

STUDENT AFFAIRS



VOICES FROM THE PROFESSION

EDITED BY
STEVEN TOLMAN
& DANIEL W. CALHOUN

Student Affairs

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Edited by

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan –
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1
4DL

First edition 2025

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83708-551-4 (Print paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-83708-550-7 (Print hardback)

ISBN: 978-1-83708-552-1 (Ebook)

ISBN: 978-1-83708-553-8 (EPUB)

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

We have identified 10 timely topics that are important to the profession of student affairs. Each of these topics is a chapter within the book and includes: (1) An academic/scholarly introduction to that topic (i.e., an abridged introduction/literature review that provides the context for that topic/chapter), (2) Perspectives on that topic from seasoned and new student affairs professionals, and (3) Perspective from a HE/SA faculty member.

This book is geared toward graduate students in HE/SA Programs and new(er) professionals in student affairs. This book can be used within HE/SA graduate programs, departments/divisions as a common read for their staff, and individuals reading it to further their understanding of student affairs. The strength of this book is that it scaffolds the topic in the academic literature while providing several perspectives on the same topic/chapter.

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PREFACE

Welcome to *Student Affairs: Voices From the Profession*, a unique exploration of the field through the diverse perspectives of those who shape it: newer professionals, seasoned practitioners, and insightful faculty members. In this book, we delve into 10 critical areas within student affairs, examining each through the distinct lenses of experience, expertise, and scholarly reflection.

Throughout the chapters, you will encounter a dialogue that spans generations and roles, offering nuanced insights and practical wisdom gained from the frontlines of higher education. The voices of newer professionals bring fresh perspectives, innovative approaches, and the enthusiasm of those embarking on their careers in student affairs. Seasoned professionals contribute rich narratives of experience, leadership, and lessons learned over years of dedicated service to student development and institutional success. Faculty members provide scholarly depth, theoretical frameworks, and a broader context that informs practice and advances the field.

Each chapter is structured to provide comprehensive coverage of its topic, presenting a blend of personal stories, professional strategies, research findings, and practical advice. From navigating career paths and professional development to addressing mental health challenges, adapting to post-pandemic realities, and embracing international perspectives, this book offers a holistic view of student affairs in today's higher education landscape.

By showcasing the voices and perspectives of newer professionals, seasoned practitioners, and faculty members, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities, opportunities, and evolving dynamics within student affairs.

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Designed to serve as a foundational resource, we hope the stories shared in this book meet the diverse needs of its readership. Whether you are a graduate student embarking on your academic journey, a new professional navigating the complexities of student support and development, or a seasoned practitioner seeking to deepen your understanding, this book provides a comprehensive framework for growth and exploration.

Whether you are embarking on your journey in the field, striving to deepen your impact, or exploring new dimensions of practice, *Student Affairs: Voices From the Profession* invites you to engage in a dialogue that enriches and inspires your own professional journey. The strength of this book lies in its ability to serve multiple purposes: as a textbook in classroom settings, as a common read for departments and divisions to foster shared understanding and dialogue among staff, and as a personal resource for individuals looking to expand their knowledge and enhance their effectiveness in higher education administration.

Chapter 1, “Career Paths in Student Affairs,” illuminates the diverse avenues available through which professionals find their way into this dynamic field, reflecting on the personal narratives and professional trajectories that shape their commitment to student development and higher education.

Chapter 2, “Professional Development in Student Affairs,” delves into the ongoing growth and learning essential for effective practice. Continuous professional development not only enhances individual capabilities but also enriches the collective expertise within the field.

Chapter 3, “Pursuing a Doctoral Degree and Working in Student Affairs,” examines the intersection of academic pursuit and professional practice, offering insightful perspectives and practical advice regarding the distinctive attributes of EdD and PhD programs, highlighting their respective strengths and relevance to the evolving landscape of higher education administration.

Chapter 4, “The Art of Supervision in Student Affairs,” explores the intricate balance of mentorship, guidance, and management necessary for cultivating a supportive and productive environment for staff and students.

Chapter 5, “Mental Health and Attrition in Student Affairs,” addresses the realities of stress and well-being among professionals in the field. Strategies for self-care and organizational support are crucial in sustaining long-term engagement and effectiveness.

Chapter 6, “Doing More With Less in Student Affairs,” confronts the challenges of resource constraints and budgetary pressures, highlighting innovative strategies for maximizing impact and efficiency.

Chapter 7, “Making a Move Within or Outside of Student Affairs,” explores career transitions and the transferability of skills cultivated in

Student Affairs to other sectors or roles within higher education and beyond.

Chapter 8, “Student Affairs in Tumultuous Political Times,” examines the role of student affairs professionals in navigating and responding to societal and political challenges that impact campus climate and student well-being.

