composition of the profession as a whole: 63% female (Pickering & Calliotte, 2000). In terms of race, 82% were Caucasian and the remaining 18% were African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic, or bi-/multi-racial. Again these numbers parallel the racial representation in the profession: 81% majority, 19% minority (Pickering & Calliotte, 2000). The majority of respondents described themselves as mid-level administrators (68%) while 16% reported being cabinet level administrators and the remaining 16% were entry level professionals.

### *Instrumentation*

The Nature of Professional Life Survey (NPLS) was a web-based instrument consisting of 119 items in four categories: the Nature of Work, the Nature of Rewards, the Nature of Relationships, and the Nature of the Campus. There were also 19 items in a fifth category, Demographic Information. The Nature of Work included 17 items related to specific job tasks, for example working one-on-one with students and independent vs. collaborative work tasks. Respondents rated statements on a scale of 1 (*not at all reflective of my job*) to 7 (*very reflective of my job*). They also estimated the percent of time spent on different types of work (e.g., serving students, administrative activities, strategic planning). The 44 items in the Nature of Rewards category asked participants to rate both extrinsic rewards such as salary and benefits and intrinsic rewards such as recognition and autonomy (1=*not at all true of my job* to 7=*very true of my job*). The Nature of Relationships (26 items) examined the degree to which participants worked closely with groups such as students, academic faculty, and other administrators. The response scale ranged from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 7 (*very true of me*). The Nature of the Campus section included 22 items that focused on the mission, values, and climate of the participants' institutions. Participants rated items on a scale of 1 (*not at all true of my institution*) to 7 (*very true of my institution*). The survey also included three open-ended questions asking participants to reflect on the culture of their institution. The remaining items elicited demographic information about respondents.

The survey was piloted on a sample of professionals who were asked to comment on the clarity and relevance of items. Comments were used to revise the instrument before administering it to the national sample. Pilot data were also used to measure internal reliability. Fifteen pairs of items on the survey were reverse-worded. All but one pair were significantly negatively correlated, suggesting that the NPLS is internally reliable.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

We sent an email message to participants inviting them to complete the survey on the web site. Each time a respondent submitted a survey, the software we used sent us notification of that submission but did not reveal the identity of the respondent. This preserved the anonymity of participants but enabled us to track the response rate. Two follow-up emails reminding the participants about the survey were sent at one-week intervals.

Data were analyzed to address the research questions posed in the study. The instrument was designed to yield interval data. We sorted respondents into four groups by the type of institution at which they worked (community college, liberal arts institution, comprehensive university, or research university). We then calculated the mean score on each item for each group and compared those means through a series of ANOVAs ($p < .05$). On those items that revealed a significant difference, we conducted a post-hoc test (Bonferroni) to identify the group or groups that differed significantly ($p < .05$).

## Results

Of the 119 survey items, 62 (52%) showed significant differences, with 13 of those differences on the nature of work, 14 on the nature of rewards, 21 on the nature of relationships, and 14 on the nature of the campus. These items are presented in Tables 1 through 4. Reverse-worded items are not included in the tables for the sake of brevity.

### *Nature of Work*

Most differences in this area were between liberal arts colleges and other types of institutions. Professionals at liberal arts colleges reported spending significantly more time in direct service to students than their colleagues at research or comprehensive universities. They are significantly more likely than those at research universities to have input into decisions made in their offices, and more likely than those at community colleges to participate in evening and weekend work. Student affairs professionals at community colleges reported serving on campus committees at a significantly higher rate than those at all other types of institutions, and spending more time in strategic planning than colleagues at research universities and liberal arts colleges.

