

**Values of Canadian Student Affairs Practitioners**

by

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**Abstract**

This study explores what a selection of Canadian student affairs practitioners saw as the role of their work, the values they brought to it, and values conflicts they encountered. All of these are personal, and all depend on each individual's experience. Through this exploration, a construction of roles, values and values conflicts was built and confirmed with the participants.

Using constructivist methodology, participants were purposively selected based on their contributions to the field of Canadian student affairs, and were interviewed about their role, values and values conflicts. Using inductive data analysis, a framework of categories was constructed from the interviews, and then member checks through re-interviews were conducted to verify that the framework reflected participants' values and experiences. Constructivism focuses on social reality; the experiences and thoughts of the participants are paramount. Constructivism builds connections between different personal realities and positions, in order to elucidate people's behaviours and motivations.

Participants saw their role as student affairs practitioners to create a learning environment and to support the academic mission of their institution; to provide expertise on student issues; to be advocates with and on behalf of students; and to provide support to individual students. Participants' values were honesty, integrity and authenticity;

having a balance of fairness and consistency with care and empathy; student-centredness; valuing the student voice; having a commitment to equity and social justice; being dedicated to student affairs work; and engaging in lifelong learning and self-improvement. Participants identified that conflicts between values arose in situations related to the overall campus environment; policy and decision-making; interactions with students; and personal aspects of their work.

The construction presented in this thesis is intended to be a starting point for further discussion about Canadian student affairs values and practices. As there is little research to date on Canadian student affairs, the study offers an illustration of what practitioners who are involved in the field consider important in their role, what their values are, and the challenges that can arise from holding those values.

## **Dedication**

To my mother, Eleanor Heise, and my father, Helier Robinson. Thank you both so much for your love, support and encouragement.

## **Acknowledgements**

My enormous thanks go to Professor Glen Jones, who has been a hugely supportive and insightful supervisor throughout my graduate career. Thanks also go to my other committee members: Professors Dan Lang, Tony Chambers, Tricia Seifert and Peggy Patterson. All provided excellent feedback, and this study has benefitted greatly from their thoughts.

The student affairs practitioners who participated in this study were generous with their time, values and experiences. They were passionate and enthusiastic about their work, and not only provided excellent data, but also continue to serve as a source of personal motivation for me; their enthusiasm is the reason why I am able to say, on completing this study, that I am just as excited about the topic as I was when I began.

I have been sustained throughout this process by wonderful family and friends. I have been lucky to have had understanding colleagues and staff members, many of whom have been deeply engaged themselves in the issues explored in this study. Finally, the involved students, student staff and student leaders with whom I have worked continue to be inspiring.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### ***Statement of the Issue***

Student affairs divisions in Canadian universities are involved in an array of programs, services and advisory capacities that have an impact on student success, the campus environment, and institutional policies and decision-making. Thousands of staff members across the country contribute to helping individual students and to shaping their institutional culture. There is a vibrant national association, with an annual conference, specialized divisions, and a regularly-published magazine. Increasingly, interest has been sparked in providing training and graduate preparation specializing in student affairs work. In spite of all this, there has been very little scholarly research on Canadian student affairs.

Canadian universities are generally public, and range in size from small undergraduate to enormous, comprehensive institutions. Post-secondary education is largely under the jurisdiction of provincial governments, although institutions enjoy a great deal of autonomy in their planning and decision-making; their governing bodies include both faculty and students. Other than this, there is sufficient institutional variation that it is difficult to make generalizations about the university system in Canada (Jones, 1997).

The development and practices of student affairs in this country is known largely through internal institutional assessment, individual experiences, and anecdotes; there has been little academic research. This has recently been somewhat alleviated by the publication of a book on Canadian student services by Donna Hardy Cox and Carney

Strange (2010), which describes the foundations of student services practice, different student services (including student life work), and Canadian institutional missions and contexts.

This study is intended to provide an understanding of what Canadian student affairs practitioners consider to be the role of student affairs in their institutions, what personal values they bring to their work, and how those values may come into conflict. It focuses on student affairs practitioners, who would be using their values in their work. This introductory chapter summarizes what is known about student affairs in Canadian universities, and then outlines the purpose of the study, the research questions, the assumptions and limitations of this study, and how it is organized. Also included is a glossary of terms and acronyms related to student affairs.

### ***Student Affairs in Canada***

Student affairs, student services and student life are terms used to refer to co-curricular programming and support for students. While the role of student affairs, as seen by practitioners, is explored in detail in Chapter Four, the institutional benefits of a supportive and developmental campus environment include assisting with student recruitment, student retention, and the provision of a positive student experience. Institutions that rely on alumni support count on graduates appreciating the positive facets of their educational experience. Additionally, student affairs staff can assist with student conflicts and student crises, including acting as a bridge between student leaders and senior administration, and assisting in resolving any problems. Student affairs staff can provide expertise around student development and student life issues (Cox &

Strange, 2010). It is common for Canadian institutional governing bodies such as boards of governors and senates to include staff and students (Jones & Skolnik, 1997), and this may have an impact on the expectations placed on student leaders.

Student affairs is a field that is widely studied in the United States, with graduate programs, an extensive literature, several refereed academic journals, two national professional organisations, and established standards of practice. As seen in this study, there is a tendency for Canadian student affairs practitioners to look to the United States for graduate education and theoretical direction. While there is much that is valuable for Canadian practitioners in American student affairs literature, the Canadian context of student affairs may differ in several significant ways. Student affairs practitioners in Canada are perhaps more likely to be generalists, and may not have specific graduate preparation, or if they do, have obtained it in the United States (Cox & Strange, 2010).

#### *A brief history of student affairs practice in Canada*

The history of student affairs has been studied more extensively in the United States than in Canada. Originally, faculty members, in addition to teaching and research, provided individual support to students both academically and personally. When post-secondary education in the United States began to expand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more specialized positions to support students began to develop; these included academically-appointed staff such as Deans of Men and Deans of Women, whose role could include housing, financial aid, athletics and student groups (Sandeen, 1991; Hamrick, Evans & Shuh, 2002). These roles largely took an *in loco parentis* approach and included an element of enforcing moral standards (Barr & Albright, 1990). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

student affairs reflected social changes, including an active student movement related to civil rights and anti-war demonstrations, which entailed student affairs officers dealing with campus disruption, and assisting in communication between student activists and institutional administrators (Barr, 1993). Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century student affairs began to take on a more and more formalized role in American institutions, including having chief student affairs officers appointed at the vice-presidential level, an expectation of graduate preparation for student affairs practice, the expansion of professional associations, and a great deal of formal research in the field and in student development (Sandeem, 1991).

The development of student affairs in Canada appears to have been similar, with an initially paternalistic approach focussing on monitoring and controlling student behaviour (such as curfews), although Cox and Strange (2010) detail several early incidents of students engaging in representative associations, providing feedback on institutional management and protesting controversial decisions. One early case of activism occurred in 1875, when some Queen's University were suspended for drinking off campus by the Principal. Other students felt this was too harsh, appealed it to the university senate, and then began refusing to attend classes, a state of affairs that lasted about a week. The suspension was upheld. A later Queen's President, though, felt it important in his 1925-1926 report to emphasize that elected student representatives (two men and two women) were responsible for liaison with the administration, and that students organized social events and maintained discipline.

Deans of women were among the first specialized student service staff, starting at Queen's in 1918, with other universities rapidly following suit. These deans lived on

campus and supervised female students; the Queen's description included enforcing on-campus curfews and visitors, as well as approving off-campus housing and dress codes (Cox and Strange, 2010).

Increasingly, according to Cox and Strange (2010), student support was seen as a broader issue which required specialized staff. The Veterans Rehabilitation Act in 1945 provided tuition and living support for a large influx of former armed services personnel. Universities began providing career advising for these older students, and the University Advisory Services was formed. This was an organisation that represented staff who worked with veterans to provide personal and career counselling; these services were not broadly available to other students. However, within a few years, the organisation moved to include deans of women and men, and other staff who specialized in student support, and shortly afterward was renamed the University Counselling and Placement Association (UCPA) in 1952. The organisation grew to include staff working in new student orientation, financial aid, international student advising and student housing/residence life. Increasingly, staff members who worked to support students were being recognised as having a formal role in Canadian institutions. The national organisation in the 1960s reportedly faced challenges with establishing a single coherent whole, although it did introduce national conferences, constitutional processes, and a publication. It was renamed the Canadian Association of University Student Personnel Services, then the Council of Associations of University Student Personnel Services. It formed autonomous divisions with which it was federated, which were the Canadian Student Services Association (CSSA), the Canadian University and College Counselling Association (CUCCA) and the Canadian College Health Services Association (CCHSA).

The University Career Planning Association (UCPA) decided not to federate. Factional disputes continued and the organization was finally reorganised as the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) in 1971, a title that has remained to the present. CACUSS continues to hold annual conferences, has developed a paid secretariat structure, negotiated divisional autonomy, and publishes a national magazine, *Communiqué*. It also oversaw the development of the Canadian Institute on Student Affairs and Services (CISAS). Changes to its divisional structure include the departure of the Canadian Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, and the creation of the National Aboriginal Student Services Association (NASSA), the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-secondary Education (CADSPPE), and the Canadian Academic Integrity and Student Judicial Affairs (CAISJA).

#### *Structure of student affairs*

Student affairs units are headed by individuals holding an array of titles, including vice president, associate vice president, provost, director, or dean; generically they are referred to as chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) or senior student affairs officers (SSAOs). The reporting relationship also varies by institution, with some reporting directly to the president, and others to either academic or administrative vice presidents. Additionally, some CSAOs may be academic appointments, rather than being hired from among non-academic student affairs practitioners. The CSAO role can be complex, including managing a wide variety of staff units, developing policies and managing resources, and co-ordinating co-curricular education and student support, as well as the



development of the campus environment, more than simply providing administrative support for service delivery (Sullivan, 2010; Sandeen, 1991).

This structure is reflected in Canada as well. There is a range of activities included within student affairs units, which may be supportive, educational, regulatory or responsive. Direct student services such as health, counselling, psychiatry, career, and financial aid are usually under the aegis of student affairs. Recruitment, registrarial and academic advising may or may not be. Residence student life is also generally included, although facilities management may not be (Lane Vetere, 2010; Sullivan, 2010; Robinson, 2003). In Canada it is notable that few institutions have a direct relationship with fraternity or sorority houses, and in most cases Greek life is specifically excluded from campus recognition. Increasingly, services and programming related to specific groups of students are provided through student affairs, including disability services, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered student support, and services for specific ethnic or cultural groups.

Some of these activities may be undertaken by student associations rather than by student affairs staff. The model of elected student associations at Canadian universities is to have central, formally-constituted and separately incorporated student associations, often with budgets of millions of dollars and full-time elected student executives managing significant numbers of staff members. These student associations manage a wide range of services and activities, which can include health and dental plans, student clubs, advocacy groups such as women's centres, on and off campus housing, food banks, foot patrols, legal advice, businesses such as campus pubs, restaurants or bookstores, and student centre administration. Additionally, programs such as new

student orientation and peer mentoring may be run by the student association directly, or in collaboration with student affairs staff. Student leaders are also expected to represent their constituents on numerous university committees, and many student leaders are involved in political lobbying at the municipal, provincial and federal levels around student issues. In student associations, full-time staff are supervised directly by the student executive; thus, skills such as budgeting, risk management and event planning may well be provided in house by student association staff (Robinson, 2010; Robinson, 2004; Jones, 1995).

Much of the information related to Canadian student affairs practices is currently anecdotal. In order to help develop a more coherent view of these practices, it is important to examine what values student affairs practitioners bring to their work, as what they consider important can inform their approach.

#### *Student affairs at a national level*

The primary student affairs organisation is the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS), which holds an annual conference, sponsors professional development, publishes a magazine, maintains a job database, and has a volunteer board of directors. There are several divisions dedicated to student affairs specializations within CACUSS, including disability services, counselling services, aboriginal student services, judicial affairs, and health services (Cox & Strange, 2010).

Another interesting point about Canadian student affairs is the extent to which professional preparation is expected or required for entry and progress in the field. In the United States, there are 130 student affairs master's degree programs and 60 doctoral

degree programs (ACPA, 2009). There are currently no specialized graduate degree programs in student affairs in Canada, although a number of university faculties of education have higher education/post-secondary education graduate programs (Memorial University, University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto,). Memorial University's program has courses on the administration of student services and student development theory (Cox & Strange, 2010). At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the Higher Education department is now offering courses in student development theory, the student experience, and student services (OISE, 2010). Through the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD) at the University of Manitoba in conjunction with CACUSS, the Canadian Institute on Student Affairs and Services (CISAS) offers an annual intensive program which included the history of student affairs in Canada, missions and goals, student development theory, current issues and research, funding and organisation of student affairs, and professional development. This program was recently restarted after a hiatus (CHERD, 2010). A number of the participants in this study had pursued professional preparation graduate programs in the United States, and as will be seen, while they acknowledged the importance of understanding research and literature related to American student affairs practices, they were unanimous in saying that there needed to be research that reflected practices and student affairs' role in post-secondary education in Canada. From this study, and anecdotally, it appears that a significant proportion of preparation for student affairs practice in Canada arises from experiential learning obtained during practitioners'

undergraduate years, for example as student leaders in student government or residence life.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to delve into what experienced practitioners value in student affairs. More specifically, this study explores what they consider to be the role of student affairs, the values important to their work, and what values conflicts they encounter. As will be seen in *Chapter Two: Literature Review*, there is an abundance of American student affairs literature that considers ethical principles and practice, but there is little that explores the actual values of student affairs practice.

In this study, the term *values* is used in preference to *morals* or *ethics*. This is deliberate, as each of these words has associated meanings – although there is overlap and in some cases in the literature the terms are used interchangeably. Morality can have overtones of judgement and can be associated with religious beliefs and practices. The term *ethics* tends to be more associated with decision-making practices, rather than with personal values. So, for example, a person may have the value of being student-centred, which informs not only their decision-making, but also their actions, planning, priorities and enthusiasm for their work; in terms of ethics, it is more common to describe the need to be mindful, or beneficent, in one's decision-making. This is explored in more detail in the literature review. In this study, I was primarily interested in exploring what student affairs practitioners believe to be the essence of their work.

The genesis of this study arose from a conversation with my supervisor, Glen Jones, in which we discussed several fundamental questions: what do student affairs

practitioners consider to be the role of student affairs in Canadian universities, what are various things that we do not know about how student affairs practice is undertaken, and what are the values that motivates student affairs practitioners? In effect, the purpose of this study is to begin to illuminate what is at the core of student affairs practice in Canada.

### ***Research Questions***

There are three main questions that are the focus of the study: What do Canadian student affairs practitioners see as their role, what values do they bring to this, and what conflicts arise from holding these values?

To address these questions, this study undertook a qualitative, constructivist approach. An interview protocol was developed, and 15 student affairs practitioners were selected as participants, as described below in *Chapter 3: Methodology*. First round interviews were conducted using the interview protocol as a guide, with follow-ups and prompts when needed. Data were then analysed in order to construct a framework of student affairs values, which was then tested by re-interviewing all participants. From this, a coherent set of values was derived, reflected in both an exploration of the role of student affairs in Canadian institutions, and then identifying areas in which values conflicts occurred, as these are intensely illustrative of how personal and professional values are put into practice.

### ***Organisation of the Study***

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The literature review provides an overview of the existing research and theory related to student affairs values: a discussion of student affairs codes of practice, student affairs principles, ethics and values, ethical dilemmas and their resolution, ethical decision-making models, and teaching values and ethics to practitioners. Following the literature review, Chapter Three explains the selection of a constructivist methodology for this study, as well as the techniques used to select and interview participants, and to collect and analyze the data. The next three chapters are the results of the study, based on the determination of categories from the development of the interview protocol and through the data analysis: the fourth chapter, on the role of student affairs in Canadian universities, includes participants' reflection on the importance of different aspects of their work; the fifth chapter discusses the values identified by participants that are central to their practice; the sixth chapter includes the different categories of value conflicts that participants encountered, and their reflections about them. The conclusion examines the findings of the study and future related research that could be undertaken in this area.

### ***Glossary of Terms and Acronyms***

This is included in order to provide a brief description of organisational acronyms or specific terms that are commonly used in this study.

1. *Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)*: The national association of public and private not-for-profit degree-level post-secondary institutions in Canada.

2. *American College Personnel Association (ACPA)*: Now the College Student Educators International, but still referred to by its original acronym, this organisation is a national student affairs organisation in the United States.
3. *Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS)*: The national organisation of student affairs and student services practitioners in Canada.
4. *Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)*: National research, lobby and service organisation made up of college and university undergraduate and graduate student associations. The CFS has provincial component organisations with their own offices and staff. The CFS has a reputation for strong political campaigning.
5. *Centre for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD)*: Based at the University of Manitoba, this organisation offers various in-person and online courses to higher education administrators, among others.
6. *Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO)*: A generic term to refer to the head of student affairs and services units, as the range of titles from institution to institution varies greatly.
7. *Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium (CUSC)*: A survey of first year university undergraduates in Canada, based on institutional participation. It assesses the undergraduate student experience, demographics and finances
8. *Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities*: An annual national guide by Maclean's Magazine that ranks universities in Canada. Some universities pulled out of this survey in 2006, citing methodological concerns.
9. *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)*: Now Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, but still referred to by its original acronym, this organisation is a national student affairs organisation in the United States.
10. *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)*: A survey of university undergraduates in the United States and Canada, based on institutional participation. It assesses student participation in curricular and co-curricular activities.
11. *Student association*: Generic term for a university's elected central student representative organisation, which is likely to have an advocacy and service role. In this study, this term is used in preference to *student government*, which implies an element of political control, or *student union*, which is a more politicized term.
12. *Student leader*: Generally, in this study, a positional elected student representative, and/or a member of the student association executive. Student

leaders in Canada are usually included on university decision-making bodies, and may have a strong political advocacy approach.

### ***Conclusion***

The field of Canadian student affairs is ripe for further research. The recognition and discussion of the values that practitioners bring to their work is a fundamental starting point. Values underlie people's motivations, decisions, and practices, and an understanding of practitioners' values can illustrate what they consider to be important and meaningful in their work, which illuminates the core of their practice.



## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### ***Introduction***

A discussion of values in student affairs can be wide-ranging, and narrowing down applicable literature can be both challenging and frustrating. Challenging in that there are multiple perspectives; frustrating in that there are some gaps. The bulk of the student affairs literature that deals with values and ethics is related to either conceptual discussions, or professional standards, and it is almost entirely focussed on the American system of higher education. Gaps also include the values inherent in different systems and campus environments, including legal issues, social mores and the contrast between publicly and privately funded institutions, as well as the involvement of students in shaping campus environments, and student activism around ethical or values discourses. Included in this literature review are summaries of ethical standards as outlined by professional associations, as well as articles related to ethical practices and values in student affairs. Academic studies and commentaries regarding both student affairs values and student affairs ethics are referenced extensively in this chapter; as described in the Introduction, the two terms are not always used distinctly, but it is helpful to consider *values* to be related to those beliefs brought to the broad practice of student affairs, and *ethics* to be related to principled decision-making. Both have applicability to this study.

### ***Canadian Association of College and University Student Services***

There is limited literature available in Canada related to professional practice and values. The Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS)

has a Mission of Student Services (1989), which states that the role of student affairs professionals is to act as advocates for students, and to promote their rights and responsibilities within the campus community. Student affairs staff assist students in both their intellectual development and their personal growth. The mission makes the following statements:

- The mission of the educational institution is paramount.
- Quality of life in a teaching and learning community is crucial to the educational mission.
- Each individual has worth and dignity, and should be treated with respect.
- Post-secondary education should be aimed at an individual's total growth.
- Learning is contextual and is influenced by a wide range of individual and environmental factors.
- Student services professionals are educators.
- The educational goals of post-secondary institutions are best realized through a partnership of Student Services personnel with students, staff, administrators, faculty (CACUSS, 1989).

In terms of values and professional practice, the CACUSS mission statement exhorts its membership to act as educators, within the framework of student development theory, in order to facilitate social, psychological, ethical, cultural and spiritual development. The advocacy role includes the elimination of all types of discrimination and the promotion of diversity on campuses. Additionally, there is a research role in understanding the needs and demographics of students. Programs should be developed in

an appropriate, responsive, and outcomes-based way. Confidentiality of records, as well as personal and professional communication, must be maintained.

There is recognition among CACUSS members in Canada that the mission statement should be revised and updated, and indeed that was the subject of two CACUSS conference sessions and an ongoing review process named the CACUSS Identity Project (Lane Vetere, 2009; Hannah, Patterson, Cull, & Cummings, 2006).

### *American Codes of Practice*

The CACUSS Mission Statement principles are quite similar to statements developed by the two American student affairs associations, the National Association of College Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), although the advocacy role is more stressed in the CACUSS statement. In addition, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) has a Statement of Shared Ethical Principles that is largely based on Kitchener's (1985) ethical principles (see below), adding *veracity* and *affiliation*. The CAS Statement suggests that these principles form the foundation for member association ethical codes.

Most of the member associations represented in CAS are guided by ethical codes of professional practice enforced through the prescribed channels of its association. CAS acknowledges and respects the individual codes and standards of ethical conduct of their organizations. From these codes, CAS has created a statement of shared ethical principles that focuses on seven basic principles that form the foundation for CAS

member association codes: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, veracity, and affiliation. This statement is not intended to replace or supplant the code of ethics of any professional association; rather, it is intended to articulate those shared ethical principles ... When professionals act in accordance with ethical principles, program quality and excellence are enhanced and ultimately students are better served. As professionals providing services in higher education, we are committed to upholding these shared ethical principles, for the benefit of our students, our professions, and higher education (Council for the Advancement of Standards, pp. 1-2)

Evans and Reason (2001) summarised philosophical statements related to student affairs and student services organisations in the United States for the last century. They found that they had remained largely consistent. From the student affairs perspective, the “whole” student is important; there is concern not only for students’ cognitive development, but also for their affective and social needs. This includes fostering a respect for individual differences, and over time the statements evolved to identify precise socio-cultural groups in likely need of particular support. Additionally, there was early identification of the need to cultivate students’ abilities to self-direct and to be self-aware; more tenuously, to foster a sense among students of their responsibility to society. Similarly, student affairs itself, in a climate of greater accountability, also needs to justify practices and priorities. Other key areas identified in these documents included the need to create a supportive learning environment, to be intentional about planning

programming and services based on appropriate research and theory, and to participate in the institutional educational mission, and instruction of students, both formally and informally. Also highlighted in numerous documents is the need to collaborate with faculty and other administrators, in terms of sharing information, developing classroom initiatives and student learning support, and engaging in co-instruction and the development of learning communities inside and outside the classroom.

The authors commented that in their review of philosophical statements, they were “left with the nagging question, ‘Is that all there is?’” (Evans & Reason, 2001, p. 375). They cited the lack of reference to any kind of advocacy or activism on behalf of students, the lack of critical examination not only of the field of student affairs, but of higher education through the lens of the profession, and the lack of a desire to become agents of change. They also pointed out that while education, psychology and management principles are well-represented in student affairs guiding documents, concepts from political science, anthropology, sociology and communications are lacking. The authors called for the incorporation of critical theory in the development of a philosophy of student affairs.

Winston and Dagley (1985) affirmed the importance of professional standards of conduct, but pointed out that they are not the end point of ethical practice. They identified different uses for ethical standards: as a pedagogical tool for student and new professionals, as guidelines for practical decisions, to clarify responsibilities, to protect the profession, for public affirmation of the role of student affairs, to protect individual practitioners, and for performance appraisal. In their article, the authors included a useful point-by-point comparison table between different professional organisations’ ethical

standards (p. 55). They discussed whether codes are philosophical and abstract, or include pragmatic and specific advice. They also raised the question as to whether professional codes should address controversial issues, and to what do practitioners owe their primary obligation, students or their institution? The authors pointed out that ethical statements, while useful, do have some drawbacks and limitations. One is a lack of enforcement of professional standards. Another is that many policies and standards are reactive to situations, and do not include advocacy, or the need to oppose institutional actions that are detrimental to students. Policies are not usually developed using standards that could avert ethical problems, but rather tend to be ambiguous. Finally, many policies and standard statements have inherent contradictions.

### *Principles of Student Affairs Practice*

Rhatigan (2000) pointed out that early student affairs work was more concerned with morality than moral development, and was based on an emphasis on humanism; this includes an expectation of rationality, the potential for human perfectibility and the importance of self-awareness. Reason and action helped define the growth of many institutions in the United States, including post-secondary education. However, the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century saw a series of changes to higher education. Post-World War II student affairs dealt with returning veterans, who were older than traditional-aged students, as well as an increase in the number of women and minority students. Additionally, with the Cold War, in the United States there was a concern over the spread of communism. Combined with the growth of racial tension in the 1950s, and the student activism movement in the 1960s, there was a shift in the campus climate. It was at this time that

student development theory became more of an underpinning of student affairs work. Rhatigan (2000) anticipated that the emerging philosophies of student affairs would focus on how to balance knowledge and skills development, with ethics and citizenship. Examination of power structures, particularly in terms of shifting away from a hierarchical organisational model, would be a positive step. Another major point to consider is whether students are seen as consumers or customers, and what their relationship is with the institution. Finally, he highlighted the use of technology and how it can impact student life. It is worth noting that some of these historical issues may be different in the Canadian context.

Blimling, Whitt and Associates (1990) identified seven key principles that they felt should guide student affairs practice. *Engaging students in active learning* includes promoting activities outside the classroom that help achieve the institution's educational goals, and this is directly related to the institutional mission. *Helping students develop coherent values and ethical standards* derives from public concerns about the moral development of post-secondary students, and relates to the development of character, values, and citizenship; student affairs may be actively involved in programs to promote academic integrity, or civic engagement. *Setting high expectations for learning* not only reflects academic standards, but also includes giving responsibility to students, even in cases where professional staff may be more effective or efficient. *Using systemic inquiry to improve performance* means that student affairs must regularly assess student and institutional performance, rather than simply relying on anecdotal evidence, or reacting to outside pressures, such as student demands. *Using resources to achieve institutional missions and goals* involves managing students' money responsibly in the administration

of ancillary service activities. *Forging educational partnerships* consists of working collaboratively with faculty, even in the face of an adversarial or indifferent relationship between the two bodies. *Creating inclusive communities* helps support a diverse student population, and clearly defining what the institutional community consists of, in order that all students feel the necessary inclusion to facilitate their success.

While the focus of these principles is largely on administrative management, they do provide comment on values appropriate to student affairs practitioners. Primarily, there is an emphasis on student affairs staff as educators and as shapers of campus communities. To a large extent, Blimling, Whitt and Associates (1990) exhorted practitioners to take greater responsibility for these areas. Of particular relevance to this study is the role that student affairs practitioners are asked to take in shaping students' values and ethical development.

Young (2003) pointed to four main philosophies of thought prevalent in universities that are reflected in student affairs. They are rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism and postmodernism. Rationalism is reflected in an education focussing on reason and universal truths, and student affairs in such an environment would focus on provided extra-curricular services, providing a disciplinary framework, and identifying and recruiting good students. An empirical approach focuses on observation and specialized knowledge; empirical student affairs practice has a broad, somewhat fragmented role, focussing on administrative practices and accountability measures. Pragmatism is based on outcomes, learner-centred constructed knowledge, and student affairs in this climate emphasizes the worth of the individual, the dignity of thinking, feeling and working, and the value of experiential learning. Postmodernism places



individual experience into the context of power structures of society. Knowledge is subjective, relative and contextual. In this framework, students are perceived as consumers, legal rights are emphasised, and marginalised groups are readily-identified and programs are provided for them.

Whether or not we agree with these characterisations or with their application to student affairs, it is useful to consider that different philosophical approaches, or paradigms, affect how student affairs relates to the educational mission of the institution, and to students.

Young (2003) said that student affairs tends to be more closely aligned with pragmatism and postmodernism, but points out that in higher education it is impossible to draw clear lines distinguishing any of the four. These values tend to focus on individuals, the context in which they exist, and caring for them. In terms of student development, student affairs values focus on the growth of a meaningful individual student identity: the development of a responsible, unique person. This development is not only intellectual, but also social, physical, aesthetic, and spiritual. Such development occurs within a context of student programming designed to promote social development and to challenge the student to take on responsibility for their own growth, and to care about society.

Richard Keeling (2004), in *Learning Reconsidered*, issued a strong call for student affairs to collaborate with faculty in transforming the type of education provided by post-secondary education, with the overarching principle being the primacy of effective student learning. He said that traditional forms of instruction focus on information transfer, which does not satisfy our current understanding of most effective learning. He called for a shift to

transformative learning, which engages students in complex experiences that increases cognitive and psychosocial development.

An institutional shift to transformative learning would involve the development of specific mission statements and planning to increase collaboration between faculty and student affairs staff to ensure that it takes place seamlessly between the classroom and co-curricular activities, which includes both information and reflection. Keeling pointed out that this type of learning is a hallmark of much of student affairs work and co-curricular involvement, as students are in a receptive and reflective state when they undertake such activities. “For such transformative learning to occur, students must 1) enter a state of relaxed alertness, 2) participate in an orchestrated immersion in a complex experience that in some way illustrates phenomena that are connected to the subject and 3) engage in active processing or reflection on the experience” (p. 12).

Students learn what they need to know to accomplish a particular task such as resolving a conflict, confronting or counseling another student or taking leadership responsibility in a group. Students are in a state of relaxed alertness when they participate in student development education sessions because they know what they need to know and, while challenge may be present, the threat level is low. Although they may receive evaluation and feedback, grading is generally not involved. The complex experiences in which students engage are related to issues of concern to them and are generally enjoyable. These programs typically include opportunities for students to reflect on and discuss how they plan to use what they have learned. (Keeling, 2004, p. 13)

Keeling called for every aspect of students' lives to be examined, in order to create a new map for learning. "*All of the resources of the campus must be brought to bear on the student's learning process and learning must be reconsidered*" (Keeling, 2004, p. 10, italics in original). He said that transformative learning unites the acquisition of knowledge and student development in multiple contexts, involving not only the acquisition of factual knowledge, but also action, reflection and emotional engagement. This model replaces outdated methods of information transfer that take place primarily in the classroom. He called for campuses to map their environment, in order to determine what learning experiences exist or can be created, so as to assess the quality of learning that takes place. This approach also enables greater support for collaboration among educators, who include student affairs staff as well as faculty.

Keeling (2004) lists different contexts in which learning can take place. The *social context* includes personal relationships, group memberships and inter-group connections. The *academic context* includes providing opportunities for reflective judgement and critical thinking, the use of constructivist classroom teaching methods, interdisciplinary and experiential learning opportunities, and personal engagement with faculty. The *institutional context* includes promoting learning through providing student leadership roles, work-study opportunities, teaching or research assistantships, off-campus work or service, and engagement with campus codes, processes, norms of behaviour, and campus culture. In the transformative learning model, the student is stimulated to learn through identity evolution, development of emotional coherence and integrity, challenges to cognitive complexity, personal interactions that develop their life management skills, and reflection about their core values, life goals, and their relationship with the broader community.

Student affairs work can enhance this model in other ways, such as through programs that encourage co-curricular participation and training, particularly for students in positions of responsibility such as residence assistants, orientation leaders, or peer counsellors. Keeling (2004) suggested engaging faculty in training programs and other activities that address both academic and non-academic needs, such as academic integrity, health education, retention, civil behaviour, the ethical climate on campus, and so on. When structures are in place that join the different aspects of campus life, this demonstrates to students the importance of broader student development. Student affairs can also take the lead in assessment of overall student learning, and the different student learning opportunities. He added that assessment should go beyond student satisfaction in order primarily to focus on student learning, through using innovative methods to determine how it is taking place.

In order to advocate for a transformative learning environment, student affairs staff need to bring their own expertise in student development and student success, and knowledge of the needs of a diverse student population, into the planning process in order to help establish a common understanding of experiential learning. Keeling (2004) stressed that professional graduate preparation needs to address these issues, and that student affairs professionals need to demonstrate cognitive complexity and the ability to incorporate theories of student development and learning into their practice. Staff must have a detailed understanding of higher education issues and concerns, and have well-developed professional skills such as conflict resolution and community development. To advance humanitarianism they need to have a strong grasp of diversity and multiculturalism, and to promote engaged citizenship among students, they should address the needs of students at different developmental levels, including motivating them to engage in experiential learning

opportunities. Encouraging the development of interpersonal skills and competence among students requires that student affairs staff be comfortable with counselling theories and skills, in addition to having a familiarity with identity, spiritual and career development theories. Similarly, assisting students with practical competence development necessitates an understanding of health, wellness and time management issues, and appropriate interventions. Learning theory and knowledge of factors that enhance student retention and success are needed to encourage student persistence and academic achievement, including understanding cultural and background factors that may influence student success. Keeling stressed that student affairs professionals should “understand how to be advocates and change agents” in their work (p. 31).

Keeling (2004) lists a number of steps that institutions can undertake in order to promote transformational learning. These include an intentional review and strengthening of structures and resources; developing specific desired learning outcomes and assessment tools to measure them; consultation with students; a strong message from senior administration, faculty and staff encouraging this approach; a review of administrative structures to ensure that student development is facilitated rather than impeded; accountability and rewards for campus educators in achieving learning outcomes; and the development of a collaborative partnership model between academic and student affairs staff. Resources should be allocated to projects that allow students to track their progress in different learning outcomes, and which help them to understand and reflect on the type of learning they are experiencing. Community-based projects should also be developed. Transformative learning should be experienced by all students – commuters, older than average students, part-time students, and graduate students.

Finally, professional development should be provided to all campus educators, in order to encourage them to improve continually student learning (Keeling, 2004, pp. 33-34)

While the original *Learning Reconsidered* (2004) focussed primarily on the foundations and theory of transformation learning, it was followed in 2006 by *Learning reconsidered 2: Implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*, which was also edited by Richard Keeling. The articles in this document primarily cover different strategies for implementing learning outcomes on an institution-wide basis, although Fried (2006) spoke of the reasons to reconsider learning, by pointing out that the current model is “out of date and inaccurate” and is not a productive educational activity. She said that traditional learning reflects of positivist epistemology which does not incorporate personal development, experiences, emotions or meaning, and which does not reflect the idea that knowledge is constructed and that knowledge and meaning-making takes place inside and outside the academic context. She advocated having a broad understanding of constructivism as a more meaningful learning model, as it supports an understanding of context, perceptions, relationships and people’s roles in society. “Constructivism challenges positivism in a profound way by asserting that there is rarely a single truth about any situation although there may be a consensus about accurate information” (p. 4).

It remains to be seen how broadly transformative learning and the implementation of learning outcomes as a means of developing and assessing educational practices will be adopted by North American post-secondary institutions. Authors involved in *Learning Reconsidered 1 and 2* are aware of the challenges inherent in reshaping educational

systems, particularly if this is driven by student affairs rather than by academics.

Mullendore (2006) even pointed out that:

Cynics may argue that *Learning Reconsidered* is the most recent attempt by the student affairs profession to level the playing field with their academic counterparts at a time when the profession is struggling to maintain its (rightful) place at the president's table (p. 65).

To counter this, Mullendore said, it is important to realize that the impact of *Learning Reconsidered* (2004) is that it integrates student affairs and academic work in a manner that calls for faculty, staff and administrators to “reinvent higher education” (p. 65). Academic learning and student development in this model are intentionally welded together. In effect, then, the impetus behind *Learning Reconsidered 1 and 2* is to assert the overarching primacy of holistic student learning and development, and this is a value that reverberates through both documents.

### ***Values of Student Affairs***

In the United States, values discussions in student affairs have been taking place for a long time. The Student Personnel Point of View (SPPOV) (1989, cited by NASPA, 2006), focused on a number of issues that are familiar throughout student affairs literature. Particularly emphasized was individual student development, encompassing not only intellectual growth, but also physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. As well, certain values ought to be promoted, specifically, a belief in democracy, an understanding of its issues and mechanism, and a personal commitment to

democratic goals. The SPPOV decried the 19<sup>th</sup> century view inherited from German universities that intellectualism is paramount. In order to facilitate broad student development, the SPPOV called for strong new student orientation and fostering a sense of belonging to the college environment, support for student academic success, good living facilities, good physical health, varied personal interests, control over financial resources, and vocational development. There was also promotion of different traits, which effectively foreshadows the growth of student development theory: self-understanding, emotional control, sense of individuality and responsibility, ethical and spiritual growth, learning to live with others, and satisfying sexual adjustments (with a notable focus on marriage). In order to foster this growth, the SPPOV outlined the elements of an effective student personnel (student affairs) program. These are: good academic and personal records, provision of counselling, mental and physical health services, academic support, housing and food services, activities programming, an educational disciplinary approach,, financial aid and work opportunities, career services, international student support, religious and interfaith activities, counselling for married or engaged students, and continual service evaluation. Truly, although the language and some particular emphases have shifted, this document does not differ enormously from many subsequent American descriptions of either student affairs structures and values, or student development theory.

Astin (1989) spoke of the moral messages of the university being an expression of values. Explicit values are those seen in the formal mission or institutional objectives, and implicit values are reflected in actual decisions. These include resource allocation, staffing, and pedagogy. Institutional problems arise when there are inconsistencies



between the two sets of values. Astin argued that one way to bring implicit values forward is to have a discussion on what excellence really means; he cited reputational excellence, or resource excellence (student and faculty achievement, survey scores, etc.), as the two most common measures, but suggested that a more appropriate approach would be to assess talent development. He particularly stressed the importance of students acquiring a sense of citizenship and a desire to contribute to society. When an institution exists primarily for its own sake, and when it identifies itself primarily in terms of its resources and reputation, its capacity to serve as an instrument for improving society is compromised.

Young (2001), in an article about the value of scholarship in student affairs, summarized different authors' perspectives on student affairs values. Winston and Saunders (1991) deduced from historical documents the values of holism, humanism, pragmatism and individualism. As seen below, Kitchener's (1985) principles of ethical practice consist of respecting autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and being just (Young did not include being faithful). Dalton and Healy (1984, cited in Young, 2001) included the following values in student affairs programs: self-awareness, independence, tolerance, respect, and fairness to other individuals. The eight essential values in student affairs identified by Young and Elfrink (1990, cited in Young, 2001) were truth, justice, equality, human dignity, aesthetics, community, freedom and altruism. Young (2001) distinguished between groups of values; those relating to differences and individuality (diversity, freedom, justice and other democratic values), and those relating to community (equality, truth, social justice, holism). There is a tension between higher education's mandate to seek abstract truth, and its service to the public good. "An

educational community is one of mutual empowerment, and the search for and sharing of truth is an obligation of all the members. What one does has an impact on the meaning of all” (Young, 2001, p. 326). In essence, the main values of student affairs are distilled to supporting the development of both individuals and community.

According to Young (2003), the contextual values of student affairs include the development of community, equality and justice for individuals, caring, and service. Ethics in this context are not based on logic or an abstract framework, but on caring or virtue; that being an understanding of the context of the situation and the well-being of the individuals involved. Young sees the future of values development in student affairs as unsettled; if postmodernism continues to be stressed, this could result in dynamic social change or sheer confusion; social reform may or may not win out over nihilism. Which is to be emphasised: Mind, logic, practicality, heart or identity? To what extent should student affairs promote the traditional goals of higher education, or encourage a different set of values? He pointed out that even asking these questions has value.

Dalton (1993) said that student affairs needs to advocate eight essential values (Young and Elfrink, 1990, cited in Dalton, 1993), because whether or not they are formally stated, student affairs practitioners will be demonstrating them in their different activities. Values underscore both decisions and conduct. He cautioned against the concern that a values discussion entails indoctrination or moralization. On the contrary, identifying and implementing values helps to develop a common purpose, and assists in ensuring they are implemented throughout the organisation’s activities. In order to accomplish this, values-centred leadership is particularly important. This involves role

modelling, communicating values, having appropriate rules and policies, and celebrating traditions.

Dalton (1993) identified five approaches to implement essential values. The first is *values transmission*, which involves direct and public promotion of values throughout the organisation. The next is *values clarification*, through discussion and reflection. *Analysis of moral issues* is also important; such discussion helps clarify issues and develop greater knowledge and sophistication, including the understanding that there may not be one clear answer in complex situations. A *commitment to values* is “perhaps the single most important factor in encouraging others to take values seriously” (Dalton, 1993, p. 94). Finally, *moral action* enables individuals to have practical opportunities to put values into practice, for example through activities or projects that promote social good.

Values conflicts are inevitable in student affairs work; Dalton (1993) cites sexual assault, racism, discrimination, academic cheating, alcohol and drug abuse, and multiculturalism as areas in which student affairs leaders will need to make decisions and judgements around issues.

In earlier times, when there was greater social consensus about core values, it might have been easier to maintain and promote a status quo.

Today, however, student affairs staff confront a pluralism of values and life-styles on campus that openly compete and often clash (Dalton, 1993, p. 94).

It is an interesting question about whether increased pluralism on campus results in more ethical complexity. In addition, it is worth noting that the examples of values conflict cited by Dalton (1993) are all related to students; the implicit assumption is that all is calm in the domain of administrative decision-making.

Baxter Magolda (2003) felt that student affairs has a distinct role in transforming higher education. She suggested that as identity formation is such a crucial part of student learning, it is important to increase the linkage between traditional pedagogy that is focussed on knowledge acquisition, and reflecting on personal experiences and identity. She saw student affairs as having a pivotal role in this, and proposed a framework in which to do so. She cited three key assumptions: “knowledge was complex and socially constructed, the self was viewed as central to constructing knowledge, and authority and expertise were shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers.” Her three key principles are that “learners were validated as capable of knowing, learning was situated in learners’ experience, and learning was defined as mutually constructed meaning.” Baxter Magolda suggested several ways in which this can be implemented. One is through multicultural education, based on Ortiz and Rhoads’ (2000, cited in Baxter Magolda, 2003) model which began with understanding the complexity of culture and how individuals construct it, then learning about other cultures, and then recognizing and deconstructing the normalization of white culture. This concluded with examining how cultures shape each other, and how personal identity can be reflected in a multicultural model. Another educational tool is to implement a community standards model, in which students create their own expectations of what is appropriate behaviour, and develop agreements on how to interact. They are also given responsibility for

resolving problems, including raising awareness of how negative behaviour affects others, and having individual members of the community take responsibility for their actions. Baxter Magolda (2003) pointed out that this model, which can be implemented in residences, student groups, and student employment, helps to develop real responsibility and the ability to negotiate with others. She cites other examples of ways that students can be actively involved in learning and knowledgeable peer support, and considers that the creation of such opportunities is key to transformational education. “They would receive a consistent message that who they are and are becoming is central to success in learning, career decisions, understanding diversity, and interacting peacefully with others” (p. 244). She said that such opportunities may be less comfortable for students, as they entail giving students responsibility, with the corollary of staff relinquishing authority. Creating an educational peer culture will, however, help students learn extremely valuable competencies within a supportive environment, “creating appropriate challenges in a setting where learning and mistakes that are inherently part of it are less costly than in life after college.”

Banning (1997) discussed how to assess the ethical climate of a campus. Universities periodically respond to issues related to misconduct in a wide range of areas, both among students and also among faculty and staff. One issue that he identified is that most ethical decisions are seen as being in the purview of individuals, rather than being systemic. This is reflected, for example, in the provision of professional codes of conduct. He suggested approaching ethical behaviour at a community level. He examined Kitchener’s (1985) principles of respecting autonomy, doing no harm, benefitting others, being just, and being faithful, with the addition of caring, which he refers to as the *ethical*

*principles aggregation approach*. Another option is Brown's (1985) *fulfillment of community values approach* which focuses on assessing how well an institution follows its stated values and goals. The other approach he cited is the *community change process approach*, based on Kelman and Warwick's (1978, cited in Banning, 1997) discussion on how institutional change is managed ethically. Banning (1987) said that examining campus artifacts such as art, architecture, graffiti and signs can give a useful indicator of a campus ethical climate, regarding what types of messages they conveyed. These can be assessed by the type of artifacts, by the *ethical issues dimension* (in what ways are the above ethical approaches reflected?) and by the *evaluative dimension* (does it convey a positive or a negative message?). Examining different aspects of the physical campus can demonstrate the moral climate of the campus, including providing examples of ethically positive or ethically negative artifacts; changing these artifacts can create change in the campus community.

Young (1993) examined five historical student affairs documents to determine the extent to values identified by Sandeen (cited in Young, 1993) were reflected. He identified:

Three domains of essential student affairs values, two of which encompassed subordinate instrumental values: human dignity (with freedom, altruism and truth), equality, and community (with justice). Aesthetics was not mentioned enough to be included with the others. The values of human dignity and community were ordered along a continuum

from the individual to the broader society, respectively, with equality reflecting aspects of both. (Young, 1993, p. 6).

Young (1993) said that human dignity included respect for individuality and personal freedom, including the facilitation of self-directed student development. To accomplish this, student affairs professionals should have an interest in individual students, to know their needs, and that students should be free to reject advice and make their own decisions. He also said that student affairs staff were likely to broadly define their work to include knowledge of self and environment, self-realization of students, and to include social, moral and physical development as well as intellectual learning. He highlighted the importance of student affairs research. In terms of equality, he said that student affairs is mandated to work towards it, for both individuals and groups. The rise of social movements has increased the emphasis on multicultural understanding and of working to reduce social inequality, rather than assuming that each student starts at an equal level. Community is manifested by creating social situations in which students can develop; in contrast with perhaps more impersonal relationships that students may have with faculty or other administrative staff, student affairs can interact with students in a personally empowering way. Justice is reflected in disciplinary cases, but more broadly as well in interactions with both individuals and groups, in ensuring that fairness in providing learning opportunities is a priority across campus.

Young (1993) asks several questions related to a shift in values from historical documents:

Our values seem somewhat different today. Factors such as cultural diversity have affected them. ... Such changes mandate further review of the essential values of student affairs. Which are external and which are ephemeral? How can we use our values well? (p. 12).

Manning (2001) spoke of the emerging importance of religion and spirituality in post-secondary education, and how this translates in terms of spirit or soul in student affairs organisational structures. She referenced Briskin's (1996, cited in Manning, 2001) categorisation of the soul into upperworld, a sense of connection, joy, happiness and health, and underworld, from which comes abandonment, rage and despair. The former is emphasised and the latter is suppressed, but self-knowledge requires that both are acknowledged. In terms of organisational theory, a professional environment is one in which feelings and personal concerns are not acknowledged and humanity is denied; thus, work is often seen as an abandonment of any spiritual side – which means the exclusion of what makes us human – and as a simple exchange for salary. While this may appear fanciful, Manning made an excellent point that student affairs is greatly concerned with such issues; concern for others, a desire to make a difference, social justice, and experiencing new challenges, are all facets of the work. Manning cited areas that have to do with the soul's upperworld as being: The opportunity to experience great joy from the work, a sense of accomplishment in educating students, non-material career satisfaction, celebration of their own and students' successes, and a healthy lifestyle. The underworld aspects include impatience with students and staff, overwork and exhaustion, territoriality and competitiveness, co-dependent relationships, and a lack of balance between work and



play. Student affairs administrators should be aware of and acknowledge the polarities inherent in themselves and their work.