Chapter 9, “Internationalization of Student Affairs,” considers the global dimensions of higher education and the growing importance of cross-cultural competencies in serving diverse student populations.

Finally, Chapter 10, “Navigating Student Affairs Post-Pandemic,” reflects on the profound shifts and adaptations in student affairs catalyzed by global events, offering lessons learned and strategies for building resilience in a transformed educational landscape.

Through these chapters, we aim to provide a comprehensive exploration of student affairs that resonates with both seasoned professionals and emerging leaders alike. The intersection of theory and practice, coupled with the voices of those who shape student affairs, provides a solid foundation for ongoing professional development and leadership in the field.

As we navigate the complexities and opportunities of this ever-evolving profession, we anticipate these voices will take you on a journey of self-discovery and growth. As such, we invite you to engage deeply with the perspectives presented. Let this book serve as a guide, a mentor, and a catalyst for your continued growth and success. We hope this book informs and inspires—a call to action to continually strive for excellence, advocate for student success, and embrace the transformative power of higher education. As you embark on your own professional journey, may the voices and perspectives shared within these pages serve as guiding lights, illuminating your path toward continued growth, impact, and fulfillment within our field of student affairs.

Looking forward, even as the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, we believe the core lessons shared in this book will remain timeless. We hope you learn as much from *Student Affairs: Voices From the Profession as We Did!*

Steven Tolman

Daniel W. Calhoun

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CHAPTER 1

CAREER PATHS WITHIN STUDENT AFFAIRS

As new professionals enter the HE/SA field, what words of wisdom would you share with them as they begin to build their careers? Would you describe their career paths into senior leadership positions as being linear or are there other considerations? If you were starting your career path over today in student affairs, what would you do differently? What are some considerations for the career trajectory of those looking to become a Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO)?

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INTRODUCTION

Lydia Ewonus

Higher education institutions are complex when you consider the many people that make up their parts. Professionals working in the dynamic field of student affairs alone come from various educational backgrounds and life experiences. Students attending these institutions are also diverse, so their needs and demands are ever-changing. The primary focus of student affairs is to provide services and support to students that enhance student learning, development, and success outside the classroom. As such, student affairs professionals must often be prepared for unprecedented change. Reductions in government funding for higher education have been an ongoing concern for institutions, which has challenged student affairs professionals to offer programs and services for students strategically. In response to this challenge, campus collaboration has been an increasing responsibility for student affairs professionals to effectively provide engaged opportunities that support student success (Das, 2022). As diversity and collaboration continue to increase on campus, student affairs professionals may be further challenged with consensus over core values that all should demonstrate (Bureau, 2018). These professionals must continue to evaluate their perspectives and values to ensure consistency throughout the field.

A career in student affairs is not necessarily a direct path, but it consistently brings together individuals who share a passion to work with students. Those who work in the field enter it at varying points in their lives, come from diverse backgrounds, and bring with them different knowledge and skills that enhance this dynamic workforce. For example, a student employment or leadership opportunity can inspire undergraduate students to

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pursue a career within student affairs. Others may work in another field entirely before exploring a position in higher education. Career development theories help determine how people enter the field and provide further evidence to explore how people progress in the field once they have entered as a professional. Regardless of their entry point, research exploring student affairs professionals' progression through the field suggests that it is the individuals' responsibility to reflect and invest in their own career development as they are the ones who know their interests, skills, and values (Ardoin, 2014; Walker-Donnelly et al., 2019). As such, it is important for student affairs professionals to be cognizant of these theories and use those that resonate most with them, which will help support their growth and development in the field.

Mobility within the profession of student affairs could lead some individuals to executive positions. Executive positions are leadership positions, such as senior student affairs officers, generally acquired through advancement through work experience or after completing an advanced degree. These positions require vision, leadership, interpersonal, and assessment skills (Villa-Komaroff, 2019). Villa-Kamaroff (2019) advises that student affairs professionals should learn the requirements for promotion at their institutions. Professionals intending to pursue executive positions should be aware of the importance of institutional type when committing to a position. Villa-Kamaroff (2019) claims it can be difficult to move between different types of higher education institutions; it is best to begin early careers within the institution type they hope to have mobility. Winston and Creamer's (1997) research into effective staffing practices in student affairs concludes that hiring decisions are most impactful when the employee has a combination of good professional preparation and fit with the institution. This supports the importance of suitability between the employee and the institution. This research also expresses that professional preparation experiences, such as through education programs, can significantly impact hiring decisions.