Table 1

*Significant Differences in ANOVAs on the Nature of the Work*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I work in conjunction with graduate students/ paraprofessionals on most job tasks | 3.45 (1.82) | 3.50 (1.85 | 2.69 (1.72 | 1.38 (0.68) | 17.56 | b,c,d,e,f |
| I work in conjunction with other student services professionals on most job tasks | 4.85 (1.56) | 5.16 (1.44) | 4.65 (1.45) | 5.41 (1.12) | 4.31 | d |
| Much of my work involves delegation of tasks to others | 4.27 (1.53) | 4.90 (1.54) | 4.13 (1.59) | 4.55 (1.76) | 8.21 | a,d |
| I serve on many campus committees | 4.56 (1.77) | 5.07 (1.85) | 4.74 (1.66) | 6.07 (1.10) | 7.47 | c,e,f |
| I have input into very few of the decisions made in my office | 2.23 (1.43) | 2.00 (1.32) | 1.87 (1.16) | 1.69 (1.07) | 3.19 | b |
| My job entails a great deal of evening work/weekend work | 4.46 (1.80) | 4.42 (1.74) | 4.67 (1.71) | 3.62 (1.70) | 3.13 | f |
| Most of the workload in my office is generated by people/events outside the office | 4.15 (1.70) | 4.21 (1.63) | 4.38 (1.76) | 5.07 (1.61) | 2.27 | c |

[1]RU = research universities; CU = comprehensive universities; LA = liberal arts colleges; CC = community colleges.
[2]Letters in this column represent significant comparison between groups: a = RU vs CU; b = RU vs LA; c = RU vs CC; d = CU vs LA; e = CU vs CC; f = LA vs CC. All items were tested at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

Table 2

*Significant differences in ANOVAs on the Nature of the Rewards*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My health insurance program is good | 5.34 (1.55) | 5.36 (1.52) | 4.93 (1.67) | 5.82 (1.09) | 4.33 | f |
| My dental insurance program is good | 4.82 (1.89) | 4.59 (2.09) | 4.12 (2.01) | 4.71 (1.90) | 4.19 | b |
| My prescription insurance program is good | 5.13 (1.55) | 5.01 (1.73) | 4.58 (1.79) | 5.41 (1.31) | 4.44 | b |
| My optical insurance program is good | 4.25 (2.10) | 4.07 (2.11) | 3.42 (2.08) | 3.85 (2.16) | 5.55 | b,d |
| My institution provides me the time to take classes on campus if I elect to do so | 5.42 (1.87) | 5.01 (1.98) | 4.76 (2.00) | 4.59 (2.01) | 4.20 | b |
| I have an adequate number of support/ clerical staff available to assist me | 4.91 (1.93) | 4.86 (2.00) | 4.19 (2.21) | 4.54 (2.19) | 4.62 | b,d |
| I have an adequate number of under-graduate employees available to assist me | 5.18 (1.86) | 5.42 (1.81) | 5.05 (1.92) | 4.08 (2.25) | 3.69 | c,e |
| I have an adequate number of graduate student employees available to assist me | 4.39 (2.28) | 4.60 (2.15) | 2.84 (2.18) | 2.08 (2.34) | 25.56 | b,c,d,e |
| I am provided funds for memberships in professional associations | 3.78 (2.45) | 4.73 (2.35) | 4.92 (2.09) | 4.29 (2.21) | 8.60 | a,b |

*Table continues*

Table 2 *continued*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student services professional colleagues show appreciation for my work | 5.07 (1.58) | 5.28 (1.41) | 5.10 (1.48) | 5.90 (1.52) | 2.85 | c |
| Academic administrators show appreciation for my work | 3.82 (1.94) | 4.11 (1.88) | 3.58 (1.81) | 4.82 (2.14) | 4.61 | f |
| I work a reasonable number of hours per week | 4.13 (1.86) | 4.28 (1.80) | 4.08 (1.84) | 5.17 (1.85) | 4.23 | c,f |
| The performance review procedures on my campus are good | 4.38 (1.95) | 4.13 (1.81) | 3.88 (1.91) | 5.03 (1.92) | 4.23 | f |
| There are ample opportunities for advancement on my campus | 3.76 (1.68) | 3.55 (1.73) | 2.96 (1.60) | 3.32 (1.93) | 7.55 | b,d |