According to Manning (2001), student affairs administrators often were themselves transformed as students, and experience a further spiritual journey in their work. Leadership in student affairs can involve discovering what matters to others, sharing with them, and knowing them personally. A leader does not rely on a position of authority, but acts by empowering others; people see their work as meaningful and worthwhile, they create together, and celebrate together. Manning recommends striving for balance between work and play, emphasising non-dualistic thinking and an understanding of complexity, embracing wholeness in individuals and the organisation, including negative aspects, making room for silence and calm; creating a meaningful language to express spiritual terms, and embracing playfulness.

This article relates to this study around issues related to understanding the negative as well as the positive, and how a sense of both personal and organisational wholeness and integrity is developed. The passion and the frustrations that infuse student affairs affect how administrators see themselves and their work; discovering what some motivating factors are for student affairs administrators would be helpful.

### ***Ethical Principles of Student Affairs Work***

Kitchener (1985) provided a foundational piece on ethical decision-making in student affairs. She suggested three levels: the first being professional rules and codes of ethics, the next being ethical principles, and the third ethical theories. In many cases, professional codes or rules can provide sufficient guidance; she cited as an example the

ACPA Code of Ethics. However, she pointed out that there will be situations in which ethical codes are inadequate or even contradictory. In such cases, practitioners should apply ethical principles: respecting autonomy, doing no harm, benefitting others, being just, and being faithful.

*Respecting autonomy*, in the context of student affairs, means permitting individuals to act as free agents, competent to make their own decisions, in the framework of taking responsibility for themselves and others. This presupposes competence in decision-making, and Kitchener pointed out that in some cases that may be absent, or the situation may be so serious as to over-ride autonomy. *Doing no harm*, or nonmaleficence, consists of both benefitting others and also, crucially, not behaving in a way that carries a strong risk of harm to others, whether physical or psychological.

*Benefitting others* is key to caring professions, and in student affairs that includes promoting the well-being of individuals as well as promoting higher education's service to society. At times, choices between individual and institutional benefit can be in conflict with each other. She also pointed out that benefitting others can easily be in conflict with respecting autonomy, particularly when trying to help students in difficulty: too great an emphasis on the first can lead to paternalism, or a breach of confidentiality; emphasizing the second can leave students without adequate support. *Being just* includes fairness, as well as balancing the rights of one group or individual against another.

Kitchener (1985) pointed to impartiality, equality and reciprocity as elements of justice in this context. Treating others as one would like to be treated, as well as ensuring balanced treatment that mitigates any inequalities, are part of reciprocity. *Being faithful* includes loyalty, truthfulness, keeping promises, and demonstrating respect. In essence, this

consists of acknowledging and fulfilling an implicit contract between individuals of trustworthiness. Such a contract implies mutual respect and equality. However, between student affairs practitioners and students there is inequality of power and authority, and Kitchener felt that this obligates student affairs staff to hold themselves to a higher ethical standard than they do students.

Ethical decision-making means applying the above ethical principles. However, there will be times when these principles are in conflict with each other, and they should not be regarded as absolute. The third level that Kitchener (1985) proposed is to turn to ethical theories, although she did not elaborate on these. It is also worth noting that in the framework she suggested, personal values are not highlighted. Implicit in this model is an assumption that personal values of practitioners are in alignment with professional codes and the ethical principles. While it is likely that few would disagree with the importance of autonomy, nonmaleficence, benefitting to others, justice or faithfulness, the weight placed on each during an ethical dilemma may indeed depend on the values of the decision-maker.

Krager (1985) elaborated on Kitchener's five principles by placing them in the context of actual roles played by student affairs practitioners. She provided tables delineating different administrative aspects (planner, resource manager, organizer/coordinator, staff development facilitator, and evaluator) and educational roles (advisor, instructor, program planner, researcher and mentor) and outlines how each principle can manifest itself. She also gave examples of how different roles may have their own ethical considerations. She pointed out that when ethical principles are in conflict, any decision will be complex and difficult, but that by placing them in a matrix,

ethical concerns are more explicit. She recommended doing the same for other roles that student affairs staff may play, and suggested that such matrices provide a useful discussion framework for incorporating principles into practice.

Brown (1985) went beyond individual ethical codes and decision-making to speak of the need to create an ethical campus community. He felt that the goal of student affairs is to promote student development, including their values, which come into play in areas as diverse as learning, lifestyles, career goals, and interactions with others; services such as housing, advising, counselling, student activities and student discipline can all impact these. Brown said that more than any other administrative unit or faculty, student affairs is the “conscience of campus” (p. 68) and has the best opportunity to influence student values. In order to do this, student affairs must have a clear ethical agenda. This includes encouraging appropriate ethical behaviour in campus community settings, and making ethical decisions within student affairs that balance the needs of the individual with the common good of the community, however it is defined. Brown cited three communities of concern: Earth, the United States, and higher education, and spoke of student affairs having a role in each. He gave examples of how pursuing ethical themes can influence each area: “peace issues, vocation as a calling, developmental progress for all students, theory and research as influences on professional practice, and a humane learning environment” (p. 74), and discussed how each might be demonstrated in an ethical community. In effect, these different aspects should be examined regarding the extent to which they reflect ethical principles. “This will require a shift in customary styles and work habits that may transform professional lives and higher education in radical ways (p. 78).

Fried (2000) saw student affairs as a helping profession, and as such, that it plays a role in ethical decision-making on campus. She summarised Kitchener's (1985) principles, that she says have widely guided student affairs practice, and that (except for perhaps for the first one of respecting autonomy) are shared across many cultures. However, Fried pointed out that fairness to individuals is a more Anglo-American concept, versus other cultures that may stress family position or other social status, or which are more collectivist in approach. In addition to principles being employed in decision-making, Fried suggested the use of "virtue ethics" (p. 413), which she says psychologists consider to be prudence, integrity, respectfulness and benevolence. She said that these are character traits rather than abstract principles; they are likely based on a more Christian culture, and as such may also differ depending on the culture and country. In order to make ethical decisions, Fried argued that not only principles and virtues need to be employed, but that decisions need to be contextual. Factors to be taken into consideration include the cultural values of the participants, their phenomenology (life experience and values), the time frame of the decision (both the length of interaction of the participants, but also current or historical social norms, for example, liberal or conservative), and the dynamic aspects of the decision (the campus environment and climate, as well as factors affecting it such as publicity or funding). Finally, Fried pointed to clinical skills and their utility in ethical decision-making. These skills include seriousness, being non-judgemental, calm, impartiality, openness to others' perspectives, balance, and the ability to convert a discussion about values into a concrete plan of action. Fried looked to a variety of places for ethical discussions: Professional associations such as NASPA and ACPA which develop codes of ethics, institutional

environments in which policy is developed with a view to its ethical implications, staff development in which professional training includes discussions on ethical dilemmas, and graduate educational programs. Additionally, she briefly discussed how ethical decision-making can be brought into play when working with students; this includes leadership training and student group orientation, group advising, and individual advising. While it is refreshing to see students being brought into the equation, this is still a rather top-down approach, which does not take into consideration the possibility that students themselves may challenge administrators on ethical issues.

In an earlier discussion about multiculturalism and its effects on student affairs practice, Fried (1997a) traced the development of ethical beliefs from a single system to a more diversely faceted structure. She points to American society being grounded in Christianity, scientific empiricism, and positivism, with beliefs about right and wrong being clearly defined in a homogenous society; this system of values is now outdated due to increased differences based not only on culture, but also socioeconomic status, race, professional identity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Previous reliance on Enlightenment thinking, with clearly defined notions of right and wrong, universal principles, orderliness and cause-and-effect has shaped American society. It is only since World War II that situational ethics have begun to be recognised; in other words, benevolence, or doing good, is the most ethical approach, and decisions should be made in particular situations and in particular contexts in a way that balances rules and individual needs. In any particular ethical dilemma there may be multiple viewpoints and values at play, and each situation involves ambiguity and in some cases conflicting beliefs. Fried pointed to racial issues as being particularly emblematic of this, and cited

examples of programs or financial assistance targeted to African-Americans or Latino students, versus the value of universality, as well as challenges in dealing with racism, versus expectations of students and their families.

Canon and Brown (1985) challenged student affairs practitioners to spend time reflecting on professional ethics. They enumerated several ethical myths:

- Personal ethical perfection (or near perfection) is prerequisite to any serious ethical inquiry;
- Ethics are just value judgements and one person's values are as good as another's;
- Freedom of speech is a First Amendment right [in Canada, from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982): freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression];
- Value clarification workshops are the appropriate way to improve professional ethical practices;
- Answers to ethical problems lie in the ethical code;
- Dealing with ethics violations is the job of the ethics committee;
- People are either ethical or not;
- A thoughtful and conscientious professional knows when he or she commits an ethical violation;
- Ethics are all very fine, but one has to be practical;
- If people would just follow the ethical codes of their professions, life would be a lot less complicated (p. 82-85).

Canon and Brown (1985) said that while ethical codes and ethical training can be helpful, “ultimately, trying to be ethical winds up as an incredibly personal journey” (p. 85). They stressed that evolving ethical frameworks stress care and student-centredness, as the focus of the field is on students, rather than on subject matter in the case of faculty. The perception, however, may arise that student affairs staff would be soft, be less concerned with institutional regulations, or to think emotionally rather than intellectually about issues. However, the ethic of care does fit with student affairs goals, particularly in stressing the importance of relationships, and in acknowledging the complexity of issues.

### *Ethical Dilemmas*

Hamrick and Benjamin (2009), in their introduction to a book of ethical case studies targeted to new and mid-level practitioners, discussed the importance of professional ethics and the need to develop a personal ethical identity. They also pointed to a combination of background beliefs, character and virtues, principles, and professional ethics as necessary in developing this identity. Many the case studies themselves, however, were startling for me as a Canadian researcher and practitioner, as they clearly demonstrated a significant difference in both the levels of student autonomy, and of student support, between American institutions and Canadian ones. It is an interesting question: Are high levels of personal and co-curricular activity support and staffing desirable? Examples in the book include dilemmas encountered by student activities advisors for clubs and other student organisations who monitor events and activities or control budgets; personal support can include a high level of control, such as



academic advisors who monitor students' grade point averages in order to determine whether they will be permitted to enrol in extra-curricular activities. In contrast, my own research (Robinson, 2004) into the experience of elected full-time undergraduate student leaders demonstrated a stark contrast; student leaders were responsible for sizeable budgets, managing services, supervising staff, independently representing students on high-level university committees, and engaging in student advocacy. This points to an expectation that ethical dilemmas encountered by Canadian practitioners in relation to students and student leaders may be different.

Canon (1985) demonstrated how ethical issues arise in the daily practice of student affairs, through a series of 27 brief case studies, divided into examples that arise during graduate student affairs preparation, working with student organisations, interactions with colleagues, supervisory relationships, working with special populations, and meeting with governing boards and external constituencies. These cases serve to “illustrate the complexity and diversity of professional behaviours that seem likely to have ethical implications.”

In a reflection piece, Thomas (2002) described the moral domain of student affairs leadership. He included a number of cases in which student affairs leaders share examples of ethical dilemmas. He said that from his own experience “some of the most important values in our work include integrity, personal achievement, the common good of the community, safety, tolerance, respect for law, self-discipline, self-fulfillment, work ethic, compassion, democracy, confidentiality, accountability, teamwork and independence” (p. 65). He pointed out that these are often in conflict, and that the challenge is to be ethically consistent over extended periods of time, likely due to shifts

in legal, social, and institutional priorities, as well as expectations of co-workers. He suggested that the work of chief student affairs officers includes incorporating and respecting values in an ethical culture. He concluded by saying that “values don’t exist in a vacuum somewhere inside us. They are connected to real people and the relationships we develop and sustain with others” (p. 70).

Upcraft and Poole (1991) described examples of different moral dilemmas that can be encountered by student affairs administrators. They include making hiring decisions based on multiple factors, clashes between personal and institutional values, balancing confidentiality and the common good, and dealing with competing interests such as in allocating financial resources. The article reviewed ethical codes of conduct and made the point that they are not able to provide answers to complex moral dilemmas, which is why the ACPA (1990) code includes Kitchener’s (1985) ethical principles. However, the authors said that these principles, while valuable, also do not help resolve some aspects of student affairs dilemmas. For example, emphasizing autonomy can shift dialogue immediately into legal issues and the removal of behaviour restraints (such as on free speech); doing no harm can be extremely difficult to gauge when the desire for transparency or advocacy on behalf of students comes into conflict with institutional loyalty, or a promise of confidentiality. Practitioners must strike a balance between rigidly following institutional policies, and getting tangled up in complexity when examining issues. The authors proposed a conceptual framework for ethics that incorporates a grid with four axes: management, community, leadership, and the individual. In the quadrants are skills, obligations, virtues, and values. Personal skills assist in managing issues effectively, community locates the practitioner’s different

relationships and to whom they have obligations, virtues define the practitioner's character, and values include justice, openness, discipline and caring. In using this framework, decisions are tested by ensuring that appropriate skills have been used, then weighing the responsibility to the community against personal commitments and values. In effect, this is a model that prompts individuals to consider multiple personal issues and ethical obligations before making a balanced decision. The authors pointed out, however, that "no model of decision making can relieve an individual from having to make some choices. There is no such thing in life as morally neutral ground" (p. 92).

Janosik, Creamer and Humphry (2004) conducted a survey of 303 student affairs administrators, with five demographic questions, and one question asking them to describe briefly two or three ethical dilemmas they had faced. The survey raised 580 ethical problems, which the authors categorised by using Kitchener's (1985) ethical principles. Respondents' examples of ethical dilemmas varied, depending on gender, experience, seniority and institution size. The authors commented that there is not enough awareness in the field of how ethical issues are observed and acted on, nor is the way ethics play out in practice sufficiently studied or discussed. Their analysis focused on the following questions:

- What types of ethical problems do student affairs professionals face in their current positions?
- Can these ethical problems be categorised using Kitchener's ethical principles?
- Do administrators report different types of ethical concerns by gender, years of experience, or organisational position?

- Do administrators report different types of concerns by institutional type and size? (p. 358).

Participants were asked to identify one or two ethical dilemmas they had recently faced in practice. Data were categorised in order to identify common themes and to create definitions for them, then categories were refined and collapsed together. Next, differences were analysed based on the demographic information provided. From the survey, the researchers derived and filled 17 categories of ethical problems and divided them based on Kitchener's (1985) moral category definitions. Under the category of *justice*, they placed moral dilemmas involving treating people equally, and those dealing with conflicts of interest or favouritism, abuses of power, inconsistent use of policies, and misuse of research data. For *beneficence*, they included dilemmas around deciding the right action in different situations, and also those related to socializing or mentoring individuals, even in cases where there is no favouritism. *Fidelity* included dilemmas involving misrepresentation of facts, misuse of resources, or violations of written and verbal contracts. Dilemmas included under *loyalty* were those that involved a conflict between choices, in situations where there were multiple responsibilities. Situations involving *autonomy* arose around confidentiality issues, or imposition of one person's judgement over that of another. Under *nonmaleficence*, they included inappropriate relationships between staff, faculty or students that may violate policies or laws.

The authors were surprised by the gender and seniority breakdown of these categories; finding that women reported more problems around *nonmaleficence*, and fewer issues around *justice*, the authors comment that women may be more likely to be confided in, and may have a different moral orientation, although this is speculative.

Similarly, the authors hypothesise that senior administrators reporting greater numbers of issues around *justice* may be reflecting a wider scope of activity or viewpoint.

Administrators from smaller institutions reported fewer problems around *justice* and the authors feel this is likely due to a more cohesive community and greater connectedness. The authors expressed consternation that in spite of clear professional ethical guidelines around a variety of these issues, administrators were still challenged by them, and they feel that increased professional development around ethical choices is warranted.

What is interesting with this study is that although the authors conceded that the term ethical dilemma was not clearly defined (they considered it to exemplify an instance of a conflict between two human rights), distinct categories around equity, cultural diversity and belief systems did not seem to emerge. Additionally, conflict or dilemmas related to student decision-making did not appear. There was only vague allusion to communication and mutual collaboration. This study illustrates the challenge of quantitatively assessing ethical issues; follow-up would likely include more in-depth interviews of some participants, to help define “ethical dilemma,” as well as to elucidate the particulars of different situations. It would be interesting to see if a comparable methodology would yield similar results among Canadian student affairs administrators.

### ***Resolution of Ethical Dilemmas***

Reybold, Halx and Jimenez (2008) provided one of the few studies on how administrative staff implement professional ethics in their work. They undertook a qualitative study with 12 staff members at one institution. The authors discussed how ethical rules and standards may govern decision-making, but are often silent on how to

make genuinely good decisions, resulting in personal and subjective approaches. They are among the only authors reviewed for this study who said that student affairs staff bring their personal values to their work, and to their application of ethical codes, particularly in different situations. The authors added that society's and organisational standards may be transient, so personal values may be the only consistent guide to decision-making. Administrative staff were asked about their perceptions of ethics, professional integrity, and institutional context. The researchers found that staff described moral reasoning and conduct in the workplace, rather than professional codes of conduct. "The majority linked professional ethics with their personal morality guided by institutional regulations and religious authority" (p. 115). Some included the importance of community and their responsibility to under-represented populations, and a few did invoke professional student affairs codes, as well as their own view that those codes were subject to interpretation.

The authors determined three groups of participants. The first relied on *regulatory ethics*, primarily based on institutional rules and personal moral and religious values. The response to a violation of these was to impose sanctions. Next, some participants used situational ethics, which based decisions on their academic culture or institutional mission as well as on codes; in other words, "ethical responsibility in general is to the institution and its constituency" (p. 116). Finally, a few participants employed collective ethics which involved *ethical reasoning* that took into account professional codes, principles, and personal and shared values, and involved critiquing all of them, as well as holding themselves to account as ethical role models. The researchers noted that length of experience was not necessarily an indication of higher-order ethical reasoning.

The authors concluded that standards for ethical decision-making are not sufficiently critiqued in practice, whether these are based on institutional rules, on personal or religious values, or on professional codes. Rather, effective ethical reasoning should consider options and consequences, and be sensitive to the situation. The authors suggested greater efforts in professional development, in order to encourage ethical consciousness and to be able to resolve situational ethical dilemmas. “We are not advocating yet one more ethics education program. Instead, we encourage intentional, public dialogue about the standards already available and how they are interpreted at institutional and personal levels” (p. 123).

Fried (1997a) pointed out that the resolution of complex ethical dilemmas usually requires extensive dialogue, which is unlikely to be successful if it takes place in the middle of a crisis. The ability to engage in complex thought about ethical situations requires a high level of cognitive development that may not be present in all students (and, I would add, in all administrators). It is important to acknowledge that there may be no set of universal principles that can be applied to ethical dilemmas. Examples given by Fried included the use of the internet and the conflict between freedom of expression, and potentially harmful behaviour or hate speech. Similarly, academic freedom may conflict with students’ religious principles, particularly for individuals from a cultural background that does not value the separation of church and state. Fried also referred to virtue ethics, which can be used by a campus community to define and emphasise what values are most important to them. “On the multicultural campuses of the twenty-first century, no single system of ethical beliefs and practices can or should prevail” (p. 18). The question for Canadian practitioners revolves around the types of ethical dialogues – if any – that take

place on campuses, as well as where, when and how practitioners develop their ethical frameworks. If this development is prompted by having to deal with certain ethical issues or dilemmas, it would be useful to identify examples and to explore ways in which they have affected policy and practices.

While Fried's (1997a) approach took multiple perspectives into consideration, it still largely focused on the *management* of student behaviour, through dialogue among student affairs professionals; students themselves seem to be the recipients of ethical approaches, rather than participants in their determination.

For student affairs professionals, the dynamic of ethical inquiry suggests two major components: attending to our own ethical assumptions and re-examining them in the light of our student populations, the way we serve them, and the manner in which we conduct ourselves; and identifying situations in which we can contribute to the ethical education of students who will live their lives in multicultural communities of all sorts (p. 20).

In Fried's model, students become involved when they are challenged by student affairs professionals to consider the ethical outcomes of their personal decisions.

In a further article, Sundberg and Fried (1997) explored how community ethics can be developed through campus dialogues. Again, the focus is on communication between student affairs practitioners and faculty. As a goal, a campus community can develop a set of ethical rules and principles; the authors cited Kitchener (1985) as proposing that there are three levels of ethical behaviour for professionals: begin with a set of ethical rules that cover most situations; next, consider a set of ethical principles that



serve as a guide for situations not covered by rules; and third, behave in a way that balances ethical principles for an outcome that one would want for oneself or for others. This includes moving beyond simple rational principles and considering feelings and intuition, which have been traditionally excluded from ethical decision-making. Barriers to dialogue include factionalisation, over-specialised or over-generalised staff roles, and territoriality. There is also a challenge in understanding student culture and behaviour, as well as what is the appropriate role for staff and faculty to take. Students transition to full legal adulthood at various ages, so there are systemic factors imposed on staff and faculty in terms of monitoring responsible behaviour. I suspect this has a greater impact in the United States, as in most states the legal drinking age is 21, versus 18 or 19 in Canada. It is worth exploring what some of the barriers are to developing coherent values, and also how practitioners deal with situations that fall outside established laws, rules or community standards.

Blimling (1998) theorised an emerging moral and ethical student affairs climate based on rights claims. He gave examples of competing rights claims, such as a conflict between a fundamentalist Christian and a gay student who are roommates. This type of conflict is a common dilemma for student affairs administrators. Blimling pointed to a need to not only have ethical standards, but also to differentiate between ethical claims; in effect, to be able to exercise moral judgement, which he defines as the ability to know what is right, and to act on it. This can also be contextual and situational. He suggested that administrators often strive for compromise as much as possible, except in the most stringent ethical cases, and outlined three informal theories concerning how this occurs. With *peace at all costs*, administrators abandon principles and give into pressure in order

to resolve conflict, causing them to be liked but ineffective. *Winning at all costs* involves playing a political game and having the ends justify the means, in order to gain power in the institution. *Fight when you can, and retreat when you cannot*, is what Blimling described as the reality of administration; some issues are solved through compromise, and some have only one right answer. In order to take this approach, administrators will need a clear sense of their values.

Blimling (1998) was rather harsh when discussing how ethical decision-making is affected by postmodernism – which he said argues that individuals cannot maintain objectivity outside of their social class, race and life experience. He critiqued what he referred to as the victim mentality, generated by social circumstances related to race, gender, sexual orientation and social class, which he said produces a culture of entitlement. Rather, he called for increased student self-discipline and self-knowledge, in order for them to take responsibility for their character and work. Eighteen-year-old students are not adults, he said, and should not have the “license for a level of personal freedom that is not only impractical for college campuses but also actually in conflict with the fundamental purposes of higher education” (p. 69). Blimling proposed a student-learning and student-centred approach rooted in foundational student affairs documents, and focussing on character development. Unlike decision-making in a value-free society, ethical student affairs practices reflect personal and institutional ethical and moral frameworks, rooted in such values as honesty, civility, respect for others, self-discipline and giving. In his case examples, the student-learning approach would be to ensure that institutional standards are made clear and take precedence, although students’ background or experiences could be taken into consideration as mitigating factors; this is

in contrast to a post-modern approach which would entitle the student to claim status such as culture or gender, in order to rationalise behaviour that violated institutional norms.

Blimling (1998) provided a list of questions that he feels student affairs practitioners should ask themselves when facing an ethical or moral decision. The first seven are direct reflections of the principles described in Blimling, Whitt and Associates (1990) above. The final three are:

- Is this a form of action that I would be comfortable explaining in public to members of the university community – faculty, staff, students, trustees, parents and supervisors?
- Given the age of the person involved, is this the way that I would want to be treated if I were a college student in a similar situation?
- Is this decision consistent with the highest vision I have of myself and my personal ethics? (p. 74).

Young (2001b) said that the law and professional codes are not sufficient as guides to ethical behaviour. “A student affairs administrator will not find easy answers in them when she or he wants to defend herself or himself from trouble. Professional practitioners must rely on other resources, beginning with their ability to understand values as well as circumstances.” (p. 154). Examining the ethical approaches proposed by Kidder (1995, cited in Young, 2001b), in a *rules-based approach* everyone is treated the same; a sanction for one incident should be imposed for other incidents, so care is needed before the first sanction is imposed. Taking an *ends-based approach*, in other words, doing the most good and the least harm to others, can at times emphasize the happiness of

the majority at the expense of a minority of people. It can also lead to maintaining the status quo instead of making change. Using a *care-based approach* focuses on a virtue of caring and the concept of doing to others as you would have them do to you, although the question remains if all people wish to have the same things done to them. Young said that all three approaches relate to what should be done to other people. Ethical dilemmas result from conflicts between community and individual welfare, or between free speech and civility. Resolving dilemmas requires “awareness of personal and professional value priorities, the ability to understand other priorities, and hard, values-based reasoning to resolve those dilemmas” (p. 159).

Young (2001b) advocated ethical reflection, which he suggests should take place both before and after a moral dilemma. He eschewed moral absolutism and recommended making decisions of conscience based on personal and professional values. He identified four components of ethical reflection: First is developing one’s own defensible definitions of ethics that consider, accept, and perhaps reject attributes of morality and law, and rules-based, ends-based, and caring-based ethics. The next is understanding one’s role within a context of people and ideas; higher education, the student affairs profession, and institutions place different demands on ethics. The third is knowing how student affairs demands ethical work. The fourth is using structures of logic for decision-making, assessment, mission development, and the mediation of people and ideas. Reflection without action, however, is empty. An ethical presence is illuminated by actions:

- Declaring what one believes to be true and acting on those beliefs.

- Living consistently, words and deeds in harmony across the different dimensions of lives – and over time.
- Being good friends to others and facilitating their learning, not by intruding on the protégés' search for integrity, but by adding to their environment of self-discovery.
- Motivating people to make up their own minds and take their own stands on ethical matters. This involves goading and prodding as much as hugging and consoling. (Young, 2003, p. 173-174).

### *Ethical Decision-making Models*

As seen, there is general agreement in the literature on the need for careful consideration of ethical dilemmas, and there are several instances in the literature of recommended models for making ethical decisions in student affairs practice.

Humphrey, Janosik and Creamer (2004) asserted that ethics are at the core of student affairs practice, including making difficult decisions. However, they said that generally practitioners are asked to rely on ethical statements or professional codes, and then for more complex situations, moving to the use of ethical principles, which are not necessarily widely known or easy to implement. The authors built an inter-relationship between student affairs values (as defined by Young, 1997, see above), individual character traits such as responsibility, respect and trustworthiness, and ethical principles (Kitchener, 1985, see above) in a model that aligns aspects of all three categories. From this, they derived four areas of ethical concern: honesty, the rights of others, fairness, and acting responsibility, which they use to construct a flowchart to make ethical decisions.

In essence, this involves defining the type of problem, then asking if it involves being honest with others (consider truth, trustworthiness and fidelity), the rights of others (consider individuation, respect and autonomy), being fair to others (consider justice/equality, fairness and justice), or acting responsibly (consider freedom/service, community services, responsibility/caring/citizenship, beneficence/nonmaleficence). From that step, an ethical solution can be identified. In cases where there is more than one ethical issue involved, the authors suggested choosing a solution that balances positive and negative outcomes for the greater good. The authors hoped that this model helps to clarify the different aspects of ethical decision-making in a manner that is simple to understand and convey, as well as to assist practitioners in making well-considered and defensible decisions. They added that ethical decisions are by nature difficult, and do not afford easy solutions; practitioners “should not adopt this model in a desire to relieve themselves of the need or responsibility to continue to explore and cultivate their commitment to the ideals of professional conduct” (p. 689).

This model provides a useful convergence between values, ethical principles and character traits that have been identified in the literature, and it is helpful to place them in four areas of ethical concern. The authors were correct to caution against oversimplification; this model does not provide solutions, but rather allows for a broader examination of what is involved in particular dilemmas faced by student affairs practitioners.

Upcraft (1988) identified dilemmas that arise between managing in the best interests of the different constituencies of students, staff or the institution. Focussing on students includes understanding student development, consulting with them (although

they may not have the knowledge or experience to differentiate between what they need and what they want), and deciding which student populations or organisations require attention and resources. In order to do this effectively, managers need to learn about the population characteristics of their students, conduct studies on needs and service satisfaction, know student development theory, discuss student needs with members of their staff, spend time with students, and follow professional ethical standards. To manage in the best interests of the institution, managers may discover that particularly in larger, complex institutions there is no clear delineation of this. Managers should know what their institution values and rewards, know the people in different positions and how they define institutional best interests, understand external influences, and know the ethical codes related to institutions. Managing in the best interests of staff includes acknowledging diverse needs, as well as a sense of being undervalued if resource constraints are an issue. Considerations include taking staff opinions into account during decision-making and policy development, being clear for reasons behind a decision or policy, and assessing staff needs.

When conflicts of interest arise, Upcraft (1988) pointed out that it is rare that all three constituencies benefit from a decision. He suggested that managers consider their role in the conflict (advocating for a particular constituency, or mediating the problem), that they ensure that there is understanding among the different constituencies, that staff are also assisted in determining their role, and learning what level of dissent is tolerated in the institution. Finally, managers should be prepared to take a stand. “Ultimately, that involves making your best judgment about the best interests of all three, based on consideration of all variables and your own values” (p. 72).

In addition to Kitchener's (1985) ethical principles, Upcraft (1988) added that there are six values inherent in good management: honesty, fairness, integrity, predictability, courage, and confidentiality. All are applicable in making effective decisions. He suggested that if managers are still conflicted about a decision about which they are already well-informed, they rely on their intuition about what is ultimately right.

After having made a decision, Upcraft advocated taking the following steps:

- Test the decision against institutional values and mission
- Discuss your decision with your boss
- When appropriate, discuss your decision with legal counsel
- Time your decision appropriately
- Make sure all persons affected know and understand your decision
- Make clear the channels for appeal of your decision, if any
- Make sure the media understands your decision and the reasons for it
- Make clear what you expect of your staff
- Do not tolerate continued resistance by staff after the decision is made
- Help staff who cannot accept your decision to consider alternatives
- Be prepared to back off a bad decision (pp. 76-77).

In effect, a good decision is well-managed, and serves the best interests of students, staff and the institution, in accordance with ethical principles and the manager's values and intuition.



Elfrink and Coldwell (1993) proposed a model for implementing values in decision-making. They defined a values conflict as a situation in which more than one value is involved, with different potential outcomes, necessitating ranking the values involved. To do this effectively, student affairs practitioners need to consider personal, departmental and institutional values, as well as the values of the people involved in the situation, in order to ensure participatory decision-making. The authors proposed what they call the INVOLVE model, which has the following components:

- I: Include all values that might be **inherent** to this type of conflict
- N: **Note** the values that define or are important to the conflict of values within this particular personal or social system.
- V: **View** the conflict or contradiction of values within the same personal or social system.
- O: **Operationalize** strategies for conflict resolution within the realm of action.
- L: **Linger** in discussions about views, opinions, perspectives, morality and values.
- V: **Vote** or make some form of choice regarding the value-laden conflict.
- E: **Evaluate** the consequences of decisions by reflecting on the choices and commitment to further action. (pp. 65-66).

Elfrink and Coldwell (1993) presented five case examples in which this model could be used. My own assessment is that they introduced an element of artificiality and constraint by using the eight values identified by Young (1997) above; these values are both too broad to have specific use, and too abstract to make the first three steps

meaningful. However, highlighting values conflicts as a key issue in decision-making certainly brings values to the fore. In addition, the authors did not limit the values conflicts to issues relating directly to students, but rather acknowledged that values conflicts can arise in relation to all aspects of student affairs work, including with respect to other administrative staff, the campus environment, the local community, and in areas such as resource allocation. It is laudable that the authors proposed a systematic method to ensure that values are identified, and further work in this area would be helpful.

### ***Teaching Values and Ethics to Practitioners***

In discussing how to teach ethics in student affairs, Nash (1997) identified ethics problem-solving briefs or cases as extremely helpful. In working through a case, students should ask ten key questions:

- What are the major moral themes in the case?
- What are the conflicts in the case that make it an ethical dilemma? (An ethical dilemma being a case in which there is a conflict between one of more moral alternatives.)
- Who are the major stakeholders in the case?
- What are some foreseeable consequences of the possible choices in the case?  
What are some foreseeable principles?
- What are some viable alternatives to the possible courses of action in the case?
- What are some important background beliefs you ought to consider in the case?

- What are some of your initial intuitions and feelings regarding the case?
- What choices would you make if you were to act in character in the case?
- What does your profession's code of ethics say regarding key moral principles in the case?
- What is your decision in the case? (pp. 4-8)

What is particularly notable about these questions is that they illustrate one of the few instances in the literature in which personal beliefs and intuition are given weight. While Nash (1997) cautioned that relying on personal beliefs alone could result in being seen to be morally subjective, he said that those beliefs give individuals a solid foundation to explain and justify their ethical decisions. Furthermore, imagining acting in character in a case helps individuals understand their own moral selves, and to understand the importance of ethical consistency throughout their personal and professional lives. Nash also advocated learning to trust flashes of insight and intuition, as well as feelings, while resolving ethical dilemmas. He stressed the need for integrating feelings, beliefs, reason, as well as interpreting professional codes, in making effective ethical decisions.

Moore and Hamilton (1993) addressed values in the context of teaching them to both students and also in graduate preparation programs for student affairs staff. They argued that there was a shift away from values education in the 1960s and 1970s, which were turbulent decades in the United States. Changes in student values continuing into the 1980s included a greatly increased emphasis on individualism and also personal benefit; higher education was a means to an end: "the meaningless of values that have no relevance to 'me' seemed to pervade the student attitudes of the 1970s and early 1980s" (p. 76). The authors believed, however, that there is a resurgence of concern for the

campus community and that this is reflected in a shift in student affairs values. This shift ought to be reflected in the preparation of new professionals. They identified four key areas: the disappearance of a value-free campus climate, a shift from a predominant focus on individual rights, the limitations of a mono-cultural perspective, the re-evaluation of campus policies and rules, and the increased importance of outcomes assessment. In these areas, they saw an increase in the emphasis on community, truth-telling, justice, responsible behaviour, caring, and understanding differences. Individual rights should be balanced with collective responsibility, and collegiality and civility, as well as collaboration with faculty, alumni, and community leaders, need to be increased. Culturally pluralistic campuses require a multicultural perspective, and this is also reflected in judicial systems, with less clear delineations between innocent and guilty, when different cultural values are taken into consideration. It is interesting that the authors stressed that:

Attempts to respond to questions such as these without a grounding in the values of our profession would place student affairs professionals in the perilous position of responding only from their personally held values or from the perspective of laws and rules that were written from a monocultural perspective (p. 81).

In terms of outcomes assessment, Moore and Hamilton (1993) said that recent developments among accreditation bodies may increase the expectation that students should be taught to behave morally, to be able to resolve ethical dilemmas, and to contribute to society. Graduate students preparing to enter student affairs should be

taught moral development, cognitive complexity, critical thinking, critical reflection, cross-cultural values differences, and how to identify implied values in what others say and do. The authors said that this will help student affairs practitioners ensure a “clearer and more consistent set of values” (p. 84) in the campus community. They said that having common community values that last over time may be the core values of student affairs.

### ***Conclusion***

The American context that is reflected in student affairs literature is grounded in a strong research base in areas such as student development theory. Many practitioners in Canada enter the field after obtaining a bachelor’s degree and some student leadership experience (Cox & Strange, 2010) and their professional development tends to be experiential. They may not have encountered formal graduate coursework on student affairs ethics. Advocacy on behalf of students is a significant portion of the CACUSS Mission of Student Services statement, although Evans and Reason (2001) lamented its absence in American philosophical statements. The question is whether advocacy is reflected in Canada with regard to individual values and practices, and also in the ways that these values are widely accepted. Advocacy may not only be on behalf of students, but also through encouraging activism by students.

The manner in which students are regarded is another major point. Is it the role of student affairs administrators to help shape the character and moral development of students? To what extent do issues of marginalisation and oppression come into play, and if these are taken into consideration, does that demonstrate an anti-oppression approach,

or is it a reinforcement of victimhood and a culture of entitlement? To what extent should student affairs administrators consider students as responsible adults capable of making complex, ethically-appropriate decisions? Should administrators presume that students have a lesser level of character development or ethical understanding? Does taking a student-learning approach reinforce assumptions, or does it enable administrators to encourage students to grow? What expectations should there be regarding student behaviour and ethical development?

Additionally, administrators' own ethical development, as well as approaches to ethical decision-making, are important in establishing a decision-making framework. What are useful self-examination and learning techniques that administrators can employ, and how can individual cases be addressed if there is no prior experience with the central ethical issues? What balance needs to be struck between consistency versus meeting individual needs, and should compromise always be sought?

Blimling (1998) raised a number of key issues related to student affairs values. First, what are considerations that come into play when there are issues of values conflict? There are many potential such cases of different claims based on belief systems, personal or cultural backgrounds, political views, and ethical frameworks. Examples could include balancing freedom of expression with public safety in the case of student protest, sexual orientation coming into conflict with religious belief, feminism versus religious beliefs around birth control or abortion, and so on. Some cases might be more subtle; examples could include shyness versus extroversion, discomfort with public displays of affection, generational gaps in language, verbal aggression or assertiveness, application of policy and rules. Virtually all sources of human conflict may eventually be

dealt with by student affairs administrators. Personal values conflicts, in which an individual is caught between two of their own beliefs, and which Blimling did not address, also may come into play. These might be related to ethical standards, approaches to multicultural issues, a disconnection with institutional values, or a lack of congruence between different issues.

In these different statements of values, and discussions on ethics, there appears to be little critical discussion of individuals' values and motivations. To what extent should practitioners reflect on how much their own personal values are reflected in codes of practice (assuming they are aware of them)? Is bringing personal values into one's work positive or negative? Do practitioners' values influence their contributions to the field? And to what extent do personal motivation, satisfaction with outcomes, and passion for the work matter?

This study inquires into practitioners' personal values that they consider important to their work, and how those values can be challenged. The following chapter on methodology describes how the study was developed.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### ***Introduction***

Personal values are, by their very nature, subjective. They are specific to the individuals who hold them. How values are implemented in work situations is also dependent on the work context, the specific issue being addressed, and the individual's beliefs. This study seeks to build a picture of what Canadian student affairs practitioners see as their role, the values they bring to it, and the values conflicts that can arise from it. In order to examine these questions, directly consulting with practitioners about their own experiences and values was an appropriate means to build a framework that reflects these values.

The field of student affairs in Canada is relatively small, and many of its practitioners are well-known to each other, both personally and by reputation. Canadian universities have fairly uniform academic standards, but are generally autonomous in their governance (Jones, 2001). The potential stakeholders who are affected by student affairs values are extensive, and include the practitioners themselves at various administrative levels, students, faculty, other administrative staff, and potentially the community outside of the institution (e.g. students' families, community groups working with student affairs on service learning projects, consultants, etc.). For the purposes of this study, I will be focussing on student affairs practitioners as those who are most familiar with how values are brought into practice; further studies could include other stakeholders.

One methodological approach that takes as its premise that social realities are defined by the people who experience them is constructivism, which seeks to



demonstrate the connections between what different people experience and do in order to produce a construction of that reality; this method is particularly suited to this inquiry.

This chapter describes the selection of the methodology for this study, and the steps by which the study protocol was developed, the data were collected and analyzed into a framework, and how that was then verified and expanded. I have also included comments on the research experience.

### ***Selection of Methodology: Constructivist inquiry***

The methodology for this study was based on a constructivist approach, seeking to produce a framework of values, rather than a single reductionist theory. As this study deals with values, participants were asked to think critically about issues related to their student affairs work, asked to comment on the role of student affairs in higher education, and on how their own values and experiences are manifested in their work, including how those values can come into conflict.

Guba and Lincoln (1981; 1985; 1989) challenge a number of assumptions regarding other research paradigms, as they contrast naturalistic inquiry and responsive constructivist evaluation, with scientific methodology. Constructivism proposes a new method of evaluation, building on naturalistic evaluation, and featuring the development of a partnership between the evaluator and stakeholders within an organisation (in this case, participants) who engage in the study. The authors outline their new paradigm for evaluation research, pointing out the weaknesses of objectivity and positivism in more traditional research methodologies. Guba and Lincoln (1985) discuss the importance of being aware of the research paradigm being used, which they define as “a systemic set of

beliefs, together with their accompanying methods” (p. 15). They argue that research has passed through a series of paradigm eras or periods that they call prepositivist, positivist and postpositivist. Prepositivist research was characterised as passive observation, which lasted until the Enlightenment era, at which point positivist research was developed. The hallmarks of positivist research centre on the scientific method, and the authors identify several issues with this approach. One is that it tends to focus less on generating theories and more in testing them, with a strong emphasis on experimental design, prediction and control, rather than on understanding or description. They also critique positivism for taking a deductive rather than an inductive approach, saying this leads to single conclusions rather than an understanding that there can be multiple conclusions derived from a set of premises. Positivism is operationalist and therefore relies on repeatable, measurable and clearly delineated facts; deterministic and therefore implies that causation is absolute, which undermines free will; and reductionist, which attempts to place human behaviour in the context of a rigid set of laws. In the social sciences, positivism studies people in an exogenous fashion which is entirely researcher-determined, compared to endogenous research which puts respondents on an equal footing. It also uses etic research methods which emphasize objectivity and separation of the researcher from subjects. The authors say that positivism lacks flexibility in dealing with the concept of uncertainty, and relies on five assumptions: That there is a single, tangible reality that can be studied in independent units; that the observer can be separated from the observed; that observations exist independently of time and context; that causality is linear; and that methodology is free from the influence of value systems.

Postpositivism, say Guba and Lincoln (1985) is the reverse of these tenets. The naturalistic paradigm that they outline has the features that reflect this. In terms of the nature of reality, rather than it being single, tangible and fragmentable, realities are multiple, constructed and holistic. The relationship between the knower and the known is interactive and inseparable, rather than independent or dualistic. Positivistic generalizations that are free of time or context are not possible; rather, naturalism develops working hypotheses that are tied to both time and context. Inquiry cannot be separated from values. Causal linkages are replaced by an understanding that “entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping” (p. 37). Guba and Lincoln (1981) point out that:

Discrete variables and their relationships do not seem to be sufficient to deal with the complex interactions and patterns of human behavior. ... Worth is determined in relation to the values, demographic characteristics, motivational factors, and so on that inhere in the context or setting (pp. 82-83).

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) describe a naturalistic (constructivist) study that they used as a case illustration:

The naturalistic paradigm assumes, however, that there are multiple realities, with differences among them that cannot be resolved through rational processes or increased data. Extended inquiry along *a priori* paths will result in a greater divergence of data; convergence comes only as the

interrelationships between all the elements of reality are seen. ... Rather than providing a neat, sterile picture of congruent geometric figures, these separate observations provided a mosaic with general, unclear boundaries, but with rich central meanings about the interrelationships in the institutions (pp. 14-15).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) contend that their focus is to demonstrate relevance rather than rigor, to be inductive rather than deductive, to discover rather than to verify. Inherent in the constructivist methodology are the beliefs that there are multiple realities and perspectives in human interactions, that there is an interaction between the inquirer and the subject of the inquiry which affects the study, that generalisations are less preferable than detailed and contextual results, and that social reality is complex and not reducible. Methodologically, constructivism involves the inquirer, data analysis occurs both during and after the inquiry, the design is emergent rather than predetermined, it takes place in a natural setting, and it analyses patterns rather than variables. In other words, constructivist inquiry presents a contrast to traditional scientific inquiry, which is intended to collect specific data, under controlled conditions, in order to verify or refute a single hypothesis.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), the benefit of constructivist inquiry stems from focussing on social reality. Participants are empowered by this approach, as it is their realities that are being used in the study, and they are involved in building the picture. A constructivist study identifies and describes a variety of issues in terms that are derived from the participants, rather than from the evaluator, and such a study is

educative for all the participants, including the evaluator. Constructivism seeks connections between different positions and personal realities, in order to achieve greater understanding of why people do what they do. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that the production of generalisations – which they consider questionable – is more of a hallmark of positivistic research, they refer instead to a study’s applicability; in other words, how well a study fits into other contexts. This can be achieved by the inclusion of thick descriptions, since the more detail provided about the subject that is being evaluated, the more likely it is that readers will be able to assess the degree to which the study applies to their own context.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe fourteen axioms of naturalistic (constructivist) inquiry:

1. That it takes place in a natural setting, with the understanding that “realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts” (p. 39).
2. That naturalistic inquiry relies on the human instrument, as it is only human instruments that can evaluate the meaning of their various realities.
3. That tacit or intuitive knowledge should be used in order to reflect the nuances of multiple realities, to enable interactions between the investigator and respondents to be understood at that level, and to reflect the values of the investigator.
4. That it uses qualitative methodologies as they are more sensitive and able to adapt to multiple realities and value patterns.
5. That it employs purposive sampling to maximize the range of data that can be gathered.

6. That it uses inductive data analysis to describe fully the setting and to increase transferability, to allow multiple realities to create the construction, and to enable values to be part of the analytic structure.
7. That theory is grounded in the data rather than decided in advance, which would likely be as a result of previous generalizations or assumptions.
8. That the research design is emergent from the interactions of the inquirer and respondent.
9. That outcomes and interpretations are negotiated with the people who provided the data, in order to reflect their constructions of reality.
10. That the inquirer prefers using case study reporting rather than scientific or technical reports as it allows thick description.
11. That data is interpreted based on the particulars of the study (ideographic), rather than on rigid generalizations (nomothetic), as interpretations depend on local particulars, and different realities would result in different interpretations.
12. That broad application of the research is tentative, as findings may not be reflected elsewhere among other realities.
13. That the boundaries of the inquiry will be determined by the emergent focus of the study, rather than abstractly.
14. That there will be special criteria for trustworthiness, rather than conventional ones such as objectivity, reliability or validity; the inquirer decides analogous criteria (such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability), and the procedures for applying them.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) add that there are risks in constructivist inquiry. One is the potential violation of trust, or ethical conflict resulting from intense interaction with respondents, or even difficulties in establishing trust in the first place. Another is the challenge in maintaining confidentiality and privacy; this can be ameliorated by having respondents review information, quotations, and cited examples. Having open negotiations regarding issues, concerns, claims and the final construction, requires avoiding any form of deception or manipulation, and working in as egalitarian a manner as possible. Another potential problem is the selection of data and categories, since one of the hallmarks of this methodology is that it is collaborative with stakeholders, each of whom is likely to have their own beliefs and issues. Building multiple constructions into a case study or narrative requires sifting through many social realities, and communicating new constructions to participants. The authors state that there will always be points of disagreement or value conflict, which then become part of the agenda for negotiation; determining what is prioritised and included is what the authors refer to as the “craft of evaluation” (p. 136).

For the purposes of this study, stakeholders were student affairs practitioners, and they were contacted sequentially and all interviewed prior to the development of the values framework. Developing a mutual construction was accomplished by using a second interview after a participant review of the framework in order to verify that the values and categories were valid and reflected practitioners’ values and experiences.

As this study’s goal is to build a framework of Canadian student affairs practitioner values, one that is clearly based on the reality and experiences of the

participants, rather than a single reductionist set of values, constructivism is an eminently suitable methodology.