Graduate programs can help prepare professionals for leadership positions through holistic learning. Participation in these programs helps socialize students to the academic environment and the field. Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) explored research into theoretical foundations shared between graduate programs and the profession of student affairs. They found that while the landscape of student affairs is too complex for just one theory, aligning curriculum with standards used in the profession is more useful. The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) provides resources and expectations for professionals in the field, which can further enhance the quality of the graduate program experience. They also provide tools for graduate programs that assess and guide the development of holistic learning and development outcomes expected

of college graduates (Henning et al., 2020; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). This standardization allows professionals to share common base skills and competencies (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). A recent research study by Ardoin et al. (2019) found that Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) value graduate programs and the professionals that are entering the field upon completion; they believe it is these employees that prove to be most capable at senior level positions because of their understanding of the work. Specifically, there are three essential and foundational skills that graduate programs teach well: theory, diversity and equity, and assessment (Ardoin et al., 2019).

Additionally, exposure to professional practice is gained through experiential learning. Research exploring graduate work's connection to student affairs values development finds that the curriculum helps students identify with certain values, ethics, and perspectives that guide professional thinking and enable them to apply knowledge to theory in the field (Bureau, 2018; Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) further emphasize that professional graduate education can greatly reduce the stress and adjustment time new professionals experience when entering roles in student affairs because of the socialization to the practical and professional experiences provided.

The information provided in this research summary will help new and prospective student affairs professionals navigate career paths within higher education. Ardoin (2014) emphasizes that since the typical career path in student affairs can begin as early as undergraduate involvement, it is vital for current student affairs professionals to explore how to encourage others interested in the field or mobility through it.

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VOICE OF A SEASONED PROFESSIONAL

Daniel Maxwell

One frequently hears advice on selecting a career that aligns with a person's passion, and then it will never feel like you are truly working because of your desire to do this work. I thought I had it all figured out as I began my senior year at Syracuse University, majoring in Personnel and Industrial Relations (aka Human Resources) in the School of Management. During a Career in Student Affairs Month presentation, I recently shared how I learned about student affairs as a profession, as it was not a career that I could have imagined even though I was an overly involved undergraduate. I remember the moment so clearly as meeting with my hall director to discuss upcoming events I was planning as a resident advisor. She casually asked what my career plans were, and I quickly presented my ideal role in corporate America at a Fortune 500 company leading their staff development and training department. She asked if I would be interested in similar work but on a college campus and working alongside students. If you could envision a caricature image of me sitting across from my hall director with a large lightbulb over my head with beams of bright light shining out, you would clearly see how I felt. At that moment, I reflected on my experiences working with my Greek Advisor, the Student Union Director, the Admissions Ambassador Coordinator, and the hall director. I suddenly had context for a career in student affairs. My hall director guided me as I explored graduate school programs in higher education and registered for the GRE. Two years later, I began working full-time in the field with my master's in science in Higher Education Leadership from the University of Miami.

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MY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Oh, the Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss (1990) is the perfect story to provide a framework for my career path, which, to date, spans over three and a half decades—35 years, to be exact. This poignant story leads the reader through the journey to find your pathway forward, but the many twists and turns, highs and lows, and opportunities and challenges that await anyone on this life journey. As I explored my own path, I found myself using four principles in making decisions on how I have engaged in my work, exploring new opportunities for career advancement, and the never-ending negotiation on crafting work-life balance. When deciding, I was and remain intentional, devoted to building my capacity, investing in myself, and growing my self-awareness. I am committed to making decisions about my work or taking on new responsibilities, both formally and informally. I need to understand how it will assist me in my professional growth and get me to the next advancement in my career. I typically take on new responsibilities when it allows me to learn a new competency, strengthen my skill set, and possibly work with a new student population. I have focused on investing in myself through earning my doctorate, presenting at professional associations, and taking on leadership roles in the shared governance structure and my professional associations. In each of the decisions, I have been grounded in creating greater self-awareness of myself to reinforce my authenticity and to nurture my relational mindset.

Relationships are critical in this profession. To be successful, I offer that you must have an honest relationship with yourself, cultivate meaningful relationships with peers and colleagues, and, when possible, have a supervisor who will work alongside you. Having an honest relationship with yourself is about knowing your values and seeking institutions congruent with those values. It is also important, to be honest with yourself on what your non-negotiable criteria may be for the type of institution you want to work at, the functional areas you are interested in building capacity in, and the type of work environment where you will thrive and just not survive. We spend a lot of time “on the job,” so I will be true to myself, align my values, and work at the type of institution that makes sense to me.

OH, THE PLACES I HAVE BEEN

Oh, the places I have gone over the last three and a half decades and the work that I have done and do today, I could not have imagined that one fall day meeting with my hall director. As an undergraduate, I spent time on the hall council and then as a resident assistant, an admissions ambassador,