[1]RU = research universities; CU = comprehensive universities; LA = liberal arts colleges; CC = community colleges.
[2]Letters in this column represent significant comparison between groups: a = RU vs CU; b = RU vs LA; c = RU vs CC; d = CU vs LA; e = CU vs CC; f = LA vs CC. All items were tested at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

### *Nature of Rewards*

Student affairs professionals working at liberal arts colleges ranked insurance benefits as significantly less important than those at other types of institutions. These staff also reported fewer opportunities for advancement than their colleagues at research and comprehensive universities. Professionals at community colleges rated benefits as important but reported low levels of support from student assistants. They also reported the most reasonable workloads. Professionals at research universities were more likely to be eligible for supplemental insurance benefits, be given time to take classes, and have opportunities for advancement than administrators at other types of institutions.

Table 3

*Significant Differences in ANOVAs on the Nature of Relationships*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I know many students on my campus personally | 4.85 (1.84) | 5.45 (1.53) | 5.61 (1.46) | 4.83 (2.04) | 7.81 | a,b,d |
| I provide services to many students but do not get to know them personally | 4.20 (1.91) | 4.27 (1.79) | 3.66 (1.72) | 4.29 (1.86) | 4.12 | b,d |
| Most students on campus know who I am | 3.31 (1.77) | 3.96 (1.70) | 5.09 (1.57) | 4.10 (1.74) | 36.17 | a,b,d,f |
| I work closely with many faculty members | 2.97 (1.82) | 3.43 (1.84) | 2.77 (1.70) | 4.34 (1.78) | 8.70 | c,d,f |
| I socialize with faculty members outside of work | 2.30 (1.72) | 2.98 (1.95) | 2.39 (1.69) | 2.31 (1.56) | 4.11 | a,d |
| Most faculty members on my campus know who I am | 2.66 (1.73) | 3.87 (2.08) | 3.98 (2.19) | 6.00 (1.36) | 31.39 | a,b,c,e,f |
| I work closely with many student service administrators on my campus | 5.29 (1.62) | 5.73 (1.60) | 5.74 (152) | 6.72 (0.53) | 8.46 | b,c,e,f |
| Most student service administrators on my campus know me | 5.42 (1.67) | 6.00 (1.58) | 6.52 (0.93) | 6.86 (0.44) | 23.68 | a,b,c,d,e |
| Most clerical staff on my campus know me | 3.36 (1.78) | 4.83 (1.83) | 5.02 (1.80) | 6.17 (1.49) | 40.25 | a,b,c,e,f |
| I work with the academic deans on my campus | 3.35 (2.06) | 4.11 (2.10) | 3.97 (2.05) | 6.14 (1.35) | 16.38 | a,b,c,e,f |

*Table continues*

Table 3 *continued*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Most academic deans on my campus know me | 3.08 (2.24) | 4.57 (2.45) | 4.85 (2.30) | 6.64 (1.10) | 31.96 | a,b,c,e,f |
| I work with the President/ Chancellor of my campus | 2.32 (1.91) | 3.82 (2.38) | 3.30 (2.15) | 5.14 (2.08) | 21.80 | a,b,c,e,f |
| The President/Chancellor of my campus knows me by name | 3.14 (2.52 | 4.89 (2.65) | 5.33 (2.42) | 6.79 (0.69) | 35.24 | a,b,c,e,f |

[1]RU = research universities; CU = comprehensive universities; LA = liberal arts colleges; CC = community colleges.
[2]Letters in this column represent significant comparison between groups: a = RU vs CU; b = RU vs LA; c = RU vs CC; d = CU vs LA; e = CU vs CC; f = LA vs CC. All items were tested at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

### *Nature of Relationships*

Size matters. Professionals at liberal arts colleges, which tend to have smaller enrollments than research or comprehensive universities, are more likely to know students personally than their counterparts at larger institutions. Research university staff members are less likely than those at all other types of institutions to know many others on campus at all levels. Those at community colleges are more likely to know academic, clerical, and administrative staff than their colleagues at other institutional types, and those at comprehensive universities are most likely of the four types to socialize with faculty outside of work.

Table 4

*Significant Differences in ANOVAs on the Nature of the Campus*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching undergraduates is very important at my institution | 4.85 (1.64) | 5.93 (1.21) | 6.37 (1.16) | 6.71 (0.54) | 47.32 | a,b,c,d,e |
| Teaching graduate students is very important at my institution | 5.53 (1.30) | 4.77 (1.64) | 3.37 (2.24) | 1.11 (0.57 | 81.92 | a,b,c,d,e,f |
| Conducting research is very important at my institution | 6.46 (0.92) | 4.28 (1.71) | 3.58 (1.81) | 1.57 (0.88) | 165.78 | a,b,c,d,e,f |
| Promoting good citizenship among students is very important at my institution | 4.89 (1.48) | 5.08 (1.60) | 5.48 (1.64) | 5.14 (1.71) | 4.51 | b |
| There is a strong sense of collegiality between faculty and student services administrators at my institution | 3.19 (1.48) | 3.50 (1.64) | 3.28 (1.55) | 4.90 (1.95) | 10.42 | c,e,f |
| There is very little turnover among student service staff at my institution | 3.40 (1.71) | 3.88 (1.72) | 3.41 (1.94) | 5.17 (2.17) | 9.55 | c,e,f |
| Most faculty and staff are aware of the issues facing my institution | 4.70 (1.31) | 4.48 (1.37) | 4.89 (1.43) | 5.62 (1.12) | 6.31 | c,e,f |
| Entrepreneurial efforts are rewarded at my institution | 4.20 (1.81) | 3.96 (1.73) | 3.36 (1.63) | 4.24 (1.96) | 8.34 | b,d |
| Preparing students for careers is important at my institution | 5.31 (1.32) | 5.59 (1.08) | 5.49 (1.43) | 6.03 (1.05) | 3.13 | c |

*Table continues*

Table 4 *continued*

| Item | Institution Type[1] Mean (Standard Deviation) RU | CU | LA | CC | F | Sig. diffs[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Faculty and student service administrators work closely together at my institution | 3.28 (1.48 | 3.78 (1.55) | 3.41 (1.46) | 5.00 (1.58) | 12.62 | a,c,e,f |
| Most faculty and staff know the history of my institution | 4.16 (1.61) | 4.51 (1.48) | 4.73 (1.62) | 5.18 (1.56) | 5.93 | b,c |
| Major decisions on my campus take a long time | 5.15 (1.50) | 5.21 (1.48) | 5.07 (1.49) | 4.10 (1.66) | 4.57 | c,e,f |

[1]RU = research universities; CU = comprehensive universities; LA = liberal arts colleges; CC = community colleges.
[2]Letters in this column represent significant comparison between groups: a = RU vs CU; b = RU vs LA; c = RU vs CC; d = CU vs LA; e = CU vs CC; f = LA vs CC. All items were tested at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

### *Nature of the Campus*

Student affairs professionals at research and comprehensive universities reported that the undergraduate teaching mission of their institutions was significantly less important than those at liberal arts and community colleges reported. Not surprisingly, there is a clear delineation among all four types of institutions on the importance of teaching graduate students and importance of the research mission, with research universities holding these missions as most important and community colleges holding them as least important. Professional staff members at community colleges reported more positive relations between faculty and student affairs staff than those at all other types of institutions. Community college staff also reported higher levels of awareness of institutional issues by faculty and staff.

## Discussion and Implications

The primary contribution of this study is to provide objective evidence to support the stories about differences in institutional type that many have offered illustratively. While it makes intuitive sense that a large research university hosts an environment that is very different for student affairs practitioners than a community college or liberal arts institution, very little data exist beyond anecdotes. The results presented here show how those differences are manifested.

Preliminary analysis of the results indicates several trends that paint a picture of what professional life is like for student affairs professionals at different types of colleges and universities. Working at a community college means more involvement across the institution, serving on multiple committees and collaborating with colleagues at all levels from support staff to the president. A student affairs professional, therefore, would be required to take a generalist approach to her or his work because of the interdepartmental nature of the work. A firm understanding of academic affairs at a community college would also be essential for student affairs staff to interact with colleagues in those areas. The flexibility to work effectively with many different groups would be valuable for these staff members who are interacting with various constituents both on and off campus. Preparation experiences in graduate programs might include practica in academic units or internships in academic affairs offices on community college campuses. Graduate students seeking to pursue careers in community colleges would also be well served to seek experiences that put them in contact with external constituents, as might be gained by serving on an alumni board.

Student affairs staff at liberal arts colleges should expect to spend a great deal of time with students and to have more flexible job responsibilities and hours than those who work at other types of institutions. Essential training for these staff members would include counseling and interpersonal skills to prepare them for issues that may arise in their close work with students. In addition, the ability to multi-task and expertise in more than one functional arena would serve liberal arts professionals well, since student affairs staff at these smaller colleges are often required to wear multiple professional hats. While in graduate school, those who aspire to work at liberal arts institutions might pursue assistantships and/or internships that require extensive work with students and that expose them to multiple functional areas of administration.

Results from professionals at comprehensive universities were very similar to those from their colleagues at research universities in most areas, with any differences attributable to size of institution. The stronger focus on the research mission at research universities may result in a greater emphasis on assessment in student affairs programs on those campuses. Emphasis on research and assessment skills would be a benefit to the graduate preparation of those aspiring to careers at these types of institutions. In addition, student affairs professionals at research universities are likely to have greater administrative responsibilities requiring greater understanding of structural and policy functions. Effective preparation programs might include courses that emphasize policy analysis.

Implications of these findings relate to professional preparation programs, student affairs administrators, professionals seeking employment in student

affairs, and future research on administrative cultures. Professional preparation programs are almost exclusively located in research and comprehensive universities. Hence, graduate students are socialized into those cultures. Therefore, curricula in these programs may need to address differences in the nature of work by institutional type for those who aspire to careers at liberal arts and community colleges. This could occur through internship experiences at different institutions or integrating discussions of institutional differences into existing courses.

For current administrators in student affairs, understanding the administrative culture at their own campus may allow for better recruitment, training, and supervision of professionals and customized professional development programs. Those seeking employment in student affairs could use information on differences in administrative life to assess institutional fit and match their personal strengths with the environments offered by different institutional types.

Finally, further research into the nature of professional life in student affairs will define the variables more clearly. Still to be discovered is the influence of functional area on administrative life. For example, to what degree do professionals in residence life experience the institution differently from those in student activities or career services? This study only examined differences among four institutional types. Further research on other types of colleges and universities (e.g., religiously affiliated, minority serving) is warranted. Studies that look at differences in professional life by demographic characteristics like sex and race may also offer interesting insights. The study also raises questions about the transferability of skills from one institutional type to another. Do search committees favor candidates with experience at the same type of institution? Do candidates eliminate options because they do not understand the culture of a certain institutional type? All these questions raise questions that merit further research.

As with all research, this study was not without limitations. The online nature of the sample selection process limited the ability to measure sample error. We explored professional life through only four variables and only certain items measured each variable. It is always possible that participants misinterpreted items on the instrument or were less than candid in their responses. The results should be interpreted within this context. In addition, the number of respondents from community colleges was small. These responses may not be representative of community college staff in general and should be interpreted cautiously.

Despite these limitations, however, and the need for more research, the study offered some initial insights into the nature of professional life for student

affairs administrators. The results suggest there are very real differences in terms of what administrators do, what is valued, and what skills they need to succeed at different types of campuses. These preliminary findings might be used to further our understanding of administrative work and to assess the degree to which graduate preparation programs embrace these differences when educating aspiring professionals.

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