### *Credibility of the study*

In constructivist research, rigour is demonstrated by the credibility of the findings. Guba and Lincoln (1985) stress that constructivist inquiry is not generalisable or focussed on deriving a single absolute truth; as understanding among stakeholders is socially constructed, assessment of a constructivist study relies on its credibility. A constructivist study is intended to develop a shared understanding of a social phenomenon, process or issue. In contrast to quantitative or positivistic research, rigour is derived by several alternative methodological techniques; while a scientific study would be sharply delineated, naturalistic inquiry has less defined boundaries. However, a constructivist inquirer can identify a problem or issue to be investigated within appropriate parameters. Focus is dealt with through working towards convergence of data, which the authors describe as categories that emerge from interactions with the study participants; these consist of concerns (a matter of interest or importance) or issues (a statement on which there are multiple points of view), and collection of further information in order to fill out the categories.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) say that the credibility of a constructivist inquiry can be improved by safeguarding against invalidating factors. Examples of such factors include asking leading questions which produce reactive responses, over-involvement in the research site (versus establishing trust and rapport), a too-strong bias in favour of the researcher's hypotheses or first impressions, and faulty data-gathering techniques. It is



also important to establish corroboration in the structure of the evidence, when information validates the different sections. This can be aided by cross-checking information from different data sources, and testing perceptions by referring back to participants; triangulation, which confirms data through two or more sources is one way to do this, as is cross-examination, which involves questioning a participant on any points that appear vague or flawed. Repeated observation and extended contact are also useful techniques. Another form of verification can be the use of alternate sources, such as documents or videotapes. They also say that consistency and confirmability of the study are important, and that these can also be achieved through careful checking, patient observation, open-mindedness on the part of the investigator, and potentially through the use of a methodological audit, which consists of verification of data collection and analysis by a third party.

Once a construction has been built, it can be verified. Referring back to sources, or *member checking*, is described by Guba and Lincoln (1989) as the “single most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 239). This is the primary verification technique employed in this study. The authors say that member checking allows the evaluator to establish whether the respondents’ intentions are reflected in the study, provides respondents the opportunity to make any needed corrections or clarifications, as well as any additional information, and to confirm that the researcher correctly interpreted them.

Claims to the adequacy of the overall inquiry most often are made by a formal member check ... This member check session, involving knowledgeable and articulate individuals from each stakeholding group,

has as its focus an inspection of the case study, the purpose of which is to correct errors of fact/interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 239-240).

For this study, I employed a member check as the primary means of verifying the construction and increasing its credibility. After the data was analysed, the constructed values framework in the form of a table of values, as well as tables of the role of student affairs and of values conflicts, was returned to participants (along with the transcripts of their interviews). Each participant was then re-interviewed, and the framework was reviewed in sections for the participants to comment on, specifically on the extent to which it reflected their own values and experiences. From these interviews the framework was refined in terms of categories, but did not require substantial change in terms of content.

### ***Study design***

#### *Use of interviews for data collection*

For the purposes of this study, interviews were considered the best method of data collection. Guba and Lincoln (1981) say that interviews tap into the experience of others, and data are provided in their own natural language. Unstructured interviews or open-ended interview questions are particularly useful, as they allow respondents to reconstruct their own perceptions and highlight important points. Researchers should build a web of informants to provide multiple views. Additionally, interview respondents can corroborate data by reviewing the inquirer's construction of their reality, in order to determine if it reflects their shared experiences.

Patton (1990) says that the purpose of interviews is to “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 278). Among interview formats he outlines, the standardized open-ended interview provides compatible responses to the same questions, which ensures that data are complete for each participant, that interviewer effects are reduced, and that evaluators can review the instrument that was used. This structure also facilitates the organisation and analysis of data. With open-ended questions, the flexibility is derived in participant responses, as each will be unique. Follow-up questions and prompts can also be used. With this structure, interviews can be cross-analyzed by grouping answers from different people together. From this, one type of analysis that can be employed is inductive analysis, which seeks patterns, themes and categories that emerge from the data (see below).

#### *Development of interview protocol*

The interview protocol is included in Appendix Two. The initial questions were related to the participant’s current position and their career path and their professional development, in order to illuminate the practitioner’s experience and the development of their understanding of their work, including professional experience, formal training, and exposure to student affairs literature and theory. Next, participants were asked to explore in what ways they felt the field was important, in what ways it had influence, and their work with other members of the university community; this was not only intended to provide helpful background, but to develop an understanding what practitioners saw as the priorities of their work and how their values around it had developed. As a significant

amount of student affairs literature focuses on students' moral development, participants were also asked about the extent to which they feel their work had an impact on students' values development; they were also asked about their work with student leaders. The next interview questions focused on exploring what values practitioners felt were important to bring to student affairs work, and examples of occasions when those values came into conflict. The interview concluded with asking participants to reflect on what aspects of their work about which they felt most passionate.

The protocol was reviewed by the three members of my PhD committee, and some suggestions were incorporated. The same protocol was used throughout the interviews, with some changes in question order, which facilitated the flow of the interviews.

The second set of interviews (discussed below) did not use a formal interview protocol, as it was primarily intended to verify that the constructed framework reflected participants' own values and experiences.

### *Selection of participants*

As stated above, student affairs in Canada is a relatively small field, and due to conference participation, movement between institutions and interactions between individuals, a significant number of practitioners are well known to each other, and to me. However, it was desirable to have a reasonably arms-length selection, so this was done by a combination of purposive and snowball sampling.

As this study examines the values of Canadian student affairs practitioners, I wished to select people who were likely to have considered the issue of how Canadian

student affairs has been shaped, who were able to speak of the values they considered important in student affairs practice, and who had sufficient experience to be able to reflect on how values were implemented. Therefore, I sought participants who were employed as student affairs practitioners in Canadian universities at the time of recruitment (since then, some participants are now working at colleges). Patton (1990) recommends purposeful sampling for qualitative research:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling* (p. 169, italics in original).

Patton (1990) lists a number of different types of purposive sampling: extreme or deviant cases; intensity sampling, maximum variation sampling; homogenous sampling; critical case sampling, criterion sampling; opportunistic sampling; random purposeful sampling; sampling politically important cases; and convenience sampling. He also suggests there can be a combination or mixed purposeful sampling. I employed criterion sampling for this study; Patton states that the purpose of criterion sampling is quality assurance (p. 183).

The criteria used for this study were that participants were current student affairs practitioners who had also demonstrably reflected on the field. I sought out participants who had made contributions to the field of student affairs by reviewing two sources:

- CACUSS conference programs for the previous five years

- *Communiqué* articles for the previous five years

I highlighted individuals who had given conference presentations or written articles about the development and practice of Canadian student affairs in general, rather than on specific initiatives or departments within the field. I used CACUSS and *Communiqué* as sources, as they represent the major opportunities for student affairs practitioners in Canada to share knowledge and expertise. Canadian academic sources, such as the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, have not examined student affairs in a scholarly way; as seen in the literature review, the only significant publication related to student affairs/student services in Canada is Cox and Strange's (2010) *Foundations of student services in Canadian higher education*, which had not been published at the time this study was initiated. Academic or peer-reviewed contributions to Canadian student affairs literature are limited as well. For example, the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* has several student affairs book reviews, but I found no published studies on Canadian student affairs.

Reviewing the two sources of conference presentations and *Communiqué* articles, I initially generated a list of 29 potential participants. It was notable that some institutions had several potential participants, based on multiple presentations or articles. Simply in order to determine an initial sample, I selected for geographical and institutional diversity, and contacted 10 different potential participants from ten separate institutions in six provinces. Selection of different locations was not crucial to the study, but it assisted in introducing variation in the conditions in which participants worked. As well, close colleagues may have had similar experiences in their institutions and could potentially identify each other from those.

Each of the participants was contacted by email asked if they were willing to participate in the study (see Appendix One), and were also asked to recommend other potential participants. Twenty-one further potential participants were obtained through their responses. From those recommendations, I selected a further five participants, seeking participants from different institutions than the original ten, and emailed them. Every one of the potential participants who was contacted agreed to participate in the study, and all 15 completed it.

I had initially planned to start at 15 participants and expand the sample size if necessary. The sample size was intended to provide depth in terms of the richness of the data, with sufficient breadth to provide an array of different concepts that could be used in the values construction. I found that the last several interviews, while providing further experiences that illustrated ideas that had been emerging, were repeating concepts that had already been provided by prior participants. I reached concept saturation and did not need to extend the sample size further.

One of the issues related to participant selection that required some caution was my own familiarity with Canadian student affairs practitioners. I wished as much as possible to ensure that this study included a wide range of experience, and was not limited to participants I knew well. However, as student affairs is a relatively small field in Canada, I had met all the participants prior to beginning the study. While this was undoubtedly useful in both the study recruitment, and in the establishment of openness and trust during interviews, I wished to ensure that participants were selected as objectively as possible.

*Characteristics of participants*

Eight of the participants were female and seven were male. At the time of the initial interviews (summer 2007) they worked in eight different provinces and ten different universities. Their length of experience in full-time student affairs positions ranged from five years to 37 years. Five were chief student affairs officers. Two had masters' degrees in higher education/student affairs administration, one obtained in Canada and one in the United States. Four had doctorates in higher education/student affairs administration, all obtained in the United States. Four others had masters' degrees in other fields, and two were pursuing graduate degrees (one masters, one doctoral) at the time of the interviews, both in higher education/student affairs administration, and both in Canada. It is also worth noting the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the participants (which likely reflects the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the field, a topic that merits further study), although there was some diversity in sexual orientation.

Table 1: Gender and length of service of participants

| 5-10 years | 11-15 years | 16 - 20 years | 21+ years |
|------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 male     |             | 2 male        | 4 male    |
| 5 female   | 1 female    | 1 female      | 1 female  |

A number of participants identified their interest in student affairs stemming from their undergraduate experience; four had been involved in residence life, four in student



politics, and another two in other leadership roles. Other participants came into student affairs from other fields, notably three from health/counselling/psychology.

### *Data collection*

All participants were provided with a letter of consent which was signed and returned. Each interview started with a review of the interview protocol and consent form, as well as an outline of the study process.

Initial interviews took place either in person (five participants) or by telephone (ten participants). Interviews were targeted to be around 90 minutes long, and most were approximately that length, although a few were significantly shorter or longer. The shortest interview was 53 minutes, and the longest 138 minutes. While I had considered the possibility of amending the interview protocol if it became clear that questions needed to be elaborated, the only change that seemed necessary as interviews progressed was an amendment of the question order, which assisted with the flow of interviews. One participant requested the interview questions in advance, and was able to provide supplemental information related to some questions which was very helpful, although I found that the interview itself was not as spontaneous as a result.

All interviews were digitally recorded. Transcription of the first round of interviews began as soon as the first interviews took place, but was considerably more time-consuming than completing the set of interviews, so continued after interview were finished. Some interviews were transcribed using Dragon Naturally Speaking v. 9.5 voice recognition software. This software is adapted to one individual's voice, and so I needed to re-record interviews while listening to them, then the software transcribed my voice. I

found that while the software was generally reasonably accurate, there were a sufficient number of unrecognised or mistranscribed words, as well as poor punctuation (even when dictating punctuation marks) that an electronically-transcribed interview needed to be comprehensively re-edited in order to correct these mistakes. I decided to type out interviews while listening to them, as this took slightly less time and provided more accurate results. Voice recognition software will likely become a valuable transcription tool, but it not yet as effective as it could be.

As the interviews were recorded digitally, the sound quality was generally high. There was an additional advantage in that digital recordings can be significantly slowed without undue distortion, which enables much easier transcription with less need to skip back to clarify words or phrases. There were very few instances where the recording was too indistinct to determine what was said.

Notes were also taken during the interviews, and provided a useful summary of the main points. While it would have been possible to hire a professional transcriber, doing transcriptions myself resulted a much greater familiarity with the data, which assisted tremendously with data analysis.

Subsequent to the initial round of interviews and transcriptions, the preliminary analysis and framework was developed as described below. Participants were next sent the framework (Appendix Three) and a copy of their interview transcript by email for their review, in order to identify any desired amendments, clarifications or deletions. Only one person made a minor correction and there were no requested deletions. All participants were then interviewed for the second time. A number of second interviews took place at the June 2008 CACUSS conference, at which a number of participants were

attending; participants were asked if they felt comfortable being interviewed in public locations but none had any objection. Five participants did their second interviews in person at the conference, one in person at my office, one in person at her office, and the other eight by telephone. In all, 10 participants were interviewed in person either in the first or second round of interviews.

I did not notice a significant difference between telephone and in-person interviews, although picking up non-verbal cues was easier in person. An interesting effect of doing telephone interviews was that I found it was somewhat easier to adhere to the interview protocol; in-person interviews tended to become more conversational. Both interview approaches yielded rich conversation and data.

#### *Inductive data analysis*

Patton (1990) described inductive analysis as deriving categories or patterns from data for which the analyst develops terms. A group of people may have *indigenous concepts*, which are ideas or terms that have specific meaning to the people involved in the study; the analyst's role is to identify and elucidate them. Patton referred to *sensitizing concepts*, which are ideas that provide a reference or meaning to the group of people being studied. When using those concepts, providing rich data in the form of examples and quotations helps the reader to make sense of the data. "The analyst's constructs should not dominate the analysis but should facilitate the reader's understanding of the world under study" (p. 392). Participants in a study may also have *indigenous typologies*, which are categories and frameworks that are specific to them; in contrast, there are *analyst-constructed typologies*, in which the analyst looks for

particular patterns, categories and themes which are used to create a construction. Patton warns that:

Such constructions must be done with considerable care to avoid creating things that are not really in the data. One major way of finding out whether or not such analyst-constructed typologies are accurate and useful is to present them to people in the program [being evaluated] to find out if the constructions make sense (p. 398).

This study primarily sought sensitizing concepts and resulted in an analyst-constructed typology; participants identified terms and ideas that were important to them regarding their own role, values and values conflicts, which were then placed into an analyst-constructed framework. This was then verified with the participants and extensive quotations and examples from the data were used to elucidate it in order to produce the study's construction.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest searching for recurring points in the source material during initial sorting, then systemically checking for internal homogeneity regarding the concern (although not necessarily implying agreement on the issue) within the category. As the inquiry progresses, further data are placed in the categories, which may be refined, tested and prioritised. Once categories are firmly established, and priorities have been established – the authors point out that more than a limited set will make the evaluation far too cumbersome – the investigator returns to the field in order to flesh them out. Priorities are determined by frequency of mention, credibility given by participants, uniqueness, likelihood of opening further areas of inquiry, and whether or

not they lend themselves to investigation within the scope of the evaluation. Evaluators must exercise their judgement concerning which categories to retain and which to discard. The set of categories should demonstrate internal consistency, and should be able to present a whole picture from an external viewpoint. The category set should be reasonably inclusive of the data. The set should also be logically reproducible if an outside judge reviewed the data. It should be credible to the participants, to the extent that they perceive that their concerns and issues have been appropriately summarised. This can be accomplished by member checks, which is the technique employed in this study.

In order to analyze data inductively, Patton (1990) cited Guba (1978) who suggested that the analyst review materials by looking for recurring regularities in the data, which are patterns that can be sorted into categories. These categories are then assessed for internal and external homogeneity; the first refers to the data holding together, and the second to each category being meaningfully distinctive. During the process of reviewing data, categories can be expanded, collapsed or merged.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) point out that inductive data analysis is “the inverse of the usual mode of deductive data analysis used in conventional investigation” (p. 202). In conventional analysis, data is sought that will confirm or disprove a theory and variables; with inductive analysis these are intended to emerge. They say that inductive data analysis “bears remarkable similarities to content analysis” (p. 203) as it takes information embedded in the data and makes it explicit. They suggest *unitizing* data, which involves identifying specific items of data and separating these out. The criterion for unitization is that this information can be read and interpreted on its own, without depending on other data for explanation. The data should then be categorized:

Categorization is a process whereby previously unitized data are organized into categories that provide descriptive or inferential information about the context or setting from which the units were derived ... Essentially, the method involves sorting units into provisional categories on the basis of “look-alike” characteristics, which, in the spirit of the naturalistic paradigm, may initially only be tacitly understood (p. 203).

In this study, data analysis began during collection. Each interview consisted of a recorded interview which was transcribed, and my own notes. Initially, data categories reflected the different questions in the interview protocol; it also became clear that specific types of values were consistently emerging among the participants. Similarly, the different aspects of the role of student affairs also increasingly became apparent, as did the types of values conflicts that participants encountered.

Once transcription of the first set of interviews was completed, each transcript was thoroughly reviewed for what I identified as *values statements*. In other words, these were points that were made by participants that stated or reflected a value that they brought to their work. To begin with, the answers to the question about what values participants thought important to bring to student affairs work were the nucleus of the values analysis, but it also became clear that values appeared when participants answered other questions about their professional development, their role and interactions with other stakeholders in the university, and the values conflicts they encountered; some values statements were more subtle and were derived from participants’ descriptions of different situations and experiences. Interviews were combed for statements that

elucidated a value. Next, those statements were each summarized in point form phrases, which were then placed into emerging categories. The categories required some amendment and refining as further data were added, and in order to ensure that all the major values statements were included. The categories then formed the basis of the values framework that was sent to participants, and which was further amended based on their feedback. The framework was then used to build the construction of student affairs values presented in Chapter Five.

A similar analysis was then undertaken for both the analysing the role of student affairs, and for identifying and categorizing values conflicts. The latter proved to be the most challenging to categorize, and eventually I took the point form list, printed it, and cut it into strips which were then arranged into sets. This physical technique assisted with categorization.

The experience of inductive data analysis was fascinating. This technique is not clearly delineated or quantifiable; rather, particularly at the beginning, it felt almost chaotic, particularly when dealing with participant statements or descriptions that reflected more than one role statement, value, or value conflict. For example, a participant could describe an incident when she was dealing with a student mental health issue. This could include information on her role in relation to other members of the university staff such as counsellors, the impact of privacy legislation in regards to contacting family, the difficulty in having enough time and resources to deal with the problem, the challenge she had in making a decision that was both caring for the individual student and took the needs of the university community into consideration, and so on. In one relatively brief description of an incident there could be multiple values

statements, descriptions of values conflicts, and even further elucidation of the role of student affairs. Trying to tease out the multiple aspects from each statement or description could be challenging.

Furthermore, the structure of this study uses participant description to illustrate different roles, values, and values conflicts. So much rich and multi-faceted data was provided by participants, that determining what example to use for each category could be difficult. Much of the participant descriptions easily spanned multiple categories. Hence, it is worth reiterating that the categorization in this study is intended primarily to create a data framework to illustrate the role, values and values conflicts of the participants, not to provide a definitive or conclusive reductionist list.

The initial analysis therefore focussed on developing a framework of the role of student affairs, of values, and values conflicts, that was compiled in point form tables. This process was completed once no further unique data units were elicited from the transcripts. The framework encapsulates the results of the different interviews related to the role of student affairs, student affairs values, and values conflicts, and can be seen in Appendix Three.

The second round of interviews was conducted primarily in order to verify the framework; to perform a member check in order to increase the study's trustworthiness and credibility. Participants were asked to comment on how well each of the framework sections and categories aligned with and reflected their own values, and if they could identify any omissions or points they disagreed with. An additional question on how values conflicts were resolved was added to the second interview, in order to provide concluding thoughts to the analysis of values conflicts.



After the second round of interviews was complete, both sets of interviews were reviewed once more, and the framework was refined. During this process, the framework categories were filled with examples and quotations, largely from the first round of interviews. At that point, a few categories were further adjusted as some of the descriptions offered by participants led to a refinement of the analysis. Much of the data included accounts of different experiences and situations that participants used to illustrate their values and how they were put into practice; at times these illuminated more than one category, which presented a challenge in attributing them.

The original intention of the study was to include narrative accounts using pseudonyms, but early in the analysis it became clear that many experiences that participants described were sufficiently detailed or known outside their institutions that a knowledgeable reader could identify the participant or situation. Instead of narratives, aspects of participants' stories were paraphrased or quoted to illuminate the categories: Guba and Lincoln's (1985) thick description.

It was also found that there was significantly more data than could be included within the scope of this study, as participants spoke at length and in depth about their experiences. Distilling participants' elucidations of their values involved intentional choices around examples to include; selection was as much as possible representative of values and situations described by participants. I was careful to ensure that data that related to the student affairs role, student affairs values, or values conflicts that was omitted was already represented by other examples or quotations.

One point that should be made is that the categories created in this study are a useful tool for classifying the wealth of data provided by participants, but are not

intended to represent any final or definitive conclusions about student affairs values. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) described the constructivist approach to inquiry:

Constructivist inquiry *is* problematic; it is the humanly devised way to entertain constructions about states of affairs that are subject to continuous refinement, revision, and, if necessary, replacement ... The “truth” of any proposition (its credibility) can be determined by submitting it semiotically to the judgment of a group of informed and sophisticated holders of what may be different constructions. Any proposition that has achieved consensus through such a test is regarded as “true” until reconstructed in the light of more information or increased sophistication; any “truth” is relative (p. 104).

#### *Verification of data*

After the constructed framework of practitioner values (Appendix Three) was completed, it was sent to participants prior to each of them being re-interviewed. The main focus of the second round of interviews was to garner participants’ reflections on the values framework. This second interview provided the opportunity for them to comment on the credibility of the framework interpretation in relation to their own values and experiences.

Second interviews involved going through the framework and asking participants to comment on each section. All participants stated that their values were included and none had any values to add. There was only one point that was disputed by a participant, which was the importance of student affairs history (see Chapter Five: Student Affairs

Values). One participant commented that he was not completely comfortable with the values headings. He felt that there needed to be more emphasis on internal personal values and how they affected conflicts arising from the work, how those conflicts were resolved, and more discussion of personal feelings and principles that were brought to decision-making. Further exploration of these points would be excellent for future study.

The values conflict section of the framework elicited further examples, and as well several participants commented that they had not personally encountered certain conflicts.

Participants were also asked during the second interview about how they used their values to address conflicts; I felt after completing the initial analysis that this question was needed to avoid leaving values conflicts issues unresolved. Responses are summarized in *Chapter Six: Values Conflicts*.

The method of re-interviewing participants as a member check for verification was extremely valuable. The second interview was not primarily for the purposes of further data collection, but rather to have participants provide their own confirmation of the framework.

### ***Ethics***

The primary ethical concern arising from this study was related to the amount of information provided by participants. Given that the participants and researcher were known to each other, establishing trust was not an issue; instead, if anything, some participants included detailed information on sensitive situations. When analysing the data and selecting quotes, it was important for me that the trust provided by the

participants in describing situations was validated. Great care was taken not to provide sufficient detail of different situations related by participants that could be potentially damaging. Participants had the opportunity to review their first interview transcripts, and to request any removal of sensitive information. Only one minor transcription correction was made by one participant, and no participants requested any removal of information.

Given the relatively small size of the field of student affairs in Canada, personal details of individual participants such as length of service, the size of their institutions, type of graduate degree obtained, and specific experiences have been deliberately excluded or paraphrased in the data analysis sections, as correlating some of this information could potentially identify individuals to those familiar with participants or Canadian student affairs.

### ***Limitations***

As stated above, student affairs in Canada is a very under-researched field. Participants for this study were purposively selected among practitioners who had publicly reflected on student affairs in Canada, or who were recommended by those who had. The most important aspect of this is that this construction is intended to illuminate their understanding of their role, their values, and the values conflicts they experience in order to increase understanding of the field. This study discusses the values that people bring to their work, and although there was high congruence and agreement among participants after reviewing the framework, other practitioners may have different viewpoints. Additionally, due to the purposive selection of participants, the results of this study are not generalizable in terms of reflecting all student affairs practitioners in

Canada; participants were selected among those who had publicly reflected on student affairs or who were recommended by others on the basis of their expertise; this study's construction illuminates their role, values and experiences which are not likely universal. The intention of a constructivist approach is to continue to refine and develop understanding through further study, which could be undertaken with further qualitative interviews, or by using this framework as a basis for a quantitative survey.

Deliberately, this is not a comparative study with the United States, which is the origin of the bulk of student affairs research. However, one of the questions asked of participants was their perception of the importance of student affairs literature, which as seen above, is largely American. While this is touched on in the analysis chapters, the question did not make up a major aspect of the study results.

### ***Conclusion***

Constructivism is both a highly rewarding and a somewhat challenging methodology. Elements I found particularly gratifying included the open acknowledgement that the researcher is involved in constructing the analysis, and that this is a mutual process with the participants. Challenges included the sheer volume of interesting data and the difficulty in prioritizing and categorizing it. Building a point-form framework of the construction and using that to verify conclusions with the participants, was an extremely helpful step in confirming the credibility of the construction and adding further depth to the analysis.

The following three chapters present the results of the study analysis. Chapter Four describes participants' perceptions of the role of student affairs in Canadian

universities, and what they consider to be priorities and why. Chapter Five consists of the identified participant values, and descriptions of how they are manifested in their work. Chapter Six describes different categories of values conflicts.

## Chapter Four: The Role of Student Affairs

### *Introduction*

This chapter discusses the different roles that participants articulated for student affairs in the university, ranging from creating an educational campus environment through extra-curricular activities and learning, supporting the academic mission, providing individual services and support, advocating with and on behalf of students, fostering relations with other members of the university community, and encouraging student leadership.

Evaluating the impact of student affairs was difficult for participants to quantify, unless speaking of specific measurable outcomes such as the number of students seen by a student service unit. Generally, participants spoke of the broader effect of student affairs work, compared to that of direct student services that were targeted to helping individual students, such as counselling, psychiatry, health, career, or academic advising. Participants spoke positively of the effect that their work could have on the university culture and on student engagement. Their care and enthusiasm for students, and their passion for their work, were clear values that emerged from the interviews.

I used to ask myself the question, occasionally, it's kind of a good brain teaser. What would happen if my department was eliminated? ... The world would not end if all student affairs, and in fact all student services *per se*, in fact, I think you could probably do things like wipe out career services, counselling and health in one fell swoop, and probably not see much of a dramatic impact in a year. ... So I think our work is very, very

long-term. It's often ambiguous, what role we play, or a little bit abstract.

And so for that reason, it's sometimes difficult to articulate what our purpose is.

The participant pointed out that it would gradually be apparent that different student affairs functions were needed; these included dealing with challenging students, which is what many people might first think of in relation to student affairs, or addressing issues such as students not getting jobs, or lower retention rates, or less effectiveness around learning outcomes, particularly those that could be expected to take place outside the classroom. One participant said the importance of student affairs, as opposed to direct services, is in creating a learning environment. An example of the difference between the two would be different aspects of a university health services department; direct service delivery would be individuals getting birth control pills or a flu shot, working in the learning environment would be providing a public health campaign. "What should be the most valued about our role is that we provide an environment in which the full realization of the learning experience can come to fruition."

Providing a strong, vibrant learning experience was a core value of student affairs work, according to participants. This chapter discusses the different ways that participants identified that it was being done.

### ***Helping to Create a Learning Environment***

I can't imagine ... going off to university and just going strictly into the classroom environment, and outside of that there was no counselling, there



was no advising, there was no programming, there was no leadership development, I mean, what kind of environment would that be? So the value is in the creation of the person. It's in the creation of that citizen-learner.

The role for student affairs in the university described by participants was working to create a campus environment that facilitated student development, particularly through providing various learning opportunities outside the classroom. Through fostering an involving campus culture, student affairs can help expose students to different people and ideas that they might not encounter otherwise. This enables students to learn and develop as individuals, as well as to contribute to the institution.

We need to support first and foremost, the academic mission, but I think we have a really crucial role to play in helping broaden out people's understanding that everything that happens to students is educational, and that we can contribute a lot to student learning through the other things that we provide, that complement the formal academic activities of the campus.

Many participants said that this type of work can span all across the university, particularly when information about best practices around student development and engagement is disseminated. It was essential to reach out to students and provide information about different activities, as well as the skills they could acquire. This could happen intentionally through programming, or through creating spaces in which students

interacted outside of class. Having physical spaces around campus in which students could engage with each other enabled greater interaction, and structured learning opportunities could occur in locations such as residences, student union buildings or club offices. Generally, students should be encouraged to take the initiative themselves, although incentives such as recognition programs could be useful to encourage them to become involved in different activities. Student affairs did not reach every student, and while that was unfortunate as some would not get the full benefit of involvement, facilitating a supportive, educational campus environment helped mitigate that. One participant spoke with excitement of a campus-wide task force to provide a supportive learning environment, including studying targeted areas in which students congregated, ranging from food services to different parts of the library, in order to improve the student engagement in those spaces. On his large campus, the focus was to examine all levels of administrative interaction with students, in order to identify areas that could be improved.

#### *Encouraging involvement*

One participant pointed out that since students tend to be busy, it is necessary to be clear about the benefits of getting involved, in order to encourage participation. She said that there were “a million different ways” to do this; that not every program would appeal to every student, so providing a range of opportunities was important. Providing information early in students’ academic careers about the potential breadth of the student experience helped with this, as well as developing them as leaders; student affairs could “walk them through, essentially.”

According to several participants, the value of campus activities is not simply to encourage individual student development, but to create a culture of engagement. These opportunities create an expectation among students of the type of university experience they will have. If an institution has a reputation for engaging students, and the message is clear that this is the type of activity in which students engage, then students are more likely to arrive with a positive attitude towards getting involved.

The perception of the institution that they are attending can sometimes set the tone for what the experiences will be. If they feel that they've been accepted into an institution that has a good reputation, that is well thought of, that is known for its student experience or its student engagement, that state of mind that those expectations will very much begin to influence, even their own perception and experiences, before they even begin. As opposed to if somehow they have this perception that I'm only going to this university because it's the only one that would accept me, or it's the only one that I can afford, that negativity and that bar is set pretty low.

An example cited by one participant was orientation week, which had a mix of academic and social activities. His institution participates in the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) assessment, and he said that respondents identified that orientation did not just prepare them for starting classes, but also helped them feel welcomed, connected and loyal to the institution.

When engaged in co-curricular program development, several participants cited the variety of skills students could acquire through involvement opportunities. These

included fostering leadership, greater life skills, improved interpersonal communication, and management; many student organisations required a high level of autonomous decision-making and responsibility.

Especially for the people who you were able to engage in higher levels of those extracurricular activities, getting management skills, people skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, the things that you don't learn from a textbook. The things that you have to learn through experience.

#### *Testing personal values*

In terms of influencing students' values, some participants cited the role of the university being to provide opportunities for students to test and examine their beliefs and ideas, rather than shaping them directly.

I don't think you should be shaping, I think you should be exposing. You know, because shaping implies that you have the answers, and you're not a parent, right? You're not trying to raise this person; you're just trying to provide the environment that allows them to pick and choose.

Students may arrive at university with espoused values, a participant pointed out, but these are not necessarily yet congruent with their actions, or "lived values." A strong campus environment can help them incorporate their values into their work and lives. He pointed to behaviours that demonstrated a lack of congruency, and how students may have been accustomed to being told how to behave.

I think where I'm going with this is, for instance, all the things that we learned, or that people are telling us, about Millennial students. You know, how they are, you know, look up to their parents as heroes, and their grandparents, and will never get divorced, and want large families, and they care about the environment, and all these kinds of things. Well, if that's true, why am I walking around my campus seeing cans all over the damn place! Or the bathroom's a complete mess, you know? It's the actual doing of it, and the students choosing to do it when no one's looking, or when it will take extra energy to enact those values. Or someone telling them exactly what to do, as opposed to figuring it out.

A participant noted that staff “step carefully” around values students may have received from their parents, that may even affect their actions, so as to avoid conflict with both students and their parents. However, students could and should expect to encounter different values at university. Another participant said that she saw university as a “crucible” where students could readily test and develop their ideas and values. She added that this was not unique to universities by any means, but that a university environment could accelerate and enrich the learning experience. This can take place both within the teaching environment and in students' lives. She noted that part of this process was to provide a safe place to make mistakes, and while students were accountable for those mistakes, the consequences may not be as great as if they took place outside the university. “So they can argue in a classroom, and have heated debate, but not have somebody walk across the room and punch them in the nose.”

A participant said that it may well be the case that most students leave university with the same values and ethics as they started with; she was focussed on providing opportunities for them to have their values challenged, and her desire was to have them reflect on their identity and goals.

Ideally, I always say that universities should be an opportunity to reinvent yourself, and if you reinvent yourself as the same person that you were when you came in four years ago, then that's fine, as long as you went through the thought process in between. ... In fact, they can come out quite the same, as long as they've had that moment of reflection in which they've said, okay, who am I, and what mark do I want to make on this world, and where am I going.

Many participants spoke of the campus environment as an important factor in exposing students to new ideas and perspectives, both inside and outside of the classroom. As seen in the following chapter, equity and diversity were important values for practitioners. One participant said that trained staff may be comfortable challenging students, where appropriate, on their values, and that a university environment, compared to home or work, may provide a greater opportunity to experience that challenge. "If a student who has very racist attitudes for example, if he or she surrounds themselves with friends that laugh at their jokes, and support that kind of thinking, there's no challenge. There's just support." Adding to that, another participant spoke of the importance of creating opportunities to encounter diversity, whether in a study group, residence, or campus activity, as that would give them a chance to reflect on their own attitudes.

If you've never met anybody who's gay, you're unlikely to rid yourself of a fear of gay and lesbian people. But as soon as you've come in contact with, and developed a relationship with, a gay or lesbian person, you're a heck of a lot more likely to have changed your views about sexuality.

A participant differentiated between teaching that focussed on knowledge acquisition, skills, or career development, such as "you're going to be a doctor, and here are the skill sets that go with that," versus the "real work" of student affairs, namely, creating a campus environment that has an impact on students' values and ethics. That participant spoke of civic engagement and student leadership as opportunities to shape students' out-of-classroom experience, adding that this contrasted with individual services, which were more intended to support students with particular needs. Not all citizenship development is the same, another participant commented. He gave the examples of charitable work such as supporting the Girl Scouts selling cookies at the door, giving charitable donations, or working at a soup kitchen; these were part of being a "good citizen," but he emphasized that there was a difference between "doing things *to* people, or doing things *for* people, as opposed to feeling a connection with people and doing something *with* them."

Similarly, a participant spoke of the opportunity to explore different life skills through discussion outside the classroom:

There is very little time to have an open discussion with 500 people about something in the popular culture, or about it if it's not directly related to the course, or about ethics if it's not related directly related to that

particular course matter. Or social skills, or how do you manage a conflict with your roommate, or all those kind of things, that all are all part of the learning, and developing and becoming adult, however you want to define that. And student affairs provides a lot of that stuff.

*Testing personal boundaries*

A participant stressed the desirability of students becoming engaged citizens on a broad level, in order to be active in their community as critical thinkers, including having authenticity and congruence with their core values and beliefs. Students should be encouraged to make future societal contributions throughout their careers; university involvement and leadership programs can provide skills that they need in order to be successful.

I think that everything that we do should have, ideally and this isn't always the case, should have some kind of student learning outcomes, whether intentional or unintentional, attached to it. So you invite students to be part of the committee, and it's because you want them to contribute, and you want them to participate, but you also want them to learn something. You want them to have that experience, not just for the experience itself, but how that experience can shape who they are, and what it is that they want to do in their life, and where they might go in the future.



A key aspect to student engagement is making connections, a participant said, and co-curricular activities provide an excellent opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, including working with people who are older and more educated, or appreciating difference, which is useful throughout a person's life and work. This includes an increased understanding of the complexity of human interactions.

We have a number of services and programs that expose people to different types of thinking, and take things that might not be discussed in the classroom, bring them forward. I think when students get involved, that complex problems that emerge in a living situation, residence, or on a team, like a leadership team that's trying to run an event, or in terms of even something like accommodating someone's particular special need, is often an opportunity for people to look at these things in a complex way. Where do my needs meet your needs? Where do my values meet your values? How would we decide which prevails?

When students do engage with each other and with staff and student leaders, they are given the opportunity to test boundaries. "It isn't till they've done something, or experienced something, or said something, that they start to question their own behaviour, and this helps solidify through that experimentation, what they really think, and feel, and believe." Student affairs staff, in the opinion of one participant, are understanding of this process, and are open to working with students who are undergoing it, perhaps more than other administrative staff or faculty; it is not that inappropriate behaviour or ideas are tolerated, but that because of their training and experience, student

affairs staff are “open, and interested in students.” This can lead to students feeling more comfortable expressing themselves and exploring different ideas.

University is an opportunity to experiment safely, added another participant. “You’re not in the real world yet ... it’s not as high stakes.” This was why, the participant said, he was always disappointed when students did not take advantage of the different opportunities available, but rather simply showed up for class, missing the “privilege of having for yours, all about you, and what you want to learn, and get excited about.”

Another participant said that in many cases, including her own as an undergraduate, students had the opportunity to undertake activities and ideas they might not have otherwise.

I was never a joiner in high school. I never would have been on a committee, or in student government, or public speaking in front of a group of people. I mean, first and second year I would drop any class that had a presentation component. And then all of a sudden, I was speaking to high school students in admissions, for 500 people, it was a big change for me.

A learning environment can also be created through interactions with individual students in need of support, when rather than simply fixing a problem for a student, a staff member will help them to navigate how to solve it themselves, and in the process, encourage the development of independence and self-reliance, as discussed below in the section on individual student support.

The main features, then, of a learning environment facilitated by student affairs is one in which students are encouraged to get involved, test their boundaries, take responsibility, think critically about their values and actions, interact with each other in meaningful ways, and develop new skills.

### *Supporting the Academic Mission*

According to participants, student affairs complements the core academic mission of the university, in a number of important ways. Participants said that student affairs programs can assist students in developing communication, presentation, and critical thinking skills. A participant from a research-intensive university said that student affairs staff can take on additional learning skills and academic counselling tasks that faculty may undertake in more teaching-centred institutions. Increasingly, student affairs staff may partner with faculty in programs such as service learning. In addition, depending on the institution, student affairs staff may be involved in academic counselling, disability support, academic integrity education, and academic misconduct investigations.

I do think there was a period of time, maybe in the 70s and 80s when people in student affairs, I think, got up on their high horse, and thought that really the important work of the university was the stuff that we were doing. And the academic stuff that was happening in the faculties was really kind of secondary. And I think that the profession went through a period when it struggled with that whole notion, and I think it's come out in the right place, which is recognizing that that's what our institution's

about. And that's what students are coming here for. And that that academic mission has to be paramount.

### *Working with faculty*

Many participants hoped to see an increase in partnerships with faculty. One said that she hoped to have an increased mutual awareness of what each "side of the house" did, in order to build more partnerships. This included ensuring that students had contact time with both staff and faculty, in order to meet the goals of producing a knowledge-based labour force, and an educated, engaged citizenry. "I think there's going to be a need to find what our niche is in the university, and help the university meet those priorities."

Working with faculty could be challenging, as academics were very busy and had their own priorities, and also did not in all cases understand how student affairs could work as a support mechanism. One participant described his department's initiatives, which included placing student service staff in different academic departments, as well as linking more with newer faculty members. He said that they already had a connection with a number of more senior academics who "are what I would call the converted." Their mutual relationship included promoting each others' events, and ensuring that faculty were involved in such things as hiring committees. His institution, however, has a relatively high turnover of faculty members, and many new faculty seeking tenure simply did not have the time to engage with student affairs. The strategy, therefore, was to reach out to faculty members who had been at the institution for two to five years, and inviting them to participate in activities such as new student orientation, including follow-up

meetings with groups of students for coffee. They found that both the students and faculty enjoyed it tremendously.

And we find that this has started to facilitate better interactions with faculty members, faculty members anecdotally tell us that these students are the ones coming to their office hours, that are participating in class. So that's a win-win and it costs next to nothing.

Other participants echoed the concern that demands on faculty, particularly at research-intensive universities, were very high. Helping faculty understand what support student affairs departments were able to offer was often raised by participants. One commented that at her university, there was a perception that the most successful faculty were those that attracted large research grants, and that service and even teaching portion of faculty work was less rewarded. In that climate, the participant felt, it was increasingly the work of student affairs to prepare and support students in their academics. Another put it as "picking up the slack" for student support.

To raise awareness among faculty about available services and support, a participant said that his approach was to go into classrooms at the beginning of the semester, which not only informed students of available assistance, but helped faculty members know where to direct them, as well as to ensure faculty knew they were there to assist with issues such as discipline and code of student conduct cases. Still another participant pointed out that sometimes student affairs staff may too often be asking faculty for help, rather than offering it. Examples could be as direct as requesting faculty members to sit on committees, or to participate in programs such as service learning,

which, while addressing academic outcomes, entailed more work for them. He said that it was essential to realize that almost all faculty want the best for their students, but are often caught up in multiple priorities regarding how their time and energy are spent. His approach has been to have his student affairs staff members go out and ask individual faculty what they might need or want, then compile the results. “If we came to the faculty saying, with an assumption, you care about your students learning and growing, you’re trying to do that, how can we help?” His goal was to “convert things from an ask to an offer.” This could be challenging for student affairs staff, as there could be a fear that faculty might request something they did not feel able to do; this does, however, present new opportunities, and gives faculty an opportunity to honestly express what they would like to see. He said that this approach was like fieldwork, and it was very easy to scale up across the institution.

One participant commented that most academics were likely to have been highly successful students, who may not have experienced many of the challenges that some of their students encounter, and may themselves never have used student services. They might feel that it is normal to have a passion for their field of study, and have been able to pursue it with success, but may not realize that this is the exception, rather than the norm. Because of this they might not see as great a need for student support services, and even see them as a drain on institutional resources. Another participant noted that many faculty today seem more aware of student services because often they were the parents of current university students.

A participant said that he saw variation between different academic departments in terms of their understanding of what supports were available, and whether they

encouraged students to access them. He said that most faculty members seemed to be supportive of student services, as they had had to refer students to them in some form at one time or another, and that helped faculty to understand the value of these services. Similarly, a participant said that student affairs' relationship with faculty varied by department. "I think that often with faculty they either are not interested, or don't have the time, or don't quite get what we do. So it requires a lot of effort on our part to kind of sell ourselves to them." Their strategy was to identify specific departments to work with, and create events to encourage faculty and staff to get to know them, including through events and newsletters. This information could help them to understand what the department did, in order to pass that on to students as appropriate. She added that this has been most effective when they have been able to establish an individual relationship with a specific person in the department, who could be a faculty member, an academic advisor, or an administrative assistant. In many ways, participants said, student affairs complemented faculty members in providing academic support.

I think that we, it sounds weird, but we're almost the glue that holds everything together. We can link students with support programs that help the academic side of things. We can create those programs in partnership with the academics that will provide the experiential learning. We help [students] make meaning out of that academic experience so they can move on into the workforce, or be outstanding contributing graduates. ... I think the academic side of the house has the freedom to pursue the scholarship, because we're there to do the other part of it.

*Developing intentional learning outcomes*

While providing individual academic support services was important, a participant pointed out that many are targeted at specific students. This can include advocacy on behalf of aboriginal students, disabled students, or international students, students needing health or counselling support, or students accused of plagiarism or other academic or non-academic issues. To reach students on a wider scale, the participant identified programs such as first-year “University One” types of courses that help students gain academic and life skills, and to understand the campus culture. A way to gauge student affairs success could be through student satisfaction surveys, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement or the Canadian University Survey Consortium, that give a sense of how engaged students are with their campus. Increasingly, the participant said, learning outcomes also provide a measurable benchmark of student affairs success.

Several participants said that student affairs staff ought to see themselves as educators, who contribute to student learning in many different ways. It was important to broaden the general understanding of what is educational, and to acknowledge that student affairs programs complement formal academic studies. A participant pointed to the impact of mass higher education, concerned that a drawback of this could be that students may not make connections and social networks in a more impersonal environment, and may not develop communication or teamwork skills. They could lack social cohesion, and not develop some desired outcomes such as an appreciation for diversity and good citizenship. She said that unless we are prepared to have higher education become a “degree mill,” it is important to structure an environment in which



desirable social outcomes are emphasized, through programming, intentional grouping of students, or creating physical spaces that invite interactions. This can also be done by partnering with faculty to increase discussion-based learning opportunities in and out of the classroom.

I don't think we need to over-program, but we actually need to provide a template for how those conversations, and the environments in which those conversations are going to occur, because they will not, and I believe this wholeheartedly, they're just not going to occur naturally.

Several participants spoke of being increasingly engaged in academic integrity education. Some institutions include more registrarial services under the student affairs umbrella than others, but many student affairs divisions are incorporating more information on academic integrity into their programming, such as orientation, residence life, mentorship programs, student leadership programs, and so on. One participant described the value of creating a peer-centred environment in which cheating was unacceptable, through training various student leaders such as residence dons, orientation co-ordinators, and recruitment ambassadors to convey the message. He said that this entailed some interesting dialogue with registrarial colleagues.

So the student affairs role in that was really interesting, in that when we all got together, the registrar wanted to make rules. ... What was the student affairs approach? How do we create a student culture that it's uncool to cheat? And that was a lot of fun, I mean, that stopped people at the table,

they went, oh! Well, why is that important? We need rules! We need punishment, we need protocol, we need appeals, judicial procedural fairness, and all that. Well, of course you need all that. You have to have all that, and it has to be well primed, and perfect in its execution. But you need, before that, a culture of what's right and wrong. So our model here is a student leadership model. .... We went looking for good students, who had strong values and beliefs in academic integrity.

Assisting academic learning outside the classroom was another role of student affairs. One participant pointed to engaged students having greater opportunities to discuss academic ideas through various co-curricular activities, study groups, or leadership opportunities, particularly in contrast to large classes.

Some participants commented that there was an increased focus in many institutions on desired learning outcomes, and on the attributes that should be possessed by an educated student, and said that student affairs can be very involved in developing programs to facilitate this. One participant said his institution had begun requiring that all of the student affairs activities have learning outcomes built into them. This focus had also had the effect of student affairs becoming involved in assisting with learning outcomes incorporation at the broader institutional level.

Student interactions outside the classroom can also assist them in developing a broader understanding of their academic field, beyond simply knowledge acquisition:

I think the confidence to go out and do what they need to do, but also that they would gain knowledge, you know, in terms of tools that they might

need to move into the future. I mean, they certainly are gaining a lot of knowledge, in terms of subject matter and so on, which is great, but I'd love for them to gain a better understanding of what that translates to, beyond just [...] the specifics of their academic field. Being able to feel confident that they can go out and do whatever it is that they want to do, and do what they *can* do.

### ***Providing Expertise Around Student Issues***

Student affairs staff were often called on to be the “experts” regarding students and student issues. This included providing information about student development and student affairs research, giving background and input in decisions affecting students, and consulting on major cases involving individual students. Being seen and referred to as experts on students, including on student behaviour, was a valuable role to play. One person said that “we suffer from a bit of egotism in our profession, thinking that we always know what’s best for students.” While he said that in many cases this was true, he added that it was necessary to continue to keep abreast of what were key issues in students’ lives. This encompassed a broad swath of emerging concerns; examples ranged from understanding various mental health issues, to being aware of computer social networking as a means of building community.

### ***Research and education in the field***

In order to be properly informed of the literature and research on students, participants had undertaken both formal and informal professional development in

student affairs. This included taking graduate degrees in the field, participating in Canadian Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD) programs, attending Canadian or American national student affairs conferences, reading student affairs research, and networking and sharing information with colleagues both within and outside their institutions. Two participants added that fellow staff members of theirs were pursuing graduate work in student affairs, and so were excellent resources for keeping up with current research. A great deal of participants' learning was self-directed, consisting of reading books and journals about student development and, more broadly, higher education; participants also referred to finding popular or academic publications on higher education or university-aged students useful. Several had backgrounds in other fields, including business management, counselling, psychology, or health services. A number of participants were directly engaged in some form of institutional research or assessment, such as administering National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) or Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) surveys.

