

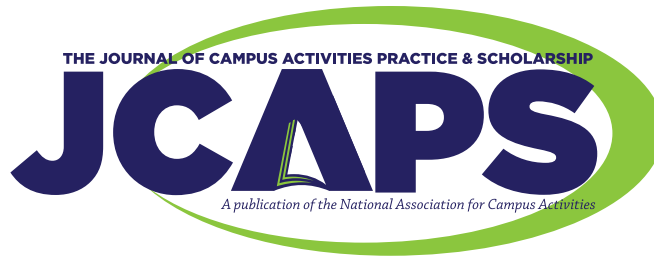
**THE JOURNAL OF CAMPUS ACTIVITIES  
PRACTICE & SCHOLARSHIP**

# JCAPS

*A publication of the National Association for Campus Activities*

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*The Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship* (JCAPS) is a social science peer-reviewed journal. It focuses on publishing rigorous, relevant, and respected scholarship related to postsecondary education co-curricular campus activities, and translating such scholarship to practice. It especially encourages submissions from practitioners throughout higher education.

Typical submissions to the journal cover topics such as:

Student and leadership development within campus activities

Programming within a diverse and multicultural campus

Advising students and their organizations

Campus programming, governance, and/or funding boards

Assessing the effects of student involvement in campus activities

Navigating political and legal issues in working with students

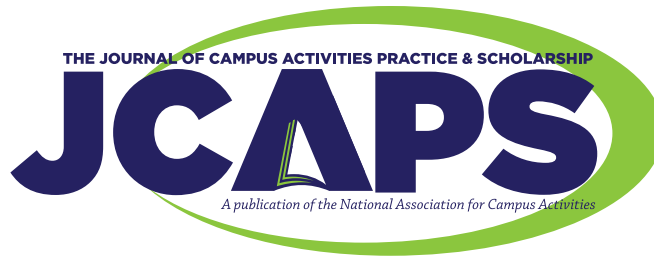
Professional development for staff and faculty who work with students

Authors can find more information about the submission process at [naca.org/JCAPS](http://naca.org/JCAPS).

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## NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to Volume 1, Issue 1 of “The Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship” (JCAPS), a publication of the National Association for Campus Activities. I will not bore you, reader, with details describing the amount of work required to create a scholarly academic journal from the seed of an idea, but trust that it is considerable and years in the making. Numerous people have been involved, from The NACA® Board of Directors, NACA staff, volunteers who serve on the JCAPS Advisory and Editorial Boards, and most importantly, those who authored and reviewed the articles within this issue. Thank you to all who had a hand in ushering JCAPS into existence!

For the inaugural issue, the JCAPS Advisory Board elected to include articles authored by invitation on specifically identified topics. We utilized author invites because we wanted the first issue to “put a stake in the ground.” They reflect our thoughts on the state of the field of campus activities in postsecondary education, and we wanted to provide examples of the types of articles we are looking for in future issues. All subsequent issues will include articles that have undergone a double-blind peer review (where authors are unaware of who reviewed their writing, and reviewers are unaware of who authored what they reviewed.)

Our goals are that the current and future articles:

- Deepen our understanding of the work of campus activities in ways that support student growth and learning.
- Rigorously inform campus activities practitioners in ways that contribute to their increased effectiveness.
- Help build a foundational body of knowledge in campus activities work that is accessible broadly to anyone working with young people and their development.

This first issue addresses some of the foundational topics of campus activities scholarship and practice:

- How does the work of campus activities contribute to the larger enterprise of postsecondary education?
- Why, really, do we require programmatic staff to possess a graduate degree, and how can we better integrate scholarship and the day-to-day practice of campus activities?
- What is the current body of knowledge regarding how students are affected by campus activities work, and what are relevant directions for future research?
- How can campus activities professionals more effectively build their own rigorous body of knowledge when doing their work?

Future issues will include four different “columns”:

1. *Empirical Research* that focuses on current research that contributes to our body of knowledge in working in campus activities.
2. *Scholarship-to-Practice* pieces that are designed to help practitioners integrate what is known about campus activities work into their own practice.
3. *Media Reviews* that connect resources available for students and campus activities professionals to student learning and developmental theory.
4. *Focus on Emerging Scholars* (for current graduate students and those with less than three years of professional experience) to contribute a smaller piece to one of the three other columns.

More details about these columns can be found at [naca.org/JCAPS](http://naca.org/JCAPS).

Our first issue has exemplary articles situated within three of these columns. One examines the effects of engagement in the types of initiatives common in campus activities on student thriving. Another provides suggestions for practitioners on working with comedians — and their campus colleagues — where material the comedian expresses some campus community members might find offensive. A final article discusses an investigation into “high-impact learning practices” in extra-curricular contexts common with campus activities work.

We sincerely hope you find these articles helpful to your own work and scholarship. JCAPS aims for two issues per year; we hope you consider writing for the Journal.

**David M. Rosch**

Editor in Chief

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



# HOW CAMPUS ACTIVITIES CAN LEAD THE MODERN UNIVERSITY: FIVE IMPERATIVES

Gwendolyn Dungy, NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education  
Adam Peck, Stephen F. Austin State University

THE POINT THAT HIGHER EDUCATION IS UNDERGOING DISRUPTIVE CHANGE is made so frequently that it has almost become a cliché. But like many platitudes, the frequency with which it is repeated is a testament to its broad acceptance and central importance in the field of higher education. A glance at the history of this profession reveals the often seismic shifts that have at once shaken our foundations and subsequently revolutionized how we teach, support and develop our students. In short, higher education is in constant flux, and while this change may seem to be occurring at higher rates of speed, change has always been a part of higher education, and professionals have always needed to adapt to keep up.

So in what ways is higher education currently changing? Perhaps no other change is more noticeable than the dramatic increase in the cost of attending college – and the extent to which the burden for paying for college has been shifted to the students. Addressed less often is the extent to which this change shapes students’ expectations of college.

Depending on the age of the individual reading this piece, one’s experiences in college may have been quite different. More seasoned readers likely went to college in a time in which higher education was seen as a public good. The state and federal government highly subsidized the costs of pursuing a degree based on the philosophy that an educated person was an asset to a democratic society.

Younger readers are more likely to have gone to school during a time in which higher education has been broadly seen as a consumer good. If someone wants to secure a good future and enhance their social mobility, they might decide to invest in a college degree. If they are successful in completing a college degree, this approach remains effective in improving one’s life, despite the high cost (Torpey, 2018).

How do students pay for the increasing cost of higher education? One way is that the vast majority are working more than previous generations. In his message to members in the NASPA Leadership Exchange magazine, NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education President Kevin Kruger notes that “40 percent of full-time students and almost 80 percent of part-time students work while attending college” (Kruger, 2018, p. 4). This fact alone dramatically changes the college experience for many. It deprives these individuals of time for study and likely inhibits their participation in co-curricular experiences. From a practical standpoint, the more hours a student works, the less time they have for involvement on campus.

As costs have risen, colleges and universities have also faced more stiff competition from each other to attract students. Projections indicate that the number of high school graduates should begin in the next decade to flatten and then steadily decline (Selingo, 2018). Such changes have required a change in approach for how colleges and universities market themselves that some would argue exacerbates the commodification of higher education. This shift might be best described as moving from selling education as *transformative* to selling it as *transactional*. In this context, it may appear as though the purpose of college is simply to complete a degree, rather than to develop, grow and learn. Participating in experiences outside of the classroom may feel likewise superfluous since it is not required to complete the degree.

It is imperative that campus activities professionals not only avoid the trap of the transactional approach to higher education but fully embrace the transformative possibilities of this work. For example, it would be limiting to view the role of campus activities as simply providing engaging events for the campus. To the end that such a view implies a lack of substance, the result could be fewer resources allocated by campus leaders who may see students' "entertainment" as a luxury in a time of scarcity (Cummings and Peck, 2017, p. 149-150). But if campus activities professionals embrace the potential of transformative education, the field can positively contribute and provide leadership for the field in the uncertain times ahead. This article offers guidance on how this can be accomplished.

## STUDENTS ARE CHANGING

As we peer into the future, it is imperative that the modern college and university continue to focus on the needs of students. Such focus requires an understanding of the changing needs, perceptions, and desires of a new generation of students. For example, colleges and universities will have to move beyond the "Millennial generation." Two younger generations follow Millennials: Generation Z (students born from 1995 through the beginning of the present decade) and Generation Alpha. While the Alphas will not hit college campuses for another decade, Generation Z is the group that colleges and universities serve today (Seemiller and Grace, 2016). According to Seemiller and Grace (2017), this generation "... has been profoundly shaped by the advancement of technology, issues of violence, a volatile economy, and social justice movements. While these issues also have affected those in other generations, the historical context of these individuals is much deeper than those in Generation Z, who may have never known anything different" (p. 22).

What's more, Selingo (2018) notes that "The cohort that arrives on campus in the 2020s will be more racially and ethnically diverse, and will include more first-generation and low-income students than any other group of undergraduates previously served by American higher education" (para 1). Campus activities is in a propitious position to impact the ability of colleges and universities to meet the needs of a changing demographic of students. To accomplish this, campus activities professionals must adapt. In the sections that follow, we lay out five imperatives that can guide practitioners as they approach this work.

### IMPERATIVE 1: LEVERAGE THE POWER OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In the past, professionals in the field of campus activities may have wished for a generally accepted, well-defined, and standardized description of their work across all colleges and universities. It can be tempting to think that because campus activities includes such a wide variety of programs for student engagement, it may appear less professional than some more well-defined units and departments. However, its historic expansiveness and porous boundaries make campus activities in the modern college and university the perfect umbrella under which all student engagement could be located.

There is a growing body of research that substantiates the importance of student engagement, often in surprising ways. One example lies in the work of Gallup, whose efforts to define and measure well-being illustrate that engagement matters not only in college but can make an impact across one's lifespan as well. In *Great Jobs*

*Great Lives*, Gallup reported that 29% of Americans say that they are not thriving in any of the five elements considered in the research (purpose wellbeing, social wellbeing, financial wellbeing, community wellbeing, and physical wellbeing). College graduates are considerably less likely to be in the same predicament. Only about 17% say they are not thriving in any of the elements – and more than 10% say they are thriving in all five elements (Gallup-Purdue Index, 2014).

Gallup’s research confirms the impact a college degree makes on one’s wellbeing. But what was even more compelling (and relevant for campus activities professionals) was what the research concluded about the impact of engagement:

*...where graduates went to college ... hardly matters at all to their current well-being and their work lives in comparison to their experiences in college. .... Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates (Gallup-Purdue Index, 2014, p. 4).*

If a graduate was emotionally attached to the institution, their odds of thriving in all areas of wellbeing were two times higher, and even higher if the graduate felt that institution had prepared them well for life beyond college. Seeing one’s work in campus activities in these terms elevates our role from simply providing opportunities for fun and entertainment to carefully cultivating an environment in which students feel challenged, supported and cared for. Campus activities professionals are uniquely prepared for leading this endeavor.

Considering the engagement needs of modern students, campus activities has many advantages. Generation Z prefers to learn independently, involving others “only when they must” (Seemiller and Grace, 2016, p. 23). While the focus and self-determination inherent in this approach have many positive attributes, it is in stark contrast to the kinds of skills and attributes employers are often looking for in recent college graduates such as teamwork, collaboration, and leadership (Career Readiness Defined, n.d.). By contrast to the dreaded group project, co-curricular learning opportunities that are abundant in campus activities offer a fun and compelling version of the group project. Consider a campus programming board that plans complex events and initiatives. This kind of experience essentially demands that students work together and that they work closely with their advisor as well.

In the report *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, Kuh (2008) shows how students who participate in these kinds of high-impact practices out-perform their peers who do not. These practices “typically demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks,” and place “students in circumstances that essentially demand they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters” (Kuh, 2008, p. 14).

One way that campus activities can lead the modern university is to leverage the power of student engagement. Practitioners would be advised to be mindful of the impact that this connection can make on students’ learning from co-curricular experiences and the impact that it can make on their wellbeing throughout their life. We also must help others outside of our profession to understand this impact so our work will not be so easy to dismiss as extraneous to the process of higher education.

## **Engaging Students: The Potential Gamification of Higher Education**

*by Gwendolyn Dungy*

It was more than a decade ago that I struck up a conversation at an airport with an interesting young man while we waited for our respective flights. What made him interesting to me was the way he was dressed. His fancy boots alone could have made him stand out from everyone else. He was wearing all black, topped off with a black silver-studded leather jacket. A heavy silver chain hung in a loop from his jean pocket down to his boot. He also looked as if he had not slept for a while. *(continued)*



Intruding on his privacy, I asked this young man where he was headed. He said he was going to Los Angeles to participate in a gaming conference. At this point, I knew that there was some interest in gaming, but a conference! I was curious and asked him to tell me about it. With more than a little enthusiasm, he told me that thousands of people would be attending, and he would be offering a session on game development. He added, with what I thought was a touch of pride, that he had something of a reputation as a game developer.

Out of courtesy, I suspect, he inquired about my work. When he learned that I was involved with colleges and universities, he began to chuckle and said, “No offense, but you all have no idea about how to motivate people to learn.” He said that he liked to learn but did not have the patience to do so the way colleges and universities taught.

He gave me an example of how gamers he knew could never sit through a 60-minute lecture but could stay up for 30 hours playing a video game. He had my complete attention as he went on to say, “You all don’t know how to incentivize people to keep trying in order to get the reward and then be motivated to keep trying to move to the next level.” He noted how small the reward might be in a game he might develop such as the image of a balloon released at just the right time when a gamer was at a decision point of continuing the game or quitting. I wanted to hear more, but there was no time.

Nevertheless, this brief airport conversation was insightful and enlightening to me. I felt as if I had discovered something that I needed to share with student affairs professionals and faculty. My very next speech to senior student affairs administrators was about the coming revolution of gaming and how its influence on our students would have a profound impact on colleges and universities.

I told the senior administrators that most of our students in the future would be gamers and that faculty and student affairs staff would need to observe and learn what was important to them to more effectively help them to achieve learning outcomes inside and outside of the classroom. I shared demographics on gamers and stressed the generation gap between educators and learners.

I urged the senior administrators to begin to work with their staff to understand the learning styles and some of the common characteristics of gamers, many of which might appear incongruent with the ideals of higher education. For example, according to Beck and Wade (2004), gamers want to be entertained and treated as customers. I wanted the administrators to realize that our job was to imagine a future of higher education when the majority of our students would be gamers with particular expectations that colleges and universities would have to meet. Toyama (2015), for example, examined a potential future in which postsecondary institutions invested in gamifying their courses and experiences.

“Students as gamers” is no longer a new phenomenon. However, the same imperatives of knowing who our students are and what motivates them must be priorities in working with our newest generation of students. Engagement programs that explicitly provide opportunities for leadership education and development and are unified for collaboration under the umbrella of Campus Activities is a prudent and sound direction to pursue in meeting the expectations of new students in the modern university.

## IMPERATIVE 2: TARGET INSTITUTIONWIDE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As we continue to explore an enhanced role for campus activities in the modern university, it will be necessary to think about how this work advances important goals of the institution. Engagement is an important outcome of work in campus activities, but it should not be pursued singularly. Campus activities can impact the pursuit of many important institutional outcomes.

A traditional view of the postsecondary student experience is that learning takes place in the classroom, while experiences outside of the classroom exist largely to promote a lively campus environment. As Benjamin and Hamrick (2011) wrote, “Beliefs associating student learning with particular times and classroom spaces are persistent and long-standing” (p. 23). Blake-Jones (2011) attributes this to the belief that “...student affairs educators are not always sure of our purpose or we fail to convincingly represent our role as educators to others” (p. 36).

Light (2001) conducted a study of Harvard students, asking them about the most influential learning experiences during their college years, writing:

*I assumed the most important and memorable academic learning goes on inside the classroom, while outside activities provide a useful but modest supplement. The evidence shows the opposite is true ... When we asked students to think of a specific, critical incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, four-fifths of them chose a situation or event outside the classroom (p. 8).*

How would the approach of campus activities professionals be different if all of them focused on outcomes beyond just attending to student satisfaction or the learning and development outcomes of the students who plan these events? Could we demonstrate the impact on students’ wellbeing that comes from joining a student organization, making sustaining friendships that provide support throughout the college years? What about the important outcome of diversity and intercultural fluency? Could we show that students who get involved in co-curricular experiences are more likely to meaningfully connect with others from different backgrounds and perspectives?

The future of higher education will likely have fewer boundaries. One’s work will be less confined by a particular office, program or functional area. The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education, traditionally known for helping higher education professionals assess their effectiveness in a variety of functional areas is recognizing the need to shift the perspective from the efficacy of individual areas to a more holistic approach. The forthcoming 10th edition of the CAS Standards will include two new cross-functional frameworks. According to CAS President Gavin Henning, these frameworks will consider, “... issues that span multiple offices such as first-year experiences and high-risk behaviors” (para. 4).

In the Fall 2017 edition of NASPA Leadership Exchange, Pam Watts, Executive Director of the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation (NIRSA) addressed the need for colleges and universities to go “upstream” in order to address the critical issue of wellness on campus (p. 11). Campus activities must take a similar approach to issues such as student success – including the persistence of at-risk students. There also is a potential to impact students’ ability to work in teams, their critical thinking and reasoning skills and a host of other skills and abilities. In addition to being a desired outcome from a college education, these skills are highly desirable by employers.

### IMPERATIVE 3: HELP STUDENTS GAIN PRACTICAL SKILLS

According to Seemiller and Grace (2017), Generation Z is hardwired to seek real-world learning experiences. They are selective about how they spend their limited time, questioning whether a particular course or activity will prepare them for an increasingly competitive world (Seemiller and Grace, 2016, p. 37).

Ultimately, the goal of engagement programs is to provide learners the opportunity to acquire the skills they need when they enter the world of work and when they carry out their responsibilities as ethical and socially responsible leaders.

While there are many experiences in which students can gain employability skills, campus activities can be particularly fertile ground. For more than six decades, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has collected employers’ perspectives on the skills necessary for success in the workplace (Mackes, 2017). Mackes (2017) reports that “certain skills and attributes have consistently appeared on the list, reinforcing the fact that these are not short-lived trends” (p. 5). In the recent report, *Career Readiness Defined*, NACE

lists eight skills desired by employers: critical thinking/problem solving; oral and written communications; teamwork/collaboration; digital technology; leadership; professionalism/work ethic; career management; and global intercultural fluency.

It is easy to imagine how students can gain these skills through participation in a wide variety of co-curricular experiences. In the book, *Engagement and Employability: Integrating Career Learning Through Cocurricular Experiences in Postsecondary Education*, authors representing six professional associations in student affairs and nine distinct cocurricular experiences discuss how these experiences can promote the development of employability skills (Peck, 2017). Findings from Project CEO (Cocurricular Experience Outcomes) reported in the book also bolster the assertion that this learning is both naturally occurring and can be cultivated (Griffin, Peck and LaCount, 2017).

Perhaps the most exciting possibility that stems from focusing learning outcomes in co-curricular experiences toward employability skills is the ability to accomplish a long-desired goal of higher education that has remained out of our grasp – the hope for a truly integrative learning environment.

Our collective inability to overcome this limitation is based upon focusing on technical skills (hard skills) rather than transferable skills (soft skills). Data from Project CEO show that students gain both technical skills (hard skills) and transferable skills (soft skills) from their classes. When campus activities professionals align their learning outcomes to these skills, it brings classroom and co-curricular learning together. While the nearly infinite variety of possible technical skills makes it impossible to apply all of them in a co-curricular context, focusing on transferable skills ensures that the skills students gain will complement their academic learning and their experiences inside and outside of the classroom will connect like never before.

Skills desired by employers such as teamwork, critical thinking or leadership cannot be learned without a context in which to apply them. Campus activities provides that context, serving as yet another way that this profession can provide leadership within the modern university. In particular, leadership education will be increasingly important.

#### IMPERATIVE 4: FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

While many academic programs exist that focus on leadership, a significant advantage of programs in campus activities is that they offer the opportunity to learn leadership while practicing it. For this reason, campus activities professionals can play a significant role in the modern university through an intentional focus on improving leadership development on campus.

Data from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership revealed that on many campuses, leadership development is in need of improvement (Owen, 2012). While there are many ways that institutions could accomplish this, it makes sense to align leadership education with employability skills. As Kruger and Peck (2017) write, “The alignment between these skills and the kinds of learning outcomes already pursued in student affairs is clear. The data are compelling and suggest that a myriad of experiences are embedded in co-curricular learning that can help develop [these] skills” (p. xii-xiv).

A new approach to developing employability skills in leadership development programs can be found in the Cocurricular Career Connections (C3) Leadership Model (Peck and Preston, 2018). The C3 model offers a structure for integrating a variety of experiences on and off campus, including 1) connecting cocurricular learning to classroom learning, 2) connecting experiential learning to learning in structured leadership development programs, and 3) connecting learning in college to learning throughout one’s career. The C3 model demonstrates how leadership educators can design programs that draw students into deeper participation in co-curricular experiences. The model also creates a meaningful connection between leadership development experiences in college and professional development throughout one’s career.

Leadership development is not well understood, even by many who endeavor to promote student leadership through co-curricular experiences. Campus activities professionals can do much to contribute to the modern university by enhancing their ability to develop student leaders through participation in co-curricular experiences they advise.

## IMPERATIVE 5: REIMAGINE ASSESSMENT WITH STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

Without a doubt, assessment and accountability will continue to be priorities for administrators in supporting the claims of the institution in contributing to the success of students. To make a case for providing opportunities for every student to acquire leadership skills, administrators need evidence that outcomes from engagement programs do indeed contribute to student success as defined broadly by the institution and as specifically expected by students and families.

Students must be at the center of everything that we do. In the realm of assessment, this means that we cannot treat student learning as if it is a small part of assessment. We must remember that assessment is but a small part of student learning. In practical terms, this means we must plan for more than just assessing student learning, we must methodically and intentionally think about how this learning can be derived from students experiences. Many programs write lists of student learning outcomes they are measuring, but how many make a detailed plan for how this learning will take place?

Finally, campus activities professionals must share the data collected about students to help them develop and grow. It is important to create assessment strategies that help students benchmark their learning against their peers and their past selves as they develop and grow.

## CONCLUSION

Eric Hoffer (1982) wrote, “In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists” (p. 30). Campus activities should heed this warning. As costs continue to rise, and competition increases, it is unlikely that anecdotal evidence of student learning will suffice to secure resources for our programs. Campus activities professionals must embrace our role as educators and prepare ourselves to speak this truth loudly and repeatedly to our stakeholders. We must show how student engagement benefits students and advances the goals and objectives of the institution. We must show internal and external stakeholders how student leadership benefits students during college and prepares them for successful careers. We must also be prepared to prove everything we say through assessment. If we remember to keep students at the center of this assessment, we will better empower our students and graduates to tell our story as well.

The imperatives outlined here are significant, and for many may require a substantial change in approach. But if, as a profession, campus activities is able to make progress in this direction, we should be prepared to not only survive in the modern university, but to lead within it.

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# ENGAGEMENT WITH CAMPUS ACTIVITIES MATTERS: TOWARD A NEW ERA OF EDUCATIONALLY PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES

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AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN CONCERNED WITH THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE since their founding when *in loco parentis* was a *de facto* model of the student-institutional relationship. The nature of that relationship has changed over time but consistently demonstrated a concern and responsibility that colleges and universities had for the holistic student experience. This article will situate student affairs practice and campus activities in the evolution of higher education with an emphasis on how purposefully designing campus activities advance desirable learning and developmental outcomes for students.

## BUILDING ON HIGHER EDUCATION HISTORY

Since the founding of American higher education, students have found ways to organize themselves around their interests leading to a plethora of formal and informal organizations and experiences that include foci that are, for example, intellectual, social, recreational, cultural, political, humanitarian, and spiritual. Arminio (2015) notes one of the first such organizations was the Oxford Union, founded in 1823 to bring students together to debate the issues of the day. It eventually expanded to engage students in other interests including hobbies, literature, poetry, and various recreational activities (Arminio).

Soon, colleges began to address other student needs and interests including academic advising, personal counseling, mental health, physical health, orientation to the college experience, financing college, housing, self-governance, sports and recreation, and career planning and job seeking. Colleges also identified institutional needs to organize how they admitted students, held students accountable (i.e., conduct), and established necessary processes such as how students registered for courses. More recently colleges began addressing the intersectional complexity of students' identity (e.g., their race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, first generation, SES, religion), their alignment within the university (e.g., class year, academic major, enrollment status such as being part-time, commuter, distance learner, student employee), and their salient campus group identity (e.g., student-athletes, veterans, members of Greek-letter or cultural groups). Awareness of these intersections is essential to focus programs and other interventions to truly meet students' needs and address their distinct issues. This sensitivity is growing in the United States culture and is evident when seeking to understand international perspectives in post-secondary education and civic relationships as well.

As these complexities developed at the end of the 19th century, some faculty assumed roles as deans and admin-

istrators of various functions addressing critical needs. It is important to note that faculty have always been concerned with the student experience (Schetlin, 1969). Over 100 years ago, campuses began hiring additional staff to serve as educators and administrators of the out-of-classroom experience for students. These staff organized their work to benefit students and their institutions and various specialties in student affairs began to emerge. One of those professional focus areas that emerged has addressed students and their organizations and activities; the professionals in that field later organized as the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) in 1960.

It is beyond the scope of this article to address the development of the broad student affairs field in detail, which includes foundational guiding documents like the 1937 Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937). Still, it is important to note the evolution of the out-of-classroom experience or the extra-curriculum that became the co-curriculum functioning in unity with the academic curriculum to address designated college outcomes.

## CAMPUS ACTIVITIES IN THE RECENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT

NACA has reshaped student activities work dramatically in the last fifty years. During this period, professional leaders realized that their work benefitted the whole campus and that faculty and staff members, alumni, and the community were often participants in campus events and programs. The focus of this reframing led to the naming of their work as *campus* (as broader than *student*) activities, signaling the broader mission.

Building on such essential functions as programming, contracting major events and being experts in entertainment, NACA leaders in the 1970s substantially raised expectations of activities advisors and activities staff toward higher levels of professionalism. In the context of the times, Chickering (1969) published his psychosocial developmental vectors; the holistic wellness model was promoted by the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point (Hettler, 1976) and became widely adopted; the promotion of intentional uses of student development theory stimulated intentional practices (Knfelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978; Miller & Prince, 1976); the advancement of a coordinated curriculum (Brown, 1972); and NACA and her sister association the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) reframed the nature and purpose of campus activities and programs. For example, in 1973, NACA leaders Kathy Allen and Margi Healy added a professional development track to their regional ACUI and NACA conference. They worked with others toward the eventual publication of the NACA guide to professional development, *Future perfect: A guide for professional development and competence* (Allen, Jillian, Stern, Walborn, & Blackstone, 1987) that promoted staff competencies to support a developmental curriculum for students engaged in activities experiences.

## CONTEMPORARY MISSION AND ROLE OF CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

Campus activities play a pivotal role in today's campuses in creating campus community and educating students through diverse co-curricular programming. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was co-founded by NACA in 1979 and NACA has been an active associational member ever since. Organized to create and advance standards and the self-assessment of programs impact on student learning and development, CAS currently is comprised of 41 higher education associations with 44 individual standards of practice approved by CAS Board representatives of all member associations. The CAS standard on Campus Activities Programs (CAP) identifies that the CAP purpose:

*... must be to enhance the overall educational experience of students through development of, exposure to, and participation in programs and activities that improve student cooperation and leadership while preparing students to be responsible advocates and citizens and complementing the institution's academic program. (CAS, 2015, p. 87)*

The CAS standard goes on to assert that:

CAP must provide opportunities for students to:

- participate in co-curricular activities;
- participate in campus governance;

- advocate for their organizations and interests;
- develop leadership abilities;
- develop healthy interpersonal relationships;
- use leisure time purposefully;
- develop ethical decision-making skills; and
- advocate for student organizations and interests (p. 87).

Typically in partnership with NACA, college unions frequently house campus activities offices and provide a venue for many of the activities promoted by campus activities staff and student groups. In *The Role of College Union*, ACUI notes the union is “a student-centered organization that values participatory decision making. Through volunteerism, its boards, committees, and its student employment, the union offers firsthand experience in citizenship and educates students in leadership, social responsibility, and values” (ACUI, 2014, para. 2). Fulfilling the purpose of campus activities requires both intentional design of programs and a physical space that can facilitate the learning – the union is often that space and a partner in campus programming.

### **Defining Engagement**

Campus activities units value student involvement and engagement. Campuses have long sought increased student participation in campus activities and leadership opportunities necessitating students invest time and energy in these areas. Increased participation matters as research consistently shows that involved students have long been known to achieve higher grades and persist at higher rates.

Scholar George Kuh (2009) advanced a definition of “engagement” as the time and effort students “devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities (Kuh, 2001, 2003, 2000)” (p. 683). Such a perspective mandates the active role of the campus in designing educationally purposeful activities and reaching out to students to ensure their meaningful involvement to the mutual benefit of the student and the campus community. Quayle and Harper (2014) caution that one can be involved but not engaged. Engaged students expect a return on their investment of time and effort leading them to accomplish the goals of those purposeful activities more successfully. As a beneficial result, engaged students often possess a stronger sense of belonging to their campus.

### **Scope of Activities**

The scope of specific activities varies by institutional type, size, and location. A rural faith-based institution would have different activities than would an urban community college or a doctoral-granting research university. Smaller campuses may have a surprisingly broad array of activities often coordinated by very few professional staff. A rural institution may have to provide comparable opportunities for involvement on campus with limited community resources, while an urban institution may offer fewer big events since their students can already attend large-venue opportunities in the cities in which they are located. The 2015 CAS standard notes a taxonomy of activities that exist to some degree or other based on institutional characteristics. For example, these activities include major speakers, cultural events, clubs and organizations, leadership programs, service learning, and campus media.

## **STUDENT DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES WITHIN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES**

In the 1990s and first decade of the 21st century, campus activities staff continued the earlier emphasis on student learning and developmental outcomes delineated by many professional associations and educators. During this period, general college outcomes were advanced by the American Association of Colleges & Universities, CAS, the inter-association project of NASPA and ACPA that produced *Learning Reconsidered* (2004), NACA, the National Association of College Employers (NACE), and most disciplinary based accrediting associations. An overview of these outcomes noted below shows the remarkable convergence on what is expected for student learning and development.

### **CAS Outcomes**

CAS asserts that the purposeful educational mission of campus activities should address institutional learning



and developmental goals, CAS learning and developmental outcomes, and contribute to the campus community while creating a sense of belonging for community members particularly students. The taxonomy of CAS learning and developmental outcomes was informed by the work of *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004). Built on the research of numerous scholars, this set of outcomes includes six domains and makes it clear that these outcomes are developed both through curricular experiences (e.g., classroom projects, labs) as well as co-curricular experiences (e.g., student media, peer leadership roles, service learning). Table 1 summarizes the CAS learning outcomes and includes sample campus-wide experiences associated with them noted within the original *Learning Reconsidered* document.

Table 1. *Overview of General Student Learning and Developmental Outcomes.\* Integrating CAS Outcomes and Learning Reconsidered (2004)*

Student Outcome Domain	Dimensions of Outcome Domains	Brief Examples of Learning and Development Outcomes	Sample Developmental Experiences for Learning and Development**
<b>Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application</b>	Understanding knowledge from a range of disciplines; Connecting knowledge to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences; Constructing knowledge; Relating knowledge to daily life.	Possesses knowledge of human cultures and the physical world; possesses knowledge of one or more subjects. Uses experience and other sources of information to create new insights. Recognizes one's own capacity to create new understandings from learning activities and dialogue with others. Makes connections between classroom and out-of-classroom learning. Provides evidence of knowledge, skills, and accomplishments resulting from formal education, work experience, community service, and volunteer experiences, for example in resumes and portfolios.	Majors, minors, general education requirements, certificate programs; laboratories; action research; research teams; service learning; group projects; internships; jobs (on/ off campus); career development courses and programs; living-learning communities; Web-based information search skills; activities programming boards (e.g. film, concerts); drama, arts, and music groups; literary magazines; special teams and activities (e.g. solar car, Model UN, Innovation Lab).
<b>Cognitive complexity</b>	Critical thinking; Reflective thinking; Effective reasoning; Creativity.	Identifies important problems, questions, and issues; assesses assumptions and considers alternative perspectives and solutions. Uses complex information from a variety of sources including personal experience and observation to form a decision or opinion; rethinks previous assumptions.	Classroom teaching, readings, and discussions; campus speakers; problem-based learning; action research; study abroad; learning communities; living-learning communities; campus newspaper and media; cultural advocacy groups; LGBT awareness programs; diversity programs; group work in diverse teams; judicial board involvement.
<b>Intrapersonal development</b>	Realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, and self-respect; Identity development; Commitment to ethics and integrity; Spiritual awareness.	Assesses, articulates, and acknowledges personal skills, abilities, and growth areas; articulates rationale for personal behavior; seeks and considers feedback from others; critiques and subsequently learns from past experiences; recognizes and exhibits interdependence by environmental, cultural, and personal values; Incorporates ethical reasoning into action; exemplifies dependability, honesty, and trustworthiness; critiques, compares, and contrasts various belief systems; explores issues of purpose, meaning, and faith.	Identity-based affinity groups; personal counseling; academic/life planning; roommate dialogues; individual advising; support groups; peer mentor programs; religious life programs and youth groups; student-led judicial boards; paraprofessional roles (e.g., resident assistants, peer tutors, sexual assault advisors, peer mentor programs); disability support services; student employment; classroom project groups; classroom discussions; religious youth groups; service learning.
<b>Interpersonal competence</b>	Meaningful relationships; Interdependence; Collaboration; Effective leadership.	Establishes healthy, mutually beneficial relationships with others; treats others with respect; Seeks help from others when needed and offers assistance to others; shares a group or organizational goal and works with others to achieve it; Works cooperatively with others, including people different from self and/or with different points of view; seeks and values the involvement of others; Demonstrates skill in guiding and assisting a group, organization, or community in meeting its goals.	Identity based affinity groups; roommate dialogues; support groups; peer mentor programs; student led judicial boards; paraprofessional roles (e.g. resident assistants, peer tutors, sexual assault advisors, peer mentor programs); disability support services; student employment; classroom project groups; classroom discussions.

<b>Humanitarianism and Civic Engagement</b>	Understanding and appreciation of cultural and human differences; Global perspective; Social responsibility; Sense of civic responsibility.	Understands one's own identity and culture; seeks involvement with people different from oneself; identifies systematic barriers to equality and inclusiveness, then advocates and justifies means for dismantling them; Understands and analyzes the interconnectedness of societies worldwide; Recognizes social systems and their influence on people; appropriately challenges the unfair, unjust, or uncivil behavior of other individuals or groups; Demonstrates consideration of the welfare of others in decision-making; engages in critical reflection and principled dissent.	Engages with diverse membership of student organizations; inter-group dialogue programs; service learning; community-based learning; cultural festivals; identity group programming (e.g., LGBT); ally programs; programs on world religions; study abroad; interdisciplinary courses; curriculum transformation; Various student governance groups like student government/ resident hall government/ commuter student assoc.; sports teams; community-based organizations (e.g., PTA, neighborhood coalitions); emerging leader programs; leadership courses; open forums; teach-ins; activism and protest; community standards codes; involvement in academic department/ major; identity with campus community.
<b>Practical competence</b>	Pursuing goals; Communicating effectively; Technological competence; Managing personal affairs; Managing career development; Demonstrating professionalism; Maintaining health and wellness; Living a purposeful and satisfying life.	Articulates and makes plans to achieve long-term goals and objectives; Conveys meaning in a way that others understand by writing and speaking coherently and effectively; listens attentively to others and responds appropriately; Demonstrates technological literacy and skills; Exhibits self-reliant behaviors; manages time effectively; Recognizes the importance of transferrable skill; Accepts supervision and direction as needed; Engages in behaviors and contributes to environments that promote health and reduce risk; Acts in congruence with personal identity, ethical, spiritual, and moral values.	Campus recreation programs; food service and health center programs; drug and alcohol education; career development courses and programs; financial planning programs; club sports and recreation programs; senior council transition programs; personal counseling; academic/ personal advising; portfolios; senior capstone course.

\*This Council for the Advancement of Standards document is an adaptation of *Learning Reconsidered* (2004) and the CAS Student Learning and Developmental Outcomes, and Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin Gyurmek (1994); George Mason University Critical Thinking Assessment Report (2006). The reader should note the domain column was shortened substantially for this table.

\*\* Adapted from *Learning Reconsidered* (2004).

### National Association for Campus Activities Outcomes

In 2009, NACA adopted a taxonomy of core competencies for student leadership outcomes to be developed through purposeful engagement in campus activities, notably student organizations. The document identified suggested initiatives and evidence of achievement for each of these ten core competencies.

- Leadership Development
- Assessment and Evaluation
- Event Management
- Meaningful Interpersonal Relationships
- Collaboration
- Social Responsibility
- Effective Communication
- Multicultural Competency
- Intellectual Growth
- Clarified Values

Most recently NACA (2017) has adopted a set of competencies that intend to achieve the association's core value of inclusivity through knowledge and practice, culture, engagement and composition, and advocacy and social justice.

### **National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Outcomes**

Colleges and employers are concerned that graduates leave college ready to assume meaningful roles in careers and society. NACE (2016) defined career readiness as, “the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace.” A NACE study of employers (2016) identified eight student competencies for employment:

- Critical Thinking / Problem Solving
- Oral / Written Communications
- Teamwork / Collaboration
- Digital Technology
- Leadership
- Professionalism / Work Ethic
- Career Management
- Global/Intercultural Fluency

The congruence of these employer goals with those of CAS is encouraging and suggests the connections between productive student development goals and attaining effective career outcomes.

### **Disciplinary-Based Accrediting Associations**

Professional associations exist for every degree-granting discipline in higher education. Co-curricular experiences in campus activities directly support the outcomes desired by those who accredit many campus academic majors. Many of these associations assert learning and developmental outcomes for students engaged in these majors. Seemiller and Murray’s (2013; see also Seemiller, 2013) study of the competencies for student learning in these associations identified eight clusters of competencies that directly support campus activities outcomes, including leadership outcomes. These clusters and sample competencies include:

- Learning and Reasoning
- Self-awareness and Development
- Interpersonal Interaction
- Group Dynamics
- Communication
- Civic Responsibility
- Strategic Planning
- Personal behavior

### **A Personal Reflection**

Researching and writing this article vividly reminded me that I personally benefitted from the perspectives my sorority and campus activities educators shared with me during my undergraduate years fifty years ago at Florida State University – namely that the skills I was learning and practicing in my co-curricular experiences were applicable in my future, particularly regarding my professional success. After serving as a graduate assistant in residence life in my master’s program, I initially sought full-time positions in that area. I accepted an entry-level hall director position at the University of Tennessee and was called a few weeks later to see if I would be interested in applying for the newly created Area Coordinator position. When I interviewed for the Area Coordinator position, one of the interviewers noted, “We see that you have not held a full-time position nor supervised other professional staff; why do you think you can handle this position?” I loved that question and said “I have several related experiences I want to share. Please let me start with the experience of being a rush chair for my sorority when over 2,000 first-year women went through the rush process in a week. I had to lead my chapter in everything from our skirts, the budget, and the complexities of member selection ....” I got the job. That college experience was clearly foundational to my belief that I could be successful in this new position. Our goals in campus activities should be that any engaged student would feel the same and know how to articulate their experience.

## **WHAT CAMPUS ACTIVITIES EXPERIENCES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

Experiences that promote a growth-producing impact have been labeled “high-impact practices” (HIPs; Kuh,

2008). Kuh's (2008) research shows that HIPs commonly share the following elements:

- Significant time and effort allocation
- Meaningful interactions with faculty and peers
- Exposure to different others and different viewpoints
- Frequent feedback
- Opportunities to reflect on learning
- Application of learning to real-world contexts
- Demonstration of competence
- High expectations

These pedagogical elements can inform campus activities educators on the intentional design of involvement opportunities to accomplish desired outcomes.

Examples of HIPs identified in the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE) research include writing intensive courses, diversity experiences, learning communities, study abroad, community service, and first-year seminars (Kuh, 2008). While the HIP's identified by Kuh are primarily within academic based experiences and hybrid programs, research has found that these characteristics are present in a number of leadership based activities and through the engagement offered through campus activities. Student experiences identified in the Multi-institutional Study of Leadership as high-impact including holding positional leadership roles, participating in community service, engaging in socio-cultural issues discussions with others, involvement off-campus, and receiving mentoring that contributes to leadership self-efficacy and leadership capacity (Dugan, Kodama, & Correia, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; see leadershipstudy.net).

### **Campus Activities Matter**

The tremendous learning experiences available through engagement with activities, clubs and organizations, and student government have long served as key opportunity points in support of the growing emphasis on student college outcomes (see Table 1). For example, research conducted almost 50 years ago affirmed that engagement with campus activities contributed to future career and leadership success (see AT&T study; Bray, Campbell, & Grant, 1974).

### **College Environments**

Researchers in the late 1980s (e.g., Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991) became interested in the characteristics of colleges that were known for highly engaging their students, and by extension, contributing to their growth and development in holistic ways both inside and outside the classroom. This seminal national study identified five critical characteristics of "involving" colleges:

- A clear, coherent mission and philosophy;
- Campus environments with human-scale attributes that use their location to educational advantage;
- Campus cultures that value student involvement;
- Policies and practices consistent with the institution's mission and students' characteristics; and
- Institutional agents who acknowledge the contribution of learning outside the classroom to achieving the institution's educational purposes.

Subsequently, NSSE (Kuh, 2008) findings affirm that from the perspective of student experiences, more variation exists within an institution than between types of institutions. Campus activities provide rich experiential opportunities for student learning and development *if* students take advantage of them and get involved.

College involvement has benefits that can be measured in alumni. For example, according to the Gallup-Purdue inaugural post-college alumni report (2014) on employee engagement at work, graduates are 1.8 times more likely to be engaged if they were heavily involved in extra-curricular activities in college.

Findings like these illuminate the learning and developmental outcomes colleges and their programs have long claimed to develop in their students (e.g., *Student Learning Imperative*; ACPA, 1996). As the student learning outcomes emphasis grew in the 1990s, campus activities provided venues that contributed to campus climate,

sense of belonging, and the development of specific learning outcomes particularly for those students involved in leadership roles.

### A Plethora of Research Findings

The assessment movement in higher education and research in the 1990s and 2000s demonstrated specific ways of engaging students in campus activities that contributed to desired learning outcomes. Phenomenal compilations of this research have been chronicled in the three volumes of *How College Affects Students* (e.g., Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The most recent edition affirms that establishing a *normative culture* of engagement (i.e., where high expectations and structures exist for a depth of student engagement) in campus activities matters:

*Environments that promoted persistence and degree completion among all students were those in which: (1) students felt that faculty and the broader institution cared about them and their well-being, (2) having on-campus friendships and attending campus activities were normative, (3) graduation and graduate school attendance rates were high, and (4) racial discrimination and prejudice on campus were infrequent. (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 540)*

Mayhew and colleagues (2016) recent review of 21st-century research on college students highlighted key findings related to campus activities observing that not all experiences make a positive impact; some experiences can even have negative outcomes. The findings presented in Table 2 largely affirm the positive developmental impact of the co-curriculum through campus activities engagement.

Table 2: Select Recent Research Findings on Campus Activities\*

Area of Engagement	Summary of Findings
<b>Athletics</b>	In general, participation in intercollegiate athletics was negatively associated with learning and cognitive development. However, athletes also fared better than non-athletes on several outcomes, including degree completion, civic values, community orientation, social self-confidence, and interpersonal skills. (p. 555)
<b>Community Service</b>	Community service participation ... appears to contribute to student outcomes, including increases in various domains of religion/spirituality, leadership capacity, civic/community values, and orientation toward female-dominated careers; the evidence is less clear for political engagement and social justice learning. (p. 556)
<b>Events Attendance</b>	...[C]ultural event attendance predicts increased understanding of arts and humanities. (p. 556)
<b>Fraternity or Sorority Membership</b>	The strongest conclusions were that fraternity or sorority membership negatively affected racial/ethnic attitudes and openness to diverse ideas and people. In contrast, affiliation was positively related to students' development of interpersonal skills, community orientation, and commitment to civic engagement. Other findings varied over time- the negative effects on knowledge acquisition and critical thinking seemed to dissipate after the first year, and the greater engagement in binge drinking disappeared after college graduation. (p. 555)
<b>Interpersonal Diversity Engagement</b>	[T]he most impressive and consistent findings for any form of interpersonal involvement occur for interpersonal diversity including those in general education knowledge, academic competence, intellectual ability, cognition, racial identity and consciousness, religious/spiritual identity, positive masculinities, leadership capacity, self-authorship, well-being, personal/social development, civic and political attitudes, gender-role progressivism, LGB attitudes, artistic orientation, ecumenical worldview, and need for cognition (with mixed findings for career development). ... This list of positive findings is more impressive than that for general peer interactions, which suggests that the benefits of diversity experiences extend beyond simply those associated with peer engagement. (p. 553)
<b>Leadership Training</b>	Leadership training appears to succeed in promoting leadership capacity and civic values... (p. 556). [T]he more students engage diversity, the better prepared they are as leaders. (p. 209). Institutional effects on leadership identity and skills, as well as proclivities for socially responsible leadership, are generally trivial in comparison to within-college effects [Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010]. (p. 189)
<b>Peer Interactions</b>	... [O]verall peer interactions (regardless of with whom these interactions occur) ... are positively related to general learning, cognition, racial identity, intellectual/academic self-concept, autonomy well-being, moral development, retention/graduation, and expected career outcomes (with equivocal findings for the need for cognition). (p. 553)
<b>Religious and spiritual engagement</b>	Religious and spiritual engagement is associated with increased well-being and civic outcomes, and spiritual development may lead to higher grades, degree aspirations, leadership, and self-esteem. These forms of engagement are also positively related to gender-role traditionalism and religious/social conservatism. (p. 555-556)
<b>Student Employment</b>	Employment had a clear nonlinear effect on educational attainment, such that working more than 15 to 20 hours a week was associated with a greater likelihood of attrition. ... working a small number of hours or doing so on campus was positively related to persistence and completion. (p. 555). Employment is positively related to autonomy, citizenship, moral formation, and post-college earnings. (p. 556)

<b>Student Government and Activism</b>	...[P]articipating in organized demonstrations and student government ... support the development of civic values (e.g., influencing the political structure, influencing social values helping others who are in difficulty, becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, developing a meaningful philosophy of life, participating in a community action program, helping to promote racial understanding). Student government effects are small compared to the strong impact of participating in protests (Rhee & Kim, 2011) (p. 279).
<b>Student Organizations</b>	Overall engagement in student organizations is positively associated with retention/graduation and the development of leadership skills, intellectual and academic self-concept, and positive masculinities (although the evidence for cognitive outcomes is mixed). Participation in ethnic student organizations specifically contributes to some of these same outcomes as well as racial identity development (p. 555).

\* All findings are direct quotes from: Mayhew, et al., (2016). *How college affects students: 21st-century evidence that higher education works* (Vol. 3). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## PREPARED CAMPUS ACTIVITIES EDUCATORS

Especially since the publication of *Future Perfect* (Allen, et al., 1987) and continuing through the complexity of today's times, campus activities professionals must meet substantial expectations for their professional work. Since 2007, NACA has assisted professionals in planning their development by providing a comprehensive statement of 46 competencies organized into three primary categories: general knowledge and skills, interactive competencies, and self-mastery (See <https://www.naca.org/Resources/Pages/CampusActivitiesProfessionals.aspx>).

When I was a senior student affairs officer, I expected professionals in each functional area to be experts in the domain of their learning and developmental environment for students. I expected campus activities educators to be campus experts in: (1) building and sustaining a socially just community, (2) creating a climate of inclusive engagement and belonging, (3) advancing leadership and followership capacities in students, (4) assessing the role of engagement in outcomes, (5) scaffolding learning experiences over a four year cycle, and (6) administering ethical and quality project management functions. Today's educators also need to be scholar-practitioners who inform their practice by related theory, models of practice, and research to best accomplish the learning and developmental outcomes that are desired by their campus, division of student affairs, and campus activities office.

## CALL TO ACTION

The launch of *The Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship* (JCAPS) is an important development to further the professionalism of campus activities and to student affairs practice. As a scholarly outlet for critical research, JCAPS will bring timely inquiry into the focused awareness of activities professionals and lead to enhanced, intentional educational practice. The following calls to action may advance these objectives.

### **NACA Research Agenda**

Essential to the success of this journal is that professionals in the field engage in original research on topics of importance to the field. It is laudable that the NACA Foundation supports Advancing Research through Campus Activities Grants. NACA can further promote this momentum with the identification of a research agenda that targets key and compelling questions that need to be addressed in the field.

### **Mentoring through the JCAPS Submission Process**

I have been pleased to see the JCAPS editorial board members construct processes that will serve in mentoring professionals for effective writing that leads to successful publishing. We need more scholarship in the field of campus activities, and I encourage NACA to provide support (e.g., financial, conference program slots, webinars, podcasts) to advance research and publishing.

### **Honor Outstanding Research**

NACA awards should be expanded to honor and acknowledge outstanding research, including outstanding dissertation recognition to further support the importance of research to the association.

## Address Underserved Populations

Campus activities professionals are truly engaging all students in educationally purposeful activities. Such engagement requires revisiting comprehensive aspects of current programs to determine which students may not benefit in ways they could and are therefore underserved populations. Activities professionals need to conduct more scholarship and better connect practices regarding these groups to that scholarship. Particular attention needs to be devoted to:

- *Online learners:* All groups of students learn online, and for some, it is their only mode of connection to the college. They must not be overlooked. Reaching them may be enhanced perhaps through podcasts, live streaming of campus programs, creating on-line organizations, and facilitating how campus-based groups can engage on-line members either in the short term like when studying abroad or on an internship or long-term as a new category of membership. For example, the University of Arizona wisely moved online and distance education into the division of student affairs as a way to ensure this happens.
- *Adult learners:* Campuses have long known they have many adult students, including graduate students, but too often continue to act (and program) as if all students are traditional age undergraduates living on campus. Activities professionals must not only make programs accessible to adults and commuter students but must address adult developmental needs through programming such as on issues of succeeding at work, planning for retirement, their children's development such as raising teenagers and managing adult parents. Developmental needs of adult learners must be addressed.
- *All students' social identities:* In the last 30 years colleges have become exceptionally supportive of needs/issues based on students' social identities and the intersections among those identities. However, there are issues of equity and parity in attending to these needs and many students whose identities are not addressed effectively in many places, such as trans\*students, international students, conservative students as well as movements that demand attention by campus activities educators such as those presented in #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. It will be a continuing need and challenge to research and educate the campus around these issues and needs and others as they emerge in the US societal context.

## Contemporary Challenges

Activities educators have long had to address such challenges as free speech, large group behavior, and issues presented by institutional size and location. Related contemporary challenges include addressing hazing, promoting cultural appreciation, balancing the potentially competing needs for free speech and culturally inclusive environments, and providing responsive support for an increasingly diverse student population. Campus activities educators also possess opportunities and challenges in forming meaningful academic partnerships. Potential opportunity points include co-curricular programs such as entrepreneurialism and innovation labs, academic clubs, and academic honor societies. Activities educators are also increasingly asked for assistance and support when other campus units look to expand their offerings in specialty areas, such as leadership development in recreation programs.

## CONCLUSION

The title of NACA's historic document, *Future Perfect* (Allen et al., 1987), is still a timely one at this point in NACA's history, especially in the context of the founding of JCAPS. Although perfection will never be reached, the quest to be professionals striving for more effective practice to benefit *all* students and our institutions is the right thing to do. Advancing research and engaging in evidence-based practice broadens the pathway toward that more perfect future.

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# GETTING MORE FROM THE MASTERS: INCREASING SCHOLARSHIP IN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES PRACTICE

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## ABSTRACT

*With so many positions in campus activities requiring advanced degrees, campus activities practitioners begin their careers with a depth of understanding of current scholarship in the field. Once arriving to these positions on campuses, however, many practitioners may be challenged to stay engaged when faced with the limitless priorities of daily work. If the profession were to embrace the value of scholarship, it would require new points of view about the work of campus activities practice from institutions, associations, campus leaders and individual professionals. In the context of changing campus activities practice, I suggest a broader conception of the meaning of scholarship as a way to encourage campus activities practitioners to find closer alignment with the academic community within colleges and universities.*

**F**OR A LONG TIME, the context used to understand the way students were learning in college was to study what faculty were teaching. However, students describe their time in college citing transformative experiences with faculty in classroom settings as one of many ways they learned in college. The value of co-curricular learning has been documented for decades (e.g., Light, 2001), yet the learning community of the university frequently still evolves without campus activities professionals engaged within it as teachers, scholars or scholar-practitioners. If campus activities practitioners were able to align their work in greater concert with values of scholarship within an academic community, a greater potential might exist to offer the seamless learning environment that so many universities strive to offer. To that end, this article proposes an examination of influences on the campus activities profession as well as the adoption of Boyer's (1990) frames of scholarship in order to position campus activities in greater alignment with values of an academic community.

## CHANGING TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The evolution of the student affairs profession could be tracked with a starting focus on "student services," emphasizing addressing many transactional needs of students outside of the classroom. It grew to encompass a focus on "student development," as holistic development beyond class-based content and then added a focus on "student learning" after the publication of *Learning Reconsidered* in 2000. After, the additional frame of "student success" arrived to dominate priorities across institutions in a time where examination of retention practices

was now determined crucial to institutional survival. The early mention of the role of campus activities practice in the 1949 version of the Student Personnel Point of View was one of the earliest references to the need for more intentional approaches to co-curricular activities. At this point, the literature base shifted from a focus on reacting to student dynamics to now acknowledge that intervention from professionals could leverage these experiences to yield some important learning impact. With student success at the forefront, and a continued need to continue to deliver on student services, student development, and student learning, institutional leaders must realize that expertise about students is in higher demand than ever.

Today's student affairs educators frequently contemplate ways to bring the work of student affairs from the fringes of the institution's academic mission and more closely aligned with priorities around student learning. Taking this approach with "student affairs" overall is no small task, as professional literature cites anywhere from 8 to 20 departments that may share goals relating to the student experience beyond the classroom (Dungy, 2003; Kuk & Banning, 2009). Given student affairs departments may range from a childcare center to campus police to athletics to residence life, it is not surprising that a standard or consistent approach is hard to find. While many of these functional areas may need to address similar priorities of alignment with values of scholarship in the academic community, for purposes of this article, I will focus on the possibilities that exist for campus activities.

Alongside the changing student affairs profession, the context of teaching and learning was evolving as well. Although credit-based learning continues to be how most institutions define where teaching and learning take place (Wienhausen & Elias, 2017), other shifts have emerged. Campuses have embraced the positive outcomes of interdisciplinary learning, even though students are frequently left to make meaning and connections between these areas. A focus on the "whole student" has created the opening to the idea that structured practices outside of the classroom, such as through the work of campus activities offices, may make an impact on student learning. Institutional investment in high impact practices has influenced campus outcomes for student learning, frequently without mention of campus activities practice on these lists of key activities (Kuh, 2008). Still, the "getting involved" message rings loud and clear from institutional podiums across the country for its value to the student experience. Even with that focus, campus activities practitioners could be the only ones inspiring students to consider how involvement in co-curricular areas might illuminate classroom-based experiences.

## IMAGINING THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOLARSHIP

Changing demographics and dwindling availability of resources charge a practitioner to innovate by documenting outcomes and developing new approaches to expand the impact of their work. On the other hand, assumptions of practitioners' limitless availability frequently force a comparison between priorities of scholarship and the tyranny of the urgent. In short, what's a professional to do when they realize that they have applied their math formula for deciding how much pizza to order for an upcoming event more often than they have applied their knowledge of student development theory?

To imagine a more significant influence of scholarship on the campus activities profession, a basic commitment to scholarship in campus activities practice is a first step. Even with that commitment, it will lack impact until we define the body of literature from this part of the higher education field. Exactly what makes up the base of scholarship for campus activities? Is it student development theory? Organizational development? Leadership literature? Something else? Relevant topics for the campus activities practitioner are difficult to find as we lack a connected level of knowledge that brings our part of the profession together. Material relating to the unique role of student organization advising is notably absent, let alone scholarship that informs the broad range of topics that might be relevant to today's practitioner juggling a vast portfolio of responsibilities. Such absence is not all that surprising, as most student affairs literature is not written by current practitioners, but instead by former practitioners who are now faculty in higher education programs (Allen, 2002; Young, 2001).

To understand the context for the unclear base of scholarship for campus activities, it is instructive to consider the range of academic backgrounds of those entering the field. The master's degree in "higher education, student affairs or related fields" is a frequent requirement, but the influence of scholarship from "related fields" includes

a vast range of content. A new professional with a counseling degree may bring a base of scholarship that focuses on counseling techniques supporting students in crisis, while the new professional with a master's in business administration may draw from literature that serves the business operations of the department. After adding a third new professional with a degree in student affairs or higher education, each of these staff members brings a vastly different base of scholarship. While discussion of unified skill development for this work has focused on a competency model (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2015; National Association for Campus Activities, 2018), this focus on practice does not link to the need for alignment in foundations of scholarship as well.

Professional associations have great potential to yield significant influence on values around scholarship. For campus activities professionals, it is important to note that both the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) and the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) have been citing priorities around scholarship in their association activities for years and making strong progress. While these steps are important, associations must grow these initiatives in the context of engagement opportunities with members, namely the annual meetings and regional conferences. In those settings for these associations, even the most engaged scholar-practitioner is likely to shoulder some responsibilities for selecting, preparing and leading a delegation of a group of students from the university. When responsible for students at professional events, competing priorities most definitely influence how a professional may spend their time. When there is a student emergency, conflict or even an ask to more deeply investigate a certain idea that has been presented, campus activities staff must prioritize such needs and interests of student delegates above any professional development priorities the staff may have.

It is important to add that the breadth of most offices' portfolios presents an especially unique opportunity for association influence. Associations with areas of focus for leadership education, service, fraternity/sorority life, orientation, event management, auxiliary services and more all stand to exert influence on the campus activities professional of today. Each of these functional areas has at least one association primarily focused in this area and, potentially, represents an area for potential engagement with scholarship.

The literature base and the professional associations are one part of the key influences on campus activities as a profession, but the institutional influence is the most significant. It took until the late 1990's for ties between campus activities practice and learning to appear in higher education literature, culminating in publications of *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling et al., 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006). Those completing masters programs in that era were groomed within the profession with an emphasis on student learning in campus activities practice. Today, those who represent this demographic are now serving in leadership roles in student affairs, representing a wave of institutional leadership with the chance to usher in this shift in focus at the broadest institutional level.

Given the changing nature of campus activities practice, considered alongside the evolving lens of campus activities practitioners, it is time for an honest, modern-day assessment. What preparation is needed for success in these positions that will enable practitioners to make the needed impact? What kind of support is needed from the institution to make that impact possible? The arrival of new priorities around student success and retention, experiential learning, risk management, new and distinct functional areas and types of responsibilities and the expansion of expectations around assessment have all influenced the changing nature of the campus activities profession and its potential to influence student learning. Aside from the challenges with navigating change, it is important to note that this might be a sign that mission and purpose need refreshing on our campuses. In short, if everything that needs to be done at the university that could possibly apply to students can fit within the department, then it has no focus. Until we can establish that focus, a link between scholarship and practice has little chance for success.

This type of change needs leadership, so it is important to mention supervisors as a final area of influence on professional engagement with scholarship. Individuals are quick to perceive the behaviors and examples set by their supervisors as cues for whether or not scholarship is connected to any part of the work of the department

(Kane, 2014). In this study, few professionals cited talented supervisors who were able to help them grow in their understanding of how theory integrates with practice as well as how a research study might shed new light on a decision or new direction the department may consider. However, many supervisors were identified as not framing intentional expectations around the integration of scholarship and practice. Some study participants even described a collective “eye roll” that comes when trying to bring a discussion of published work into a staff conversation. Senior student affairs officers were also part of the dialogue, but with a range of engagement in scholarship themselves and presenting questions around the relevance of scholarship to the work of campus activities practice.

What if a body of scholarship about campus activities were used to support and shape that focus, highlighting the needs of the functional area and used with all student affairs educators, regardless of the discipline they studied? Those with student affairs degrees might come together with those with backgrounds in business operations, counselor education or other fields and deeply investigate ties with scholarship in light of shared experience with practice. Resting on this approach would require campus-based professionals to understand the scholarship of the profession and be able to engage with their new colleagues in this way through the onboarding process. Now that much of higher education has acknowledged the need for successful onboarding of new staff; this area could be built into extended onboarding practices.

## A MORE INCLUSIVE FRAME OF SCHOLARSHIP

In seeing the term “scholarship,” it is easy to only visualize journal articles, books or some other array of published work. Ernest Boyer (1990) led the call to reframe scholarship and how it is integrated into consideration of faculty tenure and promotion by advocating for a more inclusive approach to scholarship. While his goal to reframe the gridlock on the inherent values of tenure and promotion has yet to take hold in the academy writ large, his frames offer potential for campus activities practitioners to find both a fit with scholarship as well as possible points for alignment within the value of scholarship in an academic community.

The scholarship of teaching is, as defined by Boyer, the search for innovative approaches and effective practices to build skills and to disseminate knowledge, with the actions of the teacher as the focus (Boyer, 1990). If we examine the learner’s lens instead, a good amount of literature shares that students are learning through engagement with the work of campus activities practice without reference to a “teacher” who is offering these experiences. If students are learning, how might things change if campus activities practitioners made the leap to say that they are teaching?

Boyer’s second frame called the scholarship of discovery focused on how the scholar creates new knowledge. Formally conducting research was one part of this, but the entire notion of creating new knowledge can go beyond a sole focus on academic research. Creation of new knowledge could be happening through settings where students exercise leadership, including the work in student organizations and campus events.

His third frame of scholarship identifies the scholarship of application. Boyer defined this as the act of applying knowledge to solve real-world problems. The notion of “applied learning” is strongly linked to the work of student employee supervisors, for example. Applying knowledge in real-life situations happens daily in campus activities practice. How many times has the average practitioner helped to apply knowledge about conflict resolution in order to address stalling points in project planning?

Finally, his frame called the scholarship of integration brings new understanding through the integration of ideas. The role that student organization advisors play in mentoring, coaching, or advising practices with student leaders frequently helps them to make meaning of these experiences and connect learning from different areas of the student’s experience. What if these advisors were able to do this in service of advancing student progress along aligned learning outcomes across the institution?

There is no debate that faculty should be teaching classes, as the physical plant staff will be the best to take good

care of the campus buildings and the finance staff is the best to shape the institution's financial plan (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014). Framed under the light of a call for a more seamless student learning experience for students, alignment between the work of campus activities practitioners and the academic mission of our institutions can be seen as adding value. Before that can be examined, it requires acknowledgment that campus activities sometimes represents something portrayed as at odds with academic priorities (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Dalton & Crosby, 2012; Love, Kuh, MacKay, & Hardy, 1993).

A call for alignment does not dictate a move for every campus activities department to report to the Provost. Rather, it could shift the constant engagement of the question of whether education outside of the classroom is equally important or secondary to the classroom learning focus of an institution. Instead, we would instead frame the work in student affairs in the context of membership within an academic community. We would examine the values of an academic community and assert our unique version of a relationship to scholarship and, in turn, conduct the work of campus activities in a manner befitting scholars (Carpenter, 2001).

## WHAT IF WE MADE A COMMITMENT TO SCHOLARSHIP IN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES PRACTICE?

In a study of campus activities staffs at four institutions recognized for exemplary campus activities programs, Boyer's frames of scholarship were applied to understand more about campus activities practitioners' engagement with scholarship (Kane, 2014). This collective case study explored these frames of scholarship, finding active engagement with the scholarship of teaching, periodic engagement with the scholarship of application and integration and very little engagement with the scholarship of discovery. Through a reframe of scholarship that expands beyond the idea of traditional notions, campus activities practitioners can see a connection to their work and set goals to expand their engagement with this key value of the academic community.

A goal of supporting the academic mission of colleges and universities has been described for decades through priorities of increasing faculty collaboration and partnering with academic affairs administrators. While there are many success stories of these partnerships, the cultural norms around campus activities professionals' engagement in these partnerships range from partnerships of convenience where the role of campus activities practitioner is as a logistical partner or funding supporter. The call for alignment with values of scholarship in the academic community would draw campus activities practitioners into a different type of collegiality with academic partners.

To make this partnership more possible, we can take some concrete next steps:

***As Boyer said, reframe scholarship.*** Given advanced degree experiences held by most practitioners in campus activities, we can and should frame our work in a manner befitting scholars. We can decide how we will engage with each other and determine the applicability of the scholarship of teaching, discovery, application, and integration to our work. Our students deserve opportunities to recognize knowledge gained from their own involvement in campus activities that advances their learning. For our institutions, we can then support an expanded view of scholarship that is in line with the evolving nature of teaching and learning as well. The fact that students are enjoying themselves does not mean the institution should ignore the learning taking place.

***Engage current practitioners in ongoing skill development related to multiple frames of scholarship.*** Even those with advanced degrees may still believe that there are limits on their ability to contribute to scholarship (American College Personnel Association, 2008; Kane, 2014). Ongoing professional development will increase competence and confidence. Departments and campus leaders can work with professionals to design professional development activities to expand their ability to interpret survey results or how to do literature searches on current topics in the field, to name a few possible examples.

***Design onboarding experiences to include scholarship for entering professionals.*** Similar to the large number of faculty who arrive at teaching with little background in how to teach, if campus activities professionals are to

engage with the scholarship, institutions and associations can guide this development. We can develop reading lists and learning experiences for professionals to expand their familiarity with the body of literature that affects our part of the higher education field.

*Expect the integration of scholarship and practice at the association, institution and individual practitioner levels.* Setting intentional expectations for how campus activities work is done can come from middle managers, senior student affairs officers and campus activities professionals alike. A new frame that includes scholarship would encourage the senior student affairs officer, the first-year professional and the mid-level Director to all work together to exchange scholarship on a regular basis. Senior leaders can set a strong example by pursuing their own ideas and making space in other workloads of their staff that will make their projects possible.

*Create the content that is missing.* The missing voices of practitioners in student affairs literature result in key perspectives on the student experience that are absent from our collective professional dialogue. We must support a pipeline of scholarship that gets practitioners involved in the many forms of scholarship, including the scholarship of discovery. Experienced scholar-practitioners can shape the future of our profession by engaging new professionals and mid-level managers in partnership in research projects and publications.

*Support the scholar-practitioner.* This commitment would also mean that our colleagues who are investing in contributing to scholarship in some way could be celebrated and recognized. This work should not take place in the rare moments in between campus responsibilities. As the scholar-practitioner takes more of an identity within the field, the collective “eye roll” would hopefully be replaced by the expectation that scholarship serves as a part of the everyday culture within a campus activities department.

## ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

The climate in higher education today could be perfect for campus activities practitioners to lead this next step in the professionalization of the field and finding a place for scholarship in our profession. With studies like the Gallup-Purdue index citing the incredible impact of co-curricular involvement on wellbeing in post-graduation life, institutions across the country could be even more ready to leverage the impact of the work of our profession. The knowledge of students that is needed for our institutions to become “Student-Ready Colleges” (McNair, T. B., Albertine, S. L., Cooper, M. A., McDonald, N. L., & Major, T., 2016) is present in each campus activities professional that brings a strong foundation for her work to the job every day.

The time is right for the work of the campus activities profession to step away from the sidelines and embrace more active membership in the academic community. Through engagement with scholarship and active practitioner voices shaping the literature of our field, the study of the college experience will come closer to accurately telling the story of how students learn on our campuses. In turn, campus activities practitioners may realize even more potential from their identities as educators. Our students deserve nothing but the best of us as we work to inspire the best possible impact from their college experience.

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# ENHANCING THE USE OF THEORY IN STUDENT ACTIVITIES PROFESSIONALS' PRACTICE

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The student activities professionals we work with and have spoken to for this article are busy people who argue that they hardly have the time to slow down to use theory to guide and direct their work. However, what they do not realize is that they use theory in most situations and in virtually, all aspects of their work. The theories they most often use are personal theories. The purpose of this article is to present the concept of personal theories in student activities work, compare personal theories to formal theories, explain the relationship between them, and suggest a process to ensure these two types of theories work in concert to enhance the effectiveness of professional practice in student activities.

It is clear from our recent conversations with student activities professionals that while performing their duties, they have to make sense of a great deal of complexity to accomplish their goals and desired outcomes. They advise and mentor individual students, student leaders, and student workers helping them accomplish their goals while seeking to enhance their learning, growth, and development. They also work with fellow professionals, vendors, community members, groups, and organizations. They advise student groups and, in some cases manage their larger organization (e.g., the Office of Student Activities). They hire students and staff, conduct staff training, manage the budget, plan programs, oversee facilities, assess their work, supervise and evaluate staff, respond to crises, and lead and inspire.

The actions they take are meant to facilitate particular outcomes. They take a specific action because they believe that that particular action is more likely to bring about the desired outcome, rather than some other action. In its simplest terms, they have a “theory” about how to bring about a desired outcome – a personal theory. They have theories about all sorts of things, including leadership training, student motivation, group dynamics, organizational culture, program planning, and staff supervision. They have theories about how to work with students with diverse identities, such as first-year students, upper-class students, students of color, first-generation students, students from varying socio-economic backgrounds, non-traditional students, international students, students with disabilities, and many more. Furthermore, student activities professionals also have theories on how to work effectively with students whose identities intersect. They bring these theories with them and adapt them to new jobs, new institutions, and new organizational contexts.

Personal or informal theories refer in part to the “theoretical understanding that practitioners have of student learning and development based upon their interpretations of formal theories through the lens of their own ex-

periences” (Parker, 1977; Reason & Kimball, 2012, p. 361). However, personal theories are also the theories professionals develop through experience with or without knowledge of formal theories. Most professionals tend not to identify personal theories as influencing their choices and actions. If they consider them at all, they may talk about experience, gut instinct, common sense, intuition, or “protocols for professional practice” (Personal Communication, 2018). Pejoratively, personal theories might be referred to as trial and error (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) or habits of action (Stage & Dannells, 2000).

In our conversations with professionals about how they determine their actions to bring about specific outcomes, formal theory rarely enters the conversation. When asked specifically about formal theories guiding their work, a few that were mentioned included Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, minority/social identity theories, and Schlossberg’s Transition theory. These theories only cover a small portion of their work and typically, only involve their work with individual students in their role as mentor or advisor. One individual argued that she is also a “business woman” (referring to the larger organizational and administrative aspects of her job) and suggested that she would have benefited from learning Industrial and Organizational Psychology theories in her master’s program. Another talked about using formal theory for the design and planning aspects of her work, such as developing mission and vision statements, organizational and strategic planning, curriculum development, and staff training.

According to Moore and Upcraft (1992) theories are used to explain phenomena, predict outcomes, and influence those outcomes. Jones and Ames (2010) added that theories help us assess practice and generate new knowledge and research. For this article, we divide these constructs into two categories of theories: personal theories - the theories we carry around in our heads that are often subconsciously, influencing our choices and decisions, and formal theories - the public and published theories based on formal research. Both personal theories and formal theories can do all of the things Moore and Upcraft (1992) and Jones and Ames (2010) tell us theories do.

Professionals very rarely write down, specify, and formalize their personal theories (also called informal theories [Love, 2012] or theories-in-use [Argyris & Schon, 1974]). On the other hand, formal theories are written and specified, and are those we usually first learn in graduate school. There are many formal theories presented in student affairs preparation programs, including identity theories, psychosocial development theories, cognitive development theories, spiritual development theories, and ethical and moral development theories. There are also theories that discuss phenomena, outcomes, and influences related to learning, motivation, personality, leadership, and organizational development. Many more formal theories beyond these seek to bear on and improve the practice of student activities professionals.

The question arises – Which of these two types of theories should we use - personal or formal? The answer is both. Personal theories are ever-present and drive one’s practice whether one is aware of them or not. Formal theory and research should be used to challenge, inform, and enhance one’s personal theories, rather than replace them. Unfortunately, as the argument has been made previously (Love, 2012), there are circumstances where many student affairs professionals believe that they must choose between the two. As Evans and Guido (2012) pointed out, some master’s programs work to integrate personal theory development and practice with formal theory and encourage emergent professionals to see themselves as personal theorists. However, the experience of many student activities and other student affairs professionals we have spoken to and worked with indicate that their master’s programs focused solely on formal theory and made no mention of personal theories, informal theories, or theories-in-use. They were left with the strong impression that formal theories were the only legitimate theories and that formal theories should drive their practice.

Moreover, upon graduating from master’s programs in student affairs and having learned a great deal about formal theories, many professionals experience a negative reaction from experienced peers in the workplace when they mention formal theories in conversations about practice: “I was looked down upon because I was using formal theory in my examples and presentations” (Personal Communication, 2018). The reputation of experienced professionals being anti-theory (i.e., anti-formal theory) has been noted in the past (Rogers, 1995;

Strange & King, 1990). From our conversations with current professionals, the message that formal theory is for graduate school, but not for the world of work persists today.

In graduate school, students learn established and prevalent formal theories to describe, explain, and help facilitate their understanding of student development. Following graduate studies, many student affairs professionals find it challenging to incorporate the use of theory in their day-to-day work – as it is a complex and esoteric task, not easily applied to a diverse student population, and requires professionals to create synergy between theory and their practice. Furthermore, most student affairs professionals are often directed to apply existing procedures and protocols of their unit or division to their daily student development practice. So, because of this, many professionals do not recognize, identify, or reflect on their own personal theories that influence the decisions, actions, and sense-making in their work. Additionally, they keep any consideration or use of formal theories to themselves or avoid discussing them in the workplace altogether.

This combination of failing to recognize the relationship of personal theory to practice and being discouraged from discussing formal theory in work settings reduces the effectiveness of professional practice for two important reasons. The first is that relying un-reflexively on personal experience and not recognizing the value of one's own personal theories means that such theories will be less open to review, correction, and improvement in the light of new information and new experiences that either does not fit or contradicts one's current personal experience. The second reason is that avoiding formal theories (and the research they are based on) means that professionals are less informed about emergent issues addressed by such theories and research.

Given that this situation is detracting from the effectiveness of at least some student activities professionals, we offer the following suggestions to improve professional practice by recognizing and using both personal theories and formal theories. Specifically, we recommend that formal theory and research should be used to inform and enhance one's personal theories (Reason & Kimball, 2012).

## RECOGNIZE THE EXISTENCE OF PERSONAL THEORIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The first step in this process is to recognize the existence of personal theories, which many professionals do not. By failing to recognize the existence of personal theories, professionals often ignore or denigrate the role of prior experience in their current practice. Student affairs professionals have been developing a wide array of personal theories about the college student experience since the time they were college students themselves.

It is important to realize and accept that one cannot act without applying a theory, because, as Moore and Upcraft's (1992) definition of theory states, we are trying to explain, predict, or influence something in our work and our plans, choices, and decisions. If we did not have a personal theory, then any action we would attempt would be a random guess with no rationale for it. If there is a reason to take action, there is a personal theory behind that reason. This relationship between theory and action is clearly illustrated in a crisis situation when personal theories rush to the forefront and direct our actions in a clear way (Love, 2012). One's personal theory may be based solely on personal experience or personal observation, but it is a theory nonetheless. As Love (2012) argued:

*Humans are sensemaking machines; we cannot help but try to understand and give meaning to the events that occur around us. We try very hard to figure out what will happen next. That is the core of theory building—making sense and trying to predict to exert some control or influence over the events around us. Removing [personal] theory from the theory-to-practice connection is like removing the cooking step from “the mixing ingredients–cooking–eating” connection. (p. 188)*

Parker (1977) recognized the importance and value of personal theories. He suggested that professionals cannot act without personal theories and that formal theories cannot be applied directly to the practice of individual professionals. He further extrapolated that personal theories help professionals create constructs that make it

possible to practice. In addition, Strange (1983) recommended theory-building as a necessary and natural activity of successful administrative practice.

## BRING PERSONAL THEORIES TO CONSCIOUSNESS IN ORDER TO ELABORATE AND IMPROVE THEM

One problem with the personal theories of many professionals is that they are subconscious. Argyris and Schon (1974) discussed tacit theories-in-use, which are theories that influence behavior, but do so subconsciously. Most often these theories-in-use (i.e., personal theories) act on our decisions and actions outside our conscious awareness. Often, we do not think about from where the choice we made came. As indicated above, we might refer to it as common sense, trial and error, a “gut feeling,” or intuition. We do not realize that these “feelings” come from past experiences, observations, and formal learning that we have incorporated into our personal theories that then dropped from consciousness. Discovering and specifying our personal theories takes work:

*[It] involves critical self-reflection. It can also occur with the assistance of others in supervising, advising, or mentoring processes, where an individual is asked to reflect on and identify the assumptions, expectations, and beliefs that were involved in a particular incident or action in which they were involved. Because informal theories assert themselves in non-programmed, difficult, and threatening situations, these situations present great opportunities for self-reflection in the aftermath of the incident. (Love, 2012, p. 188)*

One recommendation is that in the aftermath of a crisis (e.g., a conflict between two student organizations) or time-sensitive situation (e.g., pressure from a supervisor to accomplish or address something quickly), student affairs professionals take the time to review the choices made and actions taken and reflect on and write answers to the following questions. These stressful and time-sensitive situations often lead us to be less conscious of the rationale behind our decisions. Therefore, during (or immediately after) these times, it is important for student affairs professionals to pause and reflect on the following:

- What choices did I make, or actions did I take to address the situation? What was I trying to accomplish?
- Why did I think they were the right choices and actions?
- What do I think influenced the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of these choices and actions? What do I think brought about these results?
- What was it in and about the situation, the context, and the students (or other people) who were involved that led me to those choices and actions?
- What does this reflection say about my personal theories that came into play in this situation?
- What changes would I then make to my personal theories on these matters?

McEwen (2003) recognized the role of personal theories and emphasized that student affairs professionals are both users and developers of theory. One cannot take the time following every significant action in one’s job to do such in-depth reflection. Still, making this a more regular practice will help us, over time, to better identify and specify our personal theories and how to improve them.

## ENCOURAGE THE NOTION OF PROFESSIONAL AS PERSONAL THEORIST

Effective professional practice typically includes a process of assessment, reflection, and adjustment of tactics and strategies after some form of action has taken place (e.g., a program, a crisis response, an intervention). Adding to such a process, as indicated above, reflecting on one’s personal theories can encourage individuals to see themselves as theoreticians. Once a practitioner has worked to bring some of their personal theories to a conscious level, they are in an excellent position to examine them in the light of new and recent evidence to ascertain the degree of their efficacy. As practitioners become consciously aware of the theories driving their practice, they can better identify where they can reinforce, challenge, or contradict their personal theories with formal theory and research. Additionally, as practitioners recognize and reflect on their struggles to make sense of the complex world around them, they may have greater empathy and appreciation for those formal researchers who have theory-building as a focus of their work.

## USE FORMAL THEORY AND RESEARCH TO INFORM ONE'S PERSONAL THEORIES

Student activities professionals use many sources of information to enhance their practice. Sources include their own direct experience, observation of others' professional practice, and conversations with peers, faculty, supervisors, mentors, and respected others (Love, 2012). The information from each of these sources is mediated through one's own personal theories in applying it in a work situation. However, it may be the case for many young professionals that formal research and theory are not brought to bear enough on one's work due to an anti-theory culture. This needs to change. One step is to encourage student activities professionals to expand the notion of valid information; to expand it to include formal theory and research. Such expansion will require getting away from the notion that formal theory always directly applies to individual practice. Instead, like advice from a mentor, it is applied to one's personal theories, which, in turn, influences one's professional practice. Ultimately, student activities professionals are encouraged to see themselves as theory-builders, to respect the role of personal theories in their practice in student activities, and to become critical and analytical consumers of formal theories and research (Love, 2012).

Reading formal theory and research is an important and valid source of information. In addition, one should judge the effectiveness of theory and research from the perspective of how it relates to our own personal theories (Love, 2012). Reading formal theory can be a way to facilitate bringing personal theories to our consciousness. This analysis of formal theory from the lens of our personal theories and professional practice provides us with the opportunity to enhance our work with students.

There is a long history in student affairs literature about how to effectively apply theory to practice (e.g., Desler, 2000; Jones & Ames, 2010; Knefelkamp, 1984; Knefelkamp, Widick, Parker, 1978; McEwen, 2003; Moore & Upcraft, 1992; Stage & Dannells, 2000; Strange, 1983; Strange & King, 1993). Some of these authors recognize the existence and influence of personal theory; however, none foreground the role of personal theory as co-equal with formal theory, or recognize its mediating influence on the application of formal theory. More recently, Reason and Kimball (2012) depict the mediating influence of formal theory on personal theories. It is our argument that theory to practice in student activities can be strengthened when the individual professional recognizes the existence of personal theories, works to bring them to conscious level in order to access them for purposes of improvement, sees oneself as a builder of theory (practicing theoretician), and uses formal theory and research to enhance their personal theories.

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[Empirical Research Column]

# LEVERAGING THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF CO-CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE STUDENT THRIVING

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## ABSTRACT

*Despite decades of research on student involvement, few studies have examined how co-curricular experiences promote holistic student success outcomes. Fewer still have differentiated the characteristics of co-curricular involvement to determine practices most likely to predict student success. This study investigates the relationship between the quantity and quality of student co-curricular involvement within a structural model of college student thriving. Evidence from undergraduate participants ( $n = 2,973$ ) at 13 colleges and universities indicates the quality of involvement directly predicts thriving, and quantity of involvement indirectly predicts thriving. Nearly 64% of the variation in thriving was explained by the full model. Findings suggest students would benefit from investing deeply in one or two meaningful co-curricular experiences. Student activities professionals should seek to identify visible pathways for co-curricular engagement on campus that foster student leadership, community building, and individual meaning-making.*

For the past 40 years, higher education researchers and student affairs practitioners have been promoting co-curricular involvement as a pathway to greater learning and development in college students. Numerous articles and reports have touted the benefits of involvement in contributing to student success, and the resulting proliferation of programs and activities have sought to engage students with events ranging from coffee house performers to foam dance parties. In this race to provide for the engagement and involvement of students, the research supporting the benefits of co-curricular involvement can be easily lost. Research on academic engagement can be conflated with co-curricular involvement (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009), even while noting that Astin (1984) defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic [emphasis added] experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518). In reality, a much smaller body of literature exists specifically supporting the contribution of co-curricular involvement to student success.

Further confounding the study of student involvement is the inconsistent and narrow research methodologies too often employed. Dugan (2013) notes that:

*Existing literature ... has largely failed to account for patterns of involvement across different types of group experiences, opting instead for designs using scattershot, macro-level, or micro-level approaches. This funda-*

*mentally biases outcomes and skews the general understanding of student organizational involvement and its influences (p. 244).*

A narrow focus on one type of involvement experience, the lack of a control group, and an abundance of single-institution studies have limited the generalizable findings that can be drawn from existing research.

Both higher education researchers and student affairs practitioners can benefit from a more comprehensive study of student co-curricular involvement and success. Compelling research has been produced noting the contributions and consequences of co-curricular involvement on academic achievement (Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2013; Zacherman & Faubert, 2014) and leadership development (Dugan, 2011). Absent from the literature is research examining the holistic effect of co-curricular involvement on students. Higher education has long sought to advance the holistic learning and development of students, yet few researchers have sought to investigate student success from a holistic perspective (Kinzie, 2012). Emerging research on student thriving provides new evidence and techniques to understand that ways students comprehensively make the most of their college experience (Schreiner, 2010; 2016).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the quantity and quality of student co-curricular involvement and college student thriving. The study employs multi-institutional data from the Thriving in College national research project, using the Thriving Quotient as a tool to measure the academic, emotional, and social flourishing of students in college.

## THRIVING

Grounded in the field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), research on college student thriving seeks to identify and measure the extent that students are succeeding academically, emotionally, and socially (Schreiner, 2010; 2016). Thriving expands on positive psychology measures of well-being and flourishing (Diener et al., 2016; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) to be encompassing of the academic challenges and successes unique to college students. Thriving is positioned as the psychological framework (Bean & Eaton, 2000) through which students experience college and pursue pathways to persistence and success.

The academic, social, and emotional framework for thriving is quantified through a five-factor model, where Thriving is observed as a second-order factor (Schreiner, 2016). Each of the five factors can be assessed through a short scale. The extent that students are academically flourishing is measured by Academic Determination and Engaged Learning. Academic Determination describes the effort students invest to overcome obstacles and persist on challenging academic tasks. Engaged Learning is exemplified by a curiosity about learning and investment in subject matter beyond the scope of an assignment. The extent that interpersonal relationships frame student success is measured through the Diverse Citizenship and Social Connectedness scales. Socially connected students engage with peers in ways that provide support and belonging. Diverse Citizenship describes an investment in the broader community while appreciating the diverse perspectives of others. The intrapersonal factor of Positive Perspective identifies the ways students approach college with a hopeful and optimistic outlook that enables them to navigate challenges.

Research on college student thriving has demonstrated a connection between college experiences, thriving, and student persistence. The framework for measuring psychosocial factors in a retention framework is grounded in the research of Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004), who posited that “the greater the level of psychological energy a student invests in various social interactions at his or her college or university, the greater the student’s degree of social integration” (p. 26). Co-curricular involvement provides the behavioral mechanisms through which students may invest in meaningful relationships that lead to psychosocial engagement and retention. Existing evidence supports the role of thriving in contributing to student persistence and GPA (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Schreiner et al., 2015).



## CO-CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

Astin's (1984) research on student involvement initiated a generation of scholarship on the ways students spend their time and energy in relation to their collegiate success. Later researchers adopting similar research designs used related terms such as *integration* (Tinto, 1986) or *engagement* (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Despite unique nuances to each term, some researchers have suggested the terms are essentially polynoms to describe the same experiences leading to student success (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). The extent to which these theories and their associated studies have examined co-curricular involvement has been limited. Often omitted from seminal writings on engagement and integration, research on co-curricular involvement has been conducted in smaller studies, sometimes using data from national projects (Berger & Milem, 1999; Koehler, 2014; Zacherman & Faubert, 2014). A comprehensive perspective on this work leaves little doubt that co-curricular involvement and student success are closely linked (Mayhew et al., 2016).

A theoretical understanding of co-curricular involvement has long been defined as “the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 528). Quantity of involvement describes the investment of time and physical energy into an experience. Quality of involvement describes the active participation and psychological investment of energy into an organization or activity. Despite the equal weights placed on quality and quantity in involvement theory (Astin, 1984), far more research has focused on measuring co-curricular involvement as time on task. A likely explanation for this imbalance is the absence of measures of the quality of co-curricular involvement in most national research projects, including the CSEQ (Pace, 1984), CIRP (Astin, 1977, 1993), MSL (Dugan & Komives, 2007, 2010), and NSSE (Kuh, 2003).

The weight of the evidence supporting a positive association between co-curricular involvement and student success (Mayhew et al., 2016) largely relies upon research measuring quantity of involvement. However, sufficient nuance has been observed in the research to warrant additional study. Zacherman and Faubert (2014) used data from over 50,000 undergraduate National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) participants to demonstrate a curvilinear relationship when examining the relationship between co-curricular involvement and student GPA. Emerick (2005) found a similar relationship in a smaller two-institution study. However, Huan and Chang (2004) failed to demonstrate a curvilinear relationship between academic engagement and co-curricular participation among students in Taiwan, instead finding a positive linear relationship best fit the model. While international differences in academic and co-curricular engagement may partially be attributed to the discordant findings, evidence exists to suggest distinctive effects of co-curricular involvement on GPA as opposed to academic engagement, critical thinking (Dew, 2010), engaged learning (Vetter, 2011), and need for cognition (Nicoli, 2011). This evidence supports future research that more comprehensively measures both co-curricular involvement and student success.

Research on the quality of student co-curricular involvement often asks about student leadership roles, learning experiences, sense of commitment, or volunteering within an organization (Emerick, 2005; Tieu & Pancer, 2009; Winston & Massaro, 1987). Practical limitations to early research measuring quality of involvement may partially be to blame for its limited use in research over the past three decades. Winston and Massaro's (1987) Extracurricular Involvement Inventory (EII) measured the intensity of co-curricular involvement as the product of involvement quantity and quality. However, because the instrument required participants to respond to questions for each of their involvement experiences repeatedly, the instrument became lengthy and impractical to implement. Later revisions by Endress (2000) streamlined the instrument. Research using the EII and other measures of quality of involvement have supported its positive effect upon GPA (Emerick, 2005), leadership development (Coressel, 2014; Fitch, 1991), and the college transition (Tieu & Pancer, 2009).

The depth of research on quality and quantity of involvement is limited given the 40 years that have elapsed since the introduction of Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1997). Calls for additional research in recent years stressed the importance of both a comprehensive measure of co-curricular involvement and holistic outcomes of student success (Dugan, 2013). The emergence of the Thriving Quotient as a conceptual model and measure of student success has the potential to reveal new insights into the contributions of frequent and meaningful involvement. Thus, the research question that guides this study is: To what extent do quantity of involvement and

quality involvement in co-curricular activities contribute to a structural model of college student thriving after controlling for campus experiences?

## METHOD

This study utilized a correlational research design to identify factors contributing to the variation in student thriving as defined by scores on the Thriving Quotient (Schreiner, 2016). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to measure the direct and indirect effects of college experiences on involvement, thriving, and other mediating factors. SEM is a confirmatory statistical technique (Byrne, 2016) that measures the fit of a hypothesized model using a given dataset. The extensive research on student involvement was applied alongside prior research using the TQ by McIntosh (2012) and Schreiner et al. (2015) to develop a hypothesized model (see Figure 1). The model was designed to incorporate the behavioral and non-cognitive factors most strongly associated with co-curricular involvement and student success as evidenced in the literature (Mayhew et al., 2016).

### Participants

Participants were drawn from thirteen 4-year colleges that participated in the fall 2017 Thriving in College national study. Small private institutions were over-represented in the final sample. Participation in the study was limited to 18 to 25-year-old undergraduate degree-seeking students. The measured demographic characteristics of the participants (see Table 1) indicates most participants were female, White, and reported living on campus.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female .....	2,131	71.7%
Male .....	842	28.3%
<b>Race</b>		
Caucasian/White.....	2,278	76.6%
Students of Color .....	695	23.4%
<b>Class Level</b>		
First-Year.....	1,127	37.9%
Sophomore.....	611	20.6%
Junior.....	613	20.6%
Senior.....	622	20.9%
<b>Residence</b>		
On-Campus .....	2,169	73%
Off-Campus .....	802	27%

### Measures

An online survey consisting of the Thriving Quotient (Schreiner, 2016) and other scales was used to collect data. The Thriving Quotient is a 24-item reliable measure of students' academic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal engagement and well-being ( $\alpha=.89$ ). Test-retest reliability over a 3-6 week period indicates a high level of stability over time ( $r = .87$ ). A confirmatory factor analysis conducted on a national sample of traditional-aged undergraduate students resulted in fit indices of  $\chi^2 (260) = 2,781.32$  ( $p < .001$ ), CFI = .955, and RMSEA = .042 with 90% confidence intervals of .040 to .043 provided evidence of construct validity that supported thriving as a higher-order construct comprised of five factors: Engaged Learning ( $\alpha=.87$ ), Academic Determination ( $\alpha=.81$ ), Positive Perspective ( $\alpha=.78$ ), Social Connectedness ( $\alpha=.83$ ), and Diverse Citizenship ( $\alpha=.79$ ).

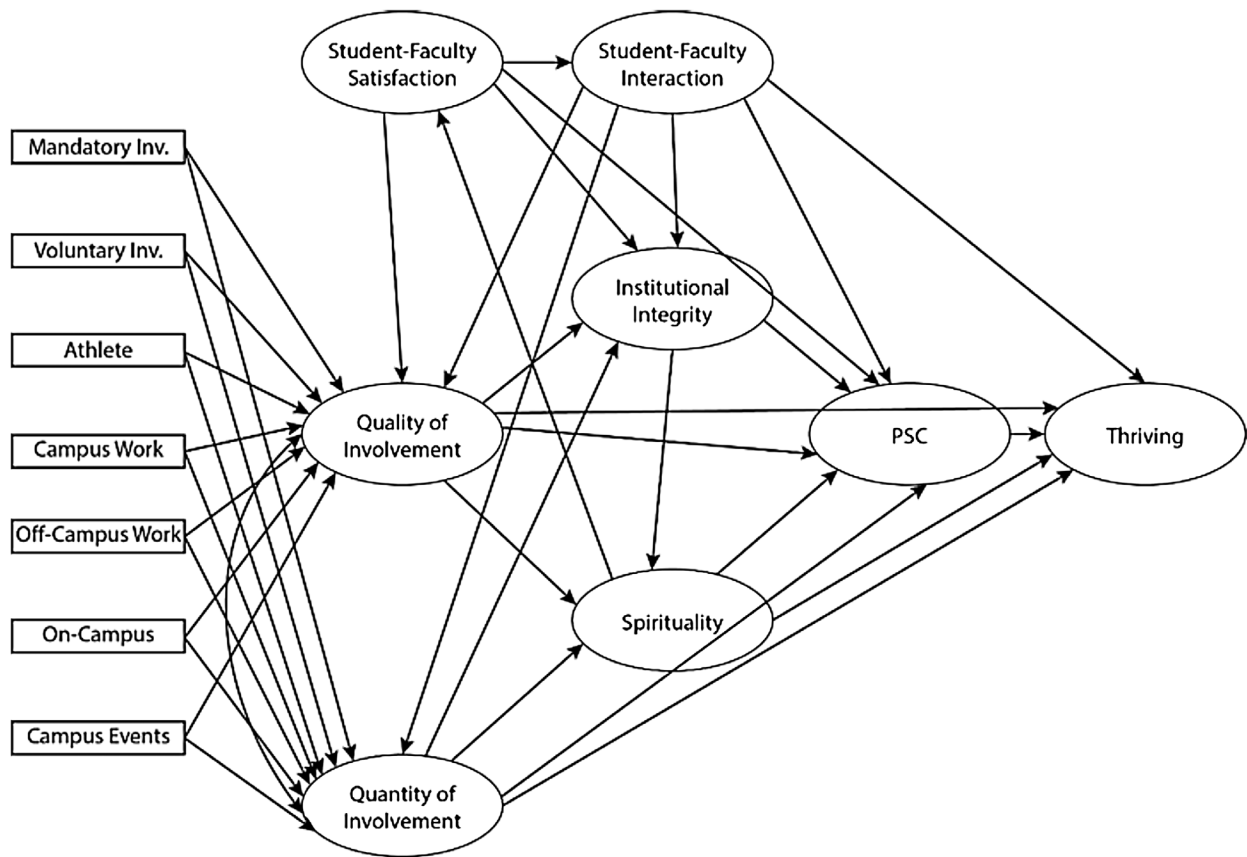


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

Quantity of involvement was measured using a revised section of the Co-curricular Involvement Experience Index (CIEI; Endress, 2000). The CIEI is based on Winston and Massaro's (1987) Extracurricular Involvement Inventory (EII), which demonstrated a 2-week test-retest reliability of .97. Endress (2000) shortened the EII to measure quantity of involvement as the sum of hours per week of involvement in co-curricular activities and the number of appointed or elected positions held. Quality of involvement was similarly measured using a five-question subscale of the EII. The questions ask students to rate the frequency in which they engage in activities associated with student organization involvement where a depth of psychological energy and effort would be required, such as engaging in group dialogues, volunteering to complete group tasks, and representing the group outside of meetings. This study slightly alters the language of the questions regarding quality and quantity of involvement to include peer leadership roles (e.g., Resident Assistant, orientation leader) as forms of co-curricular involvement alongside student organization involvement.

Other latent variables measured in the study include Student-Faculty Satisfaction, Student-Faculty Interaction, Institutional Integrity, Spirituality, and Psychological Sense of Community. Student-Faculty Interaction measures the frequency of student engagement with faculty in different behaviors outside of class. Student-Faculty Satisfaction describes the extent that students found their faculty to respond to students needs and appreciate diverse perspectives in their classes. The congruence between how students see their college portrayed in the admission process and their lived experiences on campus are measured by Institutional Integrity. Drawing from the research of Astin et al., (2011), Spirituality assessed the extent that spiritual or religious beliefs guide student actions and values. An abbreviated *Psychological Sense of Community on Campus Index* (Schreiner, 2006), grounded in the theories of McMillan and Chavis (1986), describes the extent that students feel a sense of mattering, a sense of belonging, and a shared commitment to the institution.

## RESULTS

Responses were screened and either removed or replaced through a Missing Values Analysis using expectation maximization. To account for non-normal distributions, Spirituality and PSC were reflected and transformed for the square root. A logistic transformation was applied to the items within the Student-Faculty Interaction scale. To provide greater clarity in presenting the results, statistical values associated with the reflected variables Spirituality and PSC were reported as their inverse.

SEM was conducted and evaluated for acceptable fit using the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square of error approximation (RMSEA). Acceptable fit was established at  $CFI > .95$  and  $RMSEA < .06$  (Byrne, 2016; Ullman, 2007). After an examination of parameter estimates and modification indices, several revisions were made to the model. Notably, working off campus was not found to significantly contribute to the model. The hypothesized relationship between quantity of involvement and Student-Faculty Interaction was found to better fit into the model when the direction of the relationship was reversed. Finally, several new relationships were added to the model, including a direct relationship between attending campus events and Institutional Integrity, between Mandatory Involvement and Student-Faculty Interaction, and between working on campus and student-faculty interaction. Through the use of these modifications, the final model was found to be a good fit ( $\chi^2(546) = 3,713.7, p < .001, CFI = .950, RMSEA = .044$ ).

The final model explained 64% of the variance in Thriving. Standardized regression coefficients are shown in Figure 2, and total, direct, and indirect effects are outlined in Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively. A weak but direct relationship was observed between quality of involvement and Thriving, with additional variance in the relationship

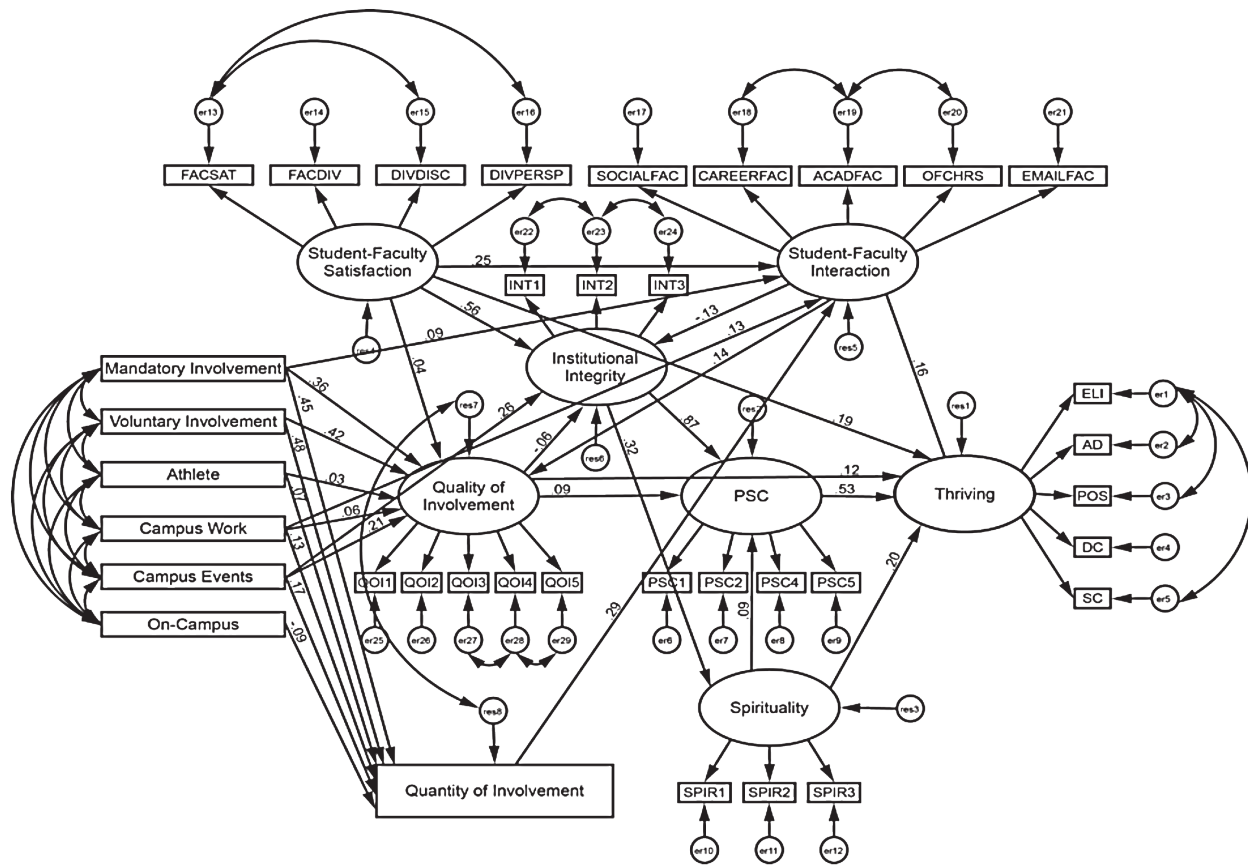


Figure 2. Final full structural equation model of student thriving.

Table 2

*Standardized Total Effects on Thriving and Latent Variables*

	Thriving	PSC	Spirituality	Integrity	Quality of Involvement	Student-Faculty Interaction	Quantity of Involvement
CampusAct.....	0.174*	0.239*	0.079*	0.244*	0.213	0.047*	0.167*
OnCampus .....	-0.003*	0.003*	0.001*	0.003*	-0.004	-0.025*	-0.087*
Work_Campus.....	0.028*	-0.016*	-0.008*	-0.026*	0.084	0.169*	0.130*
Athlete.....	-0.002	-0.003*	0.000	-0.001	-0.026	0.019*	0.068*
Voluntary Involvement.....	0.073*	0.003	-0.014*	-0.042*	0.441	0.135*	0.474*
Mandatory Involvement.....	0.073*	-0.008	-0.016*	-0.049*	0.387	0.213*	0.447*
Quantity of Involvement .....	0.033*	-0.030*	-0.012*	-0.038*	0.041	0.285*	-
Student-Faculty Satisfaction .....	0.520*	0.476*	0.169*	0.523*	0.080*	0.251*	-
Student-Faculty Interaction .....	0.116*	-0.107*	-0.043*	-0.134	0.143*	-	-
Quality of Involvement.....	0.136	0.042*	-0.019*	-0.058	-	-	-
Institutional Integrity.....	0.536*	0.896*	0.322*	-	-	-	-
Spirituality .....	0.248*	0.087*	-	-	-	-	-
PSC.....	0.525*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. \*Values significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 3

*Standardized Direct Effects on Thriving and Latent Variables*

	Thriving	PSC	Spirituality	Integrity	Quality of Involvement	Student-Faculty Interaction	Quantity of Involvement
CampusAct.....	-	-	-	0.262	0.206	-	0.167
OnCampus .....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.087
Work_Campus.....	-	-	-	-	0.060	0.132	0.130
Athlete.....	-	-	-	-	-0.029	-	0.068
Voluntary Involvement.....	-	-	-	-	0.421	-	0.474
Mandatory Involvement.....	-	-	-	-	0.356	0.086	0.447
Quantity of Involvement .....	-	-	-	-	-	0.285	-
Student-Faculty Satisfaction .....	0.185	-	-	0.560	0.044	0.251	-
Student-Faculty Interaction .....	0.163	-	-	-0.126	0.143	-	-
Quality of Involvement.....	0.118	0.093	-	-0.058	-	-	-
Institutional Integrity.....	-	0.868	0.322	-	-	-	-
Spirituality .....	0.202	0.087	-	-	-	-	-
PSC.....	0.525	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. \*Values significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 4

*Standardized Indirect Effects on Thriving and Latent Variables*

	Thriving	PSC	Spirituality	Integrity	Quality of Involvement	Student-Faculty Interaction
CampusAct.....	0.174*	0.239*	0.079*	-0.018*	0.007*	0.047*
OnCampus .....	-0.003*	0.003*	0.001*	0.003*	-0.004*	-0.025*
Work_Campus.....	0.028*	-0.016*	-0.008*	-0.026*	0.024*	0.037*
Athlete.....	-0.002	-0.003*	0.000	-0.001	0.003*	0.019*
Voluntary Involvement.....	0.073*	0.003	-0.014*	-0.042*	0.019*	0.135*
Mandatory Involvement.....	0.073*	-0.008	-0.016*	-0.049*	0.030*	0.127*
Quantity of Involvement .....	0.033*	-0.030*	-0.012*	-0.038*	0.041*	-
Student-Faculty Satisfaction .....	0.335*	0.476*	0.169*	-0.036*	0.036*	-
Student-Faculty Interaction .....	-0.048*	-0.107*	-0.043*	-0.008*	-	-
Quality of Involvement.....	0.018	-0.052*	-0.019*	-	-	-
Institutional Integrity.....	0.536*	0.028*	-	-	-	-
Spirituality .....	0.046*	-	-	-	-	-

Note. \*Values significant at p < .05.

explained by the mediating variable Psychological Sense of Community (PSC). PSC was found to be the strongest single predictor of Thriving. No direct relationship between quantity of involvement and Thriving was found in the model.

The model explained 49.2% of the variance in quantity of involvement and 48.7% of the variance in quality of involvement. Most of the college experience variables contributed to a similar degree to the variation in quality of involvement and quantity of involvement. However, Mandatory Involvement and working on campus were found to contribute to more of the variation in students' quantity of involvement than to their quality of involvement.

## DISCUSSION

Despite years of research on the contribution of co-curricular involvement to psychosocial outcomes (Mayhew et al., 2016), relatively little research has been conducted using a comprehensive measure of involvement and a holistic measure of student success (Dugan, 2013). The comparative analysis between quality and quantity of involvement provides new insights into what characteristics of co-curricular involvement matter in predicting student success.

Most notably, quality of involvement was found to directly predict Thriving despite the absence of a direct relationship between quantity of involvement and Thriving. Defined as an investment of psychological energy (Astin, 1984), quality of involvement describes active engagement in a student organization or leadership role. The demonstrated effect of quality involvement experiences is a closer connection to the university and an increased sense of community and belonging. Because thriving describes social, emotional, and academic dimensions of student success, quality involvement experiences can be seen as contributing holistically to student well-being and success in college.

Evidence from this study also confirms an indirect relationship between quantity of involvement and holistic student success. Not only is recent research connecting co-curricular involvement directly and linearly to student success rare (Dugan, 2013; Zacherman & Faubert, 2014), but also a majority of the research on student thriving has found quantity of involvement to be fully mediated by students' sense of community on campus or their levels of spirituality (McIntosh, 2012; Schreiner et al., 2015, 2017). Unique to this study is that the rela-

tionship between quantity of involvement and Thriving was only mediated by Student-Faculty Interaction. This finding can likely be attributed to the novel introduction of quality of involvement into the predictive model of Thriving. In this vein, the evidence supports that merely attending an organization meeting does not significantly enhance the student experience; an investment of psychological energy is needed to build the community ties that promote student success.

### *Limitations*

SEM is a robust statistical tool used for prediction, but as a cross-sectional and correlational study, the findings cannot be used to infer causal relationships. It should also be noted that demographic characteristics were not used in the structural model. In addition to the benefit of a more parsimonious model of thriving, most demographic characteristics are not hypothesized to affect the types of activities and involvements available to students; rather, minoritized groups are seen to experience those environments differently (McIntosh, 2012; Schreiner et al., 2017). Future studies might build upon this omnibus model and use multiple group analysis to identify group differences.

### *Implications*

The predominance of quality of involvement over quantity of involvement in predicting student thriving implies that co-curricular programs and activities are of greatest benefit when they encourage students to engage more deeply. Because students considered a single organization or leadership role in responding to items rating their quality of involvement, only one or two meaningful co-curricular involvement experiences may be needed to facilitate student success. This finding echoes calls by Dugan (2008), where similar advice was given to promote greater leadership development. Although it may seem counterintuitive to discourage wider student involvement on campus, research by McCabe (2016) supports this implication by observing that students with more diffuse friendship networks were less likely to feel a sense of community on campus. A focused involvement in one or two student organizations provides students with more time and energy to take on leadership roles, invest in relationships, and maximize their learning and growth.

Student activities professionals should consider promoting more focused involvement experiences by (a) providing early and consistent messaging about involvement experiences, and (b) developing greater richness and depth to co-curricular programs. The use of evidence-based strategies in these areas will enhance the capacity for students to make the most of their undergraduate experience.

Colleges often extol the number of different organizations available to students, and student affairs staff typically encourage students to get involved on campus or start a new organization. These messages not only occur explicitly during admission visits, first-year commencements, and involvement fair promotions, but also implicitly through the barrage of event and recruitment promotions that cover college campuses. Evidence from this study would suggest a refinement of these messages to encourage students instead to connect and engage deeply in their involvements. Refined involvement messaging may be achieved by clearly identifying pathways for engagement on campuses. Kuh et al. (2005) highlighted the importance of visible pathways in their study of highly successful colleges, noting that successful campuses spotlight key experiences and funnel institutional resources towards ensuring broad-reaching success. When properly identified, quality engagement in a co-curricular organization or leadership role could serve as a signpost leading students toward successful collegiate outcomes.

Student activities professionals have direct access to programs and services that would enable students to enhance the depth of their co-curricular experience. Supporting workshops and retreats that develop consistently strong student organization structures and leaders—in addition to being intrinsically beneficial to student success (Dugan & Komives, 2010)—enhances the opportunity for quality co-curricular experiences to form. Colleges should seek to develop these leadership development opportunities further and to purposefully focus efforts on student organizations that are most likely to provide quality experiences for students. Dugan (2011, 2013) demonstrated that higher student success outcomes could be tracked to the topical focus of student organization involvement, noting that involvement in organizations such as cultural groups, programming boards, student government, and academic leadership was associated with higher socially responsible leadership. While intentional efforts

should be made to provide experiences that are inclusive to the entire college community, colleges should focus energy and resources towards those areas most likely to produce quality co-curricular experiences.

Quality co-curricular experiences may be further developed by enhancing the opportunities for sustained involvement. Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) evidenced that students with a multi-year commitment to an undergraduate co-curricular experience were more likely to achieve post-graduate success than students with only short-term involvements. Often student organizations do little to entice sustained involvement or provide continually challenging ways to engage. When co-curricular experiences don't provide tangibly different experiences for first-year students and fourth-year students, the opportunity for depth of learning and growth is diminished. The Bonner Student Development Model provides a thorough example of sustained engagement and tiered outcomes in student civic and community engagement (Johnson & Hoy, 2013). The Model defines institutional practices and tiers of student involvement matched to each year of the undergraduate experience, with specific skills, values, and knowledge outcomes assessed at each yearly interval. Similar pathway models can be created for student organization leadership (Vetter & Pariano, 2015) as a means of intentionally fostering quality co-curricular involvement.

A growing body of research has identified over-involvement as a contemporary challenge for college campuses (Coressel, 2014; Couch, 2016; Gravelle, 2010; Zacherman & Foubert, 2014). The over-involvement hypothesis implies that after a certain threshold is reached, students might experience a negative impact from their involvement. However, these studies have typically focused on quantity of involvement without equal regard to the quality of those involvement experiences. Using the comparative pathway analysis of the present study, practitioners and researchers should instead observe over-involvement as an imbalance between the quality and quantity of involvement experiences. This guidance could lead to rich and rewarding student involvement in one or two student organizations or leadership roles that continually support holistic student success.

### *Directions for Future Research*

This study introduced new measurement techniques for assessing quality and quantity of involvement and introduced a new statistical method for examining the impact of co-curricular involvement within a structural model. Other researchers have researched co-curricular involvement by assessing the range (Dugan, 2013) or connectedness of involvement experiences (Emerick, 2005; Tieu et al., 2010). The findings of this study demonstrate the insights that can be gained from more purposefully identifying measurement criteria for co-curricular involvement. Future research should avoid single-item measures of involvement where the research topic suggests a greater complexity of student behavior patterns.

## CONCLUSION

In the 30 years since Astin (1984) first theorized that involvement is characterized by both quality and quantity, extensive research has been conducted about the outcomes associated with involvement frequency. Yet the characteristics and the outcomes attributed to quality involvement experiences have been understudied and sparsely applied. The findings of this study highlight comparative strengths of quality involvement experiences in promoting student thriving in college. Students who participate in at least one student organization or leadership role are more likely to experience stronger and more varied pathways leading to student success. Student activities professionals should consider this research as evidence supporting the benefit of meaningful involvement experiences and apply the findings to their work by offering programs and experiences that foster student leadership and meaning-making. Using thriving to apply a holistic frame to student involvement can empower student activities professionals to consider the impact of their work with students broadly. Inclusive communities focused on enriching experiences are ready to be formed to actualize the potential for each student to thrive in college.



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[Scholarship-to-Practice Column]

# DISCOMFORT, OFFENSE, TRIGGER: UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING STUDENT RESPONSES TO COMEDY

Amma Marfo, SPEAK Educators  
Jason Meier, Emerson College

COMEDY, LIKE HIGHER EDUCATION, is an institution forged from and heavily influenced by tradition. Performers readily recite their influences, drawing a clear line between their idols and the art they currently create onstage. However, because culture and norms surrounding comedy are considerably more malleable than those surrounding higher education, a previously symbiotic relationship has become harder to navigate with understanding.

In one Instagram post, Roy Wood, Jr. managed to encapsulate the current challenges these norms highlight between comedy and campus environments. The comedian, *Daily Show* correspondent and NACA Hall of Famer shared a series of texts to a comic playing his first college campus. Among the gems within the series are “material wise. [sic] always ask for what hte [sic] language parameters are (if you care about getting rebooked) otherwise be yourself,” “don’t go over your time. but DEFINITELY don’t go under your time,” and “read the campus paper when you get to the venue. Or read it online. It’s a treasure trove of local material and things you can use as natural segues into stuff you already have jokes about.”

The advice depicts someone who has, in the lexicon of performance, “paid his dues” and wanted to provide a strong performance. It also reflects generational differences that are being blamed for the dread many performers feel in this environment. For example,

*this generation doesn’t really f\*\*\* w/ standup comedy. they didn’t grow up with it on tv so you have to connect with them on the things that interest them first if you really want to take them on a journey into your world [...] not their fault. Networks all took standup off TV. drove people to other places to get new comedy.* (Wood, 2018)

Once viewed as fertile ground for comedians to refine skills and build fan bases, campuses have become a symbolic battleground for the divisive use of language and identity politics. And yet as researchers steeped in this world, we are hopeful — for comedy in a larger sense and its future on campuses.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

A public cloud formed over college comedy in 2014 when Jerry Seinfeld and Chris Rock voiced hesitance to take their acts to campuses. The latter did so on his press tour for *Top Five*, placing blame on students and their upbringing:

*Kids raised on a culture of “We’re not going to keep score in the game because we don’t want anybody to lose.”*

*Or just ignoring race to a fault. You can't say "the black kid over there." No, it's "the guy with the red shoes." You can't even be offensive on your way to being inoffensive (Rich, 2014).*

Allegations from Rock, Seinfeld, Tim Allen, and Wanda Sykes provided a preview of a cultural crossroads to come. As with protest culture before it, intolerance for "offense en route to inoffense," once assumed to be the exclusive province of campuses, has permeated to a more general feeling nationwide. Audiences of all stripes are having trouble finding the funny. Marfo articulated this crucial point for Splitsider, defending the value of the college gig for comics:

*[Students will] laugh or they won't, respond or stay silent. And the social media outrage we've attributed to young folks? That can happen anywhere, after any show, from practically anyone. Widespread reports of the humorless college student have been greatly exaggerated. The benefits of playing to this subset of audiences, especially for comedians looking to build a name for themselves, far outweigh the disadvantages — and it's worth noting that the most vocal opponents to college shows can literally and figuratively afford to take that stance. For the rest? It's worth the "risk" of a potentially less responsive audience (Marfo, 2017).*

To the myth of the humorless college student, she elaborates:

*In my experience, what students find funny and unfunny has changed relatively little. I talk often with students about what comedians they're enjoying, what shows or sketches they've liked, and what they find funny [...] What has changed significantly, however, is how they respond in mixed company. I've sat in countless shows where I'll feel eyes on me as an uncomfortable or potentially offensive punchline lands — the eyes of people who want to know, based on my reaction, if it's okay to laugh or not (Marfo, 2017).*

As practitioners, a challenge with presenting any one-off programming is a lost opportunity to create dialogue around what was seen, done, or shared. We may never know the origin or purpose of the laughter (or non-laughter) in these rooms, Marfo mused following the release of Rock's interview:

*[T]here are lots of reasons to laugh. We smile, make jokes, and show our senses of humor to those we know, respect and care about as a way to build commonality and community. We can even laugh, at times, to get through the difficult moments that inequality, hardship, and human suffering inevitably provide [...] Does [...] their refusal to laugh in our presence reflect actual understanding, or simply reflect their ability to enact a form of 'code-switching' wherein they recognize that they can laugh at these things, just not with us (Marfo, 2014)?*

We're of the belief that norm-setting around these events makes students better audience members, and creates ripple effects that make better audiences for talented and insightful entertainers.

## DISCOMFORT, OFFENSE, AND TRIGGER

In 2016, the University of Chicago took a firm stance when they sent an email to its incoming students about issues surrounding political correctness, offense and trigger warnings:

*Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called trigger warnings, we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own (Pérez-Peña, Smith, and Saul, 2016).*

In a heated reply published by the *New York Times*, University of Chicago senior Sophie Downes responded with a corrective explanation of trigger warnings and safe spaces:

*A little heads-up can help students engage with uncomfortable and complex topics, and a little sensitivity to others, at the most basic level, isn't coddling. Civic discourse in this country has become pretty ugly, so maybe it's not surprising that students are trying to create ways to have compassionate, civil dialogue (Downes, 2016).*

Conversations around comedy and its appropriateness inevitably invoke the term *trigger* or *trigger warning*. True trigger warnings "are a specific variety of content warning that attempts to forewarn audiences of content that may cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

der (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders”(A, n.d.). More importantly for this discussion, especially as it pertains to campuses, “[c]ontent warnings and trigger warnings are not intended to censure instructors nor invite students to avoid material that challenges them” (A., n.d.).

In our studies, we’ve classified potential objections to comedic content as follows:

- *Discomfort*: a comedic performance as unsettling or uncomfortable, but where the individual cannot clearly identify the source of said discomfort and/or the individual may not be personally affected.
- *Offense*: a comedic performance the individual finds personally unsettling or uncomfortable.
- *Trigger*: a comedic performance the individual finds not only unsettling or uncomfortable but aggravating to existing anxiety or prior trauma.

Our approach draws inspiration from researcher and co-author of *The Humor Code*, Dr. Peter McGraw (2015). In collaboration with Caleb Warren, McGraw coined a “benign violation” theory of humor:

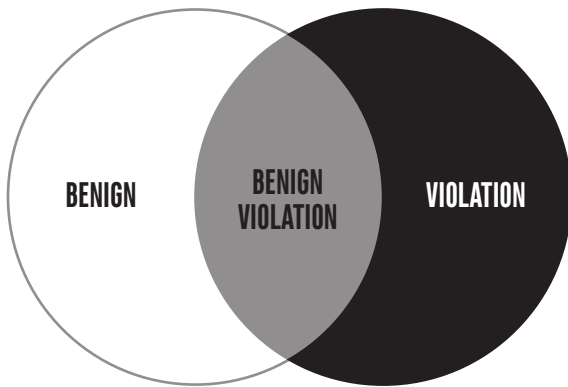


Fig 1. McGraw and Warren’s graphical representation of benign violation theory.

Per McGraw and Warren, “people experience humor when: (i) something seems threatening, negative, or wrong [violation]; (ii) things seem safe, acceptable, or okay [benign]; and (iii) both interpretations occur at the same time. In other words, humor is triggered by benign violations” (McGraw and Warren, 2015). Of note: humor can exist in times of discomfort. Indeed, McGraw and Warren’s work deems such discomfort a requirement; and perhaps can even be found in offensive material, but is nearly impossible to find in a trigger or legitimate trauma.

This distinction should matter — while likely not in theory, certainly in practice — to comedians and their agents alike. Understanding such distinction helps comics craft content people find relatable but are unlikely to find painful and helps agents to find talent who understands the distinction. Wood, Jr. shares an example of jokes about suicide on a campus that had recently seen a pair of student suicides, a scenario in which such jokes hardly seem “safe, acceptable, or okay.” Over time, he learned to craft content unlikely to land in such an unwelcome fashion. This distinction should matter to campus activities professionals because it can inform conversations following a challenging performance. As we’ll elaborate on later, the reaction to objections can and should vary based on the nature of the grievance presented. And finally, this distinction should matter to students; it presents an opportunity to interrogate discomfort, and to take the perspective of fellow students who might see content through a more pained lens.

In 2017, wishing to include the discomfort that we found our colleagues discounting, but that McGraw and Warren find essential to a joke’s success, we created a diagram to merge McGraw and Warren’s theoretical framework with our own (see Figure 2).

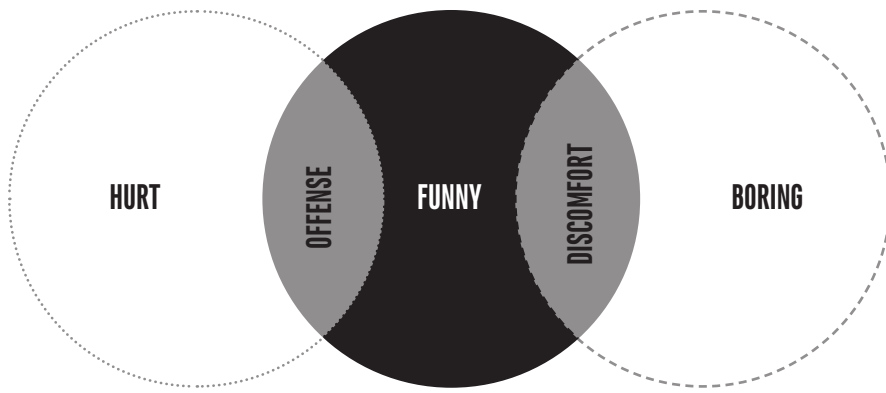


Fig 2. Marfo and Meier’s revision to McGraw and Warren’s Benign Violation diagram. (Boring is an adaption of “Benign,” and hurt an adaption of “Violation”).

Of note in this revision is a clear illustration that humor *can* be found in uncomfortable or even offensive content, but cannot be found in content that legitimately courts or inflicts trauma. Given this knowledge, it was incumbent upon us as researchers to create a representation of the awkward overlap in language recognizable to students, and incumbent upon staff members and educators to encourage the use and understanding of precise language. We believe this diagram can help. When a student expresses challenge with a joke, what is that challenge borne of? Can they articulate it? How can we temper reactions where possible, and offer support and coping mechanisms where tempering is impossible? And how does this echo a larger conversation in society today?

## THE LARGER CONTEXT OF FREE SPEECH AND CIVILITY

As we examine the intersection of comedy and its reception, it was important for us to understand how comedians influence the larger conversations about the permissibility of speech.

First Amendment law and practice surrounding freedom of speech make it clear an institution of higher learning cannot limit protected speech; it also makes clear certain types of speech are not protected. Speech not protected by the First Amendment includes fighting words, obscenity, libel and slander, and threats. Current demarcations of protected speech versus punishable speech would not exist without comedians serving as cultural provocateurs.

Comics like Lenny Bruce and his protégé George Carlin used comedy to offer social critique and constructively challenge the sensibilities of audiences by pushing the boundaries of freedom of speech and obscenity. Until his death in 1966, Bruce interweaved satire and vulgarity within jokes concerning politics, religion, and sex. The seeds Bruce and Carlin planted by challenging form this way live on as new comics like Bo Burnham, Reggie Watts, and Demetri Martin play with traditional notions of form in the comedic space. Bruce and Carlin’s efforts stand out because their experimentation often appeared to run afoul of common decency.

Bruce’s first arrest for obscenity came in 1961. Although ultimately acquitted, the arrest placed Bruce on an obscenity watch list. Bruce was arrested three more times, including once for using the word “schmuck” and once after a secret recording revealed over 100 obscene words in a single performance. This performance led to a 1964 conviction under the charge of “words crimes” (Linder, 2007).

Carlin, once arrested with Bruce, was himself charged with obscenity in 1972 for his profanity-laced “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television.” Importantly, the case was dismissed later that year by stating Carlin’s language was simply indecent, not obscene (Walston, 2012). Here again, a clear definition of language played a significant role in defining what was benign, and what constituted a violation. Continuing to push the envelope until his death in 2008, Carlin famously stated, “I think it’s the duty of the comedian to find out where the line

is drawn and cross it deliberately” (Sebra, 2013).

The line between, and evolving definitions of, indecency and obscenity in comedy is fine, but it can feel even finer on college campuses, where declining to honor the contract of an offending performer can appear to some as censorship or an affront to protected freedom of speech.

Governing documents released by the Council for Advancement of Standards and joint competencies developed by American College Personnel Association and NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education affirm that campus activities professionals are responsible for ensuring the safety and security of community members, providing spaces where community members feel safe from microaggressions, triggers, and aggravation of trauma. Student leaders are trained in inclusivity and social justice, prompting them to examine their own identities and how these identities are expressed. At the same time, many of these personal identities and experiences serve as punchlines for jokes — to be sure, commentary from campus guests (often untrained on these concepts) present a challenge to community building.

In 2018, comedian and ventriloquist Andy Gross performed at a student orientation program at Purdue University. After inviting a female student to the stage, Gross delivered a number of jokes about getting an erection and asked the student to rub his leg. Hundreds of students walked out of the performance, voicing anger on Twitter using #AndyGrossIsGross. After issuing an apology for causing offense or discomfort, Gross declared he would no longer perform on college campuses (Bauer-Wolf, 2018).

In an interview with *Inside Higher Ed* prompted by the incident, Jason defended the student response, questioning why a student would listen to a joke that is insulting or degrading:

*Why would a student want to sit there and be insulted for an hour? Students recognize that comedy can provoke, can challenge, but they also know that comics can tackle hot-button political subjects through an inclusive lens. (emphasis added)* (Bauer-Wolf, 2018)

This tension between professional standards and a desire to entertain influences anyone overseeing programming on campus, including the students who coordinate such programming. When students control spending for their organizations, are they booking performers who challenge them — or performers who have a similar perspective? Are organization advisors challenging student leaders to find performers with a different viewpoint? And if these decisions backfire or spark controversy, what actions should be taken?

## HOW CAN COLLEGES CONTRIBUTE TO THE LARGER CONVERSATION?

In addition to the above questions, a larger question exists: How can administrators honor individual identity and previous trauma, while creating space for difficult, needed, and sometimes challenging dialogue?

As professionals who have grappled with these questions in both theory and practice, we present to you several ideas for how college administrators can contribute to a larger conversation about comedy’s role on campus.

First and foremost, engage in a dialogue with your student leaders on the goals, challenges, and risks of booking comedy on a college campus. What topics might this comedian address? How will community members respond to those jokes? If boundaries or prohibitions must be made, what considerations go into that decision? Is there a legitimate need for a trigger warning on all events? Is attendance optional or is the event a part of a mandated program? What might additional precautions be necessary for a mandatory program? When done well, this dialogue can be extended to address how analogous decisions could be made in professional scenarios. Where might workplace banter cross lines? How can these challenges inform future relationships and norm-setting at the office? In a societal moment where these ideas are not just germane, but essential, this natural bridge to such a conversation should not be wasted.

Once a booking decision has been made, encourage thorough research and understanding of the performers



you are bringing to campus. While organizations like the National Association for Campus Activities provide short previews of a performance, it's important to point out they're curated performances — curated expressly toward selection criteria for a highly discerning audience. A student can find a 15-minute comedy reel suitable for their community, but in-person material during a 60-minute set to be problematic. Once a comedian is selected, provide opportunities for prospective attendees, and not just programming board members, to learn more about the comedian. Can promotional efforts include clips or background of their work? How can audience members enter a performance as informed about the act as the student board?

Extend the dialogue to performers and their professional representatives. It is in the best interest of a comedian and their agent to have a successful show. Having an open conversation with all parties can create a successful environment for performer and audience alike. A critical volume of these frank and open conversations can influence conversations between agents and acts. As was evident in the text exchange between Wood, Jr. and the aspiring college comic in question, the norms we articulate will be passed down formally *and* informally. With that said, this should not be aimed to sterilize the scope of humor. Jokes, when composed thoughtfully by skilled individuals — as many of these comedians are — can be powerful educational and reflective tools for self-discovery. Social justice comedian and TED Fellow Negin Farsad put it eloquently: “when you're laughing, you enter into a state of openness. And in that moment of openness, a good [...] comedian can stick in a whole bunch of information” (Farsad, 2016). Further, these thoughtful and well-crafted jokes can uphold and embody values many institutions espouse. If we'd like them to continue to serve in this capacity, we have to inform the market (agents and their acts) accurately of what we need to see.

Frame missteps it as an opportunity to bridge a gap. It is important to identify a solution in the midst of a controversy that will alleviate hurt and prompt reflection and healing. Sometimes that may take the form of conversations, sometimes a public statement and apology, and sometimes through supplemental programming efforts.

We suggest the following as a place to begin with a misstep: In the case of a student identifying *discomfort*, a conversation can be a meaningful tool to help them begin to unpack their feelings. Address discomfort through structured one-on-one conversations. These meetings with students should affirm their discomfort while creating a safe and open space for them to interrogate it. Can they articulate its source? Who might have felt similarly? What might be the source of a disconnect between those who were uncomfortable, and those unaffected? All these questions, and more, can address the named objection without an outsized public reaction.

In the case of a student feeling *offended* by comedy, an apology may be necessary from the organization or advisors of a programming board. While they are not responsible for telling the joke, event organizers do need to take some level of responsibility for vetting all performers. If a joke is truly offensive and hurtful, it could prove necessary to issue a community apology identifying the specific harm, taking responsibility for the harm and sharing steps to ensure the harm will not be repeated.

Finally, in the case of *trigger*, more significant programming and education may be necessary. Of course, as with all challenging situations, there is no one size fits all solution. In this rare and highly specific case, it's worth examining several potential places of action. There may be a need for training of organization members to ensure this type of programming does not occur again. Policy review may be necessary to ensure performers are properly vetted and any program proposals are reviewed with these parameters in mind. There may be audience members who need supplemental programming to be able to share their experiences. There may be additional events that highlight points of view and experiences not shared in the initial event. Earlier, we wrote of the challenges of creating dialogue around events; in the case of trigger and trauma, this dialogue is essential to facilitate healing.

## CONTINUE TO CHAMPION THE GOOD

Comedic success is contingent upon decades of hard work crafting and refining material. It can be helped along by appearances on TV and in movies, by televised specials and tours around the country. It is also helped by the

touring college circuit, creating a stable of fans eager to say they “saw them way back when.” For your authors, acts like Kathy Griffin, Daniel Tosh, and Kevin Hart (all of whom are no strangers to controversy) are beneficiaries of this long-standing tradition. The same can be said of up-and-coming comedians who count these acts among their primary influences.

In the same way that the best comedians provide colleges effective and thought-provoking entertainment, these audiences, in turn, provide comedians with a learning ground in which to iterate their work. We encourage professionals and students to use comedy as a barometer for campus climate. What can the environment support, and how well do you know that? Where might it benefit from a push? And what line is too far to cross — and why?

It is not lost on us that one of Wood, Jr.’s first pieces of advice to his unnamed protégé was, “Be kind to the advisor. And be fun with the kids.” The best performers working in this space understand the covenant they have with the college and its clientele. As custodians of an educational environment, we have a responsibility to help both our students and the comedians they want to hire succeed. Providing such help means being forthright and specific with performers and their agents, prompting our students to ask the right questions, and setting a standard for empathy and understanding that serves them well — on campus and beyond.

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[Focus on Emerging Scholars Column]

## WHAT DOES “HIGH-IMPACT” MEAN IN EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES?

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### ABSTRACT

*This study, conducted by a small group in a master’s level class taught by Dr. Christine Wilson, assessed extracurricular experiences at a large, public university to identify potential alignment with characteristics of “high-impact practices” as defined by the Center for Postsecondary Education (2015). Students engaged in extracurricular experiences tentatively defined as high-impact were invited to participate via surveys and interviews. Results and findings indicated significant alignment, and two additional potential characteristics: a sense of belonging and purpose.*

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has been used to collect data on college student engagement. Kuh and colleagues used this data to determine “high-impact practices,” which are positively correlated with persistence and student learning (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018, 2007). High-impact practices can be curricular or co-curricular engagement experiences, and little is known about whether the characteristics of high-impact experiences apply to exclusively extracurricular engagement experiences.

Student affairs professionals offer experiences designed to contribute to learning, often in the extracurricular environment. If student affairs professionals understand the characteristics of high-impact *extracurricular* experiences, appropriate criteria could be used to evaluate and enhance extracurricular experiences. This enhancement could be part of institutional efforts to foster engagement and improve the reach and quality of education (Kuh, 2009). This study sought to address a student affairs division’s need to define what “high-impact” could mean for extracurricular experiences in order to help staff enhance and create high-impact extracurricular experiences, and subsequently positively impact learning and persistence.

### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES

Student engagement refers to two aspects of the college student experience: the time and effort students expend on academic endeavors and other educational activities, and how institutions structure curricula and other opportunities to facilitate participation in activities empirically linked to student learning (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). There are many benefits of student engagement, including stronger academic performance, greater connections with peers and the institution, higher matriculation, and higher retention (Hansen

& Schmidt, 2017; Kahn, 2014; Masika & Jones, 2016; Millican & Bourner, 2011; Price & Tovar, 2014; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2007; Thelin & Gasman, 2003). These benefits also impact persistence; engaged students are more likely to continue to graduation (Masika & Jones, 2015; Thelin & Gasman, 2003).

The National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) is distributed annually to hundreds of four-year colleges and universities to collect information regarding students' participation in learning and personal development opportunities (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). The survey is "specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience" (Kuh, 2001, p. 2).

NSSE data have been used to determine that some types of engagement opportunities are "high-impact practices:" student participation in learning communities, service-learning, research with faculty, internship or field experiences, study abroad, and culminating senior experiences (Center for Postsecondary Education, 2015). "High-impact activities seem to have unusually powerful effects on all students" (Kuh, 2009, p. 695). These high-impact practices share several characteristics: they require considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback; participation in them may be life-changing (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2015). Student engagement in high-impact experiences also has the same positive outcomes for historically underserved students, including students representing different racial and ethnic backgrounds, first-generation college students, and students who were less prepared for college (AAC&U, 2018; Kuh, 2009).

## A DEFINITION OF "EXTRACURRICULAR"?

The Center for Postsecondary Research limited its investigation of high-impact practices to academic curricula (2015). However, "the student affairs profession has long embraced various iterations of the student engagement construct" (Kuh, 2009, p. 696), recognizing that many engagement opportunities facilitated by student affairs practitioners take place outside of academic curricula.

Bartkus, Kennet, Nemelka, and Gardner (2012) point to the absence of a field-wide consensus on the definition of "extracurricular activities." Some scholars have defined extracurricular activities by key elements, such as activities occurring outside of the classroom, activities not tied to academic credit, voluntary activities, activities enhancing transferrable skill development, and activities requiring psychological energy and commitment (Bartkus, Kennet, Nemelka, & Gardner, 2012; Chan, 2016; Kuh 2009). Most of these key elements also apply to curricular and co-curricular activities experiences, which is problematic.

Student engagement can occur in curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular environments. While the terms "co-curricular" and "extracurricular" may be used interchangeably, they are different. "Co" means "together with" and "extra" means "outside of" (Mirriam-Webster, 2018). Curricular / co-curricular activities are tied to academic learning and attached to academic credit. Extracurricular engagement happens outside of the academic sphere and does not result in academic credit (Bartkus, Kennet, Nemelka, & Gardner, 2012; Chan, 2016; Greene & Maggs, 2015), but can help increase the odds that students will attain their educational and personal objectives (Kuh, 2009, p. 698). For this study, extracurricular experiences were defined as *student engagement opportunities taking place outside of the academic curriculum and not attached to academic credit*.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Student affairs practitioners at this institution, as part of their work to support the academic mission of the institution, wanted to assure the availability of a variety of high-impact experiences for undergraduate students, including extracurricular experiences. These practitioners sought to support Kuh's (2009) call to monitor high impact engagement opportunities and to find ways to "scale them up to create enough opportunities so that every student has a real chance to participate" (p. 698). The Division of Student Affairs planned to create an inventory for their agenda of extracurricular experiences, and to train staff members regarding characteristics

of high-impact extracurricular experiences so they could enhance existing experiences and be intentional when creating new experiences. As they embarked upon this endeavor, though, they did not want to assume the characteristics of high-impact practices automatically applied to extracurricular experiences.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the Center for Postsecondary Research's (2015) characteristics of high-impact practices could apply to extracurricular experiences. To determine these characteristics, the group sought to answer the following question: Which characteristics of high-impact practices align with the characteristics of the potentially high-impact extracurricular experiences? Which do not? Are there additional characteristics specific to these extracurricular experiences?

## METHODS

### *Setting*

This study was conducted at a large, public, land grant institution in the northeast region of the United States. According to the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (2017), 22,383 undergraduates were enrolled in fall 2017; 11,404 identified as female, 10,979 as male; 2,678 as Hispanic/Latino, 2,527 as Asian, 1,543 as Black/African American, 12,613 as White, 1,611 as international, and 700 as two or more races. The institution does not collect information on student sexual orientation or religion.

This study focused on eight extracurricular experiences which may be high-impact; the descriptions include what may be the characteristics of the Center for Postsecondary Research's (2015) high-impact practices: they demand considerable time and effort, provide opportunities for learning outside of the classroom, encourage collaboration with diverse others, provide meaningful interactions with other students and staff (instead of faculty), provide frequent and substantive feedback, and are potentially life-changing.

The eight extracurricular experiences represented three categories. *Registered student organizations* (n=2) were the most independent experiences and had professional and/or graduate student advisors who supported the student leaders but did not dictate the components of the experiences. *University programs* (n=3) were developmental experiences related to service and/or leadership development lasting for at least a semester and were designed and facilitated by professional staff or graduate assistants. *Student employment positions* (n=3) were paid experiences. Students were supervised by professional or graduate staff members, and the students participated in training and professional development sessions. The study authors believed it important to include paid experiences in the sample to help assure students who may not be financially able to participate in voluntary high-impact experiences could be assured opportunities to participate in high-impact experiences through student employment.

### *Participants*

In fall 2017, N=221 undergraduate students participated in these eight experiences. All 221 were recruited to participate in the anonymous survey via an initial email from their supervisors/advisors through an online platform. To encourage participation in the survey, participants could enter a raffle to win one of two bookstore gift cards worth \$25. For the interviews, participants were recruited via email using a stratified sampling process to assure interview participants would represent the eight experiences. To encourage participation in the interviews, participants were offered \$5 gift cards redeemable at campus coffee shops.

Twenty-seven students representing all eight experiences finished the survey, resulting in a confidence interval of  $95 \pm 17\%$ . Participants were asked to indicate which of the eight experiences they were engaged in; if they participated in more than one, they were directed to choose the one they felt had the greatest impact on them. Nine participants indicated "university program," nine indicated "registered student organization(s)," and nine indicated "student employment." Of those who described a race and/or ethnicity, 13 participants self-described as White, two as Black/African-American, four as Latinx, five as Asian, and four as American. Of those who self-described a gender identity or gender expression, 19 described themselves as female/woman/feminine, four as male, and one as genderqueer. Nineteen participants self-described as heterosexual/straight, one as gay, and one as pansexual. Nine students indicated they were not religious. Two indicated spiritual, six Catholic, five

Christian, one Jewish, one Muslim, and one Hindu.

Five participants were interviewed, and each completed a post-interview survey to self-describe demographic information. Three participants indicated they participated in university programs, one in registered student organization(s), and one in student employment. Four participants identified as white, one as African-American. Three participants self-identified as female/woman, two as male. All five identified themselves as heterosexual/straight.

## DATA COLLECTION

The self-developed, anonymous survey was administered through an online platform. The survey was constructed to gather participants' perceptions information of the extracurricular experiences based on the Center for Postsecondary Education's (2015) characteristics of high-impact practices. The survey included 14 Likert scale questions, 26 drop down selection items, and 13 open-ended questions, including eight open-ended demographic questions. The interviews were semi-structured and included three open-ended questions about participants' chosen extracurricular experiences. At the conclusion of the interview, participants completed a demographic survey in which they self-described demographic information.

## DATA ANALYSIS

**Quantitative.** First, the data was analyzed to determine the percentage responses for each question related to the characteristics of high-impact practices. Next, to determine whether the participants' perceptions of the extracurricular experiences varied among the categories (registered student organizations, university programs, student employment), ANOVAs were conducted. Inferences of the statistical significance of the F-statistic were made at two alpha criteria: the standard  $\alpha=.05$  and adjusted  $\alpha=.0026$ . Because this approach included 19 comparisons, the alpha criterion was adjusted using the Bonferroni correction, (i.e.,  $\alpha=.05/19$  or  $\alpha=.0026$ ) to reduce the likelihood of committing type I errors. Finally, to ascertain if students' perceptions differed between the paid (student employment) and unpaid experiences (registered student organizations, university programs), 19 independent samples t-tests were conducted. Again, inferences of t-statistic were made using two alpha criteria: the standard ( $\alpha=.05$ ) and Bonferroni-corrected ( $\alpha=.0026$ ).

**Qualitative.** First, group members open coded all five verbatim interview transcripts and the open-ended questions on the survey individually and determined their own themes. The group then met to cross-compare their themes, to consider differences and overlaps, and to determine a mutually agreed upon list of themes. Next, the group identified categories of themes and created a spreadsheet documenting quotes and comments as evidence of the themes. Finally, the list of themes and evidence were compared to the characteristics of high-impact experiences.

## LIMITATIONS

A significant limitation was the response rate. The survey confidence interval was  $95 \pm 17\%$ , lower than the goal of  $\pm 10\%$ . Fortunately, all eight experiences were represented. Five of the eight experiences were represented in the interviews. The survey instrument and interview protocol were developed by the team and not tested for validity before administration. Also, the same population was utilized for the survey and interviews, so there may have been overlap in participants. Fourth, African-American students, Latinx students, and male students were not represented proportionately to the campus population, and all of the students interviewed identified as heterosexual. Finally, there were many other extracurricular experiences at the institution that may have had most of the characteristics of high impact practices, and only eight were used in this study.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Quantitative Survey Questions

The first set of results comes from the survey questions related to the characteristics of high-impact practices.

The *amount of time spent in the experiences* varied widely: 24% of survey participants indicated spending 4-7 hours per week in the experience, 41% spent 8-10, 14% spent 11-14, 7% spent 15-18, and 10% spent 20+ hours in the experience. Twenty-one percent thought this was the right amount of time, and 17% thought this was too much time. Twenty-eight percent of the participants *met with professional staff* bi-weekly and 48% weekly; 100% agreed or strongly agreed professional staff members positively impacted their experiences. The same percentages of participants *met with graduate staff* bi-weekly or weekly, but fewer (89%) agreed graduate student staff members positively impacted their experiences. One-hundred percent indicated *working with peers* in their experiences; 44% worked with their peers for more than 9 hours per week, and 97% indicated working with peers had a positive impact on their experiences. In terms of working with *students different from themselves*, 77% of participants indicated the experