The Student Issue
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Welcome to the first-ever “Student” edition of our Communiqué magazine! Although we are all students in our professional learning journey, we thought it would be interesting to focus an issue on submissions from students who are currently studying the field of Higher Education with a focus on Student Services/Student Affairs or a related area. The idea for this issue came to us from CACUSS member and U of T faculty member Neil Buddel:

“So why did I suggest this issue? Short(ish) answer: Because the students in the Student Development and Student Services stream at OISE teach me something about our roles as educators/practitioners/professionals every week, and I’m in awe of their intelligent insights and contagious passion with respect to creating the best possible conditions for students’ success at our colleges and universities! It’s a secret privilege that I’ve had over the past three years and am glad there’s a forum for them to contribute to the broader dialogue. They have important and insightful contributions and I look forward to how their gifts (which indeed they are) will shape (and elevate) our practice over time…”

Although we don’t have any data to confirm this, anecdotally, the number of professionals pursuing graduate studies or formal educational opportunities to prepare them for or enhance their career in the area of student affairs has continued to grow. From early professionals in the field who pursued doctoral work focusing on student services professionals or student issues, to a wave of students in the mid-90’s and beyond pursuing graduate programs in the United States (including both of this article’s co-authors!), to the beginnings of the first program in Canada in Post-Secondary Studies at Memorial University in 1996, to the addition of the Student Services/Student Development stream program at OISE a few years ago, to today as Wilfrid Laurier University launches a new Masters program next fall. These professionals pursuing graduate, as well as undergraduate and diploma/certificate, studies are a key catalyst for research and scholarly conversations in our field, and CACUSS is seeking additional ways to support, share, and build on some of this great work.

This issue contains a diverse collection of submissions that should appeal to any CACUSS member. The authors did a laudable job synthesizing and, at times, generalizing their research for the Communiqué audience. The articles represent the work and interests of a variety of professional communities within student affairs, demonstrating not only the breadth of functions in our field but also the breadth of the emerging research impacting these functions. The student voices you will hear come from a variety of perspectives and platforms. Some articles are comprehensive literature reviews that explore and dissect our current frameworks. Many articles summarize research done for or during graduate studies, while other articles represent the opinions and reflections of students in our field.

What is particularly interesting about this issue is that since it comes from students currently or recently studying and researching our field, it acts as a barometer of sorts for what are the most current and forthcoming trends and topics in postsecondary student affairs. Many of the articles centred on or incorporated content about equity-seeking student populations, student learning in alternative settings, and/or the very framework of our field. As the topics most on the mind of today’s students, it’s probable that we are also reading about the topics that are most primed to be areas of interest and, likely, change for everyone working in student affairs.

CACUSS continues to see growth in the number of student members, and we are encouraged to have students and faculty participate and engage with our association. There are many ways for students to participate, including:

• Accessing our online Job Board for upcoming career opportunities
• Volunteering for committees or program review for the annual conference
• Presenting and volunteering at the annual conference
• Participating in low-cost webinars and drive-in events for professional development
• Joining as a student member and accessing relevant Communities of Practice to build your professional network and connections

For faculty, we have many opportunities to share your research and engage with our association. We would love to have you more involved!

CACUSS is your professional home while you are a student and as you continue in your professional career. We welcome you here and are thankful for your contributions to your association.

We hope you enjoy this special edition issue!

If you have any comments, feedback, or suggestions, please email communique@cacuss.ca
Recently I started the process of buying a house. Scary? Yes! How do I know which house to buy? My real estate agent talks about how his clients know they found “the one” by listening to their gut. Once they walk into a house, they have a deep sense that they found their future home. That gut instinct tells them when it is time to put in an offer.

He cautioned me, saying that it was important to do a lot of research, see a lot of houses, and ask a lot of questions. That way, when I walk into the right place, my gut and my head can agree. This principle of informing or “training your gut” has certainly come in handy when house hunting, but, surprisingly, it also underscores the research I have done on crisis management within higher education.

I first became interested in responding to student crisis in higher education after reading a Maclean’s article published in 2012 on the prevalence of mental health instability on campus entitled “The Broken Generation”. This article made many of us ask the question, “What is actually causing this crisis?”

In response to this article, I started researching and ultimately published a paper on the contributing factors to the mental health crisis in higher education. (The paper, “A Suffering Generation: Six factors contributing to the mental health crisis in North American higher education,” is accessible at http://collegequarterly.ca/2013-vol16-num01-winter/flatt.html) Afterwards, I turned my attention to a specific area of mental health research affecting students: grief. Specifically, I wondered, how do we support students in the wake of a student death? Two things became apparent in my research: 1) student death in residence is something many Residence Life professionals will face in their careers, and 2) they are not trained for it.

When asked about my thesis, many higher education professionals bristled at the topic. Why would you ever intentionally study such a dark topic? Why study something that happens so rarely?

The fact is, student death in college and university isn’t as rare as we would like it to be. In my research, I interviewed 12 professionals at 11 campuses across Ontario with over 5 years’ experience managing student residences. Ten of the twelve had directly responded to a student death in residence. Three of the participants had supported a grieving community after a student death in the last six months.

It became abundantly clear that those who work in Residence Life are likely to support a community after a student death at some point in their career. However, there is no training given to Residence Life professionals on bereavement, no active plans or Death Response Teams in place, and the prevailing response was that professionals were instructed to “go with their gut” in these high-stakes scenarios.

Relying on instincts and being aware of the individuality of each student is extremely important. However, when I spoke with Residence Life professionals, it became clear that in any particular scenario, their instincts on the best response was quite different. For example, the participants were asked this open-ended question: “Imagine there is a student in the residence who was close to the deceased. This student is from a culture you are not familiar with. What would you do?”

In this case, four participants said they would do additional research on the cultural background of the student, and three participants specifically stated they would not do any additional research. Is there a correct response? If yes, how do we know which response was the correct one?

Supporting students can often require us to think on our feet, but it is possible to over-rely on instincts, especially if those instincts are not grounded in research or best practices. Additional training, reading, or mentorship on these topics could benefit the students in crisis but also the staff members responding to them.

You may not be working in Residence Life, and you may not be required to respond to a student death, but these questions are for all of us:

- Are there areas of my work where I am relying on my instincts? If so, what are shaping these instincts?
- Are there areas in my work that I can learn more about, so when faced with a difficult situation I can not only go with my gut, but trust it?

Whether it is responding to crisis in higher education, or simply buying a home, we all rely on that gut response, the instinctual answer. We can train our gut, and doing so will leave us feeling more prepared and informed when a moment of decision presents itself.

References

Alicia Flatt is a career advisor at University of Waterloo and completed her Master of Education at OISE. Alicia can be reached at aflatt@uwaterloo.ca or on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/in/Alicia-Flatt.
Introduction

Student learning is not limited to the classroom. In higher education, learning is dominated by studies and teacher-led contexts such as exams, essays, and projects (Havnes, 2008). Co-curricular development takes various forms through sports teams, volunteer work, clubs, and societies, but learning also occurs in disciplinary-related situations. Mistakes often land students in a Student Conduct Program (SCP), whether formal or informal, to discuss their actions and potential sanctions to repair harms (Meyer Schrage & Thompson, 2009).

The goal of a SCP is to foster a sense of protection, community, and ethical development (Howell, 2005) within the student body. Most institutions have moved towards an educationally focused SCP as opposed to one that is strictly punitive (Pontious, 2008). This allows for an intentional focus on helping students learn to take responsibility for their actions (Howell, 2005), while developing moral and ethical decision-making skills, social identity, and cultural competency (Taylor & Varner, 2009).

Based on a culmination of information from Canada and the United States, this research aims to draw parallels between traditional learning methods and addressing negative student behaviour in higher education by answering the following research question: What learning might take place in SCPs in higher education? To further define the parameters of the scope of the research, the following sub-questions were identified:

1. What sanctions might be used to facilitate learning in SCPs?
2. What tools and strategies might be used to assess the learning in SCPs, based on current assessment best practices?
3. In what ways might the learning in SCPs impact the higher education community?
4. In what ways might leadership impact the learning in SCPs?

This paper has been condensed for Communiqué. Only the analyses of the first two sub-research questions will be discussed.

Analysis of Results

Student Learning in Conduct Programs

A handful of topics are proven to be learned by students in SCPs, with Restorative Justice (RJ) and communication being the most prominent. Out of the 59 collected artifacts, only two articles prove that learning takes place in SCPs (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014) with a third source supporting students learning new skills (Robinson, 2009). When students were interviewed, “almost half said they learned at least one new skill in the course of their hearings,” but it is unclear as to what skills they in fact learned (Karp & Sacks, 2014, p. 155). Overlap was identified between what was proven by research and what was hoped for by conduct administrators. Conduct administrators were hoping that students were learning about the impact that their actions could have on others (Howell, 2005), that students were learning from their mistakes, reflecting on their actions and to be more involved in the community (Pavela, 2008).

Conduct administrators were hoping that students are learning how to resolve conflict and build positive relationships, ultimately leading to the development of life skills (Meyer Schrage & Thompson, 2009). The research proves that students learn how to communicate between parties involved (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Robinson, 2009), which is a main component of conflict resolution and relationship building, and is considered a life skill (Meyer Schrage & Thompson, 2009). Finding these connections in support of student learning in SCPs is a positive sign; however, the evidence shows that conduct administrators are playing a “guessing game” when it comes to discussing the types of sanctions that are given to students (Olshak, 2009).

Sanctions

A total of four different types of sanctions were proven to facilitate learning: (1) dialogue, (2) meetings, (3) sanctions that facilitated empathy for the harmed parties, and (4) sanctions that facilitated taking alternative perspectives. It should be noted that all only have one source of proof, except dialogue which has three (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Robinson, 2009). Although not necessarily a type of sanction, it was found that when sanctions were agreed upon promptly and in a timely fashion, students took note and appreciated having the opportunity to resolve the situation and that it too facilitated learning (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Robinson, 2009).
Due to the broad scope of sanctions, it was difficult to determine which sanctions were in fact best in facilitating learning about topics such as empathy and perspective taking. Typical sanctions, such as a reflection paper or community service (Carleton University, 2016), could facilitate such learning, but it is unclear which would be more appropriate. In most cases, meetings were described as a form of sanction or part of the sanction in SCPs (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Robinson, 2009). This may be because meetings allow for one-on-one intentional discussions to take place between the student and conduct administrator (Blimling, 2015). Opportunities for relationship building (Howell, 2005) and intentional conversations are proven to be effective ways that students learn (Blimling, 2015) outside of SCPs. The fact that meetings offer opportunities to have discussions grounded in these topics further supports the use of dialogue in facilitating student learning (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Robinson, 2009).

Assessing Student Learning

Two proven assessment tools were found in the research collected: surveys and guided interviews (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014). The available research is slim for reviewing SCPs, especially when finding assessment strategies to effectively determine student learning. Being able to prove that students are learning will help support the development of programs, however, there is no information on how to go about proving the presence of student learning nor how to properly gather this information.

Even with the lack of evidence to support effective implementation of assessment tools, there was a significant amount of evidence of researchers suggesting tools that would be valuable in assessing student learning. The most frequently occurring suggestion was to establish measurable learning outcomes (Karp, 2009), with surveys being the second most common. Surveys also serve a dual purpose: they could be used directly or indirectly to measure learning. If the student is the one completing the survey, the survey is then measuring the student’s perceived learning because it is based on what the student thinks, as opposed to what they actually know or do. If the administrator completes the survey assessing whether the student has achieved the stated learning outcomes, then it would be more accurate to say that the survey is measuring demonstrated learning. In both cases, there is potential for human error. Incorrectly answered questions or personal bias could make for misconstrued results. There is research supporting proven assessment tools, such as rubrics, journals, and portfolios (Suskie, 2009), which are implemented in other areas to determine student learning. These tools are grounded in measurable learning outcomes and may be better suited than solely conducting surveys and guided interviews with students.

Researchers and prominent professionals in the field are heavily supporting the importance of assessment and how it needs to be implemented in SCPs (Howell, 2005; Karp, 2009). Not only will this determine what and how students are learning, but it will also allow professionals to modify SCPs towards effective learning techniques and support the need to maintain an educational focus in conduct.

Discussion

Restorative Justice was found to be one of the most common overarching themes found in the research (Karp & Sacks, 2014). RJ practices were proven to facilitate student learning, were implemented in sanctions, and had a positive effect on the community by involving harmed parties in SCPs (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014). There are many different components of RJ that can be implemented with varying degrees of intensity, which initiates a more flexible way to educate the student population. Communication and facilitated dialogue were other themes that were prominent in the research (Howell, 2005; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Robinson, 2009).

Overall, conduct administrators want students to learn from SCPs and develop skills for the future (Meyer Schrage & Thompson, 2009). However, some of the reoccurring themes within this topic were not only assumed but also very broad in nature. Assessment was mentioned as something that should be taking place and used to prove value in SCPs; however, there is no concrete information about implementation strategies or best practices (Wood, 2013). Lastly, ethics, morals, and values were themes that were identified specifically around what students should be learning and what topics sanctions should be addressing (Pontious, 2008). It was mentioned that specific classes should be taught to students in an environment with expert faculty that encouraged group dialogue and made connections to social justice (Pontious, 2008).

Conclusion

Student Affairs as a whole is moving towards a culture of assessment in which we desire to prove the value of our programming and how it is adding to overall student development (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Since the most notable gap identified in my research is the lack of assessment in SCPs, more efforts are needed to conduct primary Canadian-based research into what is considered effective student learning in SCPs. With this valuable information, conduct administrators could tailor programs, sanctions, and meetings to benefit student development.

Student conduct administrators have challenging roles in higher education. This paper has aspired to not only identify gaps but also highlight the transformational work conduct administrators do as educators in higher education.

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Olshak, R. T. (2009). Using needs assessment and deliberative planning to enhance conflict...
Past studies have shown that there is growing participating of first-generation students (FGS) in university, with 24% of Canadian first-year undergraduate students in 2015 self-identifying under this category (Prairie Research Associates, 2015). Despite large portions of undergraduate students identifying with first-generation status, they often do not fit the mold of the typical undergraduate student in several demographical categories. FGS are more likely to have a lower family socio-economic status, identify as being part of an underrepresented minority group, have been raised in a mono-parental household, and be a non-native English speaker, in comparison with continuing-generation undergraduate students (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2008). Additionally, this population of students is more commonly employed while pursuing their studies and often pursue post-secondary education on a part-time basis (Cox, 2016). They are often older and do not live on campus or in the dedicated student off-campus housing areas but rather in their family home (Lohfick & Paulsen, 2005). Not having a parent who has attended university frequently causes FGS to have less knowledge and familial understanding of the university experience (Cox, 2016). Furthermore, first-generation undergraduate students often feel out-of-place or intimidated at university and are therefore less likely to use the available academic, emotional, social, and financial support services. All of these various factors cause these students to have greater stress about academic and financial pressures and can cause them to feel more alone in navigating this difficult and new setting (Racque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016).
FGS more commonly report feelings of isolation and self-perceived inadequacy in the university environment (Reay, 2001). Their lessened understanding of the university system often causes them to see faculty as more distant and unapproachable. FGS are also less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities, commonly due to other commitments, lack of knowledge about the available programs and clubs, and also the aforementioned feelings of isolation and otherness. Being less involved in the campus community has been shown to be related to higher rates of attrition, especially for FGS (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton, 2009).

As mentioned, a troubling component of the first-generation student population’s identity is their higher attrition rate, which has been found at several institutions (Reason, 2009). This trend has been noticed even when ethnicity, socio-economic background, and secondary school academics are controlled (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Engle and Tinto (2008) discovered that FGS are “four times more likely (26% to 27%) to leave higher education after the first year than non-first-generation students” (p.2). While this data is from American universities, it is likely to be paralleled in Canadian universities as well. These high rates of attrition suggest that there is a systemic problem in the university system, causing these institutions not to support the continued success of FGS.

Related to the financial and social mobility motivations for FGS, research by Gofen (2007) indicates that there is often a connection between parental and offspring socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, if parents have a low socioeconomic status, it is most likely that their children will also have a lower socioeconomic status when they are older (Gofen, 2007). University is often seen by FGS as a mechanism to break this cycle; however, given their high attrition rate, it is clear that FGS commonly do not achieve their goals. In order to understand why this trend is occurring, and consequently take actions to help support FGS, a greater understanding of how universities operate in today’s era is needed.

Clark Kerr’s Multiversity and First-Generation Students

The multiversity was first proposed by Clark Kerr in his book, *The Uses of the University*. This book and Kerr’s insights into the functioning of the modern research university are commonly heralded as the most in-depth and accurate understanding of the tensions and problems at these institutions.

Kerr’s initial framework was largely influenced by the massive increase in the student populations at universities following World War II (Sigurdson, 2013). Martin Trow described this shift as one from elite to mass access to higher education. He defined these levels of access by saying that elite meant 0 - 15% of the population attended higher education, mass access was 16% - 49%, and universal access occurred when more than 50% of the population attended higher education (Trow, 2000). With the large expansion in student numbers, there was a large shift in the aim and functions of a university (Trow, 200).

Such a diverse institution has a complex and varied system of governance, with often unclear boundaries between its internal communities: undergraduate students, graduate students, scientists, social scientists, administrators, and non-academic personnel (Kerr, 1982). These different communities often have conflicting interests. Kerr himself expresses this sentiment in saying that, “the university is so many things to so many people that it must, of necessity, be partially at war with itself” (p. 8). It is then the role of the president to be the ultimate mediator in mitigating this internal war. Often accused of being a hero figure, the president’s goal is to appease all the communities and continue the advancement and progress of the institution (Kerr, 1982). However, Kerr has not considered the diversity within these communities that the president must also address, by definition of their job (Kerr, 1982). Expecting the president to address the diversity of needs within the multitude of communities at a university as well is an impossible feat that commonly leads students, especially FGS, to be unsupported.

In describing students’ role in governance, Kerr argues that student governance does and should remain in extra-curricular activities with the aim of expanding and improving student life (Kerr, 1982). While this does alleviate the pressures on the president, it does not help FGS, whose lack of informed parental support and social-cognitive barriers of self-efficacy often prevent these students from participating in extra-curricular aspects of student life, which have been shown to promote university persistence (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). Being separated from this aspect of governance further quiets the needs of these students (Gofen, 2007). Not being comfortable or having space to voice what they need causes first-generation undergraduate students’ needs to be pushed to the periphery at university and thus contributes to their high rate of attrition.

Kerr himself discusses how certain populations are overlooked in the complexities and diversities of these institutions. Kerr (1982) says that, “some get lost in the city; some rise to the top within it, most fashion their lives within one of its many subcultures” (p. 41). In trying to serve so many purposes, Kerr identifies that some students get lost navigating the system and finding their place in the university (Reay, 2001). For FGS who are already at a disadvantage to understand the complexities of university life due to familial inexperience, this system creates more barriers to their success at university and makes dropping out of university more probable (Altbach & Salmi, 2011).

Marginson’s Understanding of the Multiversity Today

Understanding FGS in the university system becomes more troubling when the existence of Kerr’s multiversity in today’s university climate is problematized. Simon Marginson is the leader behind this debate against the applicability of Kerr’s use of the multiversity as the framework for understanding the university today (Marginson, 2016).

Marginson argues that Kerr did not anticipate the Internet, growth in academic communication, globalization, university networking, and a global system of research and knowledge (Marginson, 2008). Facilitated by technological advancements, these overlooked components all enhance the idea of a single world mind because they increase the breadth and scope of the university system of communication, information, and knowledge (Marginson, 2013). The multiversity is not equipped to help understand
this expansive sharing of knowledge, yet for universities to prosper, they need to embrace globalization.

Kerr did anticipate universities shifting towards student-centred learning; however, Marginson argues that Kerr underestimated the independent agency of students (Marginson, 2013). In overlooking the influential effects of learning and knowledge, Kerr does not acknowledge the personal development of students at university. Emphasizing the utility of the university rather than the humanistic aspect causes Kerr to “lose sight of the individual as the subject of modernity” (Marginson, 2008, p.6). In effect, this causes the university to misjudge its role in expanding human freedoms that accompany personal and intellectual development.

The Future for First-Generation Students

Marginson terms a potential new model for understanding the university: The Global Research University. His understanding of this model is largely influenced by Kerr’s idea of the multiversity but also incorporates ideas of globalization and the global knowledge economy. In Marginson’s view, these additions bring Kerr’s multiversity up to speed with the changing influences on the university (Marginson, 2008).

For FGS, this change has the potential to allow them to shift their education to help make achieving their goal of financial and social mobility more likely. If university changes such that these students can focus their educational pursuits on an area in which they have higher and more positive social cognitive ideas of self-efficacy and interest, they will be more likely to successfully persist throughout university. While this concept is true for all students, the goal-oriented FGS, who are less comfortable and confident in the university environment, will feel these benefits to an even greater degree (Marginson, 2016).

Furthermore, Marginson argues that Kerr overlooked the university’s role in facilitating the personal development of students. This idea of personal development is very important for FGS who are progressing through unknown territory at university (Marginson, 2008). Not having a parental figure to guide and explain what they will experience at university forces FGS to create and discover more about their personal identity as they lead this new path. In identifying the gaps within Kerr’s model for its lack of consideration of the humanistic aspect of university students, it is evident that Marginson’s ideas for a new and improved model of the university will incorporate the personal growth of students, not reducing them to simply an arm of economic prosperity as has been argued of Kerr’s multiversity (Marginson, 2008). Considering students’ personal development allows for hope that the university will attempt to hear the voices of all students, create a more supportive university climate, and more adeptly accommodate for the needs of a diverse student population.

Marginson’s reconsideration of the university changes the relationship of FGS with the institution. Amidst a wide array of other influences, Marginson sees the university as shifting towards a greater understanding of students needs with regards to both learning and personal development. For FGS, these changes have the potential to overcome the barriers within Kerr’s model that prevent them from voicing their needs and getting lost within the chaos of the multiversity — all of which contribute to the higher rate of attrition in this population.

References


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Mary Kate MacDonald is the Pathways Support Officer at Centennial College and an M.Ed. student in OISE’s Higher Education field in Student Development & Student Services. Mary Kate can be reached at marykate.macdonald@mail.utoronto.ca.
Over the past year, we (Sania Hameed and Meagan Lau) have been active members of the Student Affairs Society at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), a program association that aims to foster a sense of community between students and practitioners, offer professional development opportunities, and share relevant research and resources. During our time at OISE, we noticed a lack of Canadian research on student affairs. Sources are primarily US-based, and many accepted observations of our field – while true! – remain anecdotal. For us to best understand our field and establish pathways to move forward, we need evidence-based data to determine where we currently stand, in order to effectively decide where we need to go. Therefore, we undertook a survey-based environmental scan to capture the changing face of student affairs in Canada. Though our survey is by no means a comprehensive study, clear trends and themes have emerged, indicating key areas that need further scrutiny. This article is adapted from our poster presentation at the 2017 CACUSS Conference created in partnership with fellow members Eric Schwenger and Jacquie Beaulieu.

Literature Review

The changes in the bedrock of the profession are not readily demonstrable in Canadian literature (Hardy-Cox & Strange, 2010) but are evident in the 2011 CACUSS identity project paper “Leaders in Learning” (Fisher et al.), which outlined many themes (such as assessment-based planning) that were widely echoed in our survey of Canadian student affairs professionals (SAPs). Focusing on challenges such as “creating a
professional identity” (Renn, K.A, & Jessup Anger, E.R) may provide Canadian SAP’s with an informed approach as the field continues to shift.

**Methods**

The instrument used in this study was an online survey containing nine questions, with a mix of open-ended and demographic questions. The survey was promoted through Facebook and Twitter, as well as emails through personal networks. Survey respondents were asked to complete the survey online through a Google Form, which was open for 16 days.

**Results**

We had a total of 153 participants. The majority of respondents have worked in the field for 10+ years (32%) with 29% of respondents having been in the field for 5-10 years.

64% of respondents indicated that their entry into student affairs was related to their student experience. Student experience can include identifying as student staff or a student leader amongst other roles. However, of folks who chose student experience as their pathway, residence life involvement was specifically cited by 42% participants.

Many respondents noted a perceived “intentionality” on behalf of professionals who are currently entering the field, as well as an increase in credentialism and contract roles. Three-quarters of respondents had attained or were working on a Master’s degree or higher, of which about half were specifically pursuing specialized degrees related to Student Affairs.
Roughly 30% of the respondents commented on the increased professionalization and credentialization of the field. One participant observed that senior student affairs professionals are now expected to possess graduate degrees - a requirement that did not exist 10 years ago. One respondent commented, “When I started in this field, [it] was rare for even [Senior Student Affairs Officers] to have a Master’s degree, let alone a Ph.D., but now it seems that more and more people in the field are getting graduate degrees in adult and/or higher education.”

A significant number of respondents placed emphasis on a shift towards both diversification and internationalization of student affairs. Around 15% of the respondents commented on an increased reliance upon and need for data-driven programming, as well as a focus on assessment and evidence-based practices. Many also stated a desire for more professional development opportunities, as they feel that this is key to better establishing student affairs as a recognized field in Canada. One respondent noted, “If we have goals set on professionalizing the field and advancing our work, our staff need to be properly trained and supported.”

Though there are more women in the field, respondents indicated that there still remains a gender disparity with regards to senior-level roles, with men being disproportionately more likely to hold higher-ranking positions. The field – though slowly accepting greater numbers of racialized staff – also remains primarily white, which is not reflective of our increasingly diverse student populations. Additionally, people of colour are often pigeonholed into entry-level, front-line, or equity-related roles.

Limitations

While our goal of 150 responses was achieved, most respondents were from Ontario, followed by British Columbia, due to the limitations of our network. Results might have varied with greater representation from other provinces throughout Canada.
Future Directions

Despite higher credentials, new professionals are perceived to lack sufficient experience, suggesting a need for practical experience integrated into the degree (e.g. practicums, internships). This is important to consider in the evolution of graduate degrees in student affairs in order to ensure that students are being set up for success, particularly as more folks are intentionally choosing the field as compared to the happenstance of the past.

A dearth of racialized staff remains an issue in the field, though this is improving, albeit slowly. This is an area that Sania Hameed is particularly interested in: What are the experiences of people of colour in the field? How might hearing from these voices help our field be better at including, integrating, and elevating racialized folk, given our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion? This will be a focus of her research this year.

Our findings highlight two key issues: (1) credentialism, and (2) a lack of diversity in Canadian Student Affairs. As we conclude this article, we would like to leave you with one question to ponder: What is the relationship between credentialism and diversity, in a field where entry is increasingly limited to those who can invest in pursuing graduate studies?

References


Deconstructing the Impact of Personal Values on the Construction of Policy in Higher Education

by Kaschka Watson

Introduction

For young educators like myself who are new to the discourse pertaining to policy construction and implementation in higher education, we often assume the hierarchical characteristic (Colebatch, 1998) of the policy process. This notion of policy stems from the idea that the moulding of the policy process centres around individuals of power who are constantly hoovering at the top, who give instructions resulting from the crafting of policy (Colebatch, 1998). This assumption of policy construction is seen as authoritative, as the creation of policy determines what actions must be taken by those who are in place to implement policies. However, how are policies constructed by those at the top who hold the power? What drives the construction of policy? How have the personal values of policy-makers influenced their perspective and decision-making of policy in higher education? Do policy-makers come to the policy table with their own agendas? When a collective decision is reached on policy and its implementation, whose personal values come out as triumphant? This article provides a historical account of the ways in which decision-making has been impacted by values in education. The article then deconstructs the role of policy-makers personal values in
A Historical Account of Values on Decision-Making in Education

Values affect the ways in which we relate to each other and the principles we use to judge the worth of an idea or the actions that ought to be taken in particular circumstances (Gardner et al., 2000). The value standards or principles we have provide the criteria by which we decide whether an act is right or wrong, good or bad. Our values inform our thoughts, words, and actions during the decision-making process in educational institutions. Political leaders and those who hold leadership positions make decisions almost every day that are a reflection of their values and beliefs, which are often directed towards purposeful outcomes (Gardner et al., 2000; Carpenter et al., 2014).

Rokeach (1973) emphasizes that leaders who are faced with making decisions struggle with preferred modes of conduct as a result of their values. He argues that these instrumental values or modes of conduct involve a person’s moral values (what they feel is the “right” thing to do) and competency values, what they believe is the best thing to do or the best action to make in a given circumstance. The debate surrounding whose value interest is being served, particularly on public education, has historically been contentious (Carpenter et al., 2014). This controversial debate on policy and decision-making in education is driven by four different sets of values: individualism, collectivism, general welfare, and efficiency (Carpenter et al., 2014).

Individualism

Individual values are deeply held principles, ideals, or beliefs that the individual holds or adhere to when making decisions. Individuals express their values through action (Barrett, 2010). Proponents of the individualist perspective “hold firm to the notion that schools should facilitate an individual’s ability to achieve relative success, wherein some students exceed the success levels of their parents and possibly other classmates. Finally, others place value on the opportunity to achieve competitive success, which has as its goal the provision of advantage over one’s peers” (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003 as cited in Carpenter et al., 2014, p. 1112). This understanding of individual success poses as a challenge for decision makers in education when addressing issues and the individual values of students.

Collectivism

According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), the education system is responsible for instilling in students a societal sense of common good. Their goal is to educate students and turn them into democratic citizens. Proponents of the collective value system promote educational policies and decision-making that are based on collective values and decisions that will provide all students with access to quality education (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Furthermore, Guthrie, Garms, and Pierce (1988) state that schools still have the responsibility to ensure that students are given equal educational opportunities and that students should be exposed to a common set of democratic values and practices (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Given this, school leaders are expected to make policy decisions and to take actions that support this collective value system of education.

General Welfare

The rules and policies of educational institutions are intended to promote the general welfare of students, staff, and the mission and operation of colleges and universities (Eberhardt, 2007). Dean (1999) argues that the value on the general welfare as a result of policies and decision-making on policy issues is to “enforce solidarity and prevent dissolution by the provision for the needs of the natural population, ensuring the rights and liberties of socially responsible citizens and neutralizing the threat of social dangers” (p. 153).

It is evident that the manifestation of policies and decision-making that involve educational welfare strive for equal opportunity by means of inclusion, but also displays inequitable distribution of resources (Carpenter et al., 2014). This inequitable distribution is often experienced among students with learning disabilities who are often in need of educational resources to obtain equal educational opportunities (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). General welfare is the most profoundly contested of all the value systems that structure educational policies and decision-making.

Efficiency

Values that support equality and those that support economic efficiency have been competing for more than 200 years (Guthrie et al., 1988). Government reform efforts are promoting competition between both values by seeking more efficient use of resources (Dean, 1999). Rice and Schwartz (2008) note that the drive for efficiency fuels a push for school productivity and promotes the idea that monies being directed toward education are not effective use of government resources. The decisions that underpin the policies do not care whether educational institutions have the financial resources they need to achieve desired results; rather, these government reforms are based on efficiency and restrict monies from the institution (Ladd & Fiske, 2008) and hope that institutions will have what they need to attain efficient educational outcomes. The aforementioned value systems continue to be a controversial debate among political actors in education. When we think of policies and how they are constructed, we also think of the individual or collective group’s personal values that motivate and drive policies.

Personal Values and the Construction of Policy in Higher Education

Personal values epitomize stimuli that drive people to make certain kinds of decisions (McDonald & Letzring, 2016) during the construction of educational policy. Policy-makers come to the policy table with their own agendas and these become political and add to the intricacies involved in constructing policies and getting policies implemented. Ball (1993) argues that each policy-maker comes with their personal values and interests, which cause educational “policies to shift and change their meaning in the arenas of politics” (Ball, 1993, p. 11). This means that often times some of the key interpreters of policy change, and a new set of personal values from
policy-makers are brought into the policy discourse. Because policies are represented differently by different policy-makers with different personal values and self-interests, policies undergo a process of constant reworking and reorientation over time (Ball, 1993).

Ball (2006) further argues that, personal values take shape in educational policy discourse and implementation. Educational policy should be about creating policies that positively impact students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and does not favor one demography of students, particularly those who are privileged. This is not the case and the voices of policy agents are needed to dismantle the status-quo and some of the misconceptions we have about policy-makers serving the interests of the public. According to Lubienski et al. (2014):

Citizens in a democratic society like to think that policymakers are looking out for them, diagnosing the problems that afflict the community, weighing information on the effectiveness of various treatments, and then applying the best remedy (and perhaps following up to assess the effectiveness of that remedy).

Of course the reality is not so simple (p. 132).

Creating policies and having to implement them is not as easy as it sounds. The underlying principles of policy cannot be that “policy is made at the top, and passed down the line” (Colebatch, 1998, p. 28).

Policy-makers must be attuned to the diverse values (Dorner, 2011) of those who will be impacted by policy implementation. Catering to the voices and values of the larger community and society strengthens the construction and implementation of educational policies. Michael Brunn (2002) highlights a perfect example of this, sharing that policy-makers sought out the personal values and opinions of the community when considering educational programs for “new immigrants” by involving Central American immigrant youth and parents in the construction and implementation of their district’s bilingual policy. He further notes that the engagement process was a success because everyone had access to the political process (Brunn, 2002) and their voices and personal values were equally represented in the policy process. Giving voice to the often voiceless in the discourse on policy and policy implementation is a worthy cause.

In spite of the personal values of policy-makers and policy agents in the construction and implementation of policies in higher education, policy by its very nature has always been political. The construction, enactment, and implementation of policy have a hidden agenda and is deeply rooted in neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism and Higher Education Policy

McMahon and Portelli (2012) state that educational institutions are living in “neoliberal times.” They posit that “neoliberalism, which has its roots in liberalism, has become the dominant ideology since the early 1980s both in economics and politics, but also in other areas such as education” (p. 1). The policies that govern educational institutions have become neoliberalized in many countries (Lewis, Hill & Fawcett, 2009) around the world. In fact, the last 30 years has illustrated a fundamental shift in how higher education institutions have defined and justified their existence (Olssen, 2011) in an age of neoliberalism. David Harvey (2005) defined neoliberalism as:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices (p. 2).

According to Canaan and Shumar (2008), higher education and individuals are being reshaped by a set of neoliberal practices and policies. Higher education is being disciplined in the way it operates and the services offered through a marketized mode of operation and training educational services into a commodity (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). The policies that are guiding the functionality of universities are entrenched in a neoliberal agenda where universities are expected to operate on businesslike principles with their focus on driving revenue and engaging in free-market practices (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The overarching purpose of higher education to develop democratic citizens have been overshadowed through policies that have a neoliberal agenda.

The role of higher education in this neoliberal environment is seen by the government as having great importance to the success of the economy. As a result, governments around the world view higher education as the new star ship in the policy fleet (Olssen, 2011). For example, universities are acknowledged as being the key driver in the knowledge economy, and they are paying the price by being encouraged to form alliances with industries and businesses (Olssen, 2011). There is no doubt that policy reforms are shifting the dynamics of higher education through a neoliberal agenda. This neoliberal push, or “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), is causing universities and other higher education institutions to compete with each other in order to sustain themselves. Neoliberal educational reforms are “opening up the educational services market to for-profit educational management organizations” (Ross & Gibson, 2007, p. 4) that will determine how they will be judged by government standards.

Au (2016) maintains that high-stake, standardized tests, for example, provide information to policy-makers on which students, teachers, and schools are measured. Educational institutions are viewed as a market where parents can decide which school to send their children. Likewise, Hursh (2014) adds that parents and students are now seen as entrepreneurial individuals who are responsible for seeking the best schools based on test scores. This however only heightens the racial gap and the inequality between the rich and the poor and place the interest of the individual at the centre of neoliberal ideals. Policy-makers use a neoliberal discourse that shifts the responsibility from the state onto the students, parents, schools, teachers, and communities (Hursh, 2008). Policy-makers try to disguise the yoke of a neoliberalism agenda by promoting policies that assert that standardized testing and accountability only increase equity and fairness (Hursh, 2008). They contend that the tests hold all students to the same high standards, but the tests really do not as: 
...low-income students and students of color are unlikely to do well because they are neither expected to do so nor does the curriculum connect to their own experiences. But because policy makers portray all students as being provided the same opportunities, student failure is blamed on individual lack of effort (Hursh, 2008, p. 30).

It is evident that policies moulded in a neoliberal agenda only seek to prioritize higher education institutions and foster racial inequality when it comes to standardized testing and access to education.

Conclusion

Policy-makers hold the power to construct policies, and they themselves have to be willing to share some of the power or perhaps give some up in order to dismantle neoliberalism. They will have to find spaces in the policy process to welcome the personal values of others who are affected by policies and incorporate policies that are not neoliberally driven. But how do we ask policy-makers to give up or share something as sweet and privileged as “power” when parting from it or the idea of it disrupts their status in the political arena. Privilege and power offer different life experiences, and policy-makers, I believe, are not ready and perhaps will never be ready to become policy implementers. Why follow directions when you can give them? Why become the hunted when you can remain the hunter? Having said this, educators in higher education must decide what role they will play in policy discourse? Whose interests will have a voice during the discourse on policy? Will it be the students, parents, agencies, communities, education systems, or the policy-makers and the government? We have to be more diverse in policy construction and decide what democratic society we intend on building through policies.

References


Kaschba Watson is a Ph.D. candidate in the Educational Leadership & Policy program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. Kaschba can be reached at kaschba.watson@mail.utoronto.ca.
Over the past year we have worked at University of Toronto’s Innovation Hub, a student-centered project aiming to understand the student experience, and design solutions to make it better. Each of us had leadership roles on teams composed of students, staff, and faculty. The purposeful positioning of students as team leaders was part of a process of disrupting power norms in order to center students on this project. The following stories will outline our work-study experience at the Innovation Hub and what made it a powerful learning opportunity.

Alexandra Rodney – Student Co-Lead, Operations Team

I began my work at the Innovation Hub during the final year of a doctoral program in Sociology. I loved the mentorship and student-support aspects of teaching, and I wanted to see if a career in student affairs might be a good fit. At the Innovation Hub, I served as co-leader on two of the operations teams that aligned with my experience as a qualitative researcher. Working on this project was empowering for me both personally and professionally. I have learned that the skills developed throughout my PhD program — writing, researching, analysis, and critical thinking — are highly valued in other institutional spaces. Academics are constantly reminded about the aspects of our work that need improvement; however, at the Innovation Hub I was positioned as an expert rather than an amateur. Through this process I was able to acknowledge my own mastery of relevant skills. The Innovation Hub also inspired me to integrate a student-centered philosophy into my work as a course instructor. Students were highly responsive when I shifted my teaching work towards centering their needs and aiming to produce meaningful learning experiences, and I have enjoyed teaching like never before.

Jacqueline Beaulieu – Student Co-Lead, Integrated Learning Team

In 2014, I left a full-time role in student affairs and services in Kelowna, British Columbia to pursue a PhD in Higher Education at OISE/University of Toronto. I immediately found myself immersed in the academic culture of a research-intensive university where hierarchies are emphasized. As a practitioner-turned-new researcher, I am learning to problem solve using strategies that reflect my new surroundings. While students’ agency in problem solving can be somewhat limited within the hierarchical context of academia, the Innovation Hub creates an environment where students are encouraged to contribute ideas and feedback that would make the university a better place. As part of the Innovation Hub, I co-led a team of students and staff that investigated perceptions of integrated learning opportunities at UofT. I benefitted from being encouraged to share my ideas and feedback, and engage as an equal partner in our team’s decision-making. The Innovation Hub provided me with an important outlet for making a difference in my campus community. Creating additional avenues for students to contribute their ideas and feedback represents an important example of how student affairs and services can both integrate students’ voices while supporting the broader goals of the institution.

Margaryta Ignatenko – Student Co-Lead, Operations Team

My involvement with the Innovation Hub began as I entered my first year as an undergraduate. I had just finished an internship at University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management, working on a project with the I-Think initiative to examine pedagogy in the K-12 education system. As a high school student, I was positioned as an equal collaborator along with K-12 teachers and university researchers. I couldn’t believe my luck when I heard the Innovation Hub was looking for students to work on a similar project to gain insight about students’ experiences. In both of these spaces I have learned to think critically about how naturally-occurring power dynamics can influence decision making and how to navigate difficult conversations with colleagues who hold positions of power at the University. Learning how to communicate effectively with those in power positions has also helped me academically. While my peers were nervous and hesitant to talk to professors and teaching assistants, I could approach them with confidence. I feel fortunate to have worked in consistently disruptive spaces where collaboration, critical thinking, and innovation are valued, because they have prepared me for the future of the world of work.

Julia Smeed – Staff Project Lead

As the Innovation Hub project lead and the only full-time team member, it was important to me that students took on leadership roles while I acted...
as a facilitator who opened doors, made connections, and provided support. This task proved complex in a traditional university environment with well-established power hierarchies. Early in the process, students felt that their voices were inferior to staff in group meetings. I observed meetings where staff members dominated the conversation, forgetting to stop and acknowledge the voices of students in the room. I acknowledged my own tendency to take control and became intentional about facilitating meetings in a way that gave students equal airtime. I discussed the challenges of learning to work in new ways with the students and we’d brainstorm strategies for how we could balance power dynamics during meetings and events. Much work is left to be done, but I’ve gained an awareness of how challenging it can be to incorporate the idea of designing with students rather than for them, and to continue to explore possibilities for how students and staff members can interact effectively.

As you can see, we came to the Innovation Hub with different backgrounds and relationships to power within academia. Regardless of where we started, our time at the Innovation Hub has been a valuable learning experience that has empowered and challenged us to grow personally and professionally. We hope that providing students and practitioners with our perspectives on the benefits of disrupting normative power systems encourages them to think about how interpersonal power dynamics affect collaborative work with students. We also hope that sharing our experiences will encourage practitioners to be creative in thinking about ways to give students more power in a space where they often feel powerless.

Learn more about the Innovation Hub at uoft.me/innovationhub.

Alexandra Rodney recently defended her PhD in the department of Sociology at the University of Toronto, and can be reached at ali.rodney@mail.utoronto.ca or on Twitter @Ali_Rodney.

Jacqueline Beaulieu is a PhD student in the Higher Education program at OISE/University of Toronto, and can be reached at jacqueline.beaulieu@mail.utoronto.ca or on Twitter @jacquiebeaulieu.

Margaryta Ignatenko is an undergraduate student in the Journalism program at the Scarborough campus of the University of Toronto, and can be reached at margaryta.ignatenko@mail.utoronto.ca.

Julia Smeed is the Innovation Hub Project Officer at the University of Toronto, and can be reached at julia.smeed@utoronto.ca or on Twitter @JuliaSmeed.

Do Not Pass Go, Do Not Collect $200:
Re-Evaluating the Meaning of Internationalization in Western Institutions of Higher Education

by Cristina Peter

Increases in the number of out-of-country students in institutions have not only altered the postsecondary landscape in Canada and the United States but have also brought two main benefits to these postsecondary systems. First, as government funding declines, institutions have needed to diversify revenue streams and international students offer institutions a renewed source of income (Bailey, 2005; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Hasio et al, 2015). Second, international students enrich the diversity of the school population and introduce new ideas and cultural and educational experiences for all students (McDonald, 2014). International students have become a crucial element in the attainment of institutional prestige and financial sustainability; however, there is growing concern that international students are not receiving the transitional support necessary for success in these “internationalized” institutions. As education becomes increasingly “customer-orientation,” student support services are an essential “after-sale” service, especially for students who have paid a higher sticker price (Hasio et al, 2015; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). What issues do international students
face? How do institutions currently provide support for their diverse student body? How effective are these supports? How could we alter the way institutions and student affairs professionals view, support, and empower international students?

Issues Faced by International Students

Recent studies on international student success have demonstrated worrisome trends. While experiences of international students will, of course, vary depending on student age, national background, gender, and other personal traits, all international students are placed at a significant disadvantage as they simultaneously encounter academic emotional, cultural, and social problems (Gebhard, 2012; Ramerhausen, 2013). In comparison to local students, international students consistently demonstrate greater difficulty adjusting to the academic requirements of postsecondary institutions due to issues with language proficiency or issues adapting to the new educational culture (Burns, 1991). In one study, students disclosed that they only understood 20–30% of lecture materials, while another study cites that students often struggled with specialized, discipline-related terminology, which greatly affected their comprehension of material (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2013; Omeri et al, 2003). In addition to difficulties with language proficiency, interpretation of the education system may vary depending on the culture the student was previously educated in. Students often demonstrate difficulty in the way they critically engage with material and are often confused and anxious about class participation and grading mechanisms which assess these areas (McDonald, 2014; Gebhard, 2012; Omeri et al, 2003).

With limited sense of belonging, disruptions in self-identity, and difficulty interacting with other students, many international students experience feelings of loneliness and depression (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2013). Lack of integration, however, is not a conscious choice. International students often assumed domestic students were unfriendly, had difficulty approaching or connecting with local groups, or found it difficult to engage in extra-curricular social activities because of limited time due to the need for academic preparation or part-time jobs (Burns, 1991; Bailey, 2005). Academic and social issues are further compounded in some cases by familial pressure for students to do well, especially in cases where families and friends of students have used all financial resources available to them to send students to university.

Global trends in data demonstrate that international students experience unique stressors, including limited language proficiency, racial and ethnic discrimination, changes in cultural values, financial problems, loneliness, anxiety about failure, and familial pressure (Ramerhausen, 2013; Hasio et al., 2015; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Sherry et al., 2010). These academic, social, and cultural stressors have significant short-term impacts on the student experience while the students are at the institution, but they also affect the long-term decision-making process for international students. Less-than-positive postsecondary experiences can prevent international students from focusing on these aspirations or expecting positive career outcomes (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). While international students enter institutions with excitement for their future studies and life after graduation, there appear to be a number of barriers and obstacles that diminish their experience and limit their future goals and intentions.

How Institutions Support International Students

Institutional Supports

With increasing institutional awareness of the responsibility to support the unique needs of international students, multiple forms of advice and support have been provided. A recent trend in American institutions is to offer incoming international students a formal introductory handbook that describes the western education system and culture in great detail (Ramerhausen, 2013). Other institutions provide on-campus services and programming such as additional orientation sessions, language learning support, or counselling for international students.

Despite the wide range of resources offered by institutions, data suggest that international students are less likely to use mental health, academic, or career counseling, even when readily available (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Hasio et al., 2015). In a study of international students and institutional staff, staff suggested that student use of services was low because students did not understand what services were for, how they could be accessed, or when to use the service. Students, on the other hand, disclosed that they were not aware of the full range of services (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). In some cases, international students are concerned with the confidentiality of services that are provided and are hesitant to utilize services in case information about their needs is shared with family members. While international students are more likely to access support services if they are referred, these referrals are problematic as students often do not feel comfortable speaking to staff or faculty about their problems (McDonald, 2014; Hwang et al.).

Peer Support

A growing area of development in supporting international students is in providing peer support (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Burns 1991). Many institutional programs have been established that informally or formally connect students with peers to encourage the development of a social network and feeling of belonging. In some cases, the peer supports are other international students so that students can engage in community with people from a similar cultural background (Sherry et al., 2010; Bartram, 2007; Gebhard, 2012; Burns, 1991; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). In other alternative programs, international students are connected with domestic students in buddy programs to enhance integration and help students’ transition to a new environment with help from a knowledgeable peer (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2013).

While these peer programs attempt to enhance sense of belonging and networking for international students, these programs, like the institutional support services, do not seem to be working. In a report by the Canada Bureau of International Education, over half of international students indicated that did not have any domestic friends, which for many international students is one of the main reasons they have travelled...
abroad for education (CBIE, 2015). While institutions are motivated to continue to increase international student populations on campuses, administrators are becoming increasingly aware of the diverse support needs of international students and the seemingly inadequate response support services have provided.

**Shifting Our Perspective**

As institutions pride themselves on the achievement of their goals of internationalization with the increases in the number of international students, it is important to recognize that simply increasing international numbers does not internationalize an institution. International students pursue studies in other countries to explore another culture, learn new ways of thinking, make new friends, and improve cross-cultural understanding. However, do we expect the same from our local students, staff and faculty (Sherry et al., 2010)? How can we expect one group to achieve “intercultural learning” unless we expect this learning to be reciprocal among all our students?

In many North American institutions, administrators have focused on the international students as if they are issues that need to be “fixed” rather than truly understanding the diversity and value that these students bring. There are five stages of cultural integration: “denial,” in which individuals fail to recognize any difference between themselves and diverse individuals; “defense,” in which individuals acknowledge difference but view this difference from their own culture as negative; “minimization,” when individuals view their dominant culture as superior to other diverse groups; and “adaptation,” when individuals adapt to cultural difference while simultaneously maintaining their own cultural values. It is only in the final stage of true cultural “integration” that individuals shift their perspectives from one culture to another in a natural way (Sawir, 2011).

We seem to currently reside in the third stage of “minimization,” acknowledging difference but viewing our own culture as superior — and there are data that prove it. In a study of teaching faculty opinions around international student support, 70% of staff reported valuing cultural differences; however, one-third did not change their teaching strategy and one-eighth of staff stated they treated all students equally, regardless of cultural background.

Institutions and their members minimize the experiences and backgrounds of their students and assume that international students need to adapt to the higher education system they enter. While adaptation can be productive for practical questions, such as how to use public transit, institutional strategies have emphasized the need for adaption to all elements of the international experience, including the education system. In one example of the aforementioned introductory handbooks given as a resource to new international students, the text reads, “to succeed in it (the academic system), you will need to learn how it is organized and how it works” (Ramerhansen, 2013). Student interpretations of their education align with the handbook’s advice, as two-thirds of students feel that courses took on a western approach (Bailey, 2005). These strategies leave relatively little room for cross-cultural learning.

Internationalization of the curriculum is not simply designing accommodations for international students to better adapt to the institutional tradition. Haigh articulately observes that international students “are placed in a game where only locals know the rules” (Haigh, 2014). We can best support international students if we better understand and appreciate students rather than fix them; if we change the game, rather than teach them the rules. All the supports listed in this paper focus on viewing international students from a perspective of deficit rather than asset. If we were to leverage the unique experiences of international students, not only would we support and appreciate their experience, but we would also empower local students to explore and exchange knowledge and experiences. It is only when there is willingness on behalf of the institution to learn about their students and facilitate learning between these students that the laudable goal of internationalization can begin.

**References**


Holistic Leadership

Holistic Leadership is a leadership style defined as “the nexus of all those behaviours and practices that school principals use in order to influence the behaviour of others” (Brauckmann, 2010, p.11).

Brauckmann (2010) explains that there are five leadership styles: (1) instructional, (2) structuring, (3) participative, (4) entrepreneurial, and (5) personal development. Literature tells us that holistic leaders appreciate all styles and ideas, and consider them valuable in team settings, realizing that each individual complements the other. Myers (2010, p.495) notes leaders “welcome participation of team members.”

What distinguishes leaders from their followers? Literature says it is motivation, the desire to master a skill, and to do well in that area. Orlov (1996) defines personal mastery as “the discipline of personal growth and learning.” Literature says that discipline surpasses talent but talent is advanced by acts of discipline. Myers (2010, p.491) describes it as grit, “a passionate dedication to an ambitious, long-term goal.”

Embodied, Spiritual, and Narrative Learning

Literature points out that empirical learning is considered an embodied experience where learning is immediate, physical, and emotional. Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) note “an embodied process is a passionate connection to the topic.” Literature mentions that the whole person is made up of body, mind, and spirit. Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) comment that “spirituality has a place in adult learning.” Literature defines spirituality in terms of grace and how it is shaped by our culture, traditions, experiences, and rituals. Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) mention that “grace is transforming, healing, transcending, and opens possibilities.” Literature indicates that when we are graceful, we turn the weight of the world into times of playfulness and dance to the words of the music, which is source of connection to our experiences. Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) note that “it is about relationships, supporting, and increasing the human spirit.” Literature points out that our experiences are holistic in nature. Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) believe “that our work is not merely to share information, but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students; and we must teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students…” Literature informs us that to promote spirituality in our work is to think ethically, and to think ethically is to recognize the spirituality in a person.

Ethical behaviour

Sexty (2008) says “an individual’s behaviour is based upon being a good person.” Literature notes we should always have a sense of self-worth, pride, and honour, and we should be acting in ways that model ourselves in that manner. Sexty (2008) indicates “value judgements are subjective of what we consider to be important and based on how we intuitively feel about the goodness or rightness of goals.” Literature says that leaders must be honest, truthful, open, and express kindness and compassion towards others to some degree. Sexty (2008) describes it as the “Golden rule: do unto others as you have them do unto you.” Literature notes that kindness and concern is expressed through our ethics of care, and it is illustrated by our efforts in developing others, responding to family and community difficulties, and by volunteering in shelters. Sexty (2008) mentions “behaviour towards others must reflect a fair and courteous treatment of another.” Literature notes that leaders often confuse ethics, morals, and values. Sexty (2008) points out “ethics remain the same and do not differentiate among people, cultures, or countries whereas morals and values do.”
Literature points out that our beliefs, values, and behaviours shape our view of what is right and wrong. This view is based on our personal, social, cultural, and religious values, which direct our behaviour towards our responsibilities deemed as acceptable or unacceptable. We bring all of these—life experiences, values, and worldview—to leadership roles. Chandler (2009) indicates that “lack of effective organizational processes and accountability oversight contributes to unethical behaviour.” Literature adds that leaders are human and mistakes can happen, so accountability, checks and balances, and taking responsibility for their actions should take precedence in all leaders.

Engaging the whole student

Haber-Curran & Owen (2013) mention that “post-secondary institutions around the world are committed to enhancing the well-being of students.” Literature tells us that student affairs personnel recognize the identities of all students in this globalized and digital world and can distinguish between the similarities and differences of diverse student groups. Myers (2010, p.733) notes “although diversity commands attention, we are—as working toward shared goals reminds us—more alike than different.” Literature notes that is it through cooperation of working with others to achieve the same organizational goals and vision that we realize that we are one in our common values.

Haber-Curran & Owen (2013) indicate we should “always address the student as an integrated whole—as a ‘human personality living, working, and growing in a democratic society.’” Literature notes that student affairs believe that a student’s learning is shaped within and outside higher education and these experiences contribute to the development of the whole person.

Literature notes that higher education in the U.S. is not “practicing what they preach” with regards to the psychological and physical well-being of international students. Ozturgut & Murphy (2009) mention that “the psychological stressors such as academic demands, changes in their support system, and lack of familiarity with U.S. customs and culture, can lead to social isolation among international students.” Ozturgut & Murphy (2009) note that “almost none of the faculty jobs require skills and education in multi-cultural or inter-cultural communication.” As such, literature informs us that higher education educators in the U.S. do not know their part in the acclimatizing of foreign students. Ozturgut & Murphy (2009) indicate that the “well-being of international student life includes personal satisfaction and pursuing a meaningful and successful academic life.”

Primary Goal of Higher Education

Finch & Crunkilton (1999) note the importance of “meeting students’ needs in ways that maximize their success as they move from the school to the workplace.” Literature tells us there needs to be formal agreements/arrangements in place between education and employers because evidence is showing that education alone is not meeting the students’ employment needs. Finch & Crunkilton (1999) highlight that the “one area that is often overlooked in the linkage process is how students can be assisted in connecting their learning back and forth between the school and the workplace.” Literature mentions that being exposed to organizational practices, and their lines of business, can help students connect the context to a workplace setting. Finch & Crunkilton (1999) state that “education is neither academic nor vocational, instead it is comprised of two elements, that is, formal and informal education, and has as its goals preparation for life and preparation for earning a living.”

Holistic Model of Education and Work

Camara, O’Connor, Mattern, & Hanson (2015) report:

- the development of a holistic framework that can provide a more complete description of education and work readiness;
- the framework is organized into four-broad domains including: core academic skills, cross-cutting capabilities, behavioral skills, education and career navigation skills.

Literature tells us that higher education institutions have already begun recognizing these domains, and findings from the evidence shows that a successful academic life is associated to these domains. Camara et al. (2015) note that “it is their belief that a holistic examination of college and career readiness such as this can improve outcomes that lead to education and workplace success.” Literature notes measurements for readiness of education and education has progressed, and it has become evident through studies that a holistic approach holds great potential. Camara et al. (2015) mention that “a holistic model of education and work success should not be restricted to just core academic subjects in K-12 education, rather the goal of the framework is to identify the cognitive learning outcomes required for success in the 21st century and provide a detailed articulation of development from kindergarten through to career.”

Summary

Brauckmann (2010) explains that the “holistic leadership style is defined as the nexus of all those behaviours and practices that school principals use in order to influence the behaviour of others.” Literature points out that it takes a special kind of person to influence others. Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991) note that “leaders who demonstrate grace under pressure, inspire those around them to stay calm and act intelligently.” Literature tells us that our work is not merely to share information, but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of the students. Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner (2007) mention grace is transforming, healing, transcending, and sees the world as possibilities.

Sexty (2008) explains how a leader’s behaviour is based upon being a good person and describes it as “do unto others as you have them do unto you.” Literature mentions that a leader’s ability to assess a situation ethically must draw on their previous work experience and their own values and beliefs. Orlov (1996) adds that “ethical and moral development are core values and holistic leaders serve as role models.”

References


Karen Ann Penney is currently a Master’s student in the Faculty of Education (Post-Secondary) at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and can be reached at karen_anne@warp.nfnd.net, on Twitter at @penneykaren, and on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/in/karen-anne-penney-11523238/.
University, while a time of great opportunity, is also a time of great stress. Financial pressure, a transition from home, academic pressures, creating new friendships, a more competitive environment, and difficulties establishing a work-life balance are just a few of the stressors students commonly experience at university (Zivin et al., 2009). Additionally, young adults, the primary age of university students, are the highest age group for mental health illnesses, with three out of four people with mental health problems showing symptoms before they are 24 years old. The most common diagnoses are depression and anxiety (Ontario Undergraduate Student Association, 2012). Growing numbers of students entering university have a pre-existing mental health diagnosis, yet there are still countless students who are undiagnosed and untreated (Zivin et al., 2009).

Two of the main ways of providing mental health services are through professional-based and peer-based approaches. Professional strategies rely on counsellors and psychiatrists within the school to provide talk therapy and, potentially, medications to students who access these services (Eisenberg et al., 2007).

Peer-based approaches use support of peers to assist individuals in need. Peers are often involved in all aspects of these initiatives, including program design, delivery, and evaluation. This form of service can come in the shape of peer help lines, school clubs, drop-in spaces, and several other strategies (Hildebrand et al., 2012). Peer-based services are based on the rationale argued by Hildebrand et al. (2012) that young people are more likely to discuss personal issues with their peers rather than parents or other adults as they see their peers as a more credible and non-judgemental source of information. Through the use of peers, these programs provide opportunities to facilitate discussion amongst students on mental health in order to augment the amount of students using of these services (Czyz et al., 2015). These programs cannot provide therapy or medications, yet operate more so to increase discussions on mental health and reduce stigmas that prevent students from using the services they require (Funkhouser, 2015).

Barriers to Services

Czyz et al. have identified two key stages that students progress through in the process of understanding their mental health. The first stage is an identification of need and the second is accessing the necessary services. However, over 50% of students in the first stage never progress onto the second (Czyz et al., 2013). Common barriers students face when accessing mental health services include lack of knowledge of services, stigma, concerns of privacy, and lack of time. These hindrances are frequently augmented for minority and disadvantaged populations, due to cultural differences and unfamiliarity in the university setting (Stebleton et al., 2014).

Another barrier that students face when accessing mental health services is the large unawareness about mental health, which can be best explained through the Health Belief Model (HBM). This model was proposed by Czyz et al. (2013) and suggests that an individual’s health behaviour is determined by their evaluation of its threat, in terms of perceived susceptibility and severity, the costs or perceived barriers, and the benefits of services. Students’ perception of the threat of mental health issues is often skewed from their lack of understanding of the pervasiveness and potential severity of mental health illnesses. However, there is the additional component that the HBM bring to attention regarding perceived benefits. Students often do not trust mental health practitioners and question whether professional services will be of help. In other words, they do not consider professional counseling to have benefits that will out weight the personal costs of accessing services (Czyz et al., 2015). These types of thoughts are often fueled by societal stigmas about mental health and the general unfamiliarity with what mental illness entails (Czyz et al., 2013). Together, these barriers lead students to feel isolated and in denial with their mental health issues. Despite the plethora of services available, students are not accessing them at the rate with which they are needed.

Professional-Based Services

When progressed to the second stage, professional-based approaches, such as sessions with a psychiatrist or counsellor, are often sought (Czyz, et al., 2013). Professionals are trained to deal with the multitude of issues students may face. They have ability to seek assistance from other professionals, and they can prescribe medications (Prince, 2015). Additionally, professional counsellors have learned to maintain a professional distance so that they are not too emotionally-affected or hold themselves responsible for the mental health of their students (Dekruyk et al., 2013).
In addition to personal counselling, most institutions also offer group therapy. This approach is more often targeted towards students who are well progressed into the second stage because it requires students to be open about their mental health issues. The discussions evolving from this environment make students more likely to feel part of a community, which is one of the largest factors in improving mental health. This benefit is contingent upon having a group of students that are all willing, eager, and respectful of being part of a community that is focused on improving mental health issues (Kahn et al., 1999). This discussion can also be beneficial in reducing the stigmas regarding mental health due to the open dialogue. However, often this community only exists during the open period of the therapy session and students are still constrained by the stigmas in the campus society at large (Kahn, et al., 1999). Nonetheless, group therapy can be an effective way of creating a sense of community regarding mental health issues and from a more logistical perspective, helps counselling professionals reach a large number of students all at once (Carrera et al., 2016).

On the other hand, there are several barriers that prevent students from using professional-based mental health services. Counsellors only work a certain number of hours a day, most often when students are in class, making it difficult for students to schedule appointments. Additionally, there is often a lack of funding, which prevents institutions from being financially able to employ adequate numbers of counsellors that are needed to support all students (Sareen et al., 2007). Even when able to make an appointment, stigmas surrounding mental health often make students afraid that other faculty and students will discover that they are having mental health issues and that using the counselling services will have negative backlashes on other aspects of their personal and academic life. Furthermore, with the prevalence of students’ trust issues with counsellors, students often are not hopeful of receiving helpful therapy from these services, as explained via the HBM (Czyz et al., 2013).

Peer-Based Services

A sense of community and belonging is essential in reducing mental health symptoms and manifestations in students (Stebleton et al., 2014). In order to act proactively in mitigating student mental health issues, it is important to help foster this sense of community. This concept is foundational to most peer-based programs (Hildebrand et al., 2012).

The idea of community is foundational in peer-based mental health initiatives because they rely on having peers identify as part of a group that is actively working together to help each other discuss, achieve, and maintain mental wellness (Hildebrand et al., 2012). Community in peer-based programs helps create a university climate that can have open discussion on mental health. In effect, this type of discussion helps encourage students to use the appropriate services and minimizes the stigmas surrounding mental health that prevents students from seeking help (Smith et al., 2011).

Past studies have identified supportive relationships with family and friends as being key in reducing depressive thoughts. The peer-based programs facilitate the use of friends for this purpose (Stebleton et al., 2014). Talking with peers, whether in a group or one-on-one setting, has been shown to minimize the extent to which students feel alone with their problems or burdened by their own stigmatized ideas about mental illness. Additionally, peer relationships have a built-in component of trust, allowing for more honest and open communication. This communication is key in helping the students reach stage one and can also aid students in transitioning to stage two (Czyz et al., 2013).

Additionally, these initiatives frequently utilize technology to increase hours of operation, reduce the fears regarding privacy, and reach students who are not physically on campus (Funkhouser, 2015).

However, these programs are not without their faults. Peers involved in the dissemination of these services will most likely have received some training, but they are not trained professionals. They are not and should not act as a counsellor or psychiatrist. Rather, their role is to be part of a supportive and open-minded community regarding mental health to help peers recognize mental health issues, to identify when professional services are necessary, and help students access services that meet their needs (Funkhouser, 2015). Peer-based programs need the support and knowledge of professional-based services. Additionally, having peers involved in these programs has the potential to put substantial amounts of pressure on students, and it is important to have an emotional as well as professional network to support the students that are running these initiatives (Ontario Undergraduate Student Association, 2012).

Furthermore, some students with mental health issues may fear judgement and gossip deriving from peer-based services if they feel great distrust towards their peers. Students involved in delivering peer-based services will most likely have signed confidentiality agreements and should ensure students in need that anything shared will remain in confidence, but this may not mitigate students’ concerns in all cases (Funkhouser, 2015).

Collaborative Approach

Peer-based services help students recognize their mental health issues through facilitating an open discussion about mental health and can be helpful to reduce stigmas so that students use the professional services they require (Hildebrand et al., 2012). On the other hand, professional-based counselling services are more equipped to treat students’ needs through both talk therapy and medications, depending on the needs and desires of the student (Prince, 2015). Peer-based initiatives are more proactive, yet the reactivity of professional-based programs is extremely important for the treatment of mental illnesses (Hildebrand et al., 2012). Mental health is complex and medical. Trained professionals are needed to provide students with more intensive and theory-based help and biochemical approaches, if necessary (Prince, 2015). Yet there is also need for peer-based initiatives to augment the accessibility of services and to help make students more receptive to using the professional services.

Ideally, greater communication and alliances between these two approaches would have the potential to provide a wider breadth and scope of services for students who are battling mental health issues. In order to address student mental health issues, we need to be both proactive and
reactive. We need to create a sense of community around mental health that reduces stigma and logistical dilemmas so that students feel supported and unafraid to access help. Cooperation and strategic planning between peer-based and professional-based mental health strategies have the potential to achieve these types of accessible mental health services (Smith et al., 2011).

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Mary Kate MacDonald is the Pathways Support Officer at Centennial College and an M.Ed. student in OISE’s Higher Education field in Student Development & Student Services. Mary Kate can be reached at marykate.macdonald@mail.utoronto.ca.
Components of a Canadian Student Services Research Agenda

by Tim Fricker

Introduction

In this article, I propose, in rough form, a research agenda for Canadian student services that builds off the foundation of the long-held mission of student services, addresses current issues in the field, and strives to build an infrastructure for research, which is so desperately needed. I will also argue that given the long tradition of student services professionals being almost squarely focused on practice, and not research, that the research agenda should welcome and encourage all research activities, including the replication of American studies. To frame this argument, I will also provide some comments on the current state of higher education research in Canada.

Current State of Student Services Research in Canada

I believe that Canadian student services professionals are innovative practitioners who have always been excellent consumers of research from the United States. The progress we have made and continue to make is because we work extremely hard at, and prioritize our time on, refining and improving our practice. We have taken this path for most of our history, but I would argue that we need to begin to do more research, we need to replicate American studies and show if and how they fit our context, and we need to inform our practices by more rigorously produced evidence about the needs of our students and “what works” in supporting them.

The current state of research about student services in Canada is nothing to boast about, unfortunately. The test of the maturity of the research culture is multi-faceted. The quantity and quality of the published research are two of these factors. Over the history of the Canadian Journal of Higher Education, there have been five articles with “student services” or “student affairs” in the title or abstract: Browne, Speed, & Walker,
CSAOs are under no obligation to design and implement studies. However, to doing research in the field; however, the authors argue, “to be fair, being a practitioner. It is acknowledged there are considerable barriers authors acknowledge that the role of student services is truly first about presents a viable avenue of academic research” (p. 344). In addition, the al. (2015) stated that “identifying issues before they become significant the reactive nature of the work of many student services offices. Browne et and the results cost each institution nothing formally, except for very little this work is a huge advantage to student services offices because the work and expertise from institutions and the profession as a whole is needed to sustain this kind of research.

A third example is a paper by Wiggers and Arnold (2011) published by HEQCO. This paper summarized many of the student services-related projects funded over the years at HEQCO and the lessons learned about student success. The findings are emblematic of the challenges of student services scholarship. In general, Wiggers and Arnold (2011) found issues related to student awareness of the existence of the programs and services being researched, and little willingness to utilize the services when provided. In part due to these challenges, but also in the design of the research itself, it was very difficult to measure the impact of these programs and services on student success. The paper concluded with a series of proposed solutions to the challenges of student awareness, utilization, impact assessment, and measurement. Overall, this paper serves two important reminders. First, while a lot of good work is being done, we do not yet have generalizable evidence describing how much Canadian student services programs and initiatives have an impact on student retention, learning, and development — or if they do at all. Second, this work is difficult and requires a rigorous research design in order to measure impact. This likely requires a variety of partners, including both practitioners and scholars, to address these challenges in a meaningful way. In response to these lessons, HEQCO’s most current approach is to fund a variety of projects as part of a consortium, such as the Learning Outcomes Assessment Consortium and the Access and Retention Consortium (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2012, 2013). In this way, researchers support one another through a variety of semi-annual meetings and consultations with experts at HEQCO, which I have personally experienced. I could see an approach like this evolve on any campus and include faculty, institutional research departments, staff from teaching and learning centres, and interested student services practitioners. Similarly, student services associations like CACUSS could look to fund work in a similar way.

Two final examples are the recent Canadian student services books edited by Donna Hardy Cox and Carney Strange (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010; Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016). Each take a descriptive look at the literature and practice of the profession. Pidgeon (2010) published a thoughtful review of the first book in the Canadian Journal of Higher Education, recognizing that “the challenge in writing a seminal piece is that you are attempting to build the foundation of a field of scholarship and practice that in Canada that has not had a tradition of ‘writing’ about...
what we do” (p. 124). This is true. Pidgeon (2010) further states that while student services professionals do not actively engage in doing research, her experience is that student services professionals are actively engaged in consuming and using research to inform their practice. According to Pidgeon (2010),

this book reminds us that it is now our collective responsibility to publish our work in multiple forms (e.g., professional journals, academic journals, books, and conference proceedings). The growing use of open source technology and online publishing will ultimately support this aspect of our work. (p. 125)

The second book by Strange and Hardy Cox (2016) focused squarely on student diversity. The tone and message of the book was one of questioning assumptions and improving our services to support the ever-growing diversity of the student body. Strange and Hardy Cox (2016) explain that understanding the nature of these new groups has been equally challenging to a faculty and staff accustomed to serving a more traditional constituent. Furthermore, research on these new groups has only begun to emerge in the literature on Canadian higher education, guided too much perhaps by the work already being done in the United States. (p. xii)

In this section I explored the current state of research on student services in Canada. Within each publication, there was a recognition that student services research is still very much in its infancy and that the field is still very much one of “applied practice” (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016, p. xii). The call, and sometimes the plea, for more research was evident. Any additions to the scholarly discussion about the mission of student services would be valuable; however, as I will argue in the next section of this proposal, a future research agenda for the profession needs to be more focused and strategic than that. With growing accountability pressures, it may not be long until senior administrators start to ask student services offices to demonstrate their value in a more rigorous way.

**Components of a Canadian Student Services Research Agenda**

An agenda is a list of topics to be explored, but it can also mean a list of goals and suggest a strategy for achieving those goals. I will discuss each of these three items as elements of a proposed student services research agenda in this section. I will begin by identifying a list of general topics, followed by a number of goals and some comments about the strategy. I also summarize the agenda in the appendix.

I believe the topics for a student services research agenda should come from two places: the mission of student services and the most recent research and issues facing the field. The mission and purpose of student services is long established to be related to two core components (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015; Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2005). The first is to support student learning and development in the most holistic way possible, and the second is to support the academic mission of the institution. For example, fostering student engagement and assessing learning outcomes continues to be themes of interest in student services research and practice. In addition, the design and fostering of supportive campus environments has long been a key priority of institutions, in which student services often have a leadership role. There is no evidence that these two core elements of the mission of student services is changing or needs to change. Logically, a research agenda for student services in Canada should support these two core purposes. This opens up many lines of inquiry, and given the dearth of research in our field, I argue any additional research is valuable in creating some momentum. However, to generate the most value for student services leaders and practitioners alike, a research agenda should be focused on the most pressing issues facing the field and the greatest insights and trends from previous research. Today, the issues facing student services are many and complex, but they could likely be summarized by three overarching themes. The first is related to accountability pressures, including both financial and compliance reporting. The second issue is related to the growing diversity and complexity of student needs, including topics such as internationalization and mental health. The third is related to student services leadership, management, and organizational design and sustainability. Given the breadth and depth of student services work, it is not a surprise that this topic emerges in just about every book about student services. Under this topic, issues of staff training and development, collaborations with academic affairs, and staffing models are all worthy research topics. Finally, I believe it is critical that within each of these topic areas, the differences (or similarities) of colleges and universities be explored. Far too often, research about students comes from university environments and fails to look at colleges. Colleges also need to take greater responsibility for this absence and actively seek to research, publish, and contribute to the collective understanding of student services and student success in this environment.

I have briefly listed the topics and the rationale for their inclusion in the research agenda. Next, I focus on the strategy, which needs involvement from all stakeholders. Practitioners need to find time to contribute in a scholarly way to the profession. Leaders should find ways to support practitioners in their graduate studies and require more rigorous attention to assessment, evaluation, and research activities. Professional associations ought to take the lead on developing action plans to implement this strategy, and universities could benefit from considering a graduate program in higher education or student services as potential new programs. The idea of needing new graduate programs was argued strongly by Hardy Cox and Strange (2010). Plainly, none of these strategies are well thought out yet, as that is something that would be best facilitated, debated, and co-created within the setting of professional association membership engagement activities, meetings, and conferences.

One source of inspiration, or perhaps a template for the high-level statement of a research agenda, is the HEQCO strategic directions document (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2017). It focuses on three priorities and states short and long-term goals for those priorities, each with a number of specific steps they are taking to achieve those goals. It is lofty, yet specific. I believe if you replaced the name HEQCO with Student Services (or CACUSS), a great deal of the content would still be applicable. Such goals also make me wonder, to what degree does any one
student services department fulfill these goals? I would bet very few, if any at all, which is further evidence that we have some work to do to assess, research, and evaluate our work.

In summary, I have argued that this research agenda ought to: (1) be grounded in the mission of student services, (2) address current issues and trends in the field, (3) be informed by current and exemplary research internationally, (4) be supported by a growing and strong research infrastructure, and (5) be facilitated via strong internal and external partnerships. In addition, the overall purpose of the agenda is to develop a stronger research culture that enables leaders in our field to demonstrate value and advocate for the resources they need. This “value” approach is rooted in what some scholars call the “what works” agenda, which is a very much part of the argument I am making, although not exclusively by any means. Nutley, Walter, and Davies (2007) describe five knowledge requirements for effective social policy: know-about problems, know-what works, know-how (to put into practice), know-who (to involve), and know-why. Each are important, and any movement on any of these approaches would be a welcome contribution to our field. However, with accountability pressures mounting on our campuses, I believe demonstrating that student services programs “work” will be of critical importance. Furthermore, knowing “whom” these programs work for (e.g. at-risk students, international students, college students) is also timely and important.

Conclusion

In this paper I provided a summary of the current state of Canadian student services research and drafted a research agenda for Canadian student services that is true to the mission of the profession. The agenda also addresses current issues in the field and argues that a stronger infrastructure of support is needed if any research momentum is going to be developed. Given our unique identity, social policies, and post-secondary institutions, replication of studies from the United States is an important research practice to demonstrate transferability of theories, programs, services, and interventions to the Canadian context. Replication studies are not necessary in all circumstances, however. Studies that apply theories or principles of good practice that pose no risk of harm to study participants could proceed without pure replication and support further advancement of Canadian student services research knowledge. I also argued that as a profession we need to be far more interested in and committed to conducting research and demonstrating “what works” in students services. Canadian scholars generally agree with me on this call to action. It is helpful, one last time, to review the statements of Hardy Cox and Strange as they framed their two books about Canadian student services. In the introduction to their first book, they said that the “time and opportunity are ripe for identifying and distilling the developments and contributions of student services to the Canadian post-secondary enterprise” (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010, p. xii). A fair and encouraging comment indeed. When I look to their conclusion in their second book, the tone shifts from encouragement to change and action. They argue that “assumptions about students that once served to guide our policies and practices must now be questioned and some changed... nevertheless, change is imperative if Canadian post-secondary education is to become a positive and transformative opportunity for students of diverse backgrounds” (Strange & Hardy Cox, 2016, p. 227). The diversity and needs of our students have evolved and become more complex since 2010. And the pressure for accountability has also increased. Looking at these two quotes together, I would argue their points in a more assertive way. I believe that we are past due on identifying the ways in which student services contributes to our institutions, and more than ever before, we need to do so with a critical eye to who our students are in Canada. Our context is different, our student population is changing dramatically, and we can no longer rely on research solely from the United States to inform our practice. This work needs to occur from within Canada, by our practitioners and by our scholars. This will be a challenging task and require investments of time, money, and infrastructure from all stakeholders. The agenda I have proposed will begin us down that path to achieving this goal.

Appendix: Summary Research Agenda for Student Services at Universities and Colleges in Canada

1. Grounded by the mission of student services
   a. Supporting holistic student learning and development
      i. Fostering student engagement; assessing student learning outcomes
   b. Supporting the academic mission of the institution
      i. Creating supportive and inclusive campus environment
2. Addresses current issues and trends in the field
   a. Understanding and responding to accountability pressures (fiscal and policy)
   b. Addressing evolving student diversity and needs (international, mental health)
   c. New approaches to leadership, management, and organizational design
3. Informed by exemplary research internationally
   a. Replicating and pilot testing relevant programs and services
4. Supported by growing a strong research infrastructure
   a. Developing funding sources for research
   b. Supporting development of graduate students and programs
5. Facilitated via strong internal and external partnerships
   a. Internal partners across the institution (e.g. institutional research, faculty)
   b. Generating multi-institution and longitudinal studies (including colleges and universities)
   c. Creating multi-agency partnerships (college, university, provincial and national)
6. Overall purpose is to develop a stronger research infrastructure and culture, which will allow student services to:
   a. demonstrate the capacity of student services (at colleges and universities) to meet the demands of today’s students and institutions
   b. show the value of student services with rigorously produced research evidence
   c. advocate for resources and support when needed
Roles

• Practitioners: more scholarly contributions
• Scholars: engage more practitioners in research; mentor future scholars; partner with university and colleges
• Administrators/Leaders: support practitioners in their graduate studies and require more rigorous attention to assessment, evaluation, and research activities.
• Professional associations: lead consultation processes and development of research action plans related to funding, infrastructure, data sharing, partnerships, etc.
• Universities: offer new/more graduate programs in higher education or student services
• Colleges: actively seek to foster research partnerships with universities and scholars

References


Tim Fricker is the Dean of Students at Mohawk College in Hamilton, ON. Tim is also a doctoral student at OISE, University of Toronto. This article is an edited summary of a paper submitted as part of his doctoral work. Tim can be reached at tim.fricker@mohawkcollege.ca.

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