One participant said that the research coming out of American student services was certainly applicable, as Canadians are dealing with a similar group of learners; she pointed out, however, that the higher education systems in the two countries were somewhat different. For example, she said, it was more common in the United States to have students transferring from colleges to universities, where at least in central and eastern Canada, community colleges tended to be specifically associated with trades or career training. Another participant said that he studied American student affairs history as part of his graduate program, and found it interesting to trace the development from a service-oriented, patriarchal system, to the admission of women in universities, to

catering to returning soldiers after the Second World War, then to the “explosion” of student development theory in the 1960s and the shift away from the *in loco parentis* approach; he said this was reflected in the Canadian system as well. Other differences included less programming around student involvement, with a congruently greater autonomy among student leaders and student groups.

Participants identified several areas in which they hoped for further research. One participant cited a lack of developmental research into multiple identities (such as a gay person of colour), versus specialized areas such as race, sexual orientation or disability. Another said that the rise of distance learning was an area that needed attention, particularly concerning the extent to which those students felt connected to campus. She said that a related under-studied demographic was older students, who may not be able to stop working in order to attend university full-time. “So how do you do it while they work? ... We don’t have any theory-based stuff on the cognitive development of those students, on their psychosocial development during this period.” She highlighted that distance learners and older students were demographics that were likely to increase, especially if numbers of traditional-age students were to begin to decline.

Several participants said that a familiarity with student development literature could be extremely helpful when designing programs or making a case for resources, as citing research provided background and credibility to their proposals, and that having more institutional and Canadian research could facilitate this.

We should be doing more research, not just to bring in the research dollars per se, but just to be able to make that contribution to the literature, and to

the research, because it's a hell of a lot easier to make your case when I can point to the research. When I can point to Pascarella, Terenzini, George Kuh, all of those people, and say look, this is what we're trying to do. This is what we need to accomplish.

Another participant said that being able to cite student affairs literature gave her proposals and documents legitimacy, rather than relying on personal instincts or anecdotes.

Whenever I do any document, proposal, etcetera, I bring the literature into it. I'm telling you what experts and research are telling you, so it's not just, I really feel strongly, or this is student-driven. It seems to be that research is the language in higher ed. And it's important to bring that language into the dialogue. So, I very much use research and the literature.

#### *Fostering awareness of student affairs*

Participants had mixed views of the perception of student affairs elsewhere in the university. One said that "I think nationally student services' relations with other units on the academic administrative side has always been a tenuous one." He said that there was a constant battle for credibility around the student experience, the theories and research around students, and the money that was being spent on student programs and services. He found that building collaborative partnerships with different units made a significant difference in being able to succeed. An example he cited was involving different student service offices and academic units in providing information sessions during new student

orientation, and in offering extended hours at the beginning of the year. This relationship was very successful, as both the other units and student affairs can each see a clear benefit.

One participant said that as she became more senior in her administrative role, her scope became wider, and she found that increasingly her goals coincided with those of other senior staff. Something she valued at her institution was that there was a very clear strategic plan and set of outcomes, including financial ones, that helped everyone to work together effectively. Similarly, a participant pointed out that if student affairs staff are well-trained and have “business savvy,” they can develop models that “resist corporatization,” while being fiscally sustainable. In self-funded services such as residence operations, this was important in order to keep them financially accessible. This approach also role modelled balancing student needs and financial accountability to other university services, such as a campus bookstores, food services, or parking, which may be seen as primarily revenue-generating.

Student affairs departments can change and evolve, at times in response to institutional changes. One participant said that after his institution’s senate decided to focus on the quality of the student experience, his office was thrust into much greater prominence, and began to receive considerably more resources. He has found that administrators from across the university have begun coming to him for input on improving student success in all areas, including academic, and this has also led to a great deal of collaboration among divisions and services.

Another participant spoke of how student affairs can help break down silos, not only among service divisions, but also among faculties. He said that working

collaboratively with academic colleagues can have a real impact for students, noting that some students have brilliant academic averages but limited social skills, where others might be extremely involved as student leaders, but with lower marks, with the majority of students in the middle. Providing both support and involvement opportunities to help a range of students find a place where they can experiment with their ideas and their identity can have an important impact, not simply on them, but also in assisting faculty and the institution with recruitment and retention. Similarly, another participant spoke of student affairs playing a role in helping transition students both in and out of university, and working with faculty on making retention and student success a focus.

Administrations in which there is a high level of co-operation and a good understanding of the student experience can be very effective in creating a supportive student environment. A participant spoke of how his institution involved people from all different divisions in various activities designed to engage students. He said that there were few silos, and that when administrators made decisions, they considered both their own department and the needs of the institution as a whole. He added that this strong collegiality and spirit may be easier to foster at a smaller institution. Another said that she had observed that the reporting relationship often made a difference in terms of how student affairs is viewed; if there is a vice presidential student affairs position reporting directly to the president of the institution, then a focus on the student experience would likely be more to the forefront.

Conversely, university presidents, vice presidents or other administrators who are less familiar with student affairs, or who are preoccupied with other concerns, could be challenging to work with. “Boy, you can be really affected by people, senior people over



you, who don't understand student affairs from a professional perspective," said one participant. He pointed to the enormous variety across Canada in student affairs structures and reporting relationships as demonstrating how each institution handles student affairs differently. For example, enrolment and retention may or may not be included in the student affairs portfolio, and yet these areas are strongly affected by the campus environment and student support. He said that he had the sense that the prominence of student affairs was increasing, as more university presidents had begun speaking about the importance of the student experience. This assisted with helping student affairs "get out of just doing management stuff, and try to influence the university overall ... where you can influence on a broader level, rather than just trying to manage shrinking budgets."

Student affairs staff often had specific expertise in specific areas, which led to consultation and involvement in planning. One example cited by a participant was being deeply involved in a major policy revision initiative, in which student affairs was rewriting all policies related to students. In other areas, student affairs staff expertise with equity and diversity, such as for the disabled, international students, aboriginal students, gay and lesbian students, and so on, led to consultation not only around student support, but also for staff and faculty. This expertise enables staff to advocate with and on behalf of those groups, and to be consulted around ways to address their needs.

### ***Advocacy With and on Behalf of Students***

Participants saw their advocacy role in a number of different ways. Overall, this was in working to create an institutional culture in which students were clearly valued,

belonged, and mattered, and in which student support was central to institutional practice. That support could come in the form of meeting individual student needs, ensuring that students' voices were heard, and encouraging broad student development.

*Student participation in decision-making*

A participant spoke of the need, when making institutional decisions, to raise continually the potential impact on students, and to consider those decisions from a student perspective. As well, policies and procedures should ideally meet both the institution's and students' needs. It was necessary to ensure effective student representation on different decision-making bodies, so that their voices could be heard. At times, too, student affairs staff could be called on to deal with disciplinary issues, or to mediate a conflict or crisis involving students. In such cases, student affairs also needed to ensure that due process and care were exercised.

One participant said that his portfolio's role was to find ways to "keep students front and centre." This included helping students to be effective advocates for themselves, as well as providing information to other members of the university community about students and student needs. He added that another aspect of this role was to "be a whole collection of glass-half-full people" to counter his observation that "cynicism and critique are rewarded very highly at universities." He said that a negative atmosphere can create a sense of disappointment among students, and student affairs can be a positive influence in countering that.

Many participants stressed the importance of providing an opportunity for students to provide input about concerns related to the campus. One participant said that

“we’re sometimes still following the momentum of the past, rather than talking to students, hearing from them, knowing what is really on their mind, and then responding better to that.”

Ensuring that students have a voice did not simply involve seating them at a decision-making table, said one participant. “I’ve been involved in too many things where somebody will say, let’s get a student, and they sit there as a token.” She said that student affairs staff can make sure that students know about the opportunities to participate, and to provide the resources and information to be effective advocates for themselves. Another participant said that the extent to which the student perspective is considered varies from campus to campus. She said that when she sat on a committee, or when meeting with other administrators, she was reluctant to speak for students, rather than having them represent themselves, but that “sometimes I have to be the one, and I am the only one, who asks the question, about how does this impact students, or have students being consulted when this process has been put in place.” She said that at her current institution, there was little history of student consultation, so having students involved in decision-making was not always seen positively. She was therefore put in the position of having to speak for students, which was less appropriate as she was not a student herself. She felt that ensuring that the student perspective was provided either directly or indirectly is something that student affairs professionals should do all the time.

We’re developing services to serve students, we’re trying to be student friendly, and in a lot of institutions, students are naturally part of that process. ... At a place where that is not part of the culture, you have to

both try to change the culture, but also try to be the person who asks the questions. And so it's challenging, because you have to, you know, it's like being a white person trying to talk about issues of people of colour, and you're not a person of colour, right? ... It's trying to constantly get students involved, and trying to constantly invite students to participate in a culture that doesn't value them, and I think that deep down inside they know that they're not valued, which is why they probably don't show up.

To counter this, she said that "there shouldn't be a day that goes by, that we're not working with students in some way." She felt that this is part of a broader philosophy, that students are not simply at an institution to attend classes, but to find a community, and to have a sense of belonging and mattering.

#### *Working with elected student leaders*

When conflict arose with elected student leaders, a participant felt that a useful role for student affairs is to facilitate mediation so that they can solve the problems themselves. One participant said that when working with student leaders it was helpful to help them reflect on how issues were handled. "You just made choice A, in that conversation or that meeting, what were the other choices you thought about, and did that feel like the right one, or were you scared into it?" He said that student leaders would often feel pressured by others, including other students, to make certain decisions that they themselves did not really support. Providing time to reflect on an issue and discuss

approaches could help them be more effective spokespeople, and he appreciated the opportunity to engage with them at that level.

One of the joys that I've had during my career, is that I've often had student government people I could do some of that with, maybe not always instantly in the heat of battle, but you know, usually not too far off, we could find a place, and be able to do it, kind of in an honourable way.

At times, relations between student leaders and senior administration can be strained. One participant said that at his institution, the senior administration had "written them off," and he saw this as the reason why there was ongoing conflict. "And therefore the more you [senior administration] write them off, the less you consult, and the less you consult, the more ticked they [students] get." He was still having difficulty convincing senior administrators of the value of student consultation. In contrast, he spoke of how fortunate he felt in having a "tremendous relationship" with faculty deans across the university. Part of this stemmed from his involvement in assisting with administrative searches for new deans, which gave him a strong working relationship with them. In contrast, a participant spoke of how important "cabinet solidarity" among senior administrators could be on contentious issues. He noted that at times he would be the "poster child" for a particular policy or decision made by senior administration that went contrary to student sentiment. Even when he personally had strong feelings about an issue, he said he would voice his opinion to the senior group, but then be prepared professionally to support a decision if it went a different way.

In some institutions, student affairs and services are funded through student fee levies, rather than through university operating budgets. In these cases, there is often a mandated student consultation process regarding how those fees are allocated. In one case, a participant spoke very positively of the effectiveness of having student leaders making such decisions.

My colleagues look at me like I've got three heads, and say, how can you give up that power to students? And I say, there isn't one thing that I haven't wanted that I haven't got. Because when you work that closely with students, it's your responsibility to know what the students, who the learners are so to speak, and what their needs are, and from a professional perspective what you can provide.

A participant, speaking of her former institution, said that often she felt like the "middleman" between student leaders and other members of the administration; there was a cycle of her working to maintain credibility with students, and therefore finding herself siding with their point of view, which could produce an "us against them" mindset. The positive aspect of this was that she found that having a strong relationship with student leaders meant that she could work effectively on improving the communication between them and other divisions of the university, but the key was that she and others understood that this was her role.

What are your expectations, or what does the institution have as expectations of you? And if it's not clear, that they expect you, those

above you, your supervisor, or your senior administrators, or even deans, don't see you as a student advocate, or a person that can put senior decisions into a student-friendly context, in terms of communication, then you can get yourself into hot water.

Working on student rights and responsibilities was crucial to one participant, including helping students take responsibility for their own actions and learn from this, as well as ensuring that they receive due process. He said that it was necessary to shift from the idea of being *in loco parentis* to a framework of policies that encourage personal development and fair, balanced resolutions. A number of participants stressed the importance of student-centred policy and having students involved in both developing and implementing it.

### ***Supporting Individual Students***

Providing support to individual students was a valuable part of the student affairs role, although it was not emphasized by most participants. Student support services such as health, counselling, career, academic skills development, and disability services are well-established in most institutions. Services are valuable to students, and providing them tends to tie a number of different facets of a university experience together. For example, one participant said that good career support involves:

... Helping them translate everything that they're learning here, whether it's through academics, or just being university students, translating that into what that can mean for the future. Helping them to name what it is

that it is that they've learnt, and I'm not talking like specific academics, but just their skills and so on, I think that we kind of help them put all the pieces together.

There were distinct rewards from working with individual students. This included the opportunity to learn from them and their experiences, while helping them. "I think I've realized how most of them have such a willingness to learn, and to grow, and they can be very open, open to different ideas, and I find that really amazing to be around."

Helping individual students deal with problems was not only rewarding, but also presented an opportunity to help them to become more self-reliant. One participant cited Sanford's (1967) model of having three requirements for growth: readiness, challenge and support, and that student affairs is in a position to provide that support.

I think the challenges come from all kinds of places. They come from academic challenges, they come from just living life, they come from crises and tragedies and conflicts, and lots of things. But I think most of what student affairs does is the support side. It's certainly providing services to help those who are struggling, whether it's that they're struggling because they keep getting ill, because they're struggling with their health, they're struggling with psychological issues, they're struggling with preparedness for university study.

A participant said that it was important, when helping students deal with the various stresses they encounter, to take the time to listen to what they were saying as



much as possible. She said that when seeing hundreds of students it was easy to “lump them all together and become impatient, or want to cut the service short.” It was important not to become frustrated with people asking the same questions repeatedly, but rather to focus on the student and have respect for them and their needs. It was necessary to be aware that students are at a particular time of their lives, and that they have specific stresses, concerns and even crises. She said that what she found particularly helpful when working with an individual student was initially to outline her approach and expectations, then at the end of a session check to see if the student found it helpful, and if there were other things they needed to address.

At times, said one participant, students might go directly to the senior administrators such as the president or the provost, and in those cases they were often referred to student affairs staff for resolution of their issue. He added that this could also happen with parents. Another participant said that in her experience, problems were referred to student affairs staff when faculty or other administrative staff members were ill-equipped to respond to a crisis situation. She highlighted that at times, a situation would develop to an extreme level due to a lack of understanding of early intervention techniques. In some cases faculty or staff might wish for punitive consequences, such as expelling a student with major psychological problems. Student affairs staff could assist in both dealing with the issue, and ensuring that the student received the appropriate support or consequences.

Another participant said that there was still a perception that her department largely was a place that was accessed when a student was in crisis. She said that she wanted it to more be seen as a place that connected to students’ entire academic

experience. “So we’re not just seen as counselling in crisis, or that were not reacting in a reactive mode. ... We’re still chipping away at the fact that students see us as a place that they need to go when they’re in trouble.” She said that it was important for individual student development for them to realize the causes of the issue, and to take personal responsibility for deciding what the best course of action would be to take; her role was to assist in this process.

I think that one of the things that we do as a profession, in terms of challenging them, is when a student comes in and they’re in crisis, depending obviously on the type of crisis, but let’s take something like, you know, they’ve failed one of their courses and they’ve registered in a wrong one. Well, my job is not to sit there and fix it for them. It’s to help them outline, well, what can we do, what are your options, and helping them through that process of deciding what their options are, what they can do to make a difference, and letting them do it.

Depending on the institution, student affairs may employ student advocacy or crisis management staff. One of the most dramatic examples of helping individual students, said a participant who assisted with academic integrity issues, was when students were accused of plagiarism or another student conduct issue. Being able to influence the finding of fault and the potential penalty was important, to ensure that relevant factors were taken into consideration, and also, more broadly, to assess factors influencing students in the decision of whether or not to cheat.

Another participant said that his institution had “tremendous programming” for disabled, aboriginal and international students, as well as support services such as counselling and health, which had a strong direct impact on individual students. He added that he was less satisfied with the “broader perspective” for larger groups of people. “Student affairs needs to impact at greater levels than small targeted cohorts of students, to be able to say that if the students, overall, would turn around in a study, and would say, well, our experience has been a good one.”

Another spoke of how student services can help build a greater understanding among individual students, including those who are marginalized, of how to manage issues and to celebrate their strengths. She said that this can enable them to gain confidence and self-reliance.

If I’m working, for example with students with disabilities, I’m helping them to gain a better self-confidence ... what I see a lot of, is a fear that they’re not going to succeed. So for that group I hope that, when working with them, that they’ll walk away thinking, you know what, I can do this, and feeling more self-confident in their ability, focusing more on that, rather than on the negative things. And again, it could be similar to working with people from first peoples’ house for example, having them have a stronger sense of self, perhaps. Maybe valuing more where they come from, and what their strengths are, and what’s so wonderful about their uniqueness.

Finally, a participant said she valued student affairs having a primarily educational or campus environmental role, more than taking a direct service role, which she referred to as “come to a counter, I’ll deliver you a service.” She gave the example of how a university health services operation could deliver campus-wide programs on health, including nutrition, communicable diseases, low-risk sexual behaviour, and so on, which would be broadly beneficial. She compared this to having six health positions in an office that treat students as they come in, and conceded that students themselves would likely be more interested in the latter for convenience sake.

I’m much more interested in creating that kind of campus environment, values and constructs, and certain behaviours that are widely known and accepted and followed, and so on. So it’s more about creating this community that is healthy, that people develop – students develop skills that will eventually lead them to successful lives, and careers and creating citizens, than it is about saying come to the career centre and we’ll find you a job.

### ***The Development of Student Affairs in Canada***

#### *Structure of student affairs departments*

Several participants said that student affairs departments have developed differently by institution across Canada, including what was included in the portfolio, and how it was structured. To some extent, this has been due to geographic dispersal and different institutional sizes, but also to the growth of different organisational hierarchies.

In some cases, student support was seen as core to the academic mission of the institution, and was enshrined in it, and in others it was viewed as adjunct to research and teaching. The level to which the student experience was included in institutional policy or mission statements was cited by several participants as a useful indicator of the extent to which students are the focus. Having the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) reporting to either the president or a senior academic, as opposed to an operational or business administrator, was cited by several people as an advantage, in that it aligned student affairs with the core institutional mission, and helped build strong relationships with academic planners. One participant said that this type of academic reporting relationship was now being seen more often on Canadian campuses.

One participant anticipated that in the next ten years there was likely to be more consistency in structure, in titles of chief student affairs officers, and of focus in student affairs divisions. Another commented that the current lack of homogeneity in student affairs structures and titles across the country gave a detrimental perception to student affairs, because it was difficult to observe broad direction or trends in the field, and that there was considerable variation from one institution to another in the quality of the student affairs programs. Several participants said that they considered Canadian student affairs as lagging behind the more studied, and hence better-known, American field. They said that this was demonstrated both in the relative lack of scholarship on Canadian student affairs, and also in terms of how American institutions may be quicker to use newer approaches such as learning outcomes. However, participants said that it is difficult to make comparative generalizations for a number of reasons, including the significant institutional diversity in the American higher education system. Participants

pointed to Canadian universities being mostly public, being geographically dispersed, and several traits affecting the student experience that are different, such as a lower drinking age, a general lack of a fraternity/sorority presence, less activity around liability issues, and an apparent higher level of fiscal and managerial responsibility being conferred on student leadership and student unions.

One participant referred to Canadian student affairs as the having the mentality of being a “poor cousin” of the United States, but said that on the positive side there tended to be less hierarchy and more mutual support among student affairs staff, including across different institutions. In a similar vein, another said that she saw an increased level of sharing between different institutions, and that more places were developing new and innovative programs, although she noted that some were “out of the loop,” particularly if they had staff who had not studied or worked on other campuses, or attended national conferences. She saw that institutions with a culture of sharing ideas had a great deal of “program development, and knowledge creation, and discussion, and evolution” that was being disseminated. Another said that with an increased participation in institutional assessment, and growing levels of academic scholarship in student affairs, a broader understanding of the student experience in Canada is being developed.

Some participants pointed to areas in which they feel the Canadian student experience is excellent. One participant, who regularly visits a number of institutions in the United States said that “they always write back ... saying how much they learned from us.” He pointed out that Canadian student governments were extremely strong, in terms of service delivery, and in the level of accountability and responsibility of elected student leaders. Another area of difference he cited was athletics, in which the

expectation in Canada was that student athletes would also be expected to be academically successful, and among whom there was a much higher retention rate than in most American institutions; he said this was partly due to academic support, and also to having fewer athletic scholarships, and a generally higher academic expectation of athletes. Another participant said that she felt most American schools have a “very different challenge than we do, and I think we’re sometimes a little too quick to compare ourselves.” She gave the example of how learning communities and other programs geared towards increased retention were very common in the United States and that that was important. “But we’re at schools that might have 90%, 94% retention, and we’re saying we’re lacking in some way?” She said that often Canadian practitioners would observe what was being done in the United States and feel the need to apply it in Canada, but that it was not always necessary to do so.

Regarding the difference in national organisations and conferences between the United States and Canada, one participant joked that at American NASPA conferences, compared to CACUSS, there were “more suits, less beer.” She commented that CACUSS was a volunteer organisation that did a great deal, that there were many positive aspects of being a grassroots organisation, that the quality of presentations at the conference had greatly improved over the last ten years. “We’re not just seeing ourselves as a group of people who gets together once a year and has a good time ... people have more of a sense of why it is that they’re doing what they’re doing.”

*Educational preparation in the field*

For those participants who had done graduate work specifically in student affairs, all but one had pursued degrees in the United States, and in some cases had worked there professionally as well, so in terms of academic professional preparation, comparison with the United States was unavoidable. All who had taken graduate degrees in the United States spoke positively of their educational experience, but they commented that there were differences in Canadian practice, and that American education was not always wholly transferable to Canada. One participant joked about how people trained in the United States coming to Canada were shocked that alcohol policies were not more stringent, saying that this was due to most states have a drinking age of 21, versus in Canada where it is 18 or 19. She added that while there were extensive rules about drinking on the campus where she studied, the drinking population in downtown bars was just the same. Another participant felt that, in general, undergraduate education in Canada was more consistently rigorous, citing the diversity of institutions in the United States, as well as some of the greater social inequalities and disparities in high school education there; she felt there was also more often a student retention problem in the United States. Another said that she almost experienced culture shock returning to Canada; in the United States student affairs was very professionalized, with more access to resources and information, and more attention to planning and the consideration of ramifications and outcomes of programs. However, she said that the higher level of litigiousness in the United States led to greater attention to risk management, with a focus on preventing lawsuits. She said that she found students in Canada were treated in a more hands-off manner, and that student affairs staff were more likely to have learned experientially:



I had book smarts, and I had limited student smarts, but these are people that knew how the university worked, they knew how to get programs and services approved, they knew how to ask the right people for the right kind of support, they just knew the way, they knew the infrastructure, and the atmosphere of the environment in which student service work take place.

One said that the return to Canada of those who had attended graduate programs in the United States was a good trend, and that this was being reflected in the quality and diversity of professional development opportunities, such as in CACUSS conference presentations. Another participant added that there has been an increasing demand for training, and gave the example of CISAS, with close to 500 people attending the course over the years it was offered.

Several participants predicted that the trend in requiring formal staff credentials would continue to grow, citing the increased requirement for doctorates at the chief student affairs officer level, and more entry-level or mid-level staff positions advertising for masters degrees in student affairs or higher education. Another participant said that there should be more broad professional development than can be provided by individuals within each institution. One recommendation was to have a series of online courses leading to a certificate. Several participants hoped that a Canadian academic discipline would be created, that provided supporting theory and research, and preparation of individuals for student affairs practice.

Several participants commented on how increased graduate preparation, and the possibility of Canadian graduate courses in student affairs, would also increase the

amount of research and scholarship in the field, which they felt was badly needed. One participant saw increased professional preparation as a useful way of enhancing the credibility of student affairs and student development among senior administrators. However, this was not a unanimous opinion. Another participant commented that she wasn't sure that the increased focus on new practitioners having a graduate qualification would be beneficial to student affairs in Canada; she said there was a difference between people who had practical experience in student affairs administration, and those that had studied it at the graduate level. She felt that the experiential learning, including what the individual had garnered if they had been an involved student during their undergraduate years, could lead to very strong performance in student affairs practice.

Sometimes you need to go with your gut, and a textbook isn't going to provide you with those answers. And we rely too heavily on qualifications. Are we getting an academic in the role, or are we getting a student affairs practitioner in the role?

#### *Student affairs as a profession*

Some participants were ambivalent about student affairs becoming a "capital-P profession." One spoke of student affairs staff as having a "common set of values and beliefs" but without necessarily a common grounding in professional preparation or literature, although that was changing. He said that twenty years ago, people entered student affairs with a wide range of backgrounds, including counselling, adult education or health sciences, and in Canada the impression of the field at the time was more of an "extended family," which could even seem to be a clique. He said that more recently,

student affairs has grown considerably, and that there was a move towards more professionalism and identity as a distinct occupation. Currently, there was a great deal of discussion about how broad-based student affairs should be, and to what extent it should include functional areas such as registrars, academic advising, and judicial affairs. One participant said that regarding the development of student affairs, “we’re in our adolescence,” adding that the field is trying to determine its identity and role, but that regardless of what the department is called or how it is structured in different institutions, people are doing similar work. He was more interested in seeing what, among a broad range of skills needed by practitioners, was commonly applicable across the field.

I don’t think we have a well articulated profession in the country. ... I’m not sure it’s a bad thing. Like people often lament the lack of graduate programs in student services and student affairs, and I tend to agree, because I like the profession, and I think that having more formal programs will be a good thing. But I also like in my own case the fact that I’ve been able to kind of drift into it, from another profession.

Another participant said that while student affairs staff should have high work standards, and clear ethics and values, the hallmarks of an actual profession such as law, medicine, counselling and so on were absent, particularly in areas such as standardized credentials, as well as formally defined work boundaries and codes of conduct.

It doesn’t seem to have any of the constructs that a profession would require. Like it has no code of ethics. All professions have a code of

ethics. Well, student affairs doesn't have one. There's no licensing, there's no specific higher education program, which you would go through in order to be accredited for the profession. There's no really good description of what the heck it is. ... I think we should be clearer about what a student affairs worker, or whatever, stands for and does, and how they should behave. I'm not sure it needs to evolve into a profession. ... We are a long, long way from being a profession, in the strictest form of the word. And I think we'd have to put a lot of infrastructure in place to be a profession.

She added that in her experience, not being recognised as a member of a profession had not made any difference in the regard in which she was held. She found that faculty and administrators felt her work was valuable and interesting, and were impressed with how fulfilling, rewarding and fun it seemed to be.

#### *Accountability and assessment*

There is an increased focus on accountability in higher education institutions, said one participant, and ensuring financial accountability in student services has been essential. In many institutions in which student affairs has not been seen as core to the university mission, or revenue-generating, departments been vulnerable to cutbacks. However, she said, with an increased focus on student engagement, there has been a renewed interest in student affairs. She cited the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Maclean's ranking of universities as examples of ways the student

experience is being thrust into greater prominence. She said that student affairs staff need to be the experts on student development, and need to “get the literature circulating everywhere that we can, just to enhance the awareness that there is such a thing as student services, and what it is that we do.” In addition, having a clear understanding of financial realities and priorities is crucial in order to protect programs from resource cuts. Another participant pointed to the need for more assessment, diagnostics and planning, and greater accountability to do better with the same amount of resources. This included ensuring that students were aware of services and programs, so as to minimize them “falling through the cracks,” while balancing that with encouraging personal responsibility. Additionally, another participant pointed to an increasing need to understand institutional legal responsibilities, including human rights legislation and accommodation, particularly if the amount of litigation continues to increase.

#### *Future directions*

A participant said that she expected an increase in the number of student affairs generalists, who were not specifically service-affiliated, but who would concentrate on broader campus environmental programming. A number of people felt that across Canada more and more priority was being placed on the student experience, pointing to the increasing use of surveys such as NSSE and CUSC as indicators of this trend. They saw student services being taken more seriously, and starting to be more integrated with the rest of the university. One participant suggested that CACUSS should take a greater liaison role with organisations like the AUCC, in order to raise awareness of student affairs at the national level. Another pointed to a current discussion about to what extent

student affairs staff should be advocates or lobbyists around issues that are important to students:

It may be that we will be partnering with other groups that deal with students and student issues, to bring student concerns to the broader concern of our institutions and our governments ... I think it would be a role that our student affairs association, or associations, may want to really think about moving in that direction, that we be seen as the experts around student stuff that happens on campuses. And people that, a group that people turn to, when they have questions, or are seeking advice, about what we can do to make our institutions better for students.

Several participants predicted a continued shift away from a focus on “traditional” direct student services models, towards a broader emphasis on personal student development and the campus environment. This included programming for diverse student populations, and an awareness and responsiveness to equity issues. One participant added that in terms of individual services, it was likely there would be more of a “customer service” approach, including using business models for greater efficiency, with an increasing level of analysis and assessment. This would be in response to students and their parents who “nowadays are more savvy, more market-driven, they want value for service, they want immediacy of service.” Several people expected continued growth in integrated learning, citizenship development and community service learning. This would include a growing emphasis on student leadership, non-academic transcripts, and greater congruency between classroom and out-of-classroom learning.

One added he was finding that “more student-driven examples of work and programs are coming to the fore.”

Among all participants, there tended to be a great deal of optimism about the current strengths and the future direction of student affairs, particularly with an emphasis on the field’s role in creating a positive and enriching student experience. Fun, exciting, creative, fulfilling and rewarding were among the adjectives participants used to describe their field.

### ***Conclusion***

Student affairs practitioners were clearly passionate when describing their role in the university, with a balance of caring deeply for the success of the institution, and just as much for the success of students. Participants saw their role as integral in creating a strong campus environment that supported student engagement and the academic mission. Working with students to provide co-curricular involvement and leadership opportunities, which allowed students to learn, grow and test their own values, was extremely important. Providing student academic support systems to assist in the academic mission of the university was also central to their role, as was providing expertise around students and student issues to other members of the university community. Advocating both on behalf of, and with, students around those issues, and assisting student leaders with having a voice in institutional decision-making, was highlighted by a number of participants. When providing support to individual students, most participants saw this as an opportunity for student learning, growth, and the development of personal responsibility; there was a high level of respect for student

autonomy and maturity. They also spoke of the importance of meshing institutional policy and due process with a duty of care for individual students.

Participants also highlighted the need for strong research and assessment related to student affairs activities, and discussed the level of professionalization in the field. Most notably, participants' pride in, and commitment to, the student affairs field was clear.

In the following chapter, the values that underlie the work of these participants will be explored.



## **Chapter Five: Student Affairs Practitioner Values**

### ***Introduction***

Participants in this study were very articulate about the different values that they felt were important for student affairs practitioners to bring to their work. The values presented in this chapter were derived from both the answers to the direct interview question on values, as well as from participants' different descriptions of their work. These values and how they were demonstrated in practice were categorized, then participants reviewed them in the second interview, and the categories were further refined.

Personal traits such as honesty, integrity and authenticity were stressed by participants, and these manifested themselves in a variety of ways. Putting students at the forefront of their work was constantly emphasized, including participants' care for individual students, and appreciation of student leadership. Many participants spoke of their own values of equity and social justice being integral to their work, including the broader ideal of education being a means of encouraging social change. The ways in which participants expressed dedication to their work were wide-ranging, and they also emphasized the importance of continuing to learn, grow, and improve professionally.

This chapter explores the values that participants felt were fundamentally important for student affairs practitioners to both believe and enact in their work. What was of overarching importance was how much participants cared about what they did.

Passion, if that's a value. Yeah, passion for what it is that we do. When we talk about a value, I mean, a commitment to student success. Really valuing the learning experience, both inside and outside the classroom.

As described in the chapter on methodology, participants' values and values statements were grouped into categories in order to provide a framework for the values construction, and this was validated by re-interviewing participants. Below is the framework, slightly revised after the second interviews, of the different values categories and the ways that participants put them into practice.

Table 2: Student affairs values and how they are demonstrated in practice

| <b>Value</b>   | <b>Demonstrated in Practice</b>  |
|--|--|
| Honesty, integrity, authenticity                     | Being genuine, authentic to yourself, keeping it "real"<br>Truth-telling<br>Demonstrating trustworthiness<br>Giving unique responses to situations<br>Being prepared to revisit issues<br>Respecting confidentiality and privacy<br>Role modelling<br>Ensuring congruence between statements and actions<br>Understanding of role in a public institution<br>Acknowledging one's own power<br>Identifying and avoiding conflicts of interest |
| Balancing fairness and care, empathy and consistency | Being dedicated to student support<br>Balancing respect for policies/process with contextual decision-making<br>Taking an educational rather than punitive approach in disciplinary situations<br>Incorporating strong listening skills, patience<br>Genuinely valuing people and student contact<br>Benefiting others, doing no harm<br>Being unflappable; not being easily shocked<br>Having a positive outlook                            |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Student-centredness                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being motivated by students</li> <li>Viewing individual students as adults, and respecting their autonomy</li> <li>Encouraging personal responsibility and problem-solving</li> <li>Genuinely liking students and student interactions</li> <li>Feeling rewarded by helping students resolve issues</li> <li>Staying current with students, not constantly referring back to own personal post-secondary experience</li> <li>Assisting all students in having a transformational educational experience</li> </ul>  |
| Valuing the student voice               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building trust with student leaders, and respecting their views</li> <li>Including students as full members of the university community</li> <li>Having pride in student-driven initiatives</li> <li>Learning to work effectively with student leaders; appreciating their convictions</li> <li>Hearing students' voices, being open to what they bring to the table</li> <li>Stressing a lack of defensiveness</li> <li>Fostering learning in student involvement and leadership</li> </ul>  |
| Commitment to equity and social justice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appreciation for diversity and openness to difference</li> <li>Having an extensive multicultural knowledge</li> <li>Avoiding being an ideologue</li> <li>Working to promote socially responsible citizenship among students</li> <li>Learning from and being inspired by students' commitment to social change</li> <li>Embracing a mandate to promote equality</li> </ul>  |
| Dedication to student affairs work      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering strong people, team approach</li> <li>Increasing collegiality and collaboration across the institution</li> <li>Enjoying having ideas challenged</li> <li>Honouring student affairs history vs. being innovative (one category that prompted disagreement)</li> <li>Being hard-working</li> <li>Being clear about values and rationale when making decisions</li> <li>Supporting student affairs colleagues; giving back to the field</li> <li>Representing university, university's mission</li> <li>Employing a broad approach, rather than focussing on silos</li> <li>Taking care in planning, implementation, resource management</li> </ul> |
| Lifelong learning                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a commitment to scholarship</li> <li>Being an educator and valuing learning experience</li> <li>Using evidence-based practice, assessment</li> <li>Learning from students</li> <li>Using reflection, including about own personal post-secondary experience</li> <li>Having an ethic of self-improvement</li> </ul>  |

### *Honesty, Integrity and Authenticity*

Being true to one's personal values, being open about them, and being clear about reasons for decisions and actions were all central to effective practice, said participants. When making decisions it was important to weigh different factors, to be open about the approach to decision-making, and to role model the types of behaviours and attitudes expected of students and staff.

I think that certainly student affairs professionals need to be authentic to themselves, and the reason why I say that is because I don't think that people can be truly in a position to be helpful for other people, when they're not authentic to themselves.

### *Making decisions of integrity*

Well-considered decisions that participants could justify according to their personal values was key for many participants. The challenge was in maintaining a balance between consistent application of policies and processes, versus the need to give unique responses to specific situations, both with reference to individual student cases and also in terms of operational decisions. This included contextual decision-making and open-mindedness, as well as a willingness to revisit issues when existing policies do not appear to be working well.

At the meta-level, a decision of integrity would be around, you know, I have a choice around funding, how I'm going to structure my budget. ... so structuring your whole service structure, the people that do it, and then

when you make decisions about people's future, so whether that's student discipline issues, do you going to give somebody a refund on their parking because they've got sick and had to go home early or not? I mean, you make those decisions with honesty, fairness, respect, compassion and accountability, maybe, is that a value? Is responsibility a value? Maybe those would be the big ones, honesty, fairness, because integrity to me is everything.

Integrity also consisted of being true to one's own values, and demonstrating to others how they could be put into practice. This could involve situations as diverse as maintaining an appropriate work/life balance, ensuring that resources were fairly allocated and spent, or that students were treated equitably. Demonstrating congruence between statements and actions was crucial. A participant said that "being a real person" meant that even in a case of disagreement or conflict with students, the staff member could still be seen as trustworthy and not "out to screw them over." Another, commenting on the nature of student affairs work being a "lifestyle job" involving overtime and outside-hours work, said that in effect this meant that staff would be observed in a variety of situations, so it was necessary to role model appropriate actions, such as drinking responsibly. Otherwise it would send a conflicting message to students. She added, laughing, that it didn't mean she was willing to give up cookies. Another participant reinforced this, saying that while he tried to be as professional as he could in his work environment, he felt it was important to balance this with his social, personable side, and that he believed it was important to have a healthy balance between these.

You could go on to the more traditional kind of honesty, and integrity, I mean, you're supposed to be in a role, I suppose, or serving in a role, the role is one that I guess the expectation is that you'll provide it in a modelling way. ... And I think for the most part the hundreds of student affairs staff out there would feel a similar way, a responsibility to the student population, to deliver what they're there to do in the best way possible, a meaningful way.

A participant added that openness also included practitioners being able to learn from others, and not to assume that they were the expert in all cases, that they knew everything, or that not every situation represented a learning opportunity. Being able to admit shortcomings, or a lack of knowledge, can help build a sense of trust and equality.

I think [this] is a value everyone should have, to not be convinced they know everything. To be open to what students can bring to the table, to be open to using those moments where students disagree, to educate. And they need to be genuine, and real.

#### *Respecting and managing confidentiality*

The value of respecting and managing confidentiality was often stressed. While, unlike medical practitioners, student affairs practitioners are not bound by a professional code of conduct, institutions do have confidentiality policies, and there is also legislation around freedom of information and protection of privacy.

I think ethical issues, the issues of confidentiality really do come up for student affairs people, especially when they are dealing with students in distress, and things like that. And having a concern for the safety, or even just a feeling of concern for the student, and kind of being bound by certain legislation, but being compelled in other ways, and potentially having a student that doesn't want them to disclose anything. I think that's certainly an ethical issue that comes up quite frequently, especially with what seems to be, and I don't know if this is the case but it certainly seems to be the case, of an increased number of students with mental health issues.

Valuing students' independence and ability to make their own decisions, even in times of crisis, is another facet of confidentiality, as well as having a primary responsibility to the students, rather than any external individuals such as parents.

Another practitioner pointed out that when supporting or counselling individual students through a difficult situation, honesty about what the different options were, and what the student could learn from the situation, helped cultivate a trusting relationship.

And from having a conversation with a student on probation when you're academic advising, I mean, it's okay, yeah, so we need to fix this, and you're totally screwed, and you need to drop a bunch of classes, and you just lost \$1700 in tuition, but, where is the learning that happens here? And maybe it doesn't happen in that moment, but I think you can kind of cultivate those kinds of relationships.

In addition, practitioners spoke of the need to maintain confidentiality of student information as a means of ensuring a trusting relationship. This is balanced by trying to determine the best means to assist individual students in difficult situations, regarding the necessity of sharing information with other student services staff, or students' family members. When a student is at risk, for example due to self-harming behaviour, this became considerably more complex. At the point where the risk to the student (or to others) outweighed confidentiality concerns, the value of care needed to be prioritized. In cases like these, the decision to contact family members might be made by health providers, rather than student affairs practitioners. One participant said that some situations required a balance of values, and presented learning opportunities.

But I find that people from a common-sense point of view, [people] understand those things, and they understand another thing almost right away, both senior student leaders and new staff. ... Everything from a dramatic instance, like you know that you've come to a belief that a student is a suicidal risk. ... And you live with some stuff. And you may be a parent. And you may say, you know what, I'm doing that differently next time.

The participant said that in this type of case, there was usually an extremely high level of complexity, and that this could create an ethically uncomfortable situation. Keeping the value of care at the forefront of any decisions was of great usefulness in navigating this level of difficulty.



Confidentiality concerns notwithstanding, another participant firmly stated that people working in public institutions have a responsibility to be as transparent as possible:

Because I think we're a public institution, and I think we have a responsibility to the public, to the students, to the faculty, to the greater community, about what it is that we're doing. I think that's one thing that's particularly unique about public institutions, although I believe that's the case of any institution, of any corporation, of any organisation, period. But particularly when you are a public institution.

*Trustworthiness and transparency*

Being trustworthy was essential. This involved being as open and truthful as possible, to fellow administrators, to other staff, and to students. A participant cited Fried's (2000) work on principles in student affairs as being influential in identifying core values for him.

And she's got principles she touches back to that I kind of like. One is respecting autonomy. So these are fundamental principles for me, and I talk about these sometimes with staff, or with my team. That's one. Doing no harm is the second. Benefiting others. Being just. And being faithful. Now, Fried also in a later piece of writing adds telling the truth. That's different from being just and being faithful, in other words veracity. Being

faithful has got a different kind of, there's some consistency to it, there's honouring commitments, there's all that kind of stuff.

At times, it is not possible to be completely transparent, due to issues such as confidentiality. In one case, a participant said the best approach to deal with that constraint is to be honest and open about the reason for not being able to provide full information, rather than prevaricating or using platitudes.

I think ethical issues come up in confidences you've received, in trying to balance what's best for the situation, with the knowledge that you have, and what you should be sharing, and what you shouldn't be sharing, especially when working with students where they'll start to question your transparency, your honesty, and your trustworthiness, if you withhold information. But you also know that sometimes you have to, and you have to accept that that's at times people won't like your decisions.

It is important that student affairs practitioners understand their own power, not only in the way that their decisions can impact students, but also in terms of how they can influence student behaviour and student culture.

I think it's really, really important, because if we want students to be more responsible for their own learning, we've got to show responsibility.

That's about being a citizen. This is the notion of the institution as citizen, whether it's regional, or global, or in its own organisational machinations.

*Awareness of conflict of interest*

Participants spoke of the need to be aware of conflicts of interest and to ensure that they are not placed in such a position. This could arise with gifts, with staffing issues, or with preferential treatment of students. It was also important to ensure that there is no perception of favouritism. One participant highlighted both the need to have a high level of integrity when dealing with public money, given that she worked at a public institution, as well as how her position had a degree of power over students. In addition, she added, universities are prestigious and have a high reputation, “with good reason,” and their employees need to conduct themselves accordingly. It could be something as simple as realizing the difference from the private sector of accepting gifts from a supplier, and knowing what the institutional policy was on a conflict of interest.

I think that a lot of people don't necessarily, who don't necessarily think of student affairs professionals as civil servants, and who are working in the public institutions, that there's an extra level of accountability and ethical behaviour that's required of us. That isn't required of lots of other professions ... I have very high standards.

In general, there needed to be a balance between an over-arching desire to be as open and honest as possible, with understanding and responding to the complexities of specific situations. This balance was being a significant challenge in student affairs work, and being personally aware of the different ethical aspects of each situation, and bringing these to the forefront when making decisions, helped resolve them with integrity.

### *Balancing Fairness and Care, Empathy and Consistency*

All participants spoke of the importance they placed on working to benefit students, and the need to be committed to that; one participant pointed out that student affairs is a field in which people are genuinely dedicated to students, hoping to provide a level of understanding and support that she said bluntly that they may not encounter elsewhere.

That sense of, one of the things I really enjoy is that for the most part, you don't encounter people that are out to make students' lives hell. That, you know, and I have done that, in dealing with other units on campus, you know, when you encounter somebody that gives poor customer service, or a faculty person that prides themselves on how many students they can fail.

### *Education versus punishment*

One participant described how she was influenced by Kidder's (1997) discussion of ethical decision-making: balancing justice versus mercy, trust versus loyalty, individual versus community, short-term versus long-term, and determining if the resolution was ends-based, rules-based or care-based. In implementing this approach in student affairs, she said that ends-based decisions would represent a solution that worked for the greatest number of students; whereas care-based would be more based on an individual student's needs. She did not personally like a rules-oriented approach, but felt that sometimes it was necessary. Her general inclination was to make care-based decisions as much as possible, within the framework of existing policies.

Another participant said that good student affairs practice was not adversarial, nor should it be about punishment. She said that instead, a student needed to be seen as a whole person, and the staff member should assess where they are developmentally, and how best to help them. She cited Sanford's (1966, cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998) model of challenge and support, saying that in order for students to grow, they both needed to be understood and supported, but also encouraged to develop further. "So you have to have some sensibility of meeting that person where they're at, but then pushing them beyond." She said that considering how to make ethical decisions and helping students find their own values and act congruently to them was central to this process, which was not punitive, but rather "what you do to help people grow up, or grow more, or grow better." Other participants stressed the importance of separating the behaviour from the person, and dealing with the former while not judging or making assumptions about the latter.

Caring for students meant doing so in a way that supported them, while encouraging their own sense of responsibility and independence. Being compassionate and genuinely valuing people was necessary, including when students presented more challenging problems, or even had difficult personalities. Student discipline was an area in which this was particularly necessary, and this also entailed respecting existing policies, and the processes arising from them, while finding a caring solution.

I think that student affairs staff ... can't be so ruled by process, and consistency, and this is the way we do things, because the incidents, and events, and issues, and crises that are brought, each need a response that is

unique to that individual or situation. And it's not like you can write that all down, and this is what you do when this happens, and this is what you do when that happens. So flexibility, maybe, and an openness to approaching each situation with an open mind, about what this particular situation needs, and this particular student needs.

Even for students who were facing disciplinary sanctions, a participant said that her role was not to make an experience negative, or to be deliberately detrimental to the student, but rather that she needed to ensure that they felt valued, regardless of what they had done.

I mean you take the student code of conduct, and I had a situation recently, where a student had to be disciplined. They were making death threats against the staff. ... But the way that [the sanction] is delivered is professional, it's ethical, it's above board, and there's options for the student. And the option at that point was pretty much predetermined. ... So it's not always, you know, nice, but I think the manner within which you deal with it speaks a great deal to your own character, and your own value for that for that person sitting across from you, whether it's a student, a parent, a colleague.

Part of disciplinary work was ensuring that students learn from their experiences, and that they are treated as responsible individuals who can grasp the complexity of a situation and manage negative aspects of it. One participant said that he considered

working on student rights and responsibilities the most valuable part of his work. “I think I’m a frustrated lawyer. I absolutely think it’s crucial that we work hard to ensure what the rights of students are ... to ensure the students take responsibility for their own actions as well.” He said that it was essential that a rights and responsibilities framework be shaped through working with students, rather than taking an *in loco parentis* approach. An important aspect of this was to provide support for a student to work through his or her own challenges, rather than solving problems for them, or being over-protective. Another participant said that when everything was made positive for a student dealing with a mistake or disciplinary issue, he or she did not learn.

Sometimes our intent is very sound, and we want to protect, and we want to make everything positive. When we do that, we are denying students, or people that we’re supporting, the opportunity to learn from less than positive experiences. And that’s not a good thing. There’s great value and learning, when somebody trips up or makes a mistake, or when we do something we shouldn’t, we learn. And it’s not our role to make sure that it’s all roses and things, part of our role of student services is to support students in a positive way, through not so happy situations, as well. And that’s part of helping them shape who they are.

### *Listening carefully*

The need to possess strong listening skills and empathy included not jumping to conclusions about what the overtly stated problem was, as often there would be

underlying issues that would only emerge if students were given time to explore and express them.

I've seen it, so I know that it happens, but there's a big assumption when students are coming to [staff] with questions, that they're assuming that they know the information that the student is wanting. And I've certainly seen it happen where they kept insisting on that, you know, giving that information when the student was asking a question, but they weren't really listening to the question.

Another participant gave the example of the importance of understanding the student perspective when developing a program to assist students on academic probation. The first requirement was to hear what their specific needs were. "So there's a real, I think, respect for that voice. I don't just jump and assume I know what they need." She worked with the students to ensure that they made a commitment to doing the work, and that she included what they identified as priorities. She added that through this process, there were students who realized they were not prepared at that point to undertake the steps to remain in school, but were pleased that they would have a means of returning when they were ready.

One participant pointed to the need to be "unflappable" as so many different situations, some extreme, can arise unexpectedly. Student affairs staff should see themselves as educators, and have patience, optimism and tolerance, to be calm and not easily shocked. "I say to people, you can offend me, but you can't shock me. And I think there's a big difference." She said that staff should be prepared to hear just about



anything, “beyond what they ever imagined could be possible in someone’s life.” There are a wide variety of difficult situations that students may encounter, and in order to help them, staff need to listen, be open-minded, and be non-judgemental.

*Having a sense of vocation*

One participant said that more and more, his work felt like a vocation, and it fulfilled his need to make a difference in people’s lives.

For me what’s happened is that there’s finally some increasing convergence between work, employment and career. There’s some sense in which I’ve been fortunate enough to have a call, you know, in a vocational sense, pretty close to what I’m doing ... I’ve always felt a certain call to service.

The value of caring extended into relations with other staff members, and this included recruiting excellent people into the field, mentoring newer staff, and appreciating the complexity of work and the stresses that staff members encountered.

So that’s partly enabling staff, also, particularly younger staff, enabling younger staff, people coming new into it. We have these confining job descriptions, sometimes, or really weird ways of lining up entry level with age. And some of our frontline positions deserve to be compensated much more, than sort of middle professional positions, because the demands and the skill sets are much tougher, I think, but we’re not there yet. ... So a

thing I feel passionately about is opening up the possibility of working in this profession to students, student leaders, engaged students.

Being able to make a difference in students' lives was seen by many as one of the most gratifying aspects of their work. One participant said that although most of his work was with student leaders and student groups, he would also help individual students having difficulty; knowing that without that assistance or information they may not have succeeded, and then seeing them so was motivating. "It kind of brings excitement to me, certainly." Another participant said:

Making a difference. So at the end of the day knowing that you did something that's going to benefit someone. That you've helped them. That you've relieved their anxieties, you've made them comfortable with their school, you've made them excited about coming to the school.

### ***Student-Centredness***

I think, you know, student-centeredness, I know that's an outdated term, we're seeing learner-centred. I think being *student-centred*, it's definitely a value that means that everything you do is for the reason of being student-centred.

Participants were generally very positive about working with students, many, in fact, describing it as the most rewarding and motivating aspect of their jobs. "Whatever it

is that I do, whether it be a workshop, or the individual work, or putting on a panel with students, it's that excitement I get in terms of it being such a motivation for them.”

*Enjoying interacting and working with students*

Working with students was described as energizing, gratifying, motivating and fun, even when challenging, particularly when seeing students grow and change. Aspects of working with individual students included being aware that the relationship would always evolve, and that it was necessary to try and relate to students, in order to keep programming relevant; it was also enjoyable to hear what their experiences were. A broad vision of engaging students included ensuring that they had the opportunity to participate in activities, and that they were helped with any barriers that might impede their ability to progress in their studies. Depending on the institution, participants commented on the strength of their students' commitment to it. Participants stressed that student affairs work always needed to be about students, even if it did not involve direct contact. One participant said she “couldn't fall into the trap of paper-pushing all the time” and that she was passionate about working with students around programming and activities. Another participant said that it was important not to disconnect from what was going on: “If you do not go back to your constituency every couple of weeks, you will disconnect from what's going on, on the ground.” Another said that it was easy to get distracted by less student-orientated aspects of the work:

I find that we use that expression “student-centred,” but I do think a lot of times people just really forget why we're here, and it is about those

students, not about ... and we get caught up in budgets, and political lines, and fundraising, and alumni, there's just a lot of other people that seem to muddy the water, and we really, we lose sight of the fact that this is about the students. So I think that's just a value that we need to constantly be reminded of.

Talking to individual students outside the context of regular programs or student leadership was important. One participant described the benefit of doing a "reality check" with random students. This was helpful in ensuring that programs were responsive to student needs, and underlined the importance of being able to relate to students in order to keep programming relevant. Another said that he made the point to talk to individual students whenever possible, and this included strategies as simple as talking to them while commuting on the bus. He found that asking them what they were learning, or what would be two things to change in the university for a better first year experience, tended to open up a great deal of conversation. He particularly valued these interactions as he felt they were "unfiltered" compared to interactions with student government or student groups. He added that an engaged student was not only one who was involved in a campus activity, but as someone who had a clear and strong commitment.

The three things that I, you know, when somebody says how will you know an engaged student, I generally ask, are you putting a lot of time in on this, do you feel strongly about it, and are you clear about why you're doing it? ... The other thing is that I know an engaged student when I say,

well, what are you learning, and the person has an answer. Typically they're thinking and reflecting, they're trying things out.

### *Respecting students as adults*

Students needed to be viewed as adults, and to be encouraged to take responsibility for their own decisions. This involved creating an environment in which students were challenged and engaged in decision-making, and that rather than solving problems directly for students, it was important to provide them with support and encouragement to do so themselves. As well, students' autonomy needed to be respected. When students had the resources, support and service delivery to achieve their goals, this helped ensure that students, parents and the community could recognise the value of student services.

While this generation of students has been said to be more dependent on their parents (Strauss & Howe, 2000), few participants identified this as a major issue. Those who did address it spoke of the desire to encourage parents to support their students, while allowing students to make their own mistakes. Institutions that were constrained by freedom of information acts were limited in the amount of direct discussion that could be held with family members, and in some cases this was seen as a benefit, as it enabled administrators to focus on communicating with the student directly.

Regarding family members who remained involved in students' lives, sometimes overly involved, one participant took the approach of engaging them as much as she could, so that they understood university life, issues students were likely to face, and how they could help support their student. Parents could be allies in providing a good student

experience. She said she particularly appreciated interacting with first year students and their parents:

What fires me up is really it's the interactions with students and their parents. I love chatting with students and their parents. First year students in particular are my favourite students, because they love, they really love everything, they're eager for everything, they haven't gotten sophomore attitude yet, where they know everything. But they get it. And there's a vulnerability with this population that is so endearing, because they do appreciate people helping them. Because they know they need it.

While she said that some parents "I just want to punch in the nose," she understood that for the most part they behave the way they do because "they're just so scared, and uncertain, and they just love their student." She said that in order to make interactions more positive, she provided them with as much information as possible, and also provided them with her direct telephone line. She felt it was better that they called her, so that she could provide them with support, than to have them contact someone who was not able to respond effectively.

#### *Valuing students as autonomous individuals*

One participant said that valuing students as autonomous people was crucial, including when they were in an extremely difficult or trying situation.

I think that at the very basic level you have to care about people, as people. And especially when you have people who are up against the limit of their capacity, or life circumstance. Where, for instance, they need to withdraw from the institution, or their conduct is such that they are required to leave the institution. I think it's really important not to forget or devalue them as people. Who have choices, or limits.

Another participant defined respecting students as understanding where they are coming from. This can include dealing with students who are sometimes stressed or panicked, and understanding that each situation is different. She said that sometimes, when seeing hundreds of students personally and in workshops, it could be easy to “lump them all together, and become impatient, or want to cut the service short.” While she has seen this happen, she emphasized that for the majority of staff it does not, particularly if they are able to remember that for the student, regardless of their personal state, the issue is important, and that if an individual staff member cannot help them, the student should be referred to someone who is able to really take the time to listen and be helpful. “And if you get fed up with the fifth person that comes in and asks you the same question, then I think you're in the wrong line of work. Because we are working with people, and we are working with students that are particular place in life, and they are coming in with a lot of concerns, and questions, and crises at times.”

Even when individual students or groups are being challenging, participants said that it was essential for student affairs staff to retain a positive attitude towards them. A participant said that she particularly enjoyed that people working in student affairs had an

upbeat attitude about students. Another participant said that he would sometimes read articles in the student newspaper that he'd been warned not to, and laughed that "it pisses me off, or it makes me think that if one more 19-year-old comes into my office I'm going to go insane, you know, with justified outrage because of some self-centred need. But that is the extreme, rare occurrence." Another commented that he had a staff member that didn't enjoy interacting with students, contrary to his own value of being respectful of them. He made it clear that the staff member needed to work with students in a productive way. Another said that some non-student affairs staff elsewhere in the university clearly did not like students, "they just sort of tolerate them." She expressed that student affairs people need to be optimistic about youth and the future.

Otherwise, especially if you're in a position where you're dealing with a lot of crises and problems, and a lot of discipline, you can get easily dragged down into that view of the custodial staff members, and starting to not like students, and starting to question our whole world's going to go to hell in a hand-basket because these kids are so bad.

Conversely, being able to assist individual students was exceptionally rewarding, and appreciated by them. One participant pointed out that even if a student came to him for what he considered a small issue that was easy to solve, "to them that was huge" because they were likely afraid to even ask.



*Contributing to student learning and development*

One participant spoke of having begun his career in student affairs before there was a great deal of discussion around how the field could contribute to student learning and the academic mission. He said that the renewed focus on this was very positive, and that it was important for academic and co-curricular student support to be well-integrated and to focus on student success: "... essentially what I'm here for is to support student success, and to help students graduate. And there's no point in me having fantastic campus life and really engaged students, and then us having a crappy retention rate." He pointed out also that when talking about being learner-centred, it is important to see the student as a whole person who is learning in multiple ways, including outside the classroom, and that not everyone has that perspective.

Another participant said that her counselling background helped her to listen to students and understand their concerns, and she said that the foundation of this was to respect where they were coming from.

I think for me, and again I'm always coming from this background, which is the counselling background, so, ultimately it's respect for the students, respect for them as individuals, and as simple as that seems, it often is not always there.

One participant made the point that each student's experience is unique, and may not at all reflect that of the practitioner. She pointed out that practitioners should not assume that students will have similar experiences, and should not rely on their own personal history when interacting with students.

I think that it's really important that student affairs professionals understand that our experience is not the same. The world has changed. I don't care if you're 26 or 46, it's not about you. You had, your experience was unique. You had certain, probably advantages, that enabled you to have a particular kind of experience that may or may not exist for the student that you're dealing with tomorrow or the next day. And so really, what worked for you isn't going to work for everyone else.

However, self-knowledge is particularly key, stressed another participant, and this was what she sought when interviewing and hiring staff. Individuals should have an understanding of how their own post-secondary education affected them, and how that can affect their perceptions of students, in terms of similarities and also differences. This will influence their understanding of how to support students, to ensure they have the tools they need, in order to foster learning, development and independence. "I steer away from someone who wants to mother, or parent to death, and fix everything." There is also a need for positive energy. "I mean, we're not all Miss Bubbles every day, but, you know, there's a positivity, there's an energy there. Because students thrive on that energy and that positivity." Another participant said that she felt most passionate about being able to empower students, whether individually, or through doing workshops or panel presentations with them.

It's that excitement I get in terms of, I don't know, it being such a motivation for them. And for them to get excited about their future, to feel good, to feel empowered, is really important for me. And so I find that

very exciting, and I'm very passionate about that. Empowered is a good word, in terms of when they come in here, and they get resources, and we can brainstorm and talk about what may be ahead, and having them leave feeling stronger and empowered by the information, and about what they've figured out, I think is quite amazing.

As seen in the previous chapter, a major role of student affairs was to foster an educational environment, and that included helping all students reach their full potential. One participant said that he particularly valued transformational learning for those who might not be seen as the “best and the brightest” students, who may be those most attractive to university recruiters, but who would not need the same assistance in reaching their goals. He considered that reaching out to students who were not as stellar or high-achieving was a very exciting aspect of his work.

### *Valuing the Student Voice*

Almost all participants spoke at length of their work with student leaders, and how important it was to include student voices in decision-making; some added that they also sought student opinions and ideas from outside formal student leadership such as elected student association representatives. The level of collaboration with student leaders on planning, programs and activities varied by institution, but all participants spoke of its significance. Some participants had experienced conflict with student leaders, or felt they were in an awkward middle position between highly political student leaders

and senior administration, but they still spoke positively of the dedication and commitment that student leaders felt for their work.

*Bridging student leadership and administrators*

One participant spoke of the need to build trust between students and student affairs administrators, saying that in any student affairs position, if students do not feel comfortable with the staff member and trust them, then the impact they will have will be significantly less effective, resulting in staff taking more of a simple service delivery role, rather than acting as a mentor or influencing the way students think. He said that mutual respect was also key, and that it comes in different forms. He enjoyed the fact that students had a nickname for him, because he felt it demonstrated affectionate respect.

A participant who dealt with a particularly politicized student association said that the relationship between the student leaders and administration was “volatile, and sometimes non-existent,” which made it difficult to work together. Another said that it depended on the relationship and spheres of influence involved; at times it was civil, even compliant, and at times highly politicized.

A participant said that reflecting on her own undergraduate experience, when she was a student staff member, helped her remember the importance of being open with students, including when they were frustrated or wished for some kind of administrative change or improvement.

I’m always reminded about what it was like for me, to be a front-line staff member working with students. And being a student myself, and all those

frustrations, you know because you sit there and think, if only I was making decisions, I would make such different ones. ... My style of leadership and decision-making is very transparent. I mean, people know what I'm doing, and why I'm doing it, and I tell as much as I can tell. I probably almost share too much, but I remember that that was the part that frustrated me as a student, is that I just didn't know why people were doing what they were doing.

It was important to value students as full members of the university community. This included ensuring that they had an opportunity to participate or provide feedback on institutional decisions, by helping them to have a seat at decision-making tables. It could also be facilitated by assisting them in being informed of necessary background on various issues. One participant highlighted that patience is also required, as some discussions or issues are long-standing, and it is challenging to balance having "the same conversation 10 years in a row" while wanting to make progress on the issue or move forward with new projects. However, it was important to recognise that the individual student representative has done nothing inappropriate, as they do not necessarily have the full background. "So you have to have the patience to revisit issues continuously. And start from scratch, and not get your guard up, as much as you want to. Because you know where that conversation is going, but you still have to give that student a chance to have their voice heard. That helps to foster stronger relationships." Students may indeed bring new ideas, perspectives or issues to the table, and that is always valuable.

*Engaging students in decision-making*

One participant said that he had been lucky starting student affairs work in an institution that had very involved and active students, who were engaged in delivering services and working with the administration. He said that this was educational for him, as he formed his own ideas of the field from that environment.

It was understanding that one of the key transitions was what it means to be with students as a professional, and how the definition of that may change over time, and how early on I had been blessed to be in an institution that despite its bumps and wrinkles, had a history of student-driven activity, and a proud heritage in that regard. So I was able to come alongside that, in some very, very important modelling happened for me there, despite all the differences of opinion and stuff.

Having students involved in decision-making and ensuring they had a voice, meant, for most participants, working closely with elected student leaders. Traits that participants associated with student leaders included a passion for making change, a focus on their work, and a generally high level of confidence in their abilities. Student leaders were generally seen as selfless, and not out to “build their resume” but rather engaged in trying to make a difference. They were seen to have a high capacity to understand issues, including reflecting on them and developing a broad vision and a commitment to the “big picture.”

They tend to be a person who wanted to make a difference in the world, in some way, shape, or form. They're hard-working, there's no doubt that they work their asses off. They bear a tremendous amount of responsibility, all at once, with very little support. And I think people entirely underestimate the amount of responsibility and work that is involved in that role. And forget how many directions you're pulled in, you know, while doing this at the age of 21 or something.

Student leaders tended to hold the institution accountable, they were well-connected to decision-makers, and more than one participant commented that student leaders had greater access to senior administrators, than they did. Student leaders tended to be hard-working and to love what they were doing, said participants, and one added that they were so idealistic that "it's kind of endearing."

One participant said that there were sometimes significant variations in student leader personalities and motivations.

I guess I have a variety of different perceptions. I've met some incredible student leaders, who were very proactive, and really keen on doing whatever they could for the students, and were quite keen getting involved with us, and doing whatever it is that we were wanting to do with them. But there's extremes. So we have the ones that are quite high achievers, keen, outgoing, and who can multitask like crazy. And then you know, I've met some student leaders who really were in it more for the name, than for any other reason, so they weren't as active.

One technique useful for working effectively with student leaders was to be as inclusive as possible when making decisions. Also, one participant commented that it was sometimes constructive to give student leaders an opportunity to speak “off the record” in order for them to be able to seek advice. The relationship could vary from advisory, to supervisory, to collaborative, depending on the project or activity. Generally, participants felt that working with student leaders was collaborative and constructive, but at times student affairs practitioners could be caught between student leaders and the senior administration, and occasionally student leaders could be confrontational or lacking in trust. Factionalism within student associations could also limit their effectiveness.

A participant said that her approach of transparency and openness greatly assisted with building a positive rapport with student leaders; she had inherited a contentious relationship from her predecessor, and needed to build trust.

To be open to what students can bring to the table, to be open to using those moments where students disagree, to educate. And they need to be genuine, and real. ... This department traditionally had had a poor track record ... lots of conflicts, and I don't know why, I don't know why, because that's not been my experience. I think a lot of that has to do with who you are. ... They saw a guy [the former administrator] in a suit and a tie that they couldn't be themselves with, or say what they thought with, or they didn't trust because they couldn't see the real person.

Another motivation for having students get involved in programs, services, and committees is the potential for learning in these non-academic activities. One participant



referred to this as encouraging them to develop the potential that she saw in all students, and that planning and running an activity was a tremendously educational experience if it succeeded, and even perhaps more so if it failed. Another said:

I think that everything that we do should have, ideally and this isn't always the case, should have some kind of student learning outcomes, whether intentional or unintentional, attached to it. So you invite students to be part of the committee, and it's because you want them to contribute, and you want them to participate, but you also want them to learn something. You want them to have that experience, not just for the experience itself, but how that experience can shape who they are, and what it is that they want to do in their life, and where they might go in the future.

#### *Collaborative relationships with student associations*

A good relationship with student leaders allowed collaboration and the sharing of resources in terms of service delivery. Cultivating a strong relationship with student leaders included ensuring that they were given access to information, and student leaders appreciated transparency. Sometimes, as seen in the next chapter, working with student associations could be challenging. However, all of the participants spoke positively about strong student leaders and the impact that they could have, both for the students they represented, and for the institution. Students could provide input, as well as checks and balances, around different student affairs activities, particularly if their campus was one

in which student fees funded services. Additionally, student leaders would often be involved in planning activities, including on a large scale, and in some cases in developing policies and processes around how to do so. One participant said that working with students on these types of activities gave the opportunity for resource-sharing, skills development, and mentoring of other students. This type of collaborative work also helped to build a trusting relationship.

So that when something doesn't go in their favour, they'll understand it's about the situation in, it's your behaviour, it's not about them, it's not about necessarily their group, it's about there's actually reasons behind this. And being as transparent as possible.

One key role of student leaders was to advocate on behalf of students, and most brought a great deal of passion and activism to this. It was important to respect the autonomy of student associations, rather than attempting to oversee or direct them. In order for student leaders to succeed in making change, it was important for them to think strategically about realistic goals. One participant worried that student leaders did not genuinely represent the student body on all their issues, but generally participants were deeply impressed with their dedication and idealism.

Several participants spoke of how something as simple as the location of their offices, or their willingness to go to student leader offices for meetings, made a significant difference in their interactions with student leaders. More than one found that they had been one of the only senior administrators to visit student association offices, and that elected student leaders appreciated the courtesy. Still others deliberately located

their offices near the student association office or in a student union building, feeling that proximity to student leaders was sufficiently beneficial to offset not being located near other senior administrators. One participant said that she was careful to ensure that students were given appropriate advice, while keeping her own administrative position in mind.

### ***Commitment to Equity and Social Justice***

#### *Embracing diversity*

The values of equity and social justice were manifested in various participant interviews in different ways. The most fundamental value that was cited by participants was having an appreciation for diversity, and an extensive knowledge of multicultural and oppression issues. Being open to difference, not only regarding marginalized groups, but also in terms of ideas, was also crucial.

Equity and social justice are high on my list. I include some reference to either equity, which I think is sometimes a difficult concept, or social justice, into every job interview. Because I think at a certain point, you have to understand that's what the work's about ... it's a bit pie-in-the-sky, but to come into this work without a grounding in that, without an understanding that that's *really* what it's all about here, is a set up for some kind of disconnect. ... You have to have an appreciation for diversity ... you won't enjoy the work unless you really like working around people from all over the world, and from all different backgrounds.

Similarly, a participant said that his core value is to have a people-centred approach, with openness to different cultures and ideas. He said that his institution was very diverse, and that staff needed to be willing to embrace that diversity. “Because I don’t think that if somebody in these types of roles is closed to different ideas that they’re really going to help students in the way that they’re supposed to.”

One participant spoke of the need not to be an ideologue; in other words, to balance a passion for equity with an understanding of the limitations of what the institution could accommodate.

In the second round of interviews, another participant spoke of the need to be aware of balancing the amount of resources that should go to supporting specific groups, versus investing them in the potential to influence the campus community on a wider level.

#### *Encouraging students to be agents of social change*

On a broader front, post-secondary education was an opportunity to educate students on issues of equity and social justice, including helping them become aware of ways that they can enact social change.

It’s a learning organisation, the university, the skills that we’re trying to get students to learn, through their interactions, and their group work, and all that, and their residential living, whatever, is about conflict resolution, and collaboration, and communication, and those are all the skills that we need to rid the world of its major injustices. .... But I think that you know

our role is around educating citizens, and educating responsible citizens means having an awareness of the injustices of the world, and providing people with the toolkit that they can choose, and hopefully *will* choose, to apply to some of that.

Students were inspiring in their commitment to social change. This could be seen among elected student leaders, and also through various social action student groups. One participant said that she particularly appreciated the opportunity to make a difference in students' lives, in the hope that they would then adopt and magnify that behaviour, as there was an enormous opportunity for a larger impact. "I truly believe that we are changing the world." As well, participants encountered individual students who had identified an area in which they wished to make change, and who designed projects or programs, or influenced policy, in order to address it.

Well, I mean sometimes I'm just so impressed with students. Their commitment and their drive. I work with a young woman who is passionate about issues around sustainability. And lots of students talk about this. But she has, on her own, without the benefit of the student society behind her, or the institution behind her, done more single-handedly for sustainable living on our campus than anyone else. ... She goes in with a sunny disposition, and she talks, she finds out who the right people, she might have to go to 50 people to find out who the right person is. I know who the right person is. She goes and she does it. And I look at her, and she inspired me, you know?

*Support for marginalised students*

Support for marginalised students manifested itself in providing a variety of programs and services. Student affairs divisions would often encompass services to assist disabled students, aboriginal students, gay/lesbian/ /bisexual/transgender students, students of different religious faiths, and women. Additionally, some institutions had administrative officers whose role was to raise equity issues for marginalized groups. Generally, this type of work both assisted individual students, and also worked to influence campus policies and culture.

We opened up the Rainbow Centre, to enhance a more welcoming environment for our queer student community, which has been incredibly successful. They used to meet in secret locations, very much underground so to speak, and now we have I think about 80 student volunteers that actually staff the Centre on a volunteer basis, throughout the day and evening, seven days a week. So I mean that whole appreciation of diversity and humanitarianism has certainly been a strong value that we've all had.

Valuing diversity also included having knowledge of different faith issues, when differences arose between different faith groups, or if chaplaincy fell into the student affairs portfolio. One participant laughed when speaking of his role in this, as he was not religious.

I have no particular religious or spiritual beliefs, but I oversee the Interfaith Centre. And I'm absolutely passionate about [helping] people with finding a religious community on campus. I think that's huge, I think that's so important. And I've put a lot of resources and time meeting with those people, and learning about that stuff. Because I think it's really important, and I value it. Though *personally* I don't value it, you know what I mean?

Another participant said that on his campus, and he expected on others, there were a number of people who were very religious, and even fundamentalist. He said that he did not consider it his role to convert them from that mentality, “but I do want them to struggle, and wrestle, and reflect, and meet, and be exposed to this stuff, so that they have a broader and deeper understanding of the issues, than whatever they came in here with.” Spirituality in general was not touched on by participants, except one, who commented on how it had been largely removed from most student affairs work, with the shift away from *in loco parentis*.

I mean, if anything, we should be having more discussions than anybody, around religion, and spirituality, and what's meaningful, and just being open about everything. But we don't, because again, I think that's where the legal part has come in. I think we're now so afraid of being offensive and being seen as exclusive.

Participants said they sometimes encountered students whose values were markedly different from their own. While this is covered in more detail in the next chapter on values conflicts, participants stressed the importance of respecting the student's views, understanding their background, and being open to dialogue. As well, it was necessary not to let a student's views affect how they were treated. One participant pointed out that some staff members may not feel comfortable with certain students, for example due to their sexual orientation, but that it was necessary for them to handle that appropriately.

Well, certainly I think that people are faced with ethical issues when they are dealing with students, especially if they have their own, I guess, moral fibre behind them that maybe is in conflict with what they're kind of being forced to deal with. I think a common modern example is people who are dealing with students of various sexual orientations, who have very strong religious beliefs. That, you know, anything but heterosexual orientation is morally wrong. ... And I think for the most part people do handle it quite well, at least for the student. ... I think that that's a really good step, that they still hold their own values, but respect what the student is going through, and is still willing to do whatever's needed to help that student.

#### *Role modelling equity*

Working at an institution that modelled the importance of equity and support for diversity was of high importance for one participant, who said that her institution put equity very high on the agenda, particularly around cultural and sexual diversity, and in



its efforts to ensure financial accessibility, and for senior administration to make equity issues a priority was important to her when considering institutional fit. “So if look for these big markers, you kind of go yeah, this is a nice fit for me. ... You’re never going to walk into an institution where it’s oh, look, that looks like me at the top there, but it’s pretty darn close.” More specifically, a proud moment for her was when the institution participated in pulling out of the Maclean’s magazine rankings of universities, which she felt was a “huge values statement.” She commented that she feels the rankings are about prestige, which is not what an undergraduate education is about. When her institution made the decision not to participate in the rankings, she felt there was synergy between her personal values and the values of the institution.

Another participant said that student services were mandated to promote equality, and that there is an expectation that they do so in everything they do. This included an understanding that the institution should be a level playing field to enhance all students’ learning experiences, and that programming on a daily basis should reflect that. “We’re still the enlightened group.”

### ***Dedication to Student Affairs Work***

Being dedicated to their work was a recurring theme among participants. The importance of professionalism and effective management skills was cited by most participants, as well as the value of teamwork amongst staff, both inside student affairs divisions, and through reaching out to other departments and faculties within the university. This can be facilitated by not only asking for assistance from other divisions, but also working to discover how student affairs can benefit other areas of the university.

Managerial competencies included human resources, budgeting, planning, assessment, giving verbal and written presentations, and understanding business models.

*Professionalism and responsibility to staff*

One participant commented that professionalism infused the work, because of being in “strict academic environments,” balance needed to be maintained between the academic and services sides of the university. He added that professionalism was developed by learning from personal experiences, including as a student, and also through training. He cited “seriousness” about the work as being key.

I think if you’re a res life officer, up to a director, your professionalism must include things like your ability to – or your willingness to – present, engage in research, your interaction with colleagues at conferences, and events, and teleconferences, the development of your reputation in-house at your institution. All these things come into it. It’s not just, what’s the word, I want to say a lark, that’s not right. It’s like the seriousness of the profession, you know, you must exude that at all times.

A participant spoke of the shift in responsibility that comes from taking on staff supervision, and the way that it changed how she did things. “You have a responsibility to kind of work with those staff members, as these human beings, who are imperfect, and who may not always be the kind of people that you want them to be, or share your values. It’s this whole other part of your job, that’s really, you’re not just working for the students.” She said that she hadn’t realized the extent of the time that supervision would

take from doing projects or working with students. Other aspects of her position were similar.

I think when you look, and when students actually look at what administrators do, there are so many things. Aspects of our job. I just spent an hour and a half this morning working on my budget, you know, that's not sexy. Does that create student community? No. Are any more students engaged in what's happening here at [this institution], because I sat here for an hour and a half staring at an Excel file? No. But I still have to do it, it's part of my job.

Values were also reflected in management approaches. This included openness, non-hierarchical decision-making, and a respect for inclusive processes. One participant listed the importance of providing honest, timely information about various issues ranging from the budget, to human resources, to reports on the student experience. Another spoke of "finding that balance between the people-centred side, and the institutional side," and that sometimes the two do not intersect. "I think that's a common issue that sometimes student affairs people have, that they really want to help somebody with such-and-such, but they know if they're just going to be hitting their head against a brick wall, trying to get something done."

Being where students are. Promoting evidence-based and outcome-based practice. Working with faculties and alumni. Trying kind of flexible organisational approaches, new snap-ons, bolt-ons, teams, you know

Velcro organisation, in Harvard Business Review terms. I feel passionately about connecting with the institution's aims, and advancing them; I've always felt passionately about students, but I think my passion is growing in my role to the notion of understanding where the institution is trying to move, testing and sharing that ambition, and then doing everything I can with the team I have, or with the division I have, to help advance institutional aims as well as student success. Modelling good citizenship practices, whether it's in HR [human resources], or sustainability, or being aware of needs in the region, or, you know, etcetera.

### *Openness to new ideas*

Openness to new ideas, and to being challenged, was cited as a valuable attribute for student affairs practitioners. This included when working on new projects and initiatives, as well as during interactions with students. It was exciting to generate new ideas and enthusiasm, and this could be facilitated by sharing decision-making power. In order to test a new idea, one participant said that it was important always to ask if the proposed course of action was the right thing to do. "Such a simple question, you know, and yet it'll tap in, for some people, it'll tap into a residual doubt they've had, that they just can't express on a rational basis, because all the arrows seem to point like this, but is it the right thing to do." He highlighted the importance of ethically sensitive and well-considered judgements. When a person seemed unsure about a decision that was

bothering them, asking questions about it to examine underlying values could help. This could include determining who the stakeholders and people affected are, what do others think, and whether or not people are being true to their values. He added that having mentors or senior staff to help an individual understand their rationale is useful, because “a lot of people’s decision-making process is a mystery to themselves,” and those with more experience can help them with this. People may sometimes be resistant to having to analyze their thinking around difficult decisions, but it is essential.

One participant spoke of the need to value student affairs history, saying that student affairs is generally focussed on the future, and that “there’s very little honouring of what’s come before,” both in the context of the institutional and student affairs traditions, and also in terms of longer-serving staff members’ knowledge. “I’m not talking about blind allegiance to years of seniority; I’m talking about honouring people for what they’ve been, in addition to exactly what they are right now as they sit in front of you.” Focussing on history, was, however, challenged during the second stage interviews by another person, who said that an over-emphasis on past practice could be limiting. Therefore, respect for what has been done in the past, with making room for innovation, needed to be balanced.

#### *Demonstrating commitment*

Student affairs was seen by participants as requiring hard work and flexibility in terms of hours. One said: “If you want to be in the role, and you want to be successful, and that’s what you believe in, then you’ve got to commit the time to it.” This was cited as something that needs to be offset with attention to self-care. Participants handled

boundaries differently and generally, the extent to which people were open and relaxed in demonstrating their personality varied according to the individual.

Well, you know, I try as most professionals do, to be as professional as I can in terms of the conduct of my professional work environment. But, you know, individually as a person, I try to balance out the social, personable side. Because I don't think, like student services is not a sterile profession. You're not an accountant. You're not a doctor. It's not that your game face has to be on all the time. You've got to have a certain healthy balance to keep perspective, so that's what I subscribe to.

Another aspect of professionalism cited by more than one participant was the importance of representing the university and its mission. This included ensuring that students and student leaders have a clear understanding of the reasons for policies and institutional decisions.

One participant said that some people, particularly at the entry level of student affairs, drifted into the position without having made a conscious decision to do so, because they "love university and they want to stay at university, they're not ready to get out." She said that to offset this, there needs to be a "commitment to student affairs as a profession," which ideally includes formal training. A number of participants spoke highly of people who had mentored and supported them as they entered and grew in their careers, and how much they had learned from others; they felt that it was important to do the same for newer people entering the field.

*Contributing to the field*

Collegiality was important, both within the student affairs division and the institution, as well as among other student affairs practitioners. The latter can include participation in conferences, research, and publications, as well as assisting other student affairs practitioners when needed. In addition, one participant pointed out the importance of supporting other staff.

Things like respecting, honouring and recognizing contributions. We are a community, we are building each other up, so I place a big value of managing each other's reputation.

While paying attention to individual student needs and learning was necessary, there also needed to be a focus on collective influence of student affairs; it was crucial to have a broader view than simply to focus on one's own division or department. One participant pointed to specialization of different units of student affairs as potentially being an impediment to this, and said that rather, student affairs should take an integrated approach to the overall student experience.

I think one of the dangers that we get into in terms of, if we identify and focus only our silos, is that we're not going to have the overriding impact that we could have in student affairs. So I think student affairs people have to value the student experience overall, and not think about it just in their own individual unit perspective. And I think that's really important in terms of they have to value a team approach to working with students, and

that's not just on the student services side, but I think right from, to use our terminology, the enrolment services side, registrar side, housing, student life, plus all what you would call the traditional student service areas, they have to be integrated, and people have to value that integration.

In the same vein, a participant said that it was important to recognise that students could be "sophisticated consumers" who wanted value, good service, speed and precision. Delivering services efficiently and effectively is also a value.

One participant pointed out that different professions such as accountancy or medicine have national standards or codes of conduct, and that while student affairs does not, it was useful to imagine that it did: "You will be at all times dedicated to your students. You'll be at all times collegial. All that sort of thing."

One participant concluded his interview by saying: "I could really get broken up about this, because it means so much to me. It's been my whole life."

### ***Life-long Learning and Self-improvement***

Continual learning was both absolutely necessary and also an extremely enjoyable aspect of student affairs work. One participant spoke of the breadth of student affairs and services. In the context of helping students to learn so many different things, to develop personally, affectively or cognitively, and to critique and analyse, student affairs practitioners work in a rich, concentrated learning environment.

And it's all part of our lives, we're learning all the time, every day. So to be concentrated, that's why I love it here so much, concentrated so much



in a learning environment where people want to be here, that are serious, and they want to have fun, too, wow, I mean the reward that comes from that, it's amazing. It's every day. And it gets to you, in the heart. I mean, you get emotional over it, because the students impact you so much.

In terms of their practice, participants spoke reflecting on their experiences, including their own post-secondary experience and that of their students, and refining their work based on that. There was a need for constant learning and self-improvement, and this could be undertaken formally, through professional development such as conference attendance or graduate programs, or informally, through reading recent research or books on student affairs, and discussions with colleagues and students. As seen in the previous chapter, several participants spoke positively of their experiences pursuing graduate work in higher education or student personnel administration, in either Canada or the United States. Some participants commented that the opportunity constantly to learn new things was one of the aspects of their work that they enjoyed the most; “we have to stay current, and change with the times,” said one participant, adding that students were constantly changing, so “we’re not in a stagnant discipline.” Another said that after having worked in another field, she found that student affairs work suited her much better, because “I was always able to develop ... and there wasn’t a day where I was ever bored.”

*Engaging in both theoretical and experiential learning*

It was important to keep current with student affairs literature, as well as other research related to post-secondary education and university management. In addition, there has been a growing amount of assessment and theoretical work related to student affairs in Canada, but compared to the United States, little work has been done in this field. Student affairs and student development literature could be useful in practice, and participants hoped the gap in Canadian information would increasingly be filled, as more student affairs staff engaged in graduate work and research. One said that he expected a major shift in student affairs at a national level in Canada, including becoming more focussed on sharing and collaborating on research. Another commented that American research “doesn’t always translate well” to the Canadian context. A participant who had studied in the United States said:

I think there are some folks from Canada who go to the US, and they learn all this stuff and then they think, wow, I need to bring this back and teach everyone else this stuff. And I didn't have that feeling, because I think a lot of what we do with students, and student development, is very intuitive.

A participant said that there was a great deal in student development theory that helped to provide logic and method to student affairs practice, as well as provide an understanding of students, but that there needed to be a balance between the use of theory, and providing sufficient room for students to have their own experiences. Another spoke of how she found that while theory wasn’t necessarily useful in day-to-day work or

in informing her practice, it was extremely helpful in providing an explanation for things she had observed. “I don’t think it’s that helpful when you’re sitting in the discipline meeting to think, okay, and he’s at stage this, I don’t find any of that helpful. I just find it interesting ... when you’re reflecting on experiences.” A participant said she found pragmatic research more useful than theoretical material:

This just probably is a particular way that I approach work, that is prescriptive and tangible, that is about concrete things that I can understand. How to get more retention for example, is a good one because that’s very – although I don’t read a lot about retention – but it’s a good example of something that’s very tangible, I mean, the question is how do you get more students to stay, and here are five things that seem to work. Than I am in the very deep theoretical stuff around the psychosocial development, moral development, all of that kind of stuff. It’s interesting, fascinating stuff; I do not think that it particularly influences my day-to-day approach to the work in the same way.

Similarly, a participant said that much of Canadian student affairs practice had developed through trial and error, and in the past many practitioners had even been resistant to theory. “A lot of us couldn’t be bothered, didn’t think it was meaningful.” He said that he now understood years later how influential many authors had been, even while sometimes disagreeing with them. He cautioned about overusing different concepts and incorporating them into everything, citing the current enthusiasm for learning outcomes, which while very useful in measurement and accountability, may not capture

intangibles. Another participant reacted in the same way, saying that the literature serves as a theoretical model that he was always challenging. "I'm building my own perceptions, and my own beliefs, and I find the literature very helpful, because it introduces, it challenges me, in terms of the conceptions I have." He said that when the literature did not reflect his own experience, he tested it by trying to incorporate the concept into his work, to see if it held true. He added that an understanding of the literature provided a helpful vocabulary to describe student affairs work.

Similarly, another participant said that a great deal of student affairs work is both intuitive and practical. She said that some things were self-evident, and did not require an enormous amount of research or assessment in order to address them. "You don't need to do a survey to know that students want to succeed academically. You don't need to do research to know that they're going to feel homesick." She said that, depending on what the person's job was, student affairs "is not rocket science ... I think why we do so well, and why we've done so well all along, is because we're practical."

Another participant said that having a balance of theory and practical experience was extremely valuable.

I think there's a lot of interesting stuff that helps you understand maybe the inner workings of a student, by studying the theories. I think the theories provide a lot of logic and method that might help you change what your views are, but I think a lot of it is balance. ... And maybe that's the difference, that you don't necessarily need it to do the job, but maybe

you'd be stronger at your job if you did have it. The experience and the education.

### *Learning from students*

Learning from students was also something that is central to student affairs practice, said many participants. One participant said that one of her core values was the ethic of believing one could always do better: "I'm a learner. I believe that I gain as much from the students, or more, than I can possibly provide to them." Gathering information from students included assessing changes in student demographics and culture, examining new ways of communicating such as online messaging, and discussing new ideas for more effective practice. Another commented on the value of following the lead of students, recently alumni and new staff. "I just think there's a new world dawning ... We waste a lot of time not consulting some of the experts in our midst, even though they're not officially experts." Collaboration with students and student groups was highly valued. One participant added that even picking smaller things from students, like computer tricks, was always exciting.

Oh yeah, it's incredible. You know, or even simple things. I mean, I love it when students teach me technical stuff. I'm a bit of a techy geeky guy, and if I'm in my office and I'm doing something, and a student says, oh, you can do it this way, I love it! Love it, love it. Sit down, teach me, you know?

One participant emphasised that effectively working with student groups involved sharing power. “I’m not coming in as the professional who’s going to come and solve their problems, but I always try to approach working with students on a ‘let’s work on this together,’ sort of like a teamwork kind of thing, let’s brainstorm, let’s see how I may be of use to you, but we’re going to work on this together.” She said that she is the expert in what she does, in terms of providing background or training, but that her approach is collaborative.

I think just working with a student population, and I’ve worked with this population before in different ways years ago, it just seems intuitive that it works well with them, as opposed to coming in and saying I could tell you what you need to do. ... It’s not something that I’ve had to try to do; I mean it’s in part to the kind of person that I am. I’m very much about collaboration, and just being real, and as authentic as I can be with them. And I think that that works quite well. I think I manage to create a really strong rapport with students.

Finally, a participant said that what she loved about her work was that it was in a very creative field, whether related to research, to projects, to seeing students develop, or even to a well-crafted document. “I am inspired by the finished product.”

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has presented categories of values and examples of their implementation, derived from analysis of participant interviews. Some values could be

applicable to any caring profession, while others are specific to student affairs. It was observable that participants felt passionately about their work and the importance of maintaining a high standard of ethical conduct; even more striking was that given the range of their experiences and length of service, they all maintained high ideals related to their work and their own performance. Clearly, the dedication that participants exhibited regarding their impact on students and their institutions was deeply felt.

The categories included in this chapter were personal traits of honesty, integrity and authenticity, which were manifested in being self-aware of the impact of different decisions and approaches, the importance of role modelling and congruency between espoused values and actions, and having both a respect for policies and processes as well as ensuring care is taken when making decisions. This leads into the importance of ensuring a balance between respect for policies and processes, and care to ensure that individual student circumstances were taken into account, in making decisions that reflected the context of the situation. To do this, participants spoke of the need to take an educational approach, to listen carefully, to focus on solutions that minimized harm, and to have a positive outlook. Building on this, student-centredness was centrally important to participants, who particularly stressed the importance of providing support while respecting students' autonomy, and treating them as adults. All participants spoke in some form of how much they enjoyed interacting with students, and how central this was to their motivation, and the sense of reward they received from their work. It was particularly exciting seeing students learning and growing from their experiences. Another area that was stressed by most participants was ensuring that students had a voice in university decision-making, and were valued as full members of the university

community. Working with student leaders, even when they could be challenging, was seen as a central role for most participants, who also spoke of the need to be open to students' ideas, to create an atmosphere where they were respected, and to have pride in what students were able to accomplish. Part of the work that was identified by a number of participants included having a deep commitment to equity and social justice. This could be manifested in having a broad understanding of post-secondary education contributing to social change, and more specifically, being open to and sensitive of differences, and being well-informed around diversity issues. Identifying specific groups of students that needed specialized support and programming was part of this, as well as learning from students.

Personal work values also included the need to be dedicated to student affairs work, and committed to lifelong learning. For the former, participants spoke of managerial approaches that fostered collaboration, both within student affairs and throughout the university, as well as ensuring appropriate planning and resource management when developing programs. Some participants spoke of enjoying having their ideas challenged, and traits such as hard work and flexibility were highlighted by several participants. People also spoke of giving back to the student affairs field, through research, conference presentations, and mentoring colleagues. This leads to the final category of lifelong learning, which was identified by many participants as one of the benefits of student affairs work, as it was continual, and could take place both through keeping current with research and doing assessment, as well as learning from students and reflecting on one's own experiences.



As will be seen in the next chapter, implementing these values, and maintaining high ideals, can carry consequences, as there are inevitably times when personal values come into conflict with each other, or when an individual's beliefs run counter to some aspect of their work.

## **Chapter Six: Values Conflicts**

### ***Introduction***

Student affairs administrators, who work with clear values and passionate beliefs, encountered a range of different situations when these values came into conflict with each other, or when they were required to address situations in which their beliefs were challenged. This chapter covers different categories of values conflict, related to the campus environment, staff management, policy and decision-making, interactions with students, and personal values. The different kinds of conflicts encountered by participants are described. During the second round of interviews, some differences emerged between those in senior student affairs positions, who had more value conflicts around institutional planning and interactions with university leadership, compared with those who were less senior who were more likely to be challenged by issues directly related to students. However, there was significant overlap, and the majority of participants said that they had encountered aspects of each of the values conflict categories during the course of their career. Participants commented that even if they had not personally encountered some situations, there was a consensus that these types of conflicts were common in student affairs work.

This chapter outlines the different types of values conflict and examples of each, and concludes with a brief summary of ways that participants said that conflicts could be prevented, addressed or resolved.

### *Campus Environment*

Broadly speaking, the campus environment encompassed the overarching mission statement and policies of the university, administrative structure, policies, resources, and institutional priorities. Conflicts could arise between different aspects of the campus environment, or when some part of it conflicted with an individual's personal values.

#### *Institutional mission and senior campus leadership*

A number of participants identified the importance of having university values congruent to their own. This included a focus on student-centredness, the university as a public institution, equity, and ensuring that teaching was as valued as research. Positive campus attributes included institutional fit with participants' values, openness to new ideas, a desire to serve students better, and a reduced hierarchy and increased cooperation among departments. Concerns arose when the environment was more hierarchical or rigid, or had different priorities such as focussing on research to the detriment of teaching.

A campus environment or senior administration that was not student-centred was cited as a problem by several participants; one said that it was their job to "get them there." A participant said that student affairs can be affected if senior administration or faculty members come from the school of thought that students should be able to figure things out on their own; an over-emphasis on self-sufficiency. While the participant agreed that most students could be quite successful without assistance, such a disengaged approach would not lead to the full desired student outcomes for all students.

I think that most academics were probably highly successful in their university years. They did well, probably many of them didn't experience some of the kinds of challenges that lots of our other students did. ... And because they were successful, maybe don't understand why we need all of these services to support these students. If they can't be successful, maybe they shouldn't be here. And even stronger, I think, may even see us as a drain on resources that ought to be going into the academic area. ...

Whereas we are much more focused on the teaching and learning aspects of what happens on our campuses, and particularly on students and their learning, and so there's a bit of a value conflict there.

One participant commented that in an institution at which she formerly worked, the words "undergraduate student" were not in the mission statement, which led her to feel that while her role was to serve the mission of the university, her own work was not reflected in it. Similarly, at her new institution, she felt that the role of student services was not clearly defined in any governing documents or policies. This presented a challenge in determining where her work fit into the institutional mission. Another participant said that at times the leadership of his institution made him wonder about how much they cared about students, and added that he had quit a previous position, when the institution acted in a way he felt was not in the interest of students. Yet another participant spoke of the conflict in priorities between teaching and research, particularly if a focus on research did not translate to an enriched classroom experience, saying that the expectation that it would do so was "bogus for most students." Another said:

I don't think that the teaching ever comes close to the research agenda, and despite all the rhetoric about student experience being priority number one, I think that as you might have just caught there in my tone, a lot of it is rhetoric. I'm not sure the espoused values are the same as the actual lived values of institution, and there's some catch-up game being played there.

A participant contrasted her former institution with her current one, saying that where she is now working was a newer university, with a large number of new senior administrators, and significant resources being directed towards student-centred programs. This has led to growth and change, to the exploration of new ideas, and to better service to students. At her former institution, there was a greater focus on tradition and "an old-school value system," that could include a focus on hierarchy and protocol." While she said her former institution was outstanding, "it didn't fit with the way I was."

There was such a respect for chain of command there. It was beyond anything I've experienced before. So there would be lots of upset, if I was to go speak to somebody outside of my chain of command. ... It probably worked for most people, but I went from, and that was part of the culture shock, but I went from a small institution that had 5,000 students, and you just called somebody. ... I can't remember, but I once called the registrar, because my boss was away, to get a clarification on something that I knew had come from the registrar. And I was reprimanded for it, because it was

like, you're not supposed to call, she does not want to deal with you. Like, quote unquote.

For senior leadership of the university to not only espouse, but to implement stated institutional values, was also cited as crucial by several participants. One participant spoke of the importance of senior leadership modelling this:

If we want students to be more responsible for their own learning, we've got to show responsibility. That's about being a citizen. This is the notion of the institution as citizen, whether it's regional, or global, or in its own organizational machinations.

Another participant said that while she felt it was healthy if her supervisor, for example, felt strongly or differently about an issue, problems arose when a person in leadership had no clear values. She would rather disagree with decisions that were made for clear reasons, than for an individual not to be clear about what they were doing, to change their mind or "waffle," or not to be able to make a decision at all. That situation would lead her to feel a lack of confidence if she needed to go to a superior for a decision that she could not make herself.

One participant identified a problem when university leadership, or staff in different units, did not role model appropriate behaviour; behaving in ways that she would not permit of her own staff. She cited cases of having intimate relationships with students, or lying at public meetings, as two particularly vexing examples. She added that getting drunk in front of students crossed the line for her, but that drinking with students

was a grey area, particularly if they were older or in leadership positions. She cited as challenges the decentralized structure of her institution, the lack of clear ethical guidelines around behaviour and decision-making, and her own experience witnessing what she considered unethical behaviour by senior leadership.

So I do find that implementing a sense of ethical behaviour, I guess I'll put it that way, and integrity in our work, can be very, very challenging, when everybody seems to have their own interpretation of what's okay and what's not ... it's very, very hard to implement, when it's not demonstrated by the leadership.

Having decision-making authority concentrated in the hands of a small group of people could also be a challenge, one participant said, especially in a small institution with limited resources. She said that until recently at her institution, there were few consultative bodies such as boards and committees in place, and that while they now exist, which is a positive step for the public interest, it is taking a long time for the institutional decision-making culture to change. She said that she found it challenging to be working with people whose experience was limited to one institution, who were accustomed to making unilateral decisions, and who may not understand that there were different ways to accomplish things, particularly in a resource-effective or collaborative way.

I think in any environment without the right checks and balances, that power can be used in lots of different ways. And particularly when you

have very limited resources, things get sticky. ... And you have a lot of people being here for a long time, and who've never seen how things are done elsewhere. And so I think there is a very genuine desire to change, but that desire isn't always operationalized.

Another participant spoke of the importance of "cabinet solidarity" with his colleagues. This became an issue when he was put in the role of being the spokesperson for senior administration *vis-à-vis* student leaders, and having to balance being transparent about his own personal opinion on an issue, and representing each side's views to the other. This process included presenting administrative proposals to students, then taking back students' views to the administration, and dealing with each side's reactions. The example he used was around differential tuition increases for academic programs, in which the student leaders, although realizing that some students were in effect subsidizing more expensive programs, still had a strong belief in the importance of an egalitarian tuition fee system. He agreed with this approach, but the senior administration felt differently, at which point, by virtue of his position, he needed publicly to present their proposal.

Sometimes people felt their departments were overly isolated into silos. One participant said that she often felt ignorant of what was happening elsewhere in her university. She said that when she met people from other institutions, she was impressed at how aware they were of the activities of their entire institution, rather than just their own department; she felt that she did not have the same breadth of knowledge of her own university's culture, decision-making, or politics. "And I don't know what goes on here,



and I know it's not just me. And, you know, most of us are kind of just isolated in our own little bubbles." She felt that her campus was lagging in initiatives that were becoming increasingly common at other Canadian institutions, such as first year experience initiatives or student leadership programs.

Several participants spoke of having to decide whether or not to take a stand on an issue, which was particularly hard in institutions that were hierarchical, traditional, or where there was territoriality between departments. In cases like these, there was often a clear conflict between the participants' sense of what was the ethically correct course of action, versus knowing that taking such a stand could be personally damaging. While working with students was often cited as requiring directness, openness and transparency, these were traits that might not be appreciated by other administrators.

I am someone who will speak my mind, and if you ask me a question and I'm going to tell you what I honestly think. And if I believe in something, or if I think something's wrong, I'm going to say what it is, and so on. And so sometimes I think people are taken aback by it, it's not always easy, and I've had to learn over time when to decide to say something or not, and pick the battles that are worth fighting, or not. ... And so it's a question of learning, okay, so if I know if I'm direct with this person, they are going to see it this way, so I have to modify my approach with them.

One participant cited a case where direction was received from a supervisor that they felt was not the right approach, which put her in a "dichotomy of what do you do." Another spoke of the challenges in "speaking truth to power," because there were times

when she knew that something was wrong, or that there was information that upper administrators needed to know, but that there were protocols concerning what she could and could not say or do.

Because at the end of the day, when they are in the newspaper for making a bad decision, or whatever, it will eventually be revealed that so-and-so down at this position actually *knew* about that and chose not to tell the president. ... I must have that general feeling, you know, at least once a week. Where there is a decision, or some money being spent, or a report or something, that I see that I know to be either untrue, or unwise, or unfounded. And I don't do what you're supposed to do, which is to speak truth to power.

The participant said that her institution was "extremely hierarchical" and that there was a strong sense of the importance of knowing one's place. She experienced conflict between the importance of knowing and revealing the truth, and in maintaining her position, her job security, and her supervisor's esteem. Similarly, another participant said that it was important to "pick your battles." Yet another spoke of how strongly she believed in speaking her mind to her superiors, and laughed about how she was aware of having some difficulty when people did it to her, but added that it was only an issue if it was with disrespect.

Another participant spoke of times when students were able to jump the queue for a service, because they had contacted senior administration. "It only takes one student whose parents feel connected, or slighted that Johnny didn't get in when Johnny wanted

to get in, and they make a call to the president, or they make a call to the VP, and then you get the call, get them in now.” This presented her with the dilemma of whether to counter a senior administrator’s request on a matter of principle, or to comply and feel she was being unfair to other students who had booked by the deadline. She also was concerned about the perception of her team, as well as the possibility of the favoured student telling others how they had received preferential treatment. “From a sense of values that just goes through me like a hot knife, when somebody tries to pull those strings.”

Another participant spoke of needing to adjust to a new institution’s expectations regarding his position. At his previous university, there had been considerably more informality, which allowed him to “wear the office lightly.” At his current institution his position held greater power and influence, as well as an expectation of “some gravitas.” As an example, a human resources advisor was baffled when he was hesitant about making a decision on an individual’s compensation, telling him someone at his level should do whatever he wanted. “Well, that would never happen at [former institution]. The egalitarian ethic there was such that it would never happen.”

Another participant said that even something as simple as the level of formality at her former institution, compared to her current one, made a difference to her.

Here it’s not about what you wear; it’s what you’re bringing to the table.

There, literally there is a thing about what you wear. Like, I literally had a conversation with someone about wearing flip-flops in the summer. Or that my drinking glass was too big. .... I would drink my iced tea or water

out of a large plastic tumbler in my office. And it was suggested that perhaps I might want not want to bring a glass that size to a meeting outside of the office.

Institutional change could be challenging. A participant said that a shift in senior management could also result in a change in institutional mission or priorities, and could lead to a reappraisal of how congruent her own personal values were with her institution's new direction.

One participant mentioned how difficult it was when staff in another department were "Machiavellian and hurting people." She said that in general people in the institution had similar values, even though resolving issues may be done differently, but that there were a few people who were "truly unethical."

#### *Resources, ancillaries and budgeting*

It was common for participants to identify resources as an area of conflict, both in the need to be accountable – particularly as "public servants" spending other people's money – and also in a continual desire to provide services and programs to students in resource-limited environments. This was an issue within participants' own departments, as well as university-wide, and was also reflected by the degree to which the institution prioritised student support. Additionally, participants had to make choices themselves regarding the levels and priorities of different types of student support that could be provided.

One participant noted that there may be a perception in student affairs that success was measured in terms of the proportion of the operating budget received, and hence incremental increases in resource allocation could be insidious in terms of causing costs to rise. Another conflict could arise when resources were allocated to a specific project or activity, such as a women's-only space, which was not seen by everyone as a priority or as equitable, because the resource was not available to everyone.

Participants said they contended with being in competition with other university departments for resources. Ancillary operations can be divided into those that are subsidized (such as direct student services like counselling or disability services), those that are usually break-even (such as residences and student housing), and those that are expected to be revenue-generating for the institution (such as parking). A participant commented that other departments perceived student services as not being revenue-generating, and that that could affect whether or not they were seen as a priority.

If I were a faculty member, and I wanted to add a particular way onto my building, or a particular program, and I would toddle off and get the research dollars to do that. Produce X number of research and Nestlé's will put in a new wing for us, for nutrition, or something of that nature. Student services aren't funded that way. And we pull from everybody else's revenue, we're not revenue-generating, or we're not perceived to be that way anyway.

A participant identified that when ancillary operations were grouped together, it could create different expectations of their role. This consisted of putting more

educationally-based operations such as residences in the same category as for-profit operations such as food services or parking. She said that in the residences, there might be a planned surplus at times, but that money was earmarked for projects such as future renovations; the university did not expect residences to make a financial contribution to the operating budget. In contrast, a food service might be primarily motivated by volume of sales and delivering a profit; where this came into conflict was in instances when profit margins come before student needs. This dilemma was also reflected when other divisions of the university did not understand the underlying rationale of programming, or had different priorities. An example was recruiters wishing for more suite-style residences; feeling that dormitories, particularly those that needed renovation, were an obstacle to successful recruiting, as many potential students preferred the independence of apartment-style housing, which she said provided less community, social connections among students, or access to students to provide support. “And it’s a better experience in the first year. And that’s a value that we have, but not a value that’s shared, because what the recruitment office is looking at, is getting as many high-quality students here as possible. What happens to them once they’re here is our problem.”

A number of participants spoke of having to deal with competing priorities, both with other university departments, and also within their own service delivery. For example, one participant pointed to the university instructing her to improve registration service by extending evening hours, but then when she had overspent her budget in order to do so, telling her she should take money from somewhere else. Another participant spoke of competing priorities when deciding how to allocate bursary money, between focussing on merit-based or needs-based packages; the merit approach would reward

strong academic work, while the needs-based would increase accessibility. The decision became to create a pool of students in need and to award bursaries on academic merit within that pool. “So we sort of fudged the dilemma a bit by parsing it.” Similarly, he faced a dilemma around prioritizing shorter-term or longer-term projects when there had been an infusion of money into his department. The participant felt that providing shorter-term programs for current students could have longer-term benefits, in terms of their sense of institutional affiliation, but that each of these types of decision involved a struggle.

Budgeting as a process could be difficult, participants said, with multiple stakeholders, trying to make decisions using a consultative process, and ensuring that resources are fairly allocated without favouritism.

I think budget process is something I really struggled with, because I think there’s a right way to do budgeting, and a wrong way to do budgeting as an institution, as a department, and that’s a huge ethical issue for me.

Another participant commented on wanting to ensure good staff compensation with a limited budget. “[When] I’m hiring people, to give them a decent wage, but of course be responsible with the fiscal resources of the university. I mean if I could, I’d just take all the folks that work in my division, and put them to the top of their salary scale.” Another participant pointed to a time at a former institution, when severe budget cuts in a time of financial crisis were interpreted as a demonstration of how little his department’s work was valued, and the challenge he had of trying to understand the decision from an

institutional point of view. His department had an 80% staff cut, with most of their budget reallocated elsewhere.

That was probably the most difficult professional experience I've gone through. And it's because of the conflict between my values, I mean, I'd invested my career and my life, and at that point about six of seven years of my professional career, to work in this field. And to have it just pulled out from under our feet was, to me, a statement about how the institution valued what I did, and what our department did. I can tell you, at the time, I had no ability to see this from the perspective of the institution. I looked at it solely from my perspective. And it took me a good five years before I was able to get enough distance to have a better understanding.

Now, however, the participant was in a senior administrative role, and was experiencing the opposite perspective. Some of his staff members served particularly disadvantaged students and come from a position of idealism, rather than taking a pragmatic approach that there were insufficient resources to support these students to the degree they would want. He found that some staff members appeared to be very passionate about their own departments, and were not able to see the larger picture.

And it's been very, very difficult, and a lot of that is driven by kind of an ideology that, well, these people need it, so therefore the institution should provide it. And that's true, they should! The reality is, [it's] a complex



institution with limited resources, and everybody, and every function, and every unit in our institution feeling very tight on the resource side.

Undue interference in how managers determined, planned and budgeted for their departments was cited by one participant as being counter-productive. She gave the example of a time she was bringing in a career advisor, which would entail an increase in the student ancillary fee, “which is a huge political issue, and I don’t enter into asking for ancillary fees lightly.” The director of finance, who was unfamiliar with career services and expected salary levels, made the decision around how the new career services department would be structured and the advisor compensated, which was frustrating. “And I don’t know why those decisions are made, and to me it’s unethical.” Another participant spoke of the challenge of getting her former institution to understand the need for a disability co-ordinator in the 1980s, when this was not yet seen as standard student support, and having to not only convince them of the validity of the service, but also to obtain government funding in order to start the service. She said that she struggled with being faced with a utilitarian approach of the greatest good for the greatest number, versus a care-based one which meets the needs of one person or a smaller group of people.

One participant said that he had to reassess his values around not “treating students as customers” when he assumed a new directorship, because this included undertaking planning using business-oriented strategies, with which he was initially uncomfortable. “You come up through the ranks, and see the value of services in the traditional sense. I always thought that you cannot put a price tag on service

development.” He questioned whether using the word “customers” was appropriate or whether he should use the term selectively when proposing projects to senior administration, versus to students or academics. Using a business model, he found, enabled him to realise efficiencies, but he continued to express discomfort with this approach. “There’s people out there that are very gung-ho business-oriented service providers, and they are those of us who are more comfortable sitting on the fence, surrounded by theory.” His previous approach had been to assume that student-oriented services had no need to analyse their effectiveness, to account for the budget, or to decide whether or not to continue the service. However, in his new position, he needed to access resources to expand programming, and needed to present proposals in order to do so. This meant, he realized, that his entire operation would be subject to a business analysis. What he discovered was that he did realize efficiencies, and was also able to demonstrate clearly measurable outcomes. “So I could get value for my budgetary arguments. But, you know, as a student services professional, who believes in, you know, diversity of programs, and going by your gut feeling, it sort of still grates against me.”

Finally, one participant said that it was hard always to keep the value of what student affairs did at the forefront of their day-to-day work life.

I sound like a broken record, but I’m still coming back to the seriousness of what you do. The seriousness of your profession. The congruency in proving that, you know, your retention theory is relevant. The programs you have are relevant. You know, there’s a need for you. That’s a constant, constant battle.

*Staff management*

As with the professional conduct concerns expressed above, boundary issues between staff and students were frequently cited by participants. Examples included the appropriateness of friendships, intimate relationships, consuming alcohol together, and what could occur when a student who was close to a staff member required access to resources, or was involved in a policy or disciplinary case. These issues were seen to be particularly challenging for live-in staff, front line staff, or staff who had more recently been students themselves.

Other challenges included the difficulty in balancing multiple agendas, particularly for student affairs generalists. One participant spoke of the difficulty in taking all viewpoints into consideration including from both inside and outside the reporting structure, “especially when you’re in student affairs in a general role, such as my office, when you’re a little bit of everyone.” At times, ethical considerations came into play when a decision had to be made that was not necessarily consistent with her usual consultative approach. Another participant spoke of the need to recognise the difference between representing people’s opinions, and leading.

While you have to represent the views of the people that you work with, or you’re supporting, you also have to lead, and by your example, and sometimes leadership is taking the hard road. And taking the route that you know that you’re not going to be supported by everyone.

At times, difficult decisions might mean that not all staff agreed, and navigating relations with staff in these cases can become difficult, particularly if it is a close-knit team.

One participant identified how difficult that could be in cases where a person seeks agreement about a negative opinion regarding another staff member.

I think it's really awful to hear a colleague talk down another colleague.

Particularly in the portfolio, or particularly around an executive team. And if somebody is to the point where they think they have to do that, then they have to surface that and work it through somehow, with me or somebody.

Supporting newer staff members was also cited as sometimes being a conflict between encouraging their enthusiasm, and ensuring they were providing enough autonomy to students. For one participant, this included working with staff who were former student leaders, and who were accustomed to doing things themselves. She needed to help them shift to understanding the value of stepping back and supporting students, as well as letting students have control, and even make their own mistakes, even if this was less efficient.

It matters what the students think. In managing my staff, that's one of the things that I've imparted on them, because they are excellent at what they do, and when they were students, they were the ones that did all the planning, and all of the leading, and all of the organisation, and to have them in their transition here, for me to look at them and try to come up

with a way to say, I know what you're capable of. I know that you can plan this event, or the project, or this program and I know that you will do it far better than most students will do. But that's not what your role is now. Your role is to make them like you. Your role is to help them gain those skills so that they can be independent.

In a similar vein, one participant said that more generalist or newer staff members may not be recognised as well as they should be, and may find it difficult to stay motivated.

Many participants noted that as they moved up professionally, they had less opportunity to work directly with students and student leaders, which was a loss. Part of this entailed being careful to ensure that they did not usurp the role of more junior staff members, or interfere with their work, even if it meant foregoing contact with students.

I'm very cognizant about not stepping on the toes of my staff, and we have an advisor for [the student government], he's a full-time manager that works in our department, it's his job, it's what he does, he goes to all their meetings, he meets with them on a regular basis. So I don't feel like I have a place to develop the kind of rapport, relationship, that I had developed with some of the students at [my former institution], because I was the direct person, their advisor. And I don't want to step on [the staff member's] feet, or his boss' feet, to be hanging out with them in a way that makes them feel like they don't have a role to play.

She also noted that some newer, less experienced staff could become frustrated with students, or react in an overly disciplinary or punitive way; she was then put in the position of having to decide whether to back a decision she disagreed with, or over-rule the staff member. She gave the example of a residence manager who wanted to bring in a policy that staff could key into students' rooms if they smelled smoke. She felt that at a basic level, that staff member had a need to assert his authority over students that he felt might be defying him or his residence assistants, but while she had a desire to support him and to give him the tools he needed, that was an insufficient reason to trump her value of respecting students' privacy.

It's been challenging for me to deal with younger front-line managers who want to be more punitive, because they're frustrated. And they're annoyed if I don't let them, or I overturn their decision, or I don't allow for the policy that they're putting forward. And I've found that really challenging, because I don't want them going away saying she's so out of touch, she doesn't know what she's talking about, she doesn't know what we're dealing with. But some of the things they bring forward are just like, no.

Some participants spoke of how staff may demonstrate a lack of consideration of students when deciding working hours, or in taking vacations at high-needs time, which conflicted with a student-centred approach. One participant described how flex-time provisions could result in a "slavish adherence" to banking hours, which did not match his assessment of professional behaviour. Another said that maintaining fixed hours, which was common in a unionized environment, was not conducive to student affairs

work in which greater flexibility is required, but added that having the flexibility of working significant hours outside of regular office hours could be something that was taken advantage of. Another participant spoke of the difficulties inherent in staff taking vacations in August. “I mean, this is a huge time, right? Students are coming out of the woodwork, their parents, some of them, some big issues emerge. And no one’s around. No one can handle it.” He said that this was combined with a bureaucratic set-up in which only certain people were permitted to make decisions. In one case, as most people in an office were away for a vacation, he had to go up to the vice-presidential level to find someone who could deal with an individual student’s issue.

Deciding appropriate personal boundaries with other staff could be difficult in terms of mixing social and professional settings. One senior-level participant said that while he was personally inclined to be inclusive among all staff members, particularly with regard to sharing information and influence, some of their directors who reported to him were uncomfortable with this. “If they see me talking to one of their staff members, some of them I know that within the next two days, they’ll find a way of politely saying, why were you talking to [participant]?” Similarly, a participant said he had to check that if staff members spoke directly to him, they had also spoken to their own direct supervisor. He related an occasion when he was online chatting late one evening, a staff member signed on, and then told the participant about a person in crisis. The following day the director called and was surprised that the participant already knew about the situation.

Moving up from being a colleague of staff members to being their supervisor also presented difficulties, said several participants, particularly in tight-knit departments. One

participant cited the example of having gained a significant promotion, which changed his work relationship with many people with whom he had been friendly or was friends. What would sometimes occur is that they would “inappropriately leverage that friendship ... And so there I am, I have a role as an executive within student services, and to have a role as a friend, and a colleague. And those are in conflict.” Another participant had a similar issue when he began as a director and brought his personal value system with him, to which his staff had to adjust.

It was hard to avoid showing preference to people, especially when they were very likeable and easy to work with. In one case, a participant said she hired someone who was not the best choice for a position. “I once made a mistake in that regard, hiring somebody that I just thought was great.” Another participant spoke of the challenge of supervising a large department in which she may personally dislike some staff members, and that normally she tended to be open about her feelings, but in that case she had to be careful to be professional and impartial.

A more harsh example is the need to make difficult staff decisions, including around resources, restructuring or discipline, particularly when having either positive or negative feelings about staff members. One participant struggled with ensuring that she was making a correct decision to terminate an individual during a reorganisation, versus suspecting herself of being influenced by her personal feelings. She concluded that the decision was justifiable.

I think the conflict was doing what’s right, and doing what’s easy. Or  
doing what is right and doing what serves me. What makes my life easier,



not what's easy to do. Because it wasn't easy to do. ... And I would always want to err, or fall on the doing what's right, but I'm a human being. And we always want to make our own situation easier, or do what's easy. And it would have been easier to not do it, on some level. But then you live with that decision, right? ... Doing the right thing for the right reasons. And I think it will be always something I did for both reasons.

The intricacies of balancing care for the individual versus the group was demonstrated for one participant in the case of an long-serving staff member who was less energetic than newer staff, and was not as able to learn new skills, but who had long service; other staff had to cover for them or work outside regular hours, which was a dilemma he found came up more than he expected, with an older staff demographic. He said that as he himself got older, he was more inclined that "my ethic of care is coming up a little higher on the seesaw than my ethic of justice." However, he pointed out that caring for that older staff member meant that newer staff would have to compensate.

Now, if you can't do this job in this position description, you'd better be looking for something else. I was more that way ten years ago, never quite that crude. ... I think in an organisation you need to honour that, you need to find a way to honour that. I'm not talking about blind allegiance to years of seniority; I'm talking about honouring people for what they've been, in addition to exactly what they are right now as they sit in front of you. It's, you know, it's not a disposable mentality.

Finally, problems could arise when a staff member was not student-centred, or even genuinely disliked students. An example raised by a participant was particularly challenging, as the staff member was older, and “for me was this kind of, it was a model of what I did not want to be, or ever become.” The staff member was asked to leave in the end.

And I suppose at some level, not for myself, but for others, it’s enacting my own value there about respecting people as people. And if people don’t like students, as long as they’re doing a good job, then I will respect that. But there are ways in which their actions may indicate that they don’t like the students, and I can take issue with that. ... I think also I have to have standards, right, I have to have a bottom line. You know, if you don’t like students, okay. That’s my value, and we may differ, but you do have to work with them in a productive way. So hold your nose and do the job, or change how you’re thinking.

### ***Policy and Decision-making***

Implementing policies in decision-making was an area that almost all participants identified as a source of values conflicts, which could arise from disagreeing with policies, a lack of clarity or context, or being unable to make necessary amendments or improvements to them. Decision-making, when guided by overly prescriptive policies, could be challenging and, depending on the case, not in the best interests of the students or the institution.

Developing policy effectively could entail challenges when trying to involve all stakeholders, and communicating what were the policy goals. Examples included when policy changes were undertaken and there was major resistance from students, particularly around codes of conduct or residence behaviour, or when participants worked with a policy structure that was out of date or not respectful of students or student needs. Being responsible for implementing policy with which participants disagreed, or felt was not student-centred, was also stressful, as was being charged with administering policies without the authority to amend them as needed.

One participant spoke of being involved with developing a student code of conduct that in its first draft was “far too authoritarian, and did not respect students.” Among other things, she said, the original precluded freedom of assembly. The challenge was compounded because even while personally disagreeing with it, her role was to explain it to the student association. She felt that “it was violating my value of respect. You’re not respecting these people for who they are, or their rights.” She said it was a learning experience about “when you work for the man, you toe the line. And you have to be able to either reconcile that, or find a way to get out.”

Another participant said that her institution, which she had joined relatively recently, does not have clear policies. She said that this created a “huge lack of accountability and transparency about what students’ rights are.” She added that her previous institution had a similar problem in that “there wasn’t a lot of policies written down, and so things would be kind of decided, oh, because we’ve done this for 50 years.” She commented that while policies are time-consuming to write, develop and

disseminate, particularly through a committee process, she increasingly has found that they are crucial in protecting students' rights and conveying their responsibilities to them.

Another participant cited a number of policies on his campus that were considered antiquated, as "they were developed in the sixties or even earlier." Any new initiatives that did not fall into the policy framework were at risk, because "trying to challenge the policy that way is quite involved work." The time and resources required to amend policies became a limiting factor, which led in some cases to the *status quo* being maintained.

#### *Student discipline*

A commonly stressful issue for participants was striking an appropriate balance between rigorously following conduct policies and processes, and meeting the needs of the individual student or student group, particularly in cases that were not clear-cut. This dilemma could arise in a variety of circumstances, but particularly when policies were highly stringent, or were not communicated adequately to students. Disciplinary outcomes which entailed severe consequences were particularly difficult for participants to deal with. Several participants talked about the need to minimize the negative impact of consequences and, instead, instil a sense of personal responsibility, and to focus on the behaviour that needs to change. At the same time, participants identified the need to respect policies and processes, and to be even-handed.

And then, even when I said like finding that balance between the people-centred side, and the institutional side, sometimes those don't meet

properly. So I think that's a common issue that sometimes student affairs people have, that they really want to help somebody with such-and-such, but they know if they're just going to be hitting their head against a brick wall, trying to get something done. So I would say that's also a common thing.

A number of participants framed the dilemma around discipline as being care-based versus justice-based. Variations included considering short-term and long-term consequences, and choosing between the greatest good for the greatest number or the least harm for the individual. Sometimes there was a focus on utilitarian outcomes. At times students themselves were unable to see the shades of grey in a situation, or, increasingly, were dealing with mental illnesses which affected their behaviour.

One participant spoke of being on a committee monitoring the use of alcohol, which heard appeals from students who had been banned from campus facilities for not following the rules. She said that some students were clearly guilty, but in some cases she experienced conflict between feeling sympathy for the individual and having an obligation to uphold a code she felt did not assist in resolving the problem, due to the rigidity of sanctions and the opportunity to find loopholes.

Sometimes codes really lock you into things. And as soon as someone, they look for the loopholes, and then when you find the loophole, you close the loophole. But when the loophole is open, then it's kind of like, well, oh you're right, you get off scot free.

Codes of conduct, even when well-crafted, could present jurisdictional challenges, both when offenses took place off campus, and increasingly offenses that involved the internet. One participant spoke of the differences between on-campus and off-campus regulatory control of students. As his institution is in a smaller community, he said that the police and bylaw office are aware that the university has a student code of conduct, which can lead to off-campus cases being referred to them. This created some tension when there was a question of whether or not students should be charged with respect to off-campus offenses by city officials. However, for offenses such as noise by-law violations, he felt that these being referred to the code of conduct led to the potential for a “teachable moment [on] how to be a good neighbour. Stuff like that, it’s hard to define. It’s all subjective.” However, the institution getting involved in off-campus behaviour was not always beneficial; he gave the example of another institution which has had significant difficulties with student off-campus behaviour, and he felt that part of the issue was that the institution took responsibility themselves for dealing with the aftermath, including paying fines, “and the students had no involvement, or connection, or responsibility with that.” The participant also commented on the model of student affairs having an office of student advocacy, and openly taking on the role of defending students, but he felt that this had the potential to lead to conflict among students.

Another emerging jurisdictional issue is online behaviour, particularly when students are not using university information technology, which would be covered by an institutional policy or terms of use agreement. One participant cited a case at another institution of cyber-bullying on Facebook. The university had decided to apply the student conduct policy, even though they were aware that because of the nature of the

internet, it may not have applied. However, there was a strong sense that the institution had to act.

They had to take a stand, they had to protect, they had to show this student who was being swarmed that they valued that student, and that student was an important and welcome member of their community. And that the behaviour of the cyberswarmers was abhorrent.

The decision to take on the case has meant that the administrators might end up being involved legal appeals for quite some time. The participant himself was dealing with another Facebook incident in which a student posted an attack on two student service staff members, but because it was not through a university server it was not clear-cut as to whether it fell under the non-academic discipline policy.

Finally, a participant was blunt that: “I think the biggest ethical problem is adhering to institutional policies and trying to do the best I can for students.”

### *Confidentiality*

Values conflicts related to policies and laws around confidentiality were often raised. In crisis situations, participants were torn between respecting the autonomy of students, and wanting to contact their support systems, such as family and friends, especially when in their judgement this would be the best option for the student. Confidentiality issues were particularly apparent in mental health cases. Being able to access support from other resources and knowing how much information to share about sensitive issues was also difficult. Another issue around confidentiality related to how

information is shared among service providers, both within a service, and among different university departments.

Participants talked of the frequency with which ethical issues arise around confidentiality for people working in student affairs, particularly when dealing with students in distress who do not wish anything to be disclosed. This continually had to be balanced with being concerned for their safety. Deciding how to manage student cases involving mental health issues was cited by a number of participants as a likely source of conflict between privacy and care.

Several participants said a regular concern was ensuring confidentiality during communication with parents, although this was not raised as a common issue. The participants who did speak about parental communication were clear that their primary responsibility was to the student, but at the same time they could empathize about how worried a parent might be.

A participant said that when a parent called, she would not reveal any information, and would instead call the student to let them know what the parent's concern was. "And often it's made the parent go away, by doing that. Because the student's like, no way, my mom called you! It's like, just thought you'd like to know. And then I've had parents call me and say, I can't believe you told my son I called." However, in some cases, it could have been very helpful to get parents or family involved in supporting the student. She gave an example of a time when a student was dealing with a major mental health crisis.



And the student was clearly having a psychological breakdown. And had been found wandering around, by the police, in the morning outside, and the police took him to the hospital. And I just really wanted his family to know. Luckily, the hospital called the family and it worked out okay, and I dealt with the mom, because he couldn't come back. And the situation was not safe for the other students. And that's absolutely an ethical concern, where somebody needs to know, who's close to this kid, to this guy, needs to know where he is. Somebody who can support him, and provide him with love, and care, and understanding, needs to know he's there. ... So that's certainly a struggle.

If a student is suicidal, then the issue of communication with the family becomes crucial. A participant talked of trying to balance the need for care versus respecting policies and laws on confidentiality in a case where a 20-year-old international student had been checked out of the local hospital and was in possession of their faculties and able to make judgements for themselves, but was still at a serious risk, because hospitals would rarely commit involuntarily in all but the most extreme cases. The administrator was aware that the parents were worried, but the student was clear that they should not be told anything.

These are real things that happen, these are difficult, you know. And if you take a situation like that, and you bring these five or six things together, you get a pretty complicated Venn diagram. And the places of overlap for all those things may be an uncomfortable place. It may end up being,

we're not going to tell the parents something. And, the student as happened, may kill herself or himself. ... Instead of blaming, you know, [provincial] Privacy Commissioners for draconian stupid laws, or this, that or the other, or going the risk minimization approach that Legal advised, or something. These are difficult things, so it's not a simple kind of thing, but I think leading with some of these values can often take you a long way, actually.

Receiving confidential, highly personal, or emotionally-challenging information could be a burden. A participant said that both students and staff had told her a great deal of personal information, "that I sometimes wish I didn't know." It was hard to find support when she found this difficult to deal with, as she had to be careful about what she could share. Another participant said that in a given week dealing with a difficult case, he could spend 25% of his time on one student, or on a situation caused by one student.

Another participant spoke of balancing deciding what would be best in a given situation, when she had knowledge of confidences which might affect a larger group of people but which she could not share. She still would try to be as open and transparent as possible. This involves being careful to determine what should or should not be shared, "especially when working with students where they'll start to question your transparency, your honesty, and your trustworthiness, if you withhold information. But you also know that sometimes you have to, and you have to accept that that's at times people won't like your decisions." She added that while it might not be a value, the acquisition of a thick skin was indeed important.

Sharing information with other members of university student services such as doctors and counsellors, who are bound by professional ethical guidelines, can be complex. A participant described how such staff may be seeing a troubled student and be fully aware that if they were to return to the university residence there would be problems, but they were unable to contact residence staff to notify them.

A participant cited a case where a student made multiple appointments within her department with different advisors, and the challenge of deciding how to limit this, and to communicate that among the staff, while still supporting the student and maintaining their privacy.

Some staff may also be over-scrupulous in interpreting policy, for example around confidentiality, to the detriment of students. One participant related a case in which a student was very upset after having been told that she could not graduate or attend convocation, but when he attempted to check with her department, the staff member refused to confirm this, even though the participant had full access to the student's records, and in fact chaired a committee to make modifications to the student records system. "So, it's this, you know, what do you respect more here? I as a colleague, am I important? Do you value me? Do you trust me? Do you believe me?" He found that on a regular basis individuals are overly cautious in interpreting the university policies and government laws around confidentiality, and "will not disclose information that is needed, in order to properly care for, or assure the well-being, of a student."

*Equity and diversity*

Human rights and equity issues were areas of values conflict for some participants, as were setting priorities around diversity issues. One participant felt her institution did not reflect the value of diversity, nor was there a sense that there was a desire for change. Efforts appeared token, there was little resource support, and the participant was not optimistic about a change of philosophy, increased resources and staffing, or a shift in faculty and student recruitment to increase diversity.

So I feel there's a lot of tokenism that goes on here. And not much support to really put behind it, whether it be financial, or otherwise. So it can be quite frustrating, to be working, having that as part of your portfolio, in an environment that doesn't quite support it, or is a bit hypocritical about it.

Having a colleague question the need for equity-based programming was frustrating for one participant. The colleague felt strongly that the institution should be focused on broad education, rather than on equity issues in society.

And it was odd, because I would not consider her to be homophobic, or racist, or anything like that. ... And I didn't really know how to respond to that, it wasn't clear-cut: "you're a racist" or "you're sexist" or whatever you want to call it. It was more of like I had to respect what she was saying, and still try to sell my value system on a personal and professional level.

A participant was frustrated when discussions around equity became a question of who was more marginalized. He spoke of a colleague from another institution at an event who challenged him on his own privilege, and he told her he found that offensive. “And then she went on, and on, and on, and then she started really pounding on me about how I was so privileged. And how I saw the world through this lens of privilege, white male privilege.” However, she was not prepared to admit that he also experienced marginalization due to his sexual orientation. “I’m just trying to tell you, we all can’t be all things. I cannot walk in your shoes. I rely on you to tell me about your experience. And your experience is important, and so is mine.” He added that he learned a great deal from students, citing an example of doing a training workshop on diversity – which he said he felt uncomfortable doing, as he was a white man, but that often there were not enough people – and a student in a wheelchair completely surprised him. He had asked students to speak of how much they saw their identity in the curriculum, and expected her to identify her disability as a concern. However, she said that she wasn’t reflected as a Christian.

You know, I could have put my foot in my mouth so quickly. I could have said, oh, well, as a woman with a disability, you know, I would have been mortified if I had done it, but that’s what I was thinking! That’s what I was thinking. And that taught me something. And it just shows, you know, I have to learn about this. I am still learning about this.

The issue of competing rights was raised most frequently by participants in the context of student groups; the general concern was ensuring that if students were in

conflict over a rights issue, that they were given the tools to negotiate the situation. Helping them to do so could be particularly challenging if participants' own values around those issues were engaged. The examples related by participants included strong ideological viewpoints often associated with religion, openness to sexual orientation, incidents of sexism or racism, and challenges related to student groups with different beliefs or values. Incidents could involve students, parents, and members of the community.

In one case, a participant related how students organized a widely-publicised celebration of sexual diversity, which was met with a negative reaction.

And we had students and parents protesting, that there should be such a thing on a university campus, and what kind of degenerates were we, anyway? We didn't have a lot of it, and interestingly we had more of it from parents than we got from students.

In another case at the same institution, an inflammatory religious cartoon was published in the student newspaper, and there was a major public reaction. He said that while he did not feel the cartoon was in good taste himself, "now we're getting into values around freedom of expression, particularly on a university campus, and balancing that off against supposed good taste in the community." There were hundreds of phone calls and emails, including calling for the student cartoonist to be expelled.

We weren't going to do that, and while we expressed our own, I guess, concern about the content of that particular cartoon, we were equally

defending the right of the cartoonist to publish it, and the paper to publish it if they wanted to. To, I guess, honour the value of freedom of expression in a university environment.

A number of participants identified the challenge of balancing freedom of expression with support of marginalized groups. Some examples included whether homophobic graffiti constituted a hate crime, what to do when student groups or clubs promoted a message that members of the university community found hurtful or offensive, or when a group of students engaged in a racist act, or when fraternities behaved in a misogynistic way. Sometimes different groups in conflict may create challenges, such as dealing with people who have religious objections to homosexuality, or reflect conflict that exists in other parts of the world, such as between supporters of Israel versus supporters of Palestine. The example below refers to the Genocide Awareness Project, which uses placards comparing dead foetuses to genocide and Holocaust victims.

The one issue that certainly has come up is dealing with the campus pro-life group, and not really the group itself, because their group runs nicely, but when they wanted to bring the Genocide Awareness Project onto campus. ... You know, I don't think it mattered if people were either pro-life or pro-choice at that point. I think certain people thought this was a great idea, but other people didn't like the idea of it being juxtaposed against genocide events around the world. So we were really, as an office,

really conflicted with what they wanted to do, because they wanted to make it very public, and very open for passersby to see the whole event.

Several participants identified that working with student clubs or groups whose values are very different from theirs, or that they disagreed with ethically, could be challenging, particularly when trying to ensure that they are treated fairly and process is followed. This can include ensuring their rights are respected, such as freedom of speech, and that decisions such as access to resources like office space are made equitably. A participant spoke of the internal struggle she felt with dealing with student groups whose stated values she personally objects to, when, for example, sitting on a committee to allocate office space. However, she said she also has a strong value around fairness and due process, and that the group had an excellent application, had been active in holding events and conducting outreach, and they certainly qualified for space.

I look and I go, that is the most disgusting and disreputable reason for a gathering of people that I've ever seen, but congratulations, you got an office. Because it really can't be about your personal view on things. I'm a public servant, it's not about me, and so those I think are constant. Any kind of policy decisions have to be based on what the values of the institution are, and not what my personal values are.

Fraternities, although not formally recognised on most Canadian campuses, were mentioned as being of concern. One participant said that some fraternity activities were highly inappropriate, created a negative public perception, and at times harmful or



dangerous. “Certainly I know that a lot of activities that happened in some of the fraternity houses, are certainly in conflict with the way I feel anybody should be behaving, but university students in particular.” He added that he felt hamstrung about there being little he could do about it. He was particularly concerned at the level of alcohol consumption and incidences of non-consensual sexual activity. “Certainly there have been some reports, and those have been dealt with on an individual basis, but I think that it’s the culture that’s sometimes gets bred that allows for these types of things happen, is what I really have a problem with.” He said that he wanted to require regular meetings between the fraternities and his office, or even to have the power to shut them down, but the conflict was that he could not do that.

A participant spoke of the difficulty encountered when students were guided by their parents, to the point of them wanting to “impose their own value system, and keep them under control as they pursue four years of university.” He told of one case in which a student was engaged in leadership training, and the parents were upset at a program. “Sadly, it was around exposure to multicultural issues, and so on and so forth. Eventually, you have to make it a stand; you have to take a stand about what your values are, within your organisation.”

### ***Interactions With Students***

Participants commented on the difficulty in balancing a desire to be caring and supportive of students, with the need to hold them accountable and responsible, and to allow them to learn from their own experiences. Deciding when intervention was appropriate, and to what degree, was a continual challenge. More than one participant

commented on the dichotomy between treating students as self-sufficient adults, and then watching them flounder when trying to make adult decisions. The question of students' personal independence also included to what extent they are accessing necessary services, programs, and support, and if not, what effect this might have on desired student outcomes.

### *Communicating with students*

Student affairs practitioners spoke of the need to communicate regularly and effectively with students for a variety of reasons, and how at times this can be a challenge. One participant said that it is easy to lose track of what's changing for students as a whole. He cited social networking as an example, saying that in that context, "most of us, of my generation, are really pretty much clueless about what is going on with students." Student affairs programming may not value online social interactions, and some practitioners may even feel that social networking is a waste of time, although others may see it as a good way to build community, as well as to use technology to administer programs and to solicit student feedback about their services, and student concerns. "I'm saying we're sometimes still following the momentum of the past, rather than talking to students, hearing from them, knowing what is really on their mind, and then responding better to that."

Another participant said she was struggling with whether or not to join online computer social networking sites such as Facebook. She said there are distinct advantages to being able to increase contact with students, but she wondered how to limit the personal information about her that they could access online. Similarly, students might

post material about staff members. She gave the example of the possibility of having a drink with students, then finding a picture of that posted online. Keeping up with technology and using it to communicate appropriately with students required caution. “If we’re not careful, ethically we can find ourselves in a situation we shouldn’t be in.” She also said that there could also be an issue around the extent to which staff members were available to students, including having them being able to call them at home.

Several participants identified that as they had progressed in their careers, their contact with students had diminished, although it was that contact that they particularly valued about student affairs work. Maintaining a good relationship with student leaders, and interacting with students in general, could be challenging when other aspects of administrative work were time-consuming.

The students here are fantastic, and I just would love to find more opportunities to engage with them, because it’s very frustrating, when I started here was June, and it was like, what am I doing here, because there’s no students around ... but I feel like a different person in September. It’s a different campus. You forget in the summer why it is that you’re here.

One participant commented on how difficult it was for him when students had a consumerist mentality, rather than appreciating the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that a university education provides, and for much the same reason, the challenge of understanding students who were slacking off. “And I have a conflict with them. And it’s the same conflict. It’s that they are not getting out of this what they should be. In that

case, they're just putting in time, and maybe just wasting time." He said that he was concerned about students' single-minded focus on careers, combined with the high cost of education, and students being worried about going into financial debt, and hence were focussed on calculating the payoff for their education that they were missing out on the rich opportunities that were offered on campus. He also commented about students on the other side of the spectrum:

The slackers. I sat in on a couple of classes, a couple of years ago. There you are in a large lecture hall, there was kids up in the back rows reading a newspaper, texting on their cell phones. One of them *talking* on his cell phone. And I'm sure there are lots of other students who don't bother attending. They just are not engaged at all.

Supervising student staff also could present challenges. Maintaining consistent expectations, providing space for learning while ensuring results, and disciplining student staff or volunteers were all cited as difficulties that participants encountered. One participant spoke of the different values that came into conflict when student volunteers failed to fulfill their responsibilities, and others were relying on them. The administrator may have known good reasons for that behaviour, but due to confidentiality concerns, could not share that information with other members of the group or committee. Additionally, the issue of consistency could come into play, particularly if other students became unmotivated or followed the example of not completing tasks. She mentioned in one case that a student who had been absent was "afraid to come back" because of how others might see her.

And you can't hide the fact that they missed some of their mandatory responsibilities, but you have to balance that with your need to nurture, and foster the growth and development of that individual, with that of the committee. And then your consistency is questioned. And your ability to maintain that steadfast line, where you've set the expectations, and everybody else knows if you cross it, there's consequences.

A participant spoke of instances where service staff members may be building a relationship based on trust with a student, and others who had dealt with that student said negative things about them. "I think that that would be really not productive and helpful to that student, if someone's opinion about that student started getting around." She was concerned that the level of service the student would receive could be influenced by that.

Similarly, a participant noted the importance of not allowing one or two negative experiences with students to affect their overall approach:

People who, you know, we are like everybody else, you could do a hundred good things, for a hundred students, one sour one will spoil the batch. And so as a student services professional you have to be able to balance that.

#### *Relationships with students*

Several participants spoke of the lack of standards of conduct in student affairs, notably in the context of relationships with students. One said that behaviour was more

based on what people individually determined what they should or should not do, rather than acting on a set of predetermined standards.

Social relationships with students could span different levels of appropriateness, and participants identified that in many cases it is the individual student affairs practitioner who must determine what those boundaries ought to be. One participant said that it had taken her a while to become confident about this, when for example working with a group of students and going out for a beer afterwards; her role as a professional is to work with and support them, but it was easy to find oneself in a situation where “all of a sudden you’re one of the students.” She was concerned that this type of situation could lead to misperceptions about both herself and her department, particularly if there was later some sort of incident. Another participant said she did not have a “hard and fast rule” about drinking with students, particularly as an example, with graduate students who were in their forties. However, she pointed out that it is inevitable that there will be a time when friendships with students can become an issue, such as when a conflict was being mediated. She went on to point out that the degree to which boundaries existed depended on the staff position; that live-in staff such as residence life co-ordinators were more likely to have amorphous boundaries than, for example, professional counsellors.

Establishing appropriate boundaries with students could be intensely challenging, and participants observed that there was not a great deal of consistency. Issues ranged from friendships or intimate relations with students, socializing outside of working hours, including alcohol consumption, challenges related to student staff, or staff who are former students, and sharing personal information with students, including online on social networking sites, or home contact information. Many participants commented that

there were no clear boundaries on appropriate behaviour related to any of these issues, and that the constant challenge was in ensuring that both the appearance and the reality of fairness and impartiality were maintained.

Relationship issues are huge. ... And I'm not even necessarily talking about an intimate relationship, but the degree to which undergraduates can be your friend or not, I think is really touching and difficult, because there will come a time, and there almost always does, where there is some kind of conflict where you have to mediate, or make a decision in somebody's favour or not, and that relationship is definitely going to have some kind of effect on you. ... When is a friend really a friend, and when is a friend – we're not really friends, you're a student, and I'm a staff member, and that does not make us friends.

Several participants noted that other student services practitioners such as counsellors might have clear codes of behaviour, in contrast to people working in student affairs. Managing friendships with students were particularly complicated, and yet these were part of the working life of many student affairs practitioners. Friendships could become an issue around disciplinary cases, where a perception of favouritism could easily be engendered. One participant gave as an example what would happen in the case of a residence life staff member whose friend was smoking in their room; the staff member would be in an intensely awkward position because the level of discipline required would either endanger the friendship, or cause other students to suspect preferential treatment. Another participant suggested that "I just think you can have great

interaction and relationships, and get to know students, and be a mentor, and be an advisor but you're not their buddy, you know. You're not the best friend."

A participant spoke of the need for administrative staff to be careful in terms of relationships and socializing with students. "I think that there are many examples of colleagues, who I like very much, who crossed the line." As an example, she said that while going out drinking with the student government every Thursday night might help build community and teamwork with them, for her it would cross the line, although she knows others in student affairs who feel it does not.

A number of participants brought up the appropriateness of staff having intimate relationships with students. There was not a consensus among participants on whether or not these relationships should be permissible, but clearly they presented ethical challenges.

I think if you live in close proximity, we've certainly dealt with the whole notion of student services people, especially new professionals, who are dealing with amorous inclinations towards students. I think they have to figure out that, what does it mean if they're going to have a relationship, or want to have a relationship with a student, that goes beyond a student-practitioner one. I think that, I mean, that's an easy one I suppose, in terms of identifying. Always hard for people to work through emotionally.

#### *Student associations and student groups*

Working closely with student associations and student groups presented various values conflicts. At times, participants felt caught in the middle between student



associations and senior administration. The desire to maintain credibility and trust with student leaders was a significant issue for many participants, including the conflict between wanting transparent around university decision-making and finances, and maintaining professional reticence. Student leaders were sometimes also resistant to new ideas, and to any change in student traditions, which meant implementing new policies or programs could be balked.

Participants' roles with respect to being a bridge between senior university leadership and student leaders presented several common values conflicts. One participant said student affairs staff members could find themselves in conflict regarding whether their primary responsibility was to the institution or to the students in a particular situation. In one case of a conflict between student leaders and the administration, each side was motivated by a different principle, but the participant valued and agreed with both principles involved; it was personally difficult to negotiate this. Another participant said that student affairs staff's role in such cases may be intended to be supportive, but that they could be seen as intrusive. Still another said she always had to remember that there were allies in the room, "who think the way you do, or who share some perspectives, but you have to be careful. It's a minefield of politics." In some cases, students may do something that participants felt was reasonable, but which upset senior administrators or faculty. One participant described how she knew who the student leaders were behind a poster campaign, but chose not to identify them.

I knew who it was that did that, but I wasn't going to, it was like it was in confidence, like they trusted me to know that information. They weren't

violating any policies, so I had no reason to report them, because they didn't do anything wrong.

A participant found that timing and consultation was important for discussing issues with student leaders, and that it was important to weigh the potential outcomes. Sometimes what was anticipated to be a contentious issue would be accepted without question, while on other occasions something "simple, something that is almost irrelevant to what you're doing, and the backlash you get, you're just blown away." She said that it was interesting to see what it was that student leaders were likely to focus on, and gave the example of designing orientation for new students. She had to make changes to the schedule; she weighed a number of different solutions, and decided on the best one, but then was surprised at the level of resistance from students. She was in a working group with them, and although they did not like the schedule design initially, once all the factors were taken into consideration they ended up deciding on her version.

And thinking, well I just wasted so much time, if this is what we were going to do. So realizing that you have here to involve every player from the get go, and while it will slow the process down, it makes the end product more impactful, and more people are likely to follow through on it. That's both for students and staff. Especially when you're in a department that relies so heavily on interactions with other areas.

Another participant said that working closely on almost all his projects with the student association meant that for the most part he had an extremely positive relationship

with them, which helped if tension developed between the student leaders and the university administration. He said, though, that at times he fundamentally disagreed with how students were making decisions, and that could contrast sharply with their predecessors. He said it was important for student leaders to strike a balance between being decisive, and listening to student preferences, particularly when decisions had to be made that might run counter to what many students wanted. At times student leaders themselves might privately agree with him, but their constituents didn't, so publicly the student leader would repudiate the decision. Another participant described a similar situation when student leaders initially concurred with him in supporting a decision, but then decided against it, because they wished to represent what they felt students wanted.

And you look at the fact that they're saying, well, I agree with *you*, but I'm still going this way, because this is what the students want. And it's that balance I find, between what the students want, and what leading the students means. Because sometimes you have to make decisions against what the students want. And when that person in that position of leadership has told you that they're in support of your decision, but because the students aren't, they're not supporting it ... that's one of the parts that I find very frustrating

In terms of student associations, the annual turnover in leadership could result in inconsistent actions or approaches, or having to revisit issues, particularly if there is not a smooth transition between the outgoing and incoming leadership. A few participants commented that some years there could be student leaders who were particularly difficult

to work with, or who had a significantly different perspective from their predecessors. Senior administrators may dislike student leader decisions, or compare the students adversely to their predecessors, which could lead to tension and conflict. One participant said that with the students' union executive changing each year, there could sometimes be a very strong group who were on a "totally anti-institution bent." His challenge in one case was that the residence policies were being rewritten to try and reduce a party culture, and to have an increased focus on student development. However, members of the student association executive, who had formerly lived in residence, opposed this. They argued that the university should be considered a landlord, and that what happened in the residence halls was not their business. Some students also advocated for limited or no restrictions around parties, versus seeing the institution as an academic community where students learn, grow and fulfill their potential. He commented one aspect of working with student association executive members was that their terms did expire and "we got a new batch of executives in, and we've got a really great group of students now that we're working with, who are much more aligned with the directions that we want to go." However, he anticipated further resistance to changes in the alcohol policy and the student code of conduct, as well as risk management for student events.

And it's again the difference between youth and maturity, that we recognise some of the risks associated with these events, that you don't understand when you're 20 years old. That's going to be more difficult because it won't matter in those cases. Even if the executives of those student societies change over, from year to year. Historically they've had a

pretty consistent philosophy, and are kind of trying to keep their cultures and traditions alive and strong.

One participant said that over the course of his career, he had had mixed relations with the student association, and that this was exacerbated after they joined the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), as any issue related to tuition fees was automatically contentious. The participant said:

And it has been particularly difficult over the last few years, when we became a CFS school, because they're just so bent on being against everything and anything that has to do with fees. So, you know, it's really hard for student affairs to work with some of the student groups, if they're so bent on going in certain directions. ... We try to do so many things here to impact on students. But if it comes back to fees in any way, you're constantly bumping into the students.

Some participants felt that at times student leaders would automatically mistrust university decisions, and continually push back on policy decisions. Additionally, student groups could engage in inappropriate decisions or actions. At times, over-ruling student leaders could lead to longer-term consequences in terms of trust and future interactions with them. One participant spoke of having to make decisions around orientation at her former institution, which were extremely unpopular with the student association. She had tried for a number of years to work with them, but got to the point of saying that she was in charge, and some orientation behaviour simply was not acceptable.

And they just thought I was ruining hundreds of years of traditions, even though the men's traditional ceremony had been in place for seven years when I got there ... I was destroying the [institution], by not letting them blindfold and berate the students. So I've had conflicts, but they've usually just been around extreme different opinions, and where I've erred on doing what I thought was right, and taken the lumps for it.

One participant distinguished between different types of student groups. Generally, her department's relations with clubs were civil, and student affairs was seen as a source of support, advice, resources and facilities. She said that when students in these groups are asked to do something, they will "dutifully comply," as they are not generally politicized, or if they are, it is in an area directed outside the university, such as Amnesty International. There were also divisional student societies in faculties and colleges, with which her department tended to have a somewhat remote relationship, generally centred around fee collection and policy compliance. The relationship with these groups was "built on mutual respect, and it's fine." Central student associations (full-time undergraduate, part-time undergraduate, and graduate) were much more likely to be in conflict with student affairs, although that varied from year to year. She cited a reason for a lack of effectiveness was student associations not employing enough strong staff members to provide consistency and support to the student leaders. Some years the relationship with these groups was almost non-existent, or there might be "overlapping territory" in terms of programs, and at other times there was a friendly partnership with the student association executives and staff members. She said that in those cases student

leaders were seen as peers and mature adults, and student affairs staff did indeed at times develop social relationships with them. Conflict depended more on the individuals involved, than on the particular issues they were addressing.

And it really seems to be a bit of a roller coaster, you can never really tell where the conflict will flare up, and over what. ... I would say, for the most part, those are still very, very civil and constructive relationships, with the organisation to organisation, the only thing breaks down is between personality to personality. There are certain personalities that are extremely difficult, for members of, either me or my staff even. So it's then that you kind of assign a particular point person to deal with so-and-so, because we all know that I can't deal with them.

Conversely, many participants commented that their positive relationship with student leaders could affect how they are viewed by senior administrators. Examples included being suspected of siding with the students against the university, which could be particularly awkward if the administrator was being publicly praised by student leaders. When the student association is in conflict with senior administration, the student affairs role can be ambiguous; participants commented that they may be perceived to be bridge-builders in some cases, or overly interfering in others.

What's happened at [this institution] is the students are so, I mean, there's just a war going on here between the student leaders and the senior administration. And I'm kind of caught in the middle trying to say, look, I

have to work with these people, and they're not as bad as my senior colleagues think. ... I mean I think our senior administration are just so – and I can understand why, are having so much trouble with the students, that they've written them off. And therefore the more you more you write them off, the less you consult, and the less you consult, the more ticked they get.

Another participant ran into controversy when the student association posted the ten worst professors according to an online ratings website, and two faculty members were incensed with the student affairs practitioner, feeling that the students ought to be disciplined, although the students may simply have not thought through the potential career impact of what they'd done. Yet another participant said that his approach of inclusive decision-making and letting students decide issues whenever possible made other members of the administration uncomfortable, particularly when he was of the view that students would learn from making mistakes

Several participants related occasions where they need to decide between advising students on how to accomplish their goals, with the knowledge that some of those goals may incense senior administrators, particularly around controversial or political issues. Trying to balance the trust issues involved was always a challenge. One participant said that she encountered some administrators who had “wrong intentions” and were not transparent, when she tried to be as open with students as possible regarding campus issues. She said that she would never advise a student leader to complain to the president



of the university, but had to think carefully about telling students how decisions were made, what their different options were, and the ways that they could exercise them.

### *Personal*

Because participants felt very personally involved in many aspects of their positions, some of the personal conflicts they spoke about were related to areas that are covered in the sections above. However, people also spoke of some issues that affected their personal lives in terms of maintaining balance, such as between regular work and professional development or research, or in terms of heavy time commitments. Some also spoke of difficulties in deciding how much of their own personal experiences or personalities could be shared, in the context of maintaining a professional demeanour. As well, at times candour or bluntness, or taking a principled stand on an issue, could affect people's own work environment or career progress. As well, some participants mentioned that as they advanced in their careers, they could lose touch with the things that attracted them to the field in the first place, such as contact with students.

Having a work/life balance could be a challenge for people passionately committed to their jobs. Some participants noted that this was particularly difficult for staff who literally had very little separation between work time and personal time, such as residence life staff who lived on campus. Many participants spoke of how they had had deliberately to separate their work from their personal lives, to ensure that they put a high enough priority on the latter. Another more abstract separation was around caring for individuals, both staff and students, and trying to maintain objectivity and boundaries. In some cases, the boundaries between people being colleagues or students, and being

friends or even in a relationship, could become blurred. It was important, several participants stressed, to be conscious of this and to address it if it arose. One participant spoke of how friendships implied a level of openness and vulnerability, and that at times that could impair a work relationship with a staff member or student, when it would be more appropriate to take a collegial, impersonal approach. However, participants also noted how much they valued close personal relationships with other members of the university community.

Time was often cited as an issue by participants, particularly balancing day-to-day work with having sufficient time for learning and reflection, particularly when programs stressed evidence-based practice. As well, it could be difficult having a good work-life balance, and having family and friends understand the variable time commitments involved.

I can think about sort of work-life balances, as I use, trying to balance them, and having friends and family not understand why I'm putting so much work into my job. Seeing it consuming me, and trying to reach out to me, seeing that it wasn't healthy as a balance, but having me acknowledge that it wasn't healthy, but knowing that it would pay off at the end. I still haven't found that balance, so it's hard to see people trying to help me, and knowing that they're right, but also not willing to give up what you're doing just yet. So knowing that you're disappointing them, but knowing that if you don't follow through in the work you've done, you'll be disappointing yourself.

Another participant said that at times, emotional stress over an issue could spill over to outside of work. He said that there had been many nights that he had not been able to sleep, or was woken by an issue, “that’s just impacted you so heavily during the day.”

One participant framed student affairs as being a “lifestyle job,” and that actions outside work were reflected within it. With examples such as not drinking responsibly, or not having a healthy lifestyle, a negative message could be sent to students.

The extent to which expressing their own personality and opinions was acceptable within their work was a challenge for more than one participant. It was sometimes hard to balance the need to present a serious attitude, while at the same time being able to be genuine, including making jokes and being social. Another example was determining to what extent transparency meant bluntness and candour, and having the latter misinterpreted or not appreciated. Additionally, personal feelings could conflict with professional behaviour.

I’m real. People can usually see if I’m upset or angry. But having to pretend some things. And not just staff, students. We all had that, I’m sure you’ve, well, it’s not about you, we’ve all had students that you just think, oh god. When they graduate I’ll be so happy. [Laughs] But when they’re in the room, you’re the same as with every other student. It’s hard.

Balancing candour with discretion could be a challenge, particularly when working at an institution that did not place a high value on openness. Participants spoke of the personal struggles they had around this issue, and if particularly affected them if it

meant that their own reputation or position could be jeopardized if they spoke out too much.

I have to kind of weigh, what's the benefit of me saying something, and will it really make a difference. And knowing that the culture that you're in, that people won't look to that kindly. And so it's tough. I mean, you should be able to, we should be in an environment, particularly as an institution where different opinions are valued, and different approaches are valued, but a culture exists that that isn't necessarily true.

The recognition of the personal impact of difficult decisions was made by a number of participants, and it is worth noting that this rarely seems to arise in student affairs literature. While certainly participants spoke in highly altruistic terms of their work, many also had a sense of realism and pragmatism when it came to acknowledging that their own well-being and success was important and had value.

When working with other staff members who are extremely personally invested in their work, it could sometimes be difficult to separate their feelings from what they did. One participant spoke positively of seeing student affairs work as a vocation, but said that if a staff member's individual involvement or identity formation around their work was too strong, to the point that they became an "ideologue," that could make it difficult to have a values clarification conversation with them. "They'll have trouble hearing."

Depending on participants' length of service, they may have felt it difficult to have boundaries with students, or later in their careers, missing having personal contact with students, as that was a key aspect of student affairs work that motivated them.

In a senior position like I have, I'm not dealing that directly with students. I'm dealing with the student leaders, and although there's been some conflict there, as I mentioned before, it's primarily I'm dealing with a lot of the winners, and I'm not dealing with, in my position, I'm not dealing with students that directly. That's probably the part that I miss, because I really enjoyed working more directly with students.

Having the time to consult students in decision-making was another aspect of maintaining contact with students that was brought up by one participant:

The staff issue, like having to supervise staff, if you spend so many hours a week on those kinds of issues, having to do performance reviews, like all that stuff takes away from the time that you can engage with students, budget kind of stuff, and then dealing with other kind of administrative stuff. ... There really is no reason why students shouldn't be involved with everything single thing that I do. Every committee that I go to should have students on it. I mean, other than the budget stuff, and the staff supervision stuff, I should be engaged with students all the time. But I'm not. I should be, and I'd like to be.

In terms of personal careers, sometimes deciding to move forward on a difficult decision, or determining when to speak out, could have potentially negative consequences. Participants spoke of having to evaluate which "hill to die on," as well as

what issues they would consider serious enough even to quit their position – a consequence that two participants spoke of having done in extreme cases.

Finding the right time to do it, because there's good times to bring up new ideas, and there's times where it's just not right, and sometimes you can't just wait for the right time. Sometimes you need to push forward.

Weighing the outcomes is a huge challenge.

### ***Preventing, Mitigating and Resolving Values Conflicts***

Participants' approaches to resolving values conflicts was a reflection of the importance they placed on making ethical decisions, in caring for students, and in supporting the educational mission of their institution. While this study is not intended to delve into the mechanics of putting values-based decision-making, the way in which participants spoke of how they managed these issues certainly reflected their abiding desire to navigate between competing values, in order to find a suitable decision. In many cases, they said that being aware of the conflict beyond a feeling of vague discomfort, and intentionally examining the reasons why a situation was troubling, was the most important first step towards resolving it. Following are some specific ways participants said they dealt with values conflicts.

One participant said that values conflicts are at the core of what student affairs does. She advocated that student affairs practitioners embrace complexity: "Grey zones, for which there are no real right or wrong answers, are a good thing." She said that these situations are when priorities are set, and the status quo is challenged.

Practitioners should identify any differences between the principle or issue they are in conflict with, and their own stance; as a quick diagnostic tool, they should assess how they are feeling when they approach a decision. One participant said that she would check her moral compass: “What do I think or feel is right, then weigh the options. It is important to evaluate the situation and context.” Another participant suggested that when balancing justice and care, the whole picture of the situation should be taken in, in the case of both the institution and that of the student, as well as other factors such as faculty, staff members, as well as the institutional mission, which is often the piece that is missing. In cases where there seems to be a choice between two negative outcomes, taking the time to reflect, consult, or brainstorm ideas could help in coming up with alternatives; student affairs staff are advised to be open to the possibility that there are other answers they have not considered. Putting issues in the context of risk management can be extremely helpful in influencing opposing parties to understand the potential consequences of a course of action. One participant recommended having someone available who could give an honest and open assessment of the decision, and that having such a person in meetings was especially helpful.

When engaging in dialogue around resolving an issue, one participant suggested involving everyone “from the ground up” as decision-makers may not have a clear direction, and this can help them consider what they are doing. As well, another participant advocated trying to help all stakeholders see each others’ point of view. At times, people will be recalcitrant and unwilling to compromise, but when they have a clearer understanding of the reasons the other party is opposing them, they are more likely at least to communicate civilly. Taking the time to plan decisions before making

them, and reflect on them afterwards, helps to build expertise. Either reflection can be personal, or through sharing and debriefing with others; telling stories helps everyone to learn. One person added that having respect for people's time, particularly in complicated processes, is very important.

Resolving internal values conflicts requires prioritizing, and practitioners should think about how if one value is weighed higher, what the effects may be, including on them personally. This prioritization includes considering the end result, both short-term and long-term; there may also be the potential to make a decision on a short-term basis then later take the opportunity to readdress it.

When making exceptions to a policy due to individual circumstances, and when confidentiality means that those reasons cannot be directly explained, student affairs staff can communicate more broadly the importance of balancing fairness with making contextual decisions. A participant said that if staff have a reputation for making good and ethical decisions, people will be more likely to appreciate that they were not being arbitrary or preferential. It is also possible to let people know broadly in advance that situations are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and then people will be less likely to question contextual decisions. A participant advised using teachable moments to elucidate the balance between rights and responsibilities.

One participant referred to student affairs work as learning and knowing three stories: that of the institution, of the student, and of yourself, and each needs to be taken into consideration. The student story needs to be more thoroughly fleshed out in order for student affairs staff to be genuine experts, and this includes collecting and analyzing data, and interacting with individual students. Determining the institution's story includes



taking the time and making space to ensure student affairs has access to senior decision-making tables, and tracking institutional directions. One's own story includes being aware of emotions, what you feel is important to bring to the work. Together this enables seeing how the institution, students and personal values can converge.

When making decisions, participants who spoke of what should be the ultimate consideration were divided between the institution's benefit, and the benefit of the students, while others said that each situation had its own facets and context. A participant said that the over-riding fundamental care was about the student, but that one of the challenges was the inability to demonstrate the value to the institution involved in caring for the student. She added that meeting each student's needs is ideal, but in reality it is a constant struggle, particularly in the case of high needs students that require significant institutional resources. Another participant bluntly said that student affairs needed to be primarily accountable to students as they pay the bills. A participant who identified the institution as the ultimate consideration added that in difficult situations he had to ask himself if he could be a senior institutional officer and live with the political dimensions of the decision. This included being alert about how a poisonous environment could be created, and from that, defining what is safe or appropriate to do.

Participants suggested taking students' needs, interests and well-being into account when making decisions, and work to ensure that student-oriented people are on decision-making bodies that will affect them. When students feel as though they are included and considered in decisions, they will feel more part of the community, and decisions will also be more student-centred.

Several participants stressed the importance of building personal relationships and connections with different institutional stakeholders, which can help avoid or more easily resolve problems; when staff are known to people, they are more likely to be listened to and to have influence. A participant suggested being as well-networked across the institution as possible, particularly with decision-makers at a more senior level. This included educating them on what student affairs does, which he said will “save you money, time and public relations disasters.”

One participant mused that silos between divisions are not necessarily negative, as they can confer accountability and clear delineations of roles. It is when they impede communication and co-operation that they become a problem; the participant suggested addressing those issues before complaining about the structure. Similarly, a participant said that when developing cross-departmental initiatives such as equity programming, ensure that diversity is always taken into consideration, particularly in a positive, non-adversarial way. Building allies through communication and collaboration is important, and can help prevent conflicts. This can also include helping with outreach and building connections with the community outside the institution.

In terms of resources, several participants spoke of the usefulness of thinking inventively about financial issues, including determining if there are ways to deliver programs for less or no cost, or if there are potential collaborative partners who could assist with them.

With respect to policies and regulations, one participant recommended identifying those that are not student-centred, as being scrupulous in enforcing them will likely not be in students’ best interests, and over the long term, this will not benefit the institution,

either. Identify issues and try to make changes. Another participant added that highlighting ambiguities or shortcomings of policies, preferably before they are highlighted during a conflict or issue. Another participant stressed the importance of having a seat at policy-making tables, to help avoid being responsible for implementing policies that individuals disagree with, or find unworkable or unresponsive.

Appropriate and transparent communication was stressed by several participants. One recommended trying to avoid creating false impressions about the student experience while doing recruitment or orientation. While it may be tempting to be overly buoyant, realism is more valuable, and helps avert disappointment. Rather, ensure students know about opportunities, and inform them of supports that are available if they run into difficulties. A participant said to “set high expectations of staff, students, and yourself,” and another framed it as ensuring clear communication of one’s expectations and role.

A participant recommended varying exposure to different students, not solely those who have the time and inclination to take on leadership or volunteer positions. Another said that it is helpful to remember that demonstrating a level of support for students helps to shape the campus climate that other students will observe.

It was important to keep in mind that policies may not have been adequately conveyed to students; finding effective ways to do so is valuable, and also using difficult situations as opportunities to educate students on the reasons for the policy, not simply the provisions within it that apply to the particular situation. A participant said that recognizing that although students are adults, they may not always make adult decisions – and she added that this applied to students of all ages – and at times they may seem

irrational, for a variety of reasons. Understanding the underlying causes for students' poor decisions helps to address them and to prevent recurrence. Another participant stressed taking a balanced view to student behaviour. There will often be pressure from other individuals such as faculty, senior administrators, other students, or family members. Reaching out and communicating expectations can be helpful. At times it may be as simple as giving the student a point of connection, and being a person who is seen to understand them. Similarly, a participant said that at times helping students may include assisting them to navigate bureaucracies, or to approach problem-solving creatively, rather than having them reach the point of anger or protest. A participant said to hold students accountable and responsible, and be upfront about expectations. "It's when we don't we have problems."

Regarding working with student leaders, a participant pointed out that "it's fair game for students to challenge you." Another suggested working with the student union in improving the campus community, while ensuring they are aware that staff are institutional employees; balancing the role involves "situating your own place." Students could often be extremely strong advocates for change, particularly if they are strategic about which issues they take on. Another participant said that overcoming student distrust of administrators, or reaching student leaders who have no desire to work with staff, can be assisted by being transparent, honest, and consistently delivering on promises; staff should be open about when they disagree and the reasons why, while acknowledging and respecting students' viewpoint. A participant added that when students are being highly political or adversarial, student affairs' role is not to silence them, but to recognise the influence they themselves have and to use it.

Ensuring student leaders receive good training and developmental is key to them making better-informed decisions. If student affairs provides training, it ought not to be in a controlling manner, but rather providing them with an opportunity to learn necessary information and skills to do their work better. This type of training also helps build community.

In cases where freedom of expression has the potential to cause hurt to others, this can be mitigated by advance negotiation of conditions and limits, and also by educational follow-up for affected individuals and groups.

Engaging students in regular dialogue can prevent many issues from arising, and make it considerably easier to communicate if one does. If students are not frustrated at a lack of communication or access to decision-making, they are less likely to be adversarial; with a collaborative relationship, staff and students can continue to work together effectively even if a political issue boils over.

In terms of staff boundaries, supervisors can balance coaching and performance management, in a developmental context. Coaching involves helping staff see the impacts, context, personal effects, and even legal requirements of what they are doing. Having a professional code of conduct is less important than good training and work plans. With staff, be friendly and approachable, but ensure that they know any boundaries you wish to maintain in advance. Different participants wished for different levels of formality or social boundaries, and many acknowledged that this varied according to the supervisor or campus expectations; clarity on expectations around these issues can help prevent problems.

In addition, boundaries and expectations around personal relationships between staff members, and between staff members and students, should be codified or at least specified by supervisors. This includes early declaration of any potential conflict of interest. Professional rules or codes of conduct were not advocated as tools for ensuring professional behaviour, but one participant commented that although every situation is contextual, a code of ethics could help represent a consensus in the field about appropriate staff behaviour, which is particularly important as student affairs administrators are guardians of public money.

When challenging or critiquing a decision, participants recommended doing so constructively. One participant said that since often practitioners will be the ones implementing the decision, it is important to be honest and open as possible, while being aware that this is not always easy: “I hope to one day learn how to advocate strongly and not get in trouble.” Another participant said that practitioners should identify aspects of the particular institutional values or environment that they appreciate, rather than focussing solely on what they would like to see changed.

Participants also found professional development opportunities helpful, as well as informal discussions of issues they had encountered. Some opportunities to do so included conferences or staff retreats, in which fundamental issues and concepts were discussed. Staff retreats were also opportunities to elucidate mutual understanding of goals and the mission of the department.

A participant outlined that the critical aspects of decision-making include what staff bring to the work, their understanding of the principles, how to involve other people, being energetic positive and faithful, doing what they say, being a good steward of

resources, demonstrating respect, and being focussed on learning. Another participant recommended staff staying focussed on what their own personal mission is: “what am I here to do, and can I still do this with integrity?” A participant said that being authentic means taking principled actions.

One participant advised not losing sight of one’s sense of calling or vocation. Practitioners should remind themselves of the key reasons they care about this field, and what they hope to accomplish, and to remember that although they could be doing different socially conscious work, “we are influencing the next generation of people, that will be doing all those things, and their development, and that’s a real privilege.”

Another participant suggested focussing on happy stories; while at times things may seem overwhelming, practitioners should remember the positive incidents when they were able to make a difference, and remember that even the most complicated situation can sometimes be resolved in a very satisfying way. They should look for and appreciate positive outcomes.

Several participants spoke of the importance of a balanced lifestyle. Aspects of that included having realistic expectations of themselves. This includes maintaining a work-life balance, and not expecting to be reading student affairs books “at 10 o’clock at night.” Student affairs people tend to want to over-achieve, so it is important to learn to say no to unlimited extra commitments. Staff should model their expectations of staff and students through their own behaviour. A participant said that at the end of the day, try not to lose sleep.

A participant reminded practitioners not to forget about their own professional standing and advancement. This can range from assessing if this role is the life they want

to lead, whether the influence they hope to have is really there and how they can develop it, and thinking in advance what issues they may need to take a stand on, even if it proves to be unpopular. Another participant commented that student affairs practitioners are not students or tenured faculty, so they do not have the same freedom to speak or disagree with institutional governance decisions or senior administration. While this does not mean they must be blindly loyal, they must also be comfortable with having an ambiguous role, and find their own ways to make their voices effectively heard.

One participant spoke of the value of finding good mentors in student affairs. Individuals should never under-estimate the learning they can obtain from others, and a good mentor will help with values clarification and resolving values conflicts. Mentors may have encountered similar situations themselves and have had the opportunity to reflect on how they were resolved. Another participant said that when working in a specialized part of student affairs, people should ensure they do not marginalize themselves, but rather continue to reach out to colleagues, and try to build collaborative programs.

A number of participants said that the ultimate values conflict would result in a decision to leave their institution, if they felt strongly enough about the issue and it was clear that there was nothing they could do. One described it as “will things change, and if not, why am I here, waiting for change to happen?” A participant pointed out that perseverance may be rewarded: from time to time, “senior people may have an epiphany,” or there will be a change of leadership that permits resolution of the problem. Another participant said that choices at times amounted to “suck it up, leave, or stay and try to make incremental change.” Two participants described having in the past taken the



final step of leaving a position over a values conflict. While these are severe examples of living up to one's values, this certainly demonstrates the importance participants placed on doing so.

### *Conclusion*

It is not surprising that people who are deeply passionate about both their work and their values would find areas of conflict. It was fascinating to see the different ways that those emerged for participants.

To summarize, values conflicts could arise in the campus environment, in policy and decision-making, and in personal situations.

Values related to the campus environment could be affected by institutional mission, senior leadership, allocation of resources, or staff management, and many conflicts arose due to different priorities or because of a lack of perceived ethicality or appropriate conduct. As well, feeling free to speak out about value-laden decisions could be curtailed in some campus hierarchies. Being situated in a bridge-building role between administrative departments, and being advocates for students, could lead to frustration and challenges.

In terms of policy and decision-making, being unable to influence policy, or being responsible for implementing policies that were seen as flawed, was difficult. Student conduct issues highlighted the conflict between caring for the individual and ameliorating negative effects on the community, and following policies or regulations. Struggling with confidentiality included trying to abide by policies and laws while judging what was best for students, and a need to preserve confidentiality could lead to being misrepresented or

misunderstood. Equity and diversity issues could arise when other individuals were not respectful or even bigoted, and in situations in which different student rights were in conflict with each other.

Working effectively with students also could create values challenges. Instances included hostility or a lack of trust between students and senior administration, a lack of student leader continuity, and issues becoming unexpectedly contentious. Relationships with students and student leaders could lead to boundaries being overly flexible, and participants spoke of the difficulty in determining what was appropriate for both themselves and their staff. As well, it could be difficult when students' values did not align with those of the participants.

Personal values conflicts arose between the desire to be dedicated to the work, and the importance of self-care. This manifested itself both in maintaining a good work-life balance, but also in deciding how strongly to take a stand on an issue when it could cause reputational damage. As well, administrative trivia could take away from more important work, time for reflection and research, and the ability to maintain contact with students, and advancing in the field generally meant less student interactions.

Notably, when participants spoke of their own values conflicts, as well as different ways to resolve them, they universally demonstrated an understanding of the situational complexity and the need to make well-considered, consultative decisions. One participant elaborated that ambiguous situations are central to student affairs work and making change. While it is unlikely that the above values conflict situations would be heartily embraced by student affairs practitioners, the approach of regarding them as opportunities is a powerful one.



## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

### ***Introduction***

This concluding chapter includes a review of the research design and methodology, as well as the findings of the analysis. Next, there is a discussion of the implications for practice that this study may have on Canadian student affairs. This begins with the recruitment and development of practitioners. Next, relationships between student affairs and other members of the university community are explored, as well as working collaboratively with students. Both the development and interpretation of policies, and the need for intentionality when negotiating complex, value-laden situations are discussed as well. Next, the broader development of Canadian student affairs is discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, and my final reflections on the study.

### ***Rationale for Research Design and Methodology***

The idea of this study was to explore what a selection of Canadian student affairs practitioners saw as the role of their work, the values they brought to it, and values conflicts they encountered. All of these are personal, and all depend on each individual's experience. Through this exploration, a synthesis of common roles, values and conflicts could be built and confirmed with the participants.

In order to accomplish this, the use of constructivism for the research was an appropriate choice, not only for its methodological approach, but for the underlying values it contains. Constructivism focuses on social reality; the experiences and thoughts

of the participants are paramount. The basic premise of constructivism is to build connections between different personal realities and positions, in order to elucidate people's behaviours and motivations.

In terms of the study design, interviews provided an opportunity to examine the core motivations and passions of student affairs practitioners; to do this required in-depth conversations with individual people. This study deliberately sought out experienced participants who had clearly reflected on student affairs in Canada, as they had presented or written about the field. These were what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as "elite" respondents, because of their knowledge of the issues at hand.

Following the first round of interviews, a framework of values categories, as well as a typology of values conflicts was constructed through data analysis. During a second interview, participants reviewed and commented on the framework, in order to test its credibility in terms of how it reflected their own values. This review provided an extremely valuable confirmation. In addition, several participants commented on how personally useful they found the discussion of their own values during the interview, as well as how they liked seeing their values confirmed in the framework.

The drawback to this methodology is volume: there was an immense amount of rich data generated by interviewing individuals who are both expert in their field, highly articulate and passionate, and who were prepared to extend a great deal of trust to the researcher. Analysing the interview data involved inductively searching for categories; writing about these categories meant selecting representative examples or stories, when other participants may have had a similar illustrative experience. As the interviews were semi-structured, there were also data that fell outside the direct scope of the study.

### *Study Findings*

This study revealed what participants valued most about the role of their work in the university, as well as their personal values, and the conflicts that could arise from holding them.

#### *The role of student affairs*

In terms of the role of student affairs, participants highlighted that the creation of a strong learning environment, that fostered individual growth and a strong community on campus, was extremely important. While this is in keeping with principles and practices outlined in various mission statements and principles of practice (NASPA, 2006, Blimling, Whitt and Assocs., 1990, CACUSS, 1989), participants included aspects that were rarely stressed in the literature. Of particular note was the emphasis on fostering involvement and leadership opportunities among students, and a culture of student engagement in decision-making. While respecting autonomy is a core aspect of Kitchener's (1985) principles of ethical decision-making, this is not widely highlighted in literature on student affairs practice. Notably, Hamrick and Benjamin (2009) present a range of case studies related to ethical decision-making, but as seen in the literature review these cases reflect a much more interventionist approach than was related by participants in this study. Encouraging students, student leaders and student organisations to make independent, informed decisions was central to participants' practice, and it was clear they believed students should be given a high level of personal and institutional responsibility. Even in cases of difficult behaviour, participants spoke of working with

students rather than overseeing or directing them. In terms of student values development, in contrast to the approach of encouraging the teaching of values *to* students (Blimling, Whitt & Assocs., 1990), participants in this study were keen on creating a campus environment that encouraged students to examine critically their *own* values.

Many participants saw themselves as advocates working both with and on behalf of students on a range of issues. While advocacy is mentioned in the CACUSS Mission (1989), it is not a facet of the general literature on student affairs. Evans and Reason (2001) and Wilson and Dagley (1985) identified that advocacy on behalf of students was largely absent from student affairs professional and philosophical statements, but participants in this study identified it as a key aspect of their role.

For participants, working on behalf of students included both influencing campus decision-making, such as policy development related to students, as well as providing individual support in cases of student behaviour or crises. Most participants also related how they would work with student leaders to help them develop skills, and to assist them in having a voice at decision-making tables. This could also involve being a bridge between students and senior administration. They also spoke of being able to assess the potential impact of various institutional decisions on students, and ensuring that students were valued and placed “front and centre.”

Finally, many participants spoke of the importance of supporting individual students in difficulty. This included student service provision, ranging from personal counselling to academic and career advice, but also assisting students who were in difficulty, due to either a personal crisis, or disciplinary issue. Such work included

ensuring that the student's needs were met, that due process was followed, and that care for both the student and the university community was demonstrated. Respecting students' autonomy, while encouraging the development of personal responsibility, was an important component of student support for participants.

In terms of the development of the field of student affairs in Canada, several participants spoke of it in the context of fostering autonomy among students and student groups, and while Canadian student affairs was sometimes seen as the "poor cousin" of the American field, many participants spoke proudly of the experiential learning fostered among students and staff, that enabled a great deal of personal responsibility and a high degree of student leadership. Several participants noted that issues such as alcohol, fraternities and sororities, risk management and retention may be less salient in the Canadian context than in the American. Numerous participants commented on the need for greater research and literature on Canadian student affairs practices, particularly to stay current with student issues, and to increase the legitimacy of the field.

#### *Values of student affairs practitioners*

This area of the study focussed on the values that student affairs practitioners identified as being important to bring to their work. Participants spoke passionately about the different values that they felt were important to their work. This is the core of the research, and illustrating how those values were incorporated into the different aspects of their work, demonstrated their deep commitment, not only to their field, but also to their own sense of rightness and ethics.

The categories of values were:



- Honesty, integrity, authenticity
- Balancing fairness and care, empathy and consistency
- Student-centredness
- Valuing the student voice
- Commitment to equity and social justice
- Dedication to student affairs work
- Lifelong learning

Many of these are reflected in student affairs values identified in student affairs literature, although there are some distinctions, and as seen in the literature review, the value of advocacy on behalf of students, and encouraging the student voice in institutional decision-making was little-raised in existing values literature. Young (2001, 2003) identified individual values (diversity, freedom and justice) and community values (truth, equality, social justice and holism) as central to student affairs practice. These were all raised by participants in this study, particularly in the context of balancing between the needs of individuals and those of the community. Similarly, Blimling, Whitt and Associates (1990) emphasized the role of student affairs in educating students and in shaping campus communities. A key difference in this study was that participants were explicit that they did not feel it was their role to shape students' values, but rather to create conditions in which students explored their own ethical development. Moreover, Young (2003) pointed out that much of student affairs practice is focussed on individual development, and while this was identified in this study as important, more community-

oriented values such as empathy, community, the student voice, and social justice were strongly stressed.

Other values seen in the literature included Dalton and Healy (1984, cited in Young, 2001) referring to self-awareness, independence, respect, tolerance, and fairness to other individuals. Participants differed somewhat in orientation from these values, as they were more interested in context and maintaining a consistent and transparent process for decision-making, than in stressing the similar treatment and outcomes for different cases. Independence among students was highly valued by participants, as was mutual respect, including the extent to which the student voice was stressed. “Tolerance” was not a word encountered in this study, and perhaps is a somewhat outdated value, compared to equity and diversity, which were the terms that were usually used by participants in this study.

Baxter Magolda (2003) emphasized identity formation as the root of student affairs practice, and as a crucial part of transforming higher education. Certainly, student development theory resonates throughout the existing literature on student affairs. Participants, when asked about the influence of the literature on their practice, spoke of the need to understand student development theory, but also several of them commented that they employed it more as a guide for reflection, rather than as a tool for program development and planning. Identity formation of students was not a key value highlighted by this study’s participants; rather, they spoke of students as equal partners in their academic and co-curricular learning, and in the campus community. Participants also spoke of learning *from* students. In that respect, they strongly reflected Baxter Magolda’s ideal of learners and their experiences being validated, and of learning being jointly

constructed; she also strongly stresses the value in implementing community standards models of behaviour, and of encouraging peer support, which entails giving students responsibility that is relinquished by staff.

From what participants related of student involvement, and their independent political, social and environmental activism, this model is highly familiar. It is clear that on their campuses, involved students are expected to develop their own critical thinking and values, and to act with great autonomy and personal responsibility, as well as to be engaged in creating a positive and supportive community. Perhaps instead of speaking of values development or identity formation in this context, it would be more appropriate to refer to values encouragement. Certainly several participants in this study spoke glowingly of the high level of idealism among student leaders, and how their enthusiasm and critical questioning of all different aspects of university life was deeply rewarding to observe and interact with. Participants who experienced frustration with student leaders also spoke of them with respect. Participants referred to students doing much of the work related to student clubs, social programming and political representation and advocacy on their campuses. Participants spoke of student associations employing and managing staff of their own, rather than being directly advised and supervised by student activities staff. This level of responsibility made it quite feasible for participants in this study to consider students and student leaders as full members of the educational community and as partners in delivering services and programming. The focus for participants was to ensure that students were given a voice, that student leaders were provided with training in skills and institutional knowledge, and that all students were encouraged to take advantage of

the richness of co-curricular learning opportunities that were largely provided by students themselves.

Dalton (1993) highlighted the significance of values transmission and clarification, of the analysis of moral issues, and most importantly, having a commitment to values. This is in the context of identified student affairs values, which are largely reflected in this study, although as seen, given a somewhat different weight by participants. Participants in this study, however, identified their own personal values as being crucial to their practice, rather than an external set of philosophical guidelines or professional codes. Superficially, this is similar to what was found by Reybold, Halx and Jimenez (2008), when they discovered that the majority of senior practitioners they interviewed would not make ethical decisions based on external professional guidelines or codes. However, they found that those decisions tended instead to be based on internal institutional policies, or on religious grounds. This is in sharp contrast with this study, in which participants spoke of the importance of balancing the context of individual cases with institutional policy, and in many cases themselves pushed for policy development or change, or else supported student advocacy around that issue. None of the participants in this study cited religious beliefs as a basis for their values, or for making moral decisions.

The lack of emphasis on religion or spirituality overall in this study was notable. Manning (2001) spoke of the importance of spirituality in student affairs, and clearly religion can play a significant role in student affairs ethical decision-making, according to Reybold, Halx and Jimenez (2008). However, practitioners in this study tended only to refer to religion in the context of managing multifaith centres or initiatives, in negotiating disagreements between different religious groups, or in dealing with values conflicts

when individual religious beliefs intersected with other people's identities or values. One participant spoke of people being afraid to raise issues of religion lest others be offended. However, another participant, in spite of his own lack of religious beliefs, valued being able to meet the needs of religious students, and learning from them.

Young (2003) proposed an interesting distinction among different types of student affairs practice, between rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism and postmodernism. According to the responses of participants in this study, in terms of service delivery Canadian student affairs practice is largely pragmatic: concerned with managing limited resources, and creating a strong co-curricular learning environment that fosters student independence. The empirical model, with a focus on research and accountability, was not greatly reflected in participants' responses, although many spoke of the need for increased research and assessment. The rationalist search for universal truths was also not greatly reflected; rather, participants were more likely to be aware of issues related to marginalization and power, so in that respect reflected a somewhat more postmodern outlook, although with greater emphasis on individual student autonomy and on community development. Certainly Blimling's (1998) sharp criticism of postmodernism in student affairs as a morally relativist and potentially inconsistent approach would not likely resonate with participants, who identified multicultural awareness and a focus on diversity, social justice and equity, as well as an acknowledgement of situational factors and complexity in decision-making, as key components of their work.

The values in this study most closely reflect Kitchener's (1985) ethical principles in terms of identified values. Her categories were respecting autonomy, doing no harm, benefitting others, being just, and being faithful. Authenticity, or congruence between

stated values and actions, was extensively highlighted by participants, who spoke of needing to weigh the factors in making a decision, and having to balance the desire for consistency with the contextual elements of each unique issue. They spoke of learning from their mistakes, and role modelling the behaviour and attitude they felt was appropriate, not only to students, but to other administrators and faculty members. A number of participants spoke of the usefulness of being open and transparent about policies, practices, and how that affected their approach to decision-making, pointing out that when they were clear about the underlying issues, it was easier to explain why things were done; if people understood the complexity of a situation or issue, they were better able to make good decisions. Additionally, and this was not a facet seen in student affairs literature reviewed for this study, the social responsibility of working for publicly funded institutions was raised in this study. Several participants also spoke of the need to understand their own power, and to use it wisely, including being aware of conflicts of interest, both in the more conventional sense of not being seen to be swayed out of personal interest, but also specifically in terms of their relationships with other staff and students. These aspects of student affairs work reflect the community-oriented approach that participants stressed among their values.

Fried (1997a) identified situational ethics and complexity as challenges for student affairs practitioners, particularly when multicultural issues are brought into play. American society, she points out, is grounded in Christianity, scientific empiricism, and positivism, with clearly-defined beliefs about right and wrong. Notably, in this study, all participants had their own clear conceptualizations of what they considered right and wrong; it was in the application of those values that they all demonstrated an

understanding of situational complexity, multiple perspectives, ambiguity concerning the underlying causes of an issue, and the need to ensure that different viewpoints were taken into account. In another article, Fried (2000) pointed out that many traditional values in higher education and student affairs are derived from a western Enlightenment viewpoint, particularly the emphasis on individual rights and fairness, in contrast to a greater emphasis on social groups or the family that may be seen in other cultures. While she was speaking of American society, participants in this study also cited the importance of community, social support and multiculturalism. Individual needs were spoken of more often than individual rights; context and empathizing with others more than rules and consistent outcomes. What was particularly notable was the lack of protectiveness exhibited towards students by practitioners in this study. While they had a great deal of emphasis on care and concern, all participants emphasized the importance of encouraging autonomy and personal responsibility among students. Among participants, the development of community and the need to consider others was stressed above individual rights, and yet they gave students a significant amount of personal responsibility and freedom.

Many of the participants in this study had been involved in student activism or student leadership positions as undergraduates, and referred to those experiences as key in developing their values around student affairs, familiarity with delivering programs and services, and knowledge of student issues. A number of participants spoke of their primary values being based in a commitment to equity and social justice. For them, this meant openness to difference, and embracing and celebrating diversity. All participants spoke of the importance of having a diverse student body, particularly in assisting with

student learning and citizenship development for all students. It was important to provide services to specific marginalized groups, to work with them collaboratively to understand their needs, as well as to help educate others. In addition, several saw their role as helping students understand the complexity of equity issues, particularly when the needs of two conflicted groups. More than one participant spoke of their hope that post-secondary education would be an agent for reducing social inequalities and for producing graduates committed to making a difference in society. Several participants spoke of how inspired they were by students and student leaders who were committed to social change.

Canon and Brown (1985) stress the importance of student affairs practitioners taking personal responsibility for developing a strongly ethical practice, with a focus on care and student-centredness; they suggest that the corollary of this is that student affairs practitioners may be perceived to be soft-hearted, or to prioritize student care over institutional regulations. This approach was certainly reflected by participants in this study, who stressed student-centredness and care very highly. In many cases participants went further, when they identified the need for bridge-building between student leaders and senior administration, and commented on the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with both senior administration and students.

Student-centredness was intrinsic to participants' work, but in a manner which was not widely seen in existing literature. This manifested itself in a variety of ways for participants; all of them identified it in some form as a core value. Some spoke of working with challenging students, and needing to maintain perspective on that, and continuing to have a "basic need to like students." Most participants spoke of the importance of valuing students as full members of the university community, including



ensuring that they were viewed as responsible adults, and that they were engaged in personal learning and growth. Several spoke of ways that they worked to share power, authority and decision-making with student leaders, and how this not only benefitted students themselves, but also led to greater trust and to more effective planning and collaboration. One participant illustrated the value of student-centredness by commenting that “not a day should go by that we’re not talking to students.”

While there was discussion about the extent to which student affairs should be considered a profession, participants distinguished between that, and maintaining a high level of professionalism. This included having a genuine dedication to student affairs work, and understanding the seriousness of what they did. Participants spoke of having the approach of always seeking the right thing to do, while being open to new ideas and to being challenged. Having a clear understanding of decision-making processes, and taking multiple factors into account, was important, as was respecting their institution and its mission, and being collegial with staff and faculty as well as students. On a more pragmatic level, good management of resources and staff was strongly emphasized by participants. There was some disagreement on the extent to which valuing student affairs history was important, as one participant said that an over-emphasis on this could potentially stifle innovation.

Due to their strongly-held values, there were indeed many occasions cited by participants when one or more of these values came into conflict. These different conflicts included when two values were in conflict, or when a value was challenged by an aspect of their work, or when they needed to mediate a complex, value-laden situation among other individuals or groups.

*Values conflicts*

A number of authors in student affairs literature (Canon, 1985; Dalton, 1993; Hamrick and Benjamin, 2009; Janosik, Creamer and Humphry, 2004; Thomas, 2002; Upcraft and Poole, 1991) identify a range of cases that provoke ethical dilemmas among practitioners. Dalton (1993) cites cases of ethical dilemmas related to student behaviour. In Hamrick and Benjamin (2009) student behaviour was stressed as well, although the authors also provided examples of dilemmas related to staff supervision and some administrative concerns. Janosik, Creamer and Humphry (2004) categorize ethical dilemmas using Kitchener's (1985) ethical principles around justice, beneficence, fidelity, loyalty, autonomy, and nonmaleficence.

The majority of cases cited in the literature were related to identifying ethical situations in which there were no "right" answers. This study took a somewhat different approach in asking participants to identify occasions when two or more of their own values were in conflict; while many of these issues would involve ethical dilemmas, the focus was on how values came into play in different situations. The categories that emerged from this study were related to the campus environment, to policy and decision-making, to interactions with students, and to values conflicts.

The types of values conflicts highlighted by participants were illuminating. They were related to the institution, policy and decision-making, interactions with students, and personal issues. In each of these areas, participants identified examples of occasions in which their values came into conflict, due to some aspect of their work. Examples of ethical case scenarios are seen in the literature (e.g. Hamrick & Benjamin, 2009), values

dilemmas are placed into categories (Humphrey, Janosik and Creamer, 1985) and frameworks are devised on how to make ethical decisions. All of this is important, but generally one's own values and how they can come into conflict with each other, or with different situations or policies, are not generally addressed, although Young (2001b) advocates developing one's own definition of ethics, including considering how they are reflected in rules, policies and laws, as well as considering how these fit in the context of one's institution and student affairs work. He also maintains that ethical behaviour is not simply reflection, but also action.

This study found that for Canadian practitioners, values conflicts could arise in relation to the campus environment in which they worked. This could include disagreement with the institutional mission or practices, or the perception that senior administration did not subscribe to the same values or role model appropriate behaviour; several participants spoke of a lack of student-centredness as being particularly difficult. Other difficulties arose if there was a pervasive negativity or cynicism, or if campuses were overly hierarchical, there were too many silos, there was a lack of communication, or there was too much competition for resources, or there was a resistance to change. A lack of institutional transparency or accountability was mentioned by several participants as a challenge to their values. Similarly some participants spoke of a lack of professional principles or code of conduct in student affairs work as contributing to not having clear standards of behaviour, which could contribute to challenges in staff management; although others felt that not having behaviour codified enabled personal growth and an understanding of complexity. These types of issues were parenthetically mentioned in much of the literature reviewed for this study; Sundberg and Fried (1997) spoke of

territoriality or factionalization as barriers to ethical discussions and dialogues, as well as encouraging levels of ethical decision-making ranging from first considering ethical rules, then principles, then balancing ethical principles and outcomes. Participants in this study balked at overly prescriptive policies or codes when considering intricate situations, but rather emphasized a high level of personal responsibility among students and staff.

Ethical codes of conduct and policies are not sufficient to provide solutions to complex ethical dilemmas (Hamrick & Benjamin, 2009; Upcraft & Poole, 1991). Participants in this study viewed institutional policies as useful tools, but did not rely on them to resolve values conflicts. Many participants spoke of how policies may not reflect the complexity of different situations, in which there may be competing needs, most often in cases of student discipline or crisis, or in cases of controversial issues with competing marginalities. In fact, some participants spoke of policies themselves as a potential source of conflict. A few participants spoke of the problem of having out-of-date or non-existent policies around student issues, and a few others mentioned occasions when if policies were developed that were not student-centred, there was tremendous personal difficulty in being responsible for implementing them. Decision-making processes may not involve all stakeholders, which could lead to a lack of voice, especially for students, and potentially to conflict. Jurisdictional issues and confidentiality concerns were also frequently spoken of by participants.

Interactions with students also created situations where more than one value was involved. Many participants spoke of the tension between wanting to care for and nurture students, and feeling over-protective or paternalistic. Balancing having respect for students' autonomy while providing support to them was difficult. While respecting

autonomy is a core value identified in Kitchener's (1985) principles, the standpoint of participants in this study was very much focussed on considering students to be adult members of the university community, which was a source of tension when students required higher levels of care.

Negative interactions with individual students could taint people's viewpoints, and participants also spoke of colleagues who had become bitter or cynical about students, due to too many occasions when individual students were difficult. In a similar vein, participants, especially more senior student affairs officers, spoke of the difficulty the encountered when there was a lack of trust between student leaders and senior university administration. In these cases, they felt stuck in the middle of a conflict, often without the ability or opportunity to mediate effectively. A lack of continuity among student leaders could exacerbate this, as relationship-building was challenging in short periods of time, and some administrators may not feel it is worth bothering. Some participants commented that at times they were surprised when a particular issue became contentious; not being prepared to deal with unexpected conflict could lead to difficulties. Participants also spoke of boundary blurring in their social relationships with students, particularly in environments with good collegiality between student leaders and student affairs staff.

Participants identified situations in which there were competing rights among students, although certainly not to the extent that Blimling (1998) refers, when he speaks of different claims based on belief systems or identity. The most common such issue for participants was related to more politicized students, whether those involved in the student association, or in some cases, advocacy or issue-based groups. A few participants

went somewhat further, when in some cases they identified that their own values could come into conflict when dealing with highly-charged situations, such as groups opposing abortion.

People encountered their own value conflicts related to their work, when their desire to be hardworking and highly professional conflicted with other aspects of their values or personality. For example, some participants said that as they advanced in their careers, their contact with students and student leaders was diminished, and that affected their personal motivation as it was that contact that initially attracted them to the field. Maintaining boundaries, sometimes at the expense of behaving in a natural and social manner, was also a challenge, and this occurred with both staff and students.

Krager (1985) placed Kitchener's (1985) principles into a matrix of different student affairs roles. Values are manifested in different ways depending on the context of the situation, perhaps more so than in the different administrative or educational roles that Krager delineates. Some values conflicts lend themselves to the matrix approach, while others that were identified in this study are more challenging. When values conflicts arise between deep personal beliefs, and situations in which practitioners find themselves powerless as the decision is not in their hands, what is their ethical obligation? Two practitioners identified having quit their positions when faced with such an example, and it was between senior administrative decision-making and their own fundamental belief in student-centredness.

While not the primary focus of this study, the approaches that participants recommended in terms of resolving values conflicts were reflected in decision-making models seen in the literature. Of note is that participants included their own personal

welfare as a consideration. This was not something that was seen in the literature, with the exception of Upcraft (1988), who provides one of the rare instances of describing how to manage the potential consequences of a decision after making it, although providing a somewhat draconian checklist in order to do so. In contrast, participants in this study were keenly sensitive to the political and personal ramifications of complex decisions, and spoke feelingly of the need to consider all stakeholders, but in particular senior administration and students; echoing Fried's (1997a) call for ethical dialogues, but in a more structured approach of engaging stakeholders in decision-making, rather than in discussions of ethical issues. Participants spoke of the personal impact of difficult decisions, such as their own emotional involvement, the perception of others – including their supervisors and their students – up to and including their professional reputation, how a precedent would affect their ability to do their work in the future, and even questioning whether they could justify remaining in their jobs. They were not doing so in a selfish way; participants had high ideals of public service and altruism, but they clearly recognised that any honest decision would need to take personal factors into account. The personal impact of decisions not reflected in most of the literature, in terms of professional impact in the case of complex or controversial issues, how relationships with other members of the university community are affected, or the emotional impact on an individual of dealing with a difficult situation.

### ***Implications for Practice***

#### *Recruitment and development of student affairs practitioners*

Many participants, particularly the younger ones, spoke of having been involved as student leaders during their undergraduate years, and having continued in the field of student affairs because of a deep commitment to student life. All participants spoke passionately about their work and with clarity about the issues and challenges they dealt with.

Much of the professional development of student affairs practitioners was experiential. Those who had undertaken professional preparation tended to have done so in the United States, doing graduate programs in student affairs/student personnel administration. If student affairs continues to expand in Canada as a career field, increasingly there will be an expectation that training and academic work will be available, if not at each institution, then through academic departments of education or through the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS). Given the emphasis placed by participants on the importance of having values attached to their work, and the need to consider carefully how to address and resolve dilemmas, some form of ethical/values consideration and training would be appropriate for new practitioners. While experiential on-the-job learning is immensely important, understanding underlying theory, learning from others, and reflecting on different cases in the Canadian context, could be an important addition to student affairs practitioner preparation.



That said, the experiential learning that the participants – many of whom had not had graduate preparation in student affairs – was clearly very high. Many spoke of reading and reflecting on student affairs literature, but they brought their own critical lens to it, including the extent to which they felt it was applicable to their own practice. The level of thoughtfulness and expertise of the practitioners who participated in this study was extremely high; clearly, in their cases, experiential learning had been effective.

The values stated by Canadian student affairs practitioners in this study, incorporated into the recruitment and training of new staff members, could help them to consider their own roles within the campus environment and as student educators. On a decision-making level, having practitioners spend time considering their own values framework, values in practice, appropriate work boundaries, and ways to address complex ethical issues, could greatly assist them in their daily work and career development. It can be hoped, as well, that creating an expectation that student affairs practitioners undertake this type of reflection, will benefit students and institutions, as this will help ensure that student affairs practitioners are intentional in bringing values into their decision-making and practices.

From personal observation, there is not a great deal of diversity among student affairs practitioners in terms of race, ethnic origin, or visible disability relative to the Canadian population overall. Participants spoke of diversity and equity as a strong value, and putting this value into practice could include making conscious efforts to recruit and mentor student staff, student leaders and new student affairs practitioners from diverse backgrounds.

Several participants spoke about whether or not having a professional code for student affairs was appropriate in Canada, and the larger question of whether or not the field should be considered a profession in the formal sense of the word. One participant said that not having a formal code of practice permitted flexibility and an understanding of “shades of gray,” and encouraged reflection. Newer practitioners could be asked to develop their own personal code of behaviour, building on foundational concepts and documents, and institutional mission and priorities, but reflecting their own values. This approach is not directly suggested in the student affairs literature, but is certainly seen in student affairs practice.

*Relations with members of the university community*

Participants emphasized that building strong relationships with faculty, other administrative staff, and students was central to the success of their programs. A perception that student affairs largely consists of offering individual services and support could be limiting, when participants wished to develop programs and activities that stressed changes to the campus environment, collaboration with other members of the university community, co-curricular educational programs, or approaches to dealing with student behaviour.

Exploring the differences between doing things *for* students and doing things *with* students is a valuable fundamental question. Working with students includes respecting their own opinions, autonomy and identity, and treating them as equal partners in their educational pursuits and in the university community. Doing things for students provides

them with support that they may well need, but may not assist in the development of personal responsibility.

A number of participants spoke of the importance of self-care, particularly when dealing with challenging situations. They also considered their own professional and personal well-being when making decisions, which was not a factor that was generally included in the literature on student affairs ethical decision-making. If self-awareness and even self-preservation are considered values, rather than as secondary or non-existent factors when making ethical decisions, then that can be legitimately incorporated into decision-making models. People can feel guilty if they try to take their own welfare into account when making a decision that might be unpopular. Clarifying this as a value may assist with this.

Senior participants in particular spoke of their role in helping to create better understanding between senior university administrators and student leaders, particularly in institutions where relations between the two groups could be contentious. This included having a clear understanding of the priorities of each group, and helping to explain them to the other. Several commented that the role of bridge-builder was very challenging, as misunderstandings and misperceptions were common, and that they themselves could be seen as unduly favouring one group over the other. Exploring common ground, encouraging greater opportunities for communication, and fostering mutual respect, all led to improved relationships. The high turnover of student leaders was also cited by a number of participants as a factor in how well relations between the two groups progressed; the turnover either could lead to an opportunity to improve relations, or could create a deleterious lack of continuity. Having an understanding of the

dynamics of both senior administrative decision-making, and of student associations and student leadership, is crucial to assisting with positive interactions.

A number of participants commented on the lack of understanding in other university departments of the role of student affairs, and how it was at times difficult to explain or to quantify the effect of student affairs work. Some also said that Canadian student affairs was not intrinsically defined in the first place, and that could lead to inconsistencies among institutions, and a lack of a guiding mission. Being able to explicate the effectiveness of student affairs work to other members of the university community would be of assistance in building collaboration and in obtaining or retaining resources. In order to do so, said a number of participants, it was important to have valid assessment data of the impact of student affairs work. Challenges in doing so included that some effects such as student development may be difficult to quantify, assessment required staff time and financial resources, and there has not been a history of assessment practices in Canadian student affairs. Several participants pointed out that more graduate programs and academic faculty working in Canadian higher education departments could beneficially lead to increased research in student affairs.

#### *Working collaboratively with students*

The switch from *in loco parentis* to recognizing students as adult members of the university community was not simply lip service for the participants in this study. Students needed advice, support and encouragement, but there was no question that participants considered students to be involved in shaping the campus climate of their institutions, rather than having it shaped for them.

Creating a student-centred educational community means involving them as stakeholders and ensuring that they have an investment in creating programs and in ameliorating the campus climate. Students themselves can constitute a resource, particularly in magnifying the effects of programs: one staff member can deliver a program to a limited number of individuals, but if students are recruited and trained to do so, they are able to increase significantly the reach of that program. A focus on challenging preconceptions around perceived limitations in students' skills and abilities can help to overcome resistance to this approach. Furthermore, ensuring that members of the university community understand the theoretical underpinnings of this approach can assist in building a consensus around taking it.

Many participants acknowledged and appreciated the work of student associations on Canadian campuses, while speaking cogently of issues that were involved in working with student leaders, and of challenges that arose. Participants spoke of their work with student leaders in terms that were respectful, encouraging, and which reflected their strong belief in the students' abilities. Criticisms of student leadership tended to be more over political issues or approaches, rather than on any assumption that they were unskilled, self-interested, or incapable, although some participants found student leaders to be at times contentious and difficult to work with.

I should acknowledge that this was the area that I had the most difficulty with in analysing and constructing, due to my own history of involvement in student politics, particularly when a participant was critical of the Canadian Federation of Students – an organisation about which I have mixed feelings, but which I feel is highly beneficial in

many ways to students in Canada. I decided to include the statement verbatim, as I did not want to impose my own stand on that participant's viewpoint.

Participants spoke of how co-curricular involvement is certainly encouraged on Canadian campuses; participants saw their role as helping ensure that students were included in decision-making, that communication between student leaders and senior administrators was facilitated, and that student associations could be strong partners in program development and student life initiatives. In addition, student staff and volunteers were involved in many student affairs programs; with appropriate training and support, students assume a high level of responsibility.

Students were encouraged by participants to test boundaries, generate new ideas, and to take initiative. The respect and appreciation for students as full members of the university community was a clear and abiding value among participants. Many participants spoke of the need for institutional transparency, honesty and openness among administrators, clarity in processes, and of ensuring students had a voice. Appreciating the role of student leadership can help shape better communication and collaboration between students, student leaders and university administrators.

Student affairs practitioners certainly saw themselves as educators, but many participants spoke of influencing learning, and of creating an environment in which students were exposed to new ideas and had the opportunity to explore them. This was particularly evident when asked to what extent student affairs should be involved in shaping students' values. Participants did not speak of teaching values or of lecturing students, but rather of engaging students in dialogues, in encouraging them to see different sides of issues, and of ensuring they had space and opportunity to engage in co-

curricular learning opportunities. It is worth noting that many participants in this study spoke just as strongly of the need to educate other members of the university community about students, and to be experts on student needs. Participants spoke as well of learning from students themselves.

In practice, this educational approach would reflect a purposeful effort to engage students themselves in crafting and delivering student life programs. Peer educators, student staff, volunteers and student leaders all constitute excellent resources for magnifying the effectiveness of student affairs practitioners. Embracing the attitude of holding students' abilities in high esteem can lead to strong, collaborative working relationships, and to the development not only of students, but also of practitioners themselves. As well, students could be ambassadors to other members of the university community, not simply in student leadership roles that may by nature be adversarial, but in helping to educate about the student experience.

#### *Development and interpretation of policies*

Participants all agreed on the importance of taking a student-centred approach, and this included ensuring that students were given a high level of responsibility, autonomy, and respect, and that they were involved in decision-making and in shaping the university community.

In order to implement this approach, it is clearly valuable to examine programs, policies and practices to determine the extent to which they reflect it. This would include devising a revision process that was consultative and collaborative. Policies and practices that are imposed or rigid, rules-based, geared to a common denominator, or framed in an

adversarial way, would run counter to this approach. They would also tend to set low expectations of students. Conversely, student-centredness is reflected in taking a care-based and empowering approach which assumes that students have a high level of responsibility and personal development. The challenges would include having an openness to being questioned, patience with using an educational rather than an authoritative stance, and confidence in giving students room to learn for themselves. Participants spoke of how tempting it could be simply to solve problems, rather than to give students the opportunity and scope to do so for themselves, but at the same time provide enough of a support framework that students did not feel helpless.

Participants made it clear that they were expected to interpret policies and rules, rather than simply apply them, and that that was a major challenge in their work. Their values and the context of the case influenced the outcome of this interpretation, and while this approach is implied in some of the literature on ethical decision-making, it is rarely made explicit. Institutional policies and procedures, particularly those related to conduct, could build in context, if that is indeed the reality of how they are interpreted. Determining appropriate levels of flexibility and a range of outcomes, rather than taking a prescriptive approach, could serve to protect staff making decisions, students or other members of the community who are affected by those decisions, and the institution itself. In effect, this would enable care-based and educational decision-making to be included in policy, rather than being perceived as continually making exceptions.

Values can be reflected in institutional policies, particularly those related to student behaviour. Reactive policies tend to be in response to the most extreme examples of bad behaviour. Rather than examining underlying conditions for behaviour, they



attempt to proscribe it, through clear, detailed and specific language, and do not permit a great deal of interpretation or contextual decision-making. Educational and care-based policies focus on prevention, through outlining expectations and what is acceptable and desirable behaviour, and permit educational sanctions and outcomes, as well as encouraging personal responsibility. To reflect the stated values of student affairs practitioners in this study, student affairs policies and programs should move away from controlling, prescriptive approaches, and even away from the idea that students are always at lower levels of development, and that practices should reflect that. This would be an approach that openly acknowledges students as agents in their own development, and encourages all members of the university community to consider students as equals.

Taking a rehabilitative and caring approach to student disciplinary issues does not imply slackness, but rather that sanctions are restorative and educational. Addressing an issue in a less adversarial way, focussing on the behaviour rather than the person, and having the student take responsibility for educating themselves about the impact of their behaviour, and mutually deciding on solutions, all can lead to lasting behavioural modification and positive outcomes. Mediation of conflicts with an issue-based approach that focuses on mutual understanding can lead to a beneficial outcome for all parties. This approach focuses on educational conversations, sensitivity to the needs of all the parties involved, and acknowledgement of issues and responsibility, and a demonstration of trust. Delicacy around what is an educational opportunity compared to a need to resolve a problem quickly is also required; not every moment is a teachable one.

A campus environment that reflects the values of care and context would include openness about expectations, and would entail role modelling patience, understanding

and trust. This can encourage students and other members of the university community also to embrace these values. Practitioners taking this approach must be prepared to have their own boundaries pushed, and ideas challenged; indeed, encouraging a lack of conformity and a desire to be critical can be very developmental, and it cannot be expected that this lens would not be turned on practitioners themselves.

*Intentionality in negotiating the complexity of value-laden situations*

What became clear, particularly when discussing values conflicts, was that participants felt that understanding the underlying complexity of different situations was crucial in being able to address and resolve them. Furthermore, many participants emphasized that when they were able to facilitate reflection and discussion of different issues in difficult situations, they were more successful in encouraging people to work towards mutually-satisfactory solutions, in a mutually satisfactory manner. This understanding of complexity helps avoid eliciting knee-jerk reactions, defensiveness, or self-righteousness, and fosters good will and the desire for positive outcomes.

Identifying the values inherent in a situation has the effect of encouraging empathy for the people involved. Individuals can be encouraged to reflect on why an issue might be controversial or upsetting, and what the causes of values conflict are. Once they have done so, they can more readily understand why others may be reacting in similar ways, and this can encourage greater mutual understanding. Given that many of the issues identified by participants as demonstrating a values conflict did not have clear right or wrong answers, people who understand each others' perspectives are likely to be more receptive to developing a mutually acceptable solution. Even in cases where

conflicts are not resolved, a better understanding of the other side's perspective and the complexity of the situation can lead to greater respect and openness; a conflict or a disagreement would not preclude future collaboration and good will.

The benefits of alleviating tension and hostility are great. Actually seeking to identify cases of values conflict will not necessarily help to resolve them, but can lead to making informed and considered choices that are contextually-based; they will not necessarily be generalisable, but do serve to demonstrate the approach.

Participants did not generally see students (or, for that matter, staff and faculty) as being unable to grasp the complexity of an issue, particularly if a transparent and intentional approach was taken to the discussion. Asking people involved in a complex situation what is important to them, what the desired effect of their action or decision might be, and are there issues related to it that make them uncomfortable, all assist with reflection on the values people are bringing to the discussion. As examples, this type of approach was cited by two different participants, one in the context of student discipline, and the other in decision-making at the highest level of university administration.

Operating on an assumption that there is a right or wrong answer, that complex situations have simple answers, or using personal authority to impose a solution, are not as likely to generate the positive effects that could result from taking a values-based approach. As seen in the literature review in Chapter Two, there is considerable discussion about acting in ethically appropriate ways, and Fried (1997a) and Fried and Sundberg (1997) advocate having dialogues about ethical issues on campus. However, this does not focus on the educational aspects of involving *all* stakeholders, including

students, in a values-based discussion of an issue. Above all, it is crucial not to assume that this type of discussion is beyond the scope of students.

One of the points made by several participants was to distinguish between consistency in process versus consistent responses to issues. In considering values-based decision-making, this becomes particularly salient. Fairness can be contextual; a solution that is appropriate in one case may be wrong in another. A focus on maintaining consistent responses can result in requiring cases to have the same solutions, and that certain actions will result in predetermined consequences. It is important to ask what if there are potentially detrimental effects in taking a rigid approach. Having a set of rules that are applied regardless of context may lead to forfeiting the opportunity to care for individual students, to create a sense of personal responsibility, and to enable an educational outcome.

#### *Development of Canadian student affairs*

Some of the advantages cited by participants of working in Canadian institutions – when things were going well – included a high level of student responsibility and autonomy, a collaborative approach with student leaders, and a strong sense of community. Disadvantages included a lack of resources, a sense that Canadian student affairs research and practitioner preparation were under-developed, and a concern about having a “sink-or-swim” mentality towards students.

Policies and practices that participants appreciated and felt reflected their values included taking an approach that was based on balancing care and encouraging personal responsibility. This was reflected throughout participants’ discussion around the campus

environment, student affairs programs and activities, and interactions with individual students. Transparency around approaches, and a genuine desire to encourage student input, were both important aspects of this. None of the participants wished to assert their authority over students; rather, they emphasized the need to listen to what student had to say, and to work with them as partners to resolve any issues. What was clear from all the participants was their deep and abiding respect for students as full members of the university community. Participants did not see themselves in a role of controlling student behaviour, but rather, encouraging students to perform at very high levels of maturity and responsibility.

The extent to which these values are reflected in day-to-day practice in Canadian student affairs at different institutions, and what limitations prevent them from being fully implemented, is worthy of further study. Placing these values at the forefront of Canadian student affairs practice could continue to ensure a community-based and collaborative model of practice, if this approach demonstrably encouraged a high level of student development and student responsibility. It would also be helpful to examine what factors might limit this model, such as administrative or student resistance, lack of knowledge or resources, institutional cultures, and expediency.

None of the participants in this study were reluctant to speak of their own values that they brought to their work; there was no expectation that practitioners were expected to be value-neutral. A number of them, in fact, came into student affairs after being involved in student politics, which by its very nature is value-laden. While, therefore, we can conclude that student affairs staff will continue to hold, and likely express, strong values, the question is how to implement them appropriately and effectively into their

practice. Many of the value conflicts that participants related had to do with feeling they could not speak out, or that they were expected to suppress their values in the interests of institutional loyalty. Devising strategies to help student affairs practitioners to negotiate this difficult terrain could greatly assist with this.

Since many practitioners' main professional development has been experiential, tapping into the wealth of knowledge that they have could be at the forefront of Canadian student affairs development. As well, experienced participants in this study spoke of the energy and enthusiasm of newer staff members, and certainly it appears the field is growing quite rapidly, so further linkage of experiential learning and formal training could be fruitful.

Discussions in student affairs departments, at institutional levels, and in professional development settings around the current values and future directions of student affairs could be fruitful, particularly if they reflect the pragmatic, results-oriented approach of which many of the practitioners in this study spoke. All agreed with the need for more research in Canadian student affairs, that graduate preparation that reflected Canadian realities was valuable, and that learning took place throughout a practitioner's career.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

There is great scope for future research in the field of Canadian student affairs. Specifically, there is the potential for expansion of this study's construction of student affairs values. Such an expansion would likely include researching the values and

perceptions other stakeholder groups, particularly students, but also faculty, staff and community members.

A quantitative study of student affairs practitioners across Canada to test how generally-held these values are would be an interesting next step. Continuing with further research into how values can be implemented into day-to-day work, and how values conflicts can be resolved, would be useful additions to student affairs training. It is also worth exploring whether the understanding that values conflicts exist and that decisions are complex is replicated among less experienced student affairs practitioners; the participants in this study were deliberately selected for their level of expertise.

Further to this, it is likely that factors such as institutional size, resources, provincial funding and legislation, student affairs funding models, and administrative structures all affect the role of student affairs in different institutions, and may also impact what types of values conflicts practitioners encounter. This study did not attempt to correlate these factors, except when specifically mentioned by participants. Further exploration of these issues could be illuminating, particularly if practitioners who have worked at two or more institutions during the course of their careers were asked to provide comparative insights.

During the second interview one participant wished to see greater elaboration on values and feelings, and how when individuals were internally conflicted between values, they achieved resolution. Further discussion among Canadian practitioners regarding values conflict resolution could be a next logical step stemming from this study; from that, potentially an ethical decision-making framework reflecting Canadian student affairs realities could be derived. It would also be good to explore to what extent practitioners

are encouraged to reflect on their values and incorporate them in their work, and ways to facilitate them doing so. It would be particularly interesting to take a phenomenological approach that examined which types of values conflicts practitioners found most personally affecting.

Further related data could be generated by speaking to stakeholders who are affected by student affairs to garner their perceptions on how student affairs work is conducted, and on its effectiveness. Correlating student affairs values to further available data, such as institutional documents, policies and mission statements, would also be helpful. As well, it would be useful to examine further how values are implemented in student affairs administrative structures, logistics, or decision-making processes involved in service delivery, although an ethnographic approach of observing practitioners *in situ* could be difficult, as this study demonstrated that values are most often challenged in sensitive situations, which would preclude an external observer.

This study did not include student leaders as participants, who are major contributors to the culture of Canadian campuses. Student associations deliver extensive services that as seen in the American literature are overseen by student affairs staff. In addition, student leaders have a role in governance and institutional decision-making. It would be interesting to discuss values with student leaders and student association full-time staff, and to compare their responses to those of student affairs practitioners.

It would also be illuminating to research further the career paths of student affairs practitioners in Canada, including exploring in greater detail how and why did they become interested in the field, what major experiences have shaped their practice, and



what kind of professional development they have pursued would be useful information to affect recruitment and retention in the field.

Governance and decision-making in student affairs would be a good next step from this study, as it would be fascinating to explore how well practitioners are able to achieve congruence between their values and in shaping their work environment. Similarly, challenges in managing and budgeting for ancillary operations, how those operations are funded, and values around those decisions, could be further explored.

Further comparison between the constructions derived from this study with the American literature on student affairs ethics could be useful. There are aspects of Canadian higher education and Canadian society that likely have effects on student affairs practices. Some that were cited by participants in this study include a high level of responsibility given to individual students, a largely public university system, the autonomy of student associations and the level of resources they have, student participation in governance, different legal issues from the United States (such as a lower drinking age, and a different approach to liability), and a suspected high retention rate in Canadian universities. To what extent these factors influence Canadian student affairs practices, and whether there are other factors, would be an interesting comparative study.

Although it may be difficult to elucidate, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which Canadian culture, laws, and national values influence student affairs practice in this country. Research could include the effect of the public nature of post-secondary education, the autonomous nature of university governance, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and human rights codes on multicultural attitudes or

freedom of speech, the autonomy of student associations and their participation in service delivery, and other distinctive facets of Canadian campuses and student affairs practice.

### *Conclusion*

Pursuing this study was an extremely positive experience. The depth and richness of participant responses both provided more than ample data, and also personally influenced me in my current practice. Constructivism as a methodology is one that lends itself well to this type of exploration, as it incorporates a high level of respect and engagement with respondents, which allows for a multifaceted construction of the experiences and realities of the people involved in the study.

Student affairs in Canada is a field that incorporates strong values and a deep commitment to a complex and fascinating role in higher education. Constructing the values of the participants has been illuminating, and it is my hope that this study provides a useful starting point for further research and discussion on the topic.

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## Appendix One: Interview Protocol

### Introduction.

*Informed consent:* Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This interview should take about one and a half hours. Once it is completed, I will compile a transcript from the recordings and my interview notes. From this, I will build a narrative based on your interview, which you will be able to review to provide any changes or elaborations, in order to ensure it is an accurate reflection of your experience, and to ensure that no identifying details have been included. As interviews progress, I will be building a constructed framework of student affairs practitioner values, which will include categories based on the different interviews. In some cases, issues or concerns will likely arise that denote different perspectives. Once I have completed this initial construction, I will send it, and the narrative based on your interview, to you for review. I expect to do this within three months of your interview. Next, I hope to have a second one to one and a half hour interview with you in order to obtain your feedback on this construction.

This study is completely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time by contacting me either by email or telephone. During the interview, you are free to decline to answer any question, and you may stop the interview at any point you wish. Your identity will remain as confidential as possible. I will use a pseudonym, and will limit identifying details about you or your institution. General descriptions of your institution will be kept separate from your responses, and no institutions will be named in the study. However, it is possible that an informed reader may be able to hypothesize your identity through unique details related to your work. If while you are relating an example of your practice, any personal details related to you or others emerge, they will be kept confidential. When you review the narrative of your interview you can remove any points you do not wish to be made public.

Data obtained for this study will be retained by me and will be used for research purposes only, and original interview notes/transcriptions will only be seen by myself or my supervisor. I will destroy tape recordings and rough notes within two years after my thesis is approved. [Consent form, if you agree to participate, I will collect from you at the beginning of the interview, and which I will keep in a locked and secure location.]

Do you have any questions at this point?

1. Tell me about your student affairs position. When did you become interested in the field and why? What were some key transitions in your career path?
2. Can you describe your professional development? [Prompts: What are different learning experiences you've had that have influenced your practice? To what extent has student affairs literature been helpful or had an influence on your practice?]
3. In what ways do you think student affairs is valuable and important? How do you see the role of student affairs in the greater university community? [Prompts: What sorts

of issues can come into play in relation to students? Administrators? Faculty? Can you provide some examples of collaborative work?]

4. What do you hope students will gain from their university experience? How does student affairs facilitate this? Are there ways that this can be improved?
5. In what ways do you see students' values and ethics shaped by their postsecondary education? Do you see student affairs taking a role in shaping students' values and ethical development?
6. What are some values you believe are important for student affairs practitioners to bring to the profession? (With each, take the time to describe why and examples of how they are used).
7. What are some examples of ethical issues faced by student affairs practitioners?
8. One of the areas I'm exploring is the issue of values conflict. Do you feel your personal or professional values are congruent with other members of the university community? Can you describe some examples of when they are or are not? What are some challenges in implementing your values into your work? Can you give me an example of a time when two personal values of yours have come into conflict?
9. How would you describe your work with student leaders and student groups? In your view, what traits make up an engaged student? Involved student or student leader?
10. What is your sense of how student affairs in Canada has developed? What do you foresee in the future of Canadian student affairs?
11. What aspects of student affairs work do you feel passionately about? Can you describe why?
12. Do you have anything to add, or is there anything we haven't covered?

## Appendix Two: Letter of consent

### Values of Canadian Student Affairs Practitioners

Researcher: Nona Robinson, PhD student, Theory and Policy Studies in Education,  
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Supervisor: Glen Jones, PhD, TPS, OISE/University of Toronto. Telephone: (416) 923-6641  
x2236. Email: [gjones@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:gjones@oise.utoronto.ca)

July 10, 2007

Dear [Participant]:

I am currently undertaking a doctoral thesis research study into the values of Canadian student affairs practitioners. This will involve building a framework based on interviews with between 15-20 of student affairs staff members from across the country who have been identified as having an interest in these issues.

I am asking you to participate in two 1.5-2 hour one-on-one interviews, either in person or by telephone, which will be tape-recorded. Following the first interview, I will compile a transcript from the recordings and my interview notes. From this, I will build a narrative based on your interview, which you will be able to review to provide any changes or elaborations, in order to ensure it is an accurate reflection of your experience, and to ensure that no identifying details have been included. As interviews progress, I will be building a constructed framework of student affairs practitioner values, which will include categories based on the different interviews. In some cases, issues or concerns will likely arise that denote different perspectives. Once I have completed this initial construction, I will send it, and the narrative based on your interview, to you for review. I expect to do this within three months of your interview. Next, I hope to have a second interview with you in order to obtain your feedback on this construction.

From this study, I am hoping to learn more about the values and ethics employed by student affairs administrators in Canada, and what contributes, both positively and negatively, to Canadian student affairs practices.

This study is completely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time by contacting me either by email or telephone. During the interview, you are free to decline to answer any question, and you may stop the interview at any point you wish. Your identity will be kept confidential, and your interview narrative and any quotes will be anonymous, as I will use a pseudonym. In the study, I will limit identifying details about you or your institution. General descriptions of your institution will be kept separate from your responses, and no institutions will be named in the study. However, it is possible that an informed reader may be able to hypothesize your identity through unique details related to your work. When you review the narrative of your interview you can remove any points you do not wish to be made public.

Data obtained for this study will be retained by me and will be used for research purposes only, and original interview notes/transcriptions will only be seen by myself or my supervisor (contact information above). I will destroy tape recordings and rough notes within two years after my thesis is approved. Attached is a consent form that, if you agree to participate, I will collect from you at the beginning of the interview, and which I will keep in a locked and secure location.

I do not anticipate any risk of harm to you deriving from your participation in this study, and participants will at no time be judged or evaluated in any way, nor will any value judgements be placed on your responses

I hope that this study could prove useful in the further development of Canadian student affairs as a professional field. You will be welcome to request an electronic copy of the completed thesis if you are interested in the research findings.

If you are willing to participate, or have further questions, please contact me at the above number or by email. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Nona Robinson

**Please complete the information below if you agree to participate**

“Values of Canadian Student Affairs Practitioners”

Study by Nona Robinson, PhD student, Theory and Policy Studies in Education, OISE/UT

Telephone (416) 978-7246, email [nona.robinson@utoronto.ca](mailto:nona.robinson@utoronto.ca)

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I will participate in the study. I understand I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I understand that my identity will remain confidential. I understand I may choose not to be audio-taped and that I may decline to answer any specific questions during the interview. I understand I will have the opportunity to review the narrative from my interview and remove any information or quotations I choose not to have included. I understand that audiotapes and interview notes will be kept in a secure location and destroyed after the study is submitted, and that this letter will also be kept in the same secure location.

I agree to be audio-taped:  YES  NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

The time(s) at which I prefer to be contacted is: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you very much – your participation is greatly appreciated!*



### Appendix Three: Framework of student affairs values

#### *The study*

Fifteen participants from different institutions in eight provinces, completed the first round of interviews. Participants' professional experience ranged from under five years to over thirty. Eight participants were female and seven male. Selection of participants was done through identifying contributors to Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) conferences/CACUSS Communiqué magazine on the broad subject of student affairs, and/or by the recommendation of another participant.

Below are tables encompassing participants' conceptualizations of the role of student affairs, the relationship between student affairs and students, core practitioner values that they bring to their practice, and areas of value conflict. Further study data not included in this framework as it is not directly related to values includes summaries of participants' professional development, personal motivations for entering and remaining in the field, and their thoughts on the general development of Canadian student affairs.

#### *The role of student affairs in the institution*

##### **How student affairs helps to create a learning environment**

- Reaching out to students; letting them know what's available
- Sharing information and best practices across institution
- Exposing students to new ideas and perspectives, encouraging students to test assumptions; providing a safe space to experiment with new concepts
- Not so much shaping personal values, as exposing people to questions
- Being structured and intentional about encouraging life skills development
- Structuring places and activities for student interaction
- Encouraging positive attitudes towards institution, academic program
- Creating a strong institutional welcome to foster loyalty, good fit
- Services not just something you access in a crisis; can be educational
- Pushing students out of their comfort zone (esp. millennial generation)
- Providing incentives to participate and engage in student activities
- Developing students as leaders, whole-person development
- Outside-classroom experiences are likely to shape values
- Civic engagement: distinguishing between doing things *to*, *for* or *with* people
- Developing sense of connection with community
- Having students reflect on reasons/values re: civic engagement
- Learning can come from negative experiences, mistakes (e.g. discipline)
- Creating an environment where students take responsibility
- Helping shape a strong student culture

### How student affairs supports the academic mission

- Programs complement formal academic activities to enhance learning
- We are bridge-builders, or glue, between faculty, students, administration
- Helping to break down silos
- Academics are freed by student services to pursue scholarship
- Focussing on new faculty increases their engagement in student life
- Offering support to faculty, rather than asking for their help
- Most academics were likely highly successful undergraduates; helping them understand students in difficulty, reasons student support is needed
- Encouraging consistency across departments (e.g. policy, programming, student support)
- Developing services and programs that support student success

### Student affairs advocacy on behalf of students

- Ensuring students are at the table and are listened to
- Influencing administrators to consider the student perspective, impact of decisions on students
- Working to create a culture where students are valued
- Ensuring policies reflect both student and institutional needs
- Ensuring student support is central to institutional practice
- Stepping into a crisis that faculty, senior administration are not prepared for
- “There shouldn’t be a day that goes by that we’re not working with students”
- Creating a sense of students belonging, mattering in institutional culture
- Individual student support as well as encouraging student development

### Where improvement may be needed

- Student affairs profession is *not* central, academic mission is paramount
- We suffer from a bit of egotism, thinking we always know what’s best for students
- We may be gatekeepers for student leader access to senior administrators
- Students may have consumerist mentality towards services, even academics
- We are not doing enough regarding academic integrity, ethical behaviour
- Since we moved away from *in loco parentis*, we do not do enough wellness, spirituality programming
- Students may not develop connection, responsibility, understanding of impact of actions
- We lack a rite of passage, institutional induction
- Negative role models in society and sense of entitlement can create inappropriate student expectations, e.g. around rules, expectations, loopholes
- Students arrive and can be profoundly disappointed; we may create false expectations
- Student affairs needs to develop as a profession, including assessment and literature

### ***Relationship between student affairs and students***

#### **Relationship with individual students**

- Relationship always evolving
- Design programs to meet and respond to their needs
- Trying to relate, communicate, keep programming relevant
- Parental concern and engagement is an issue
- Troubled, mental health issues
- Important to do reality check with random students
- Students have strong commitment to institution
- Broad vision is to engage students in activities; services exist to help students with barriers that will inhibit their ability to continue through university
- Educational aspect of programming, services
- Instead of just quickly solving their problems for them, challenging them again and engaging them in the decision-making processes, and the problem-solving processes, so that they understand what's going behind it.
- Enjoy hearing what their experiences are
- Very motivating to work with them
- Students are very sensitive, very diverse here
- Fun, even the challenges
- A learning experience for all of us
- Energizing to be around them
- Gratifying to see them grow and change, and make change
- The higher you advance, the less contact you have with them; budget, staff, takes away from student time

#### **Working with engaged students and student leaders**

- Taking an inclusive approach to decision-making
- Give them opportunity to speak off the record
- Depends on relationship, area of influence; ranging from civil and compliant to highly politicized
- Collaborative and constructive
- Personality-driven, sometimes difficult, confrontational, conflict-based
- Can be coercive relationship
- Volatile, some years non-existent
- Caught in the middle between students/senior administration (who may have written them off)
- As transparent and consultative as possible; they trust me to be open
- Sometimes supervisory, sometimes advisory
- Professional, can work at the level of someone with 25 years of work experience
- Important to recruit students who are not typecast

| <b>Traits of engaged students/student leaders</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Positive traits</i>                            |   |
| Learning confidence in finding their voice        | Principled  |
| They are the people who are really alive          | Sense of mission, take initiative                   |
| Involved in asking questions, exploring           | Always looking to do more, grow                     |
| Love what they're doing                           | Engage in thinking and reflecting                   |
| Sincere, genuine, passionate, focussed            | Motivated, empowered, proactive                     |
| Selfless, rarely out to build resume              | Wanting to make an impact, change, difference       |
| Taking on tremendous responsibility               | Broad vision and commitment to big picture          |
| Connected and invested                            | Hard-working, put a lot of time in role, activities |
| Influential; have access to tables I don't        | Want to hold institution accountable                |
| High capacity to understand issues                | Collaborative in sharing resources                  |
| Often confident, extroverted, outgoing            | So far beyond idealistic, it's kind of endearing    |
| Not to be feared!                                 |   |
| <i>Challenging traits</i>                         |   |
| May not be able to forecast trouble, manage risk  | Value orientations can be different                 |
| Sometimes in it for the name/position             | May lack communication skills                       |
| Over-confident and unprepared, naïve              | Taking on a thankless job                           |
| Suspicious if not provided information            | Antagonistic  |
| Can be overly optimistic, or pessimistic          | Not representative of student body                  |
| Too much conflict and tension                     | Too busy fighting with each other                   |
| Highly traditional (e.g. initiation ceremonies)   | Sometimes are judged by predecessor                 |

***Core personal values and how they can be implemented in professional practice***

| <b>Personal Value</b>            | <b>Professional Practice</b>  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Honesty<br>Integrity<br>Fairness | Demonstrating trustworthiness<br>Respecting confidentiality and privacy<br>Understanding conflicts of interest<br>Genuineness, authenticity to yourself, keeping it "real"<br>Congruence between statements and actions<br>Role modelling<br>Truth-telling<br>Understanding of role as public servant<br>Giving unique responses to situations<br>Not being ruled by policies/process<br>Respecting policies/process<br>Unflappability, not being easily shocked<br>Ability to revisit issues<br>Understanding of own power |
| Care<br>Empathy<br>Compassion    | Dedication to student support<br>Genuinely valuing people and student contact<br>Strong listening skills  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>Benefiting others<br/>Contextual decision-making, open-mindedness<br/>Doing no harm<br/>Positive outlook<br/>Patience</p>  |
| <p>Equity<br/>Social Justice</p>                | <p>Appreciation for diversity<br/>Openness to difference<br/>Not being an ideologue<br/>Inclusive, ethically-sensitive decision-making<br/>Sense of social conscience<br/>Working to create responsible citizens<br/>Community-centred<br/>Our work is needed to teach how to rid the world of major injustices, e.g. through collaboration, conflict resolution</p>                        |
| <p>Lifelong Learning</p>                        | <p>Commitment to scholarship<br/>Being an educator and valuing learning experience<br/>Evidence-based practice, assessment<br/>Learning from students<br/>Reflection, including about own personal post-secondary experience<br/>Ethic of self-improvement</p>  |
| <p>Commitment to student affairs profession</p> | <p>Fostering strong people, team approach<br/>Enjoying having ideas challenged<br/>Breaking down silos<br/>Respectful of process and policy<br/>Honouring student affairs history<br/>Collegiality<br/>Care in planning, implementation, resource management<br/>Representing university, university's mission<br/>Hard-working, not a "9-5 job"<br/>Passion, creativity and dedication</p> |
| <p>Student-centredness</p>                      | <p>Listening to and hearing students' voices, open to what they bring to the table<br/>Valuing individual students as adults<br/>Respecting students' autonomy<br/>Lack of defensiveness<br/>Staying current with students, not constantly referring back to own personal post-secondary experience</p>   |

**Values conflicts****Campus environment, administration**

- Lack of fit between institutional values and personal values
- Stated institutional mission/values and actual practice not aligned
- Conventional environment which prioritizes aspects like professional appearance
- Isolated or siloed departments
- Lag regarding initiatives commonly seen at other institutions
- Senior administration not student-centred; challenge in acting as a bridge between senior administration and student leaders who are both acting from a different set of principles
- Institutional interests placed above those of students
- Having to “choose your battles” and not being able to speak truth to power
- Change in senior administration causes reassessment of personal/professional philosophy
- Extremely hierarchical institution
- Students able to jump the queue if they contact senior administration
- Superiors not role modelling appropriate/ethical behaviour
- Utilitarian versus care-based approach
- Revenue-generating and student life ancillaries grouped together
- Other divisions of institution have different goals or approaches regarding student life/services
- Lack of consistency between divisions (e.g. pub offering licensed event during orientation)
- Staff in another division behaving in hurtful or manipulative way
- Lack of respect for people’s time
- Lack of clear ethical guidelines (n.b. also seen as an advantage, as this allows for reflection and self-examination on issues)
- Resource allocation and decision-making around it; lack of resources
- Lack of transparency and accountability
- Information is not shared, to detriment of students and/or institution (e.g. because of confidentiality)
- Institution is not diverse, efforts around equity are token
- Always battling for credibility

**Staff management**

- Boundary issues between staff and students (e.g. friendships, intimate relationships)
- Boundary issues between staff members
- Sharing of personal information with students, staff members
- Challenge of maintaining fairness and impartiality
- Staff being very ideological and unable to see the bigger picture
- Insufficient attention to scale in terms of resource allocation
- Balancing multiple agendas
- Supporting new staff who are former student leaders
- Less experienced staff reacting in an overly harsh manner to disciplinary issues
- Balance between supporting staff and ensuring students’ needs are met

- Staff being over-scrupulous to the detriment of students (e.g. in policy interpretation)
- Maintaining professional relationship even with difficult staff member
- Balance between care for staff member versus resources (e.g. long-serving staff member who is no longer as effective)
- Staff member values not congruent (e.g. lack of support for equity programming, agnostic working on multifaith issues)

### **Policy and decision-making**

- Challenge in involving all stakeholders
- Major resistance from students (e.g. around code of conduct)
- Policy structure out of date/not respectful of students
- Being responsible for implementing policy that is not student-centred
- Administering policies without the authority to change them
- Striking balance between following policy, and meeting needs of student/student group
- Not all cases are clear-cut; policy may not be flexible enough
- Policies not adequately communicated to students
- Ensuring students are valued as individuals and rights are respected (e.g. in disciplinary cases)
- Being able to minimize negative impact on students while instilling sense of personal responsibility
- Policies on confidentiality may cause harm to students, institution
- Finding appropriate people from whom to see advice
- Balancing freedom of expression with support of marginalized groups (e.g. racist student newspaper articles, religious objections to homosexuality)

### **Students**

- Balancing caring, with holding students accountable and responsible
- Giving students room to learn from their own experiences
- Deciding when intervention is needed or appropriate
- Students are adults but may not be making adult decisions
- Expectation of students responsibly accessing resources when needed isn't always met
- Senior administration has "sink or swim" mentality regarding students
- Students have career-focussed mentality rather than appreciating educational opportunity
- Changes in communication, campus culture (e.g. online social networking)
- Maintaining credibility and trust with student unions; automatic mistrust is a problem
- Desire to be transparent around university decision-making/finances not always possible
- Student union lack of transition leads to inconsistency, revisiting issues
- Student leader decisions are negative, or demonstrate different priorities
- Students may find it difficult to speak out against decisions they disagree with
- Students may have conflicting roles (e.g. representative versus leader)
- Participants' positive relationships with student leaders may negatively affect perception of them by senior administration

- Ambiguous role when student leaders in conflict with senior administration
- Working with clubs/student groups whose values are not congruent with your own; ensuring fair treatment
- Challenge in maintaining consistency or disciplining student staff/volunteers
- Not letting one or two negative student experiences affect overall approach

**Personal**

- Balancing day-to-day with professional development/research
- Having time for learning and reflection
- Maintaining work-life balance
- Family and friends not understanding time commitments
- Presenting serious/professional demeanour while still exhibiting own personality
- Balancing transparency with bluntness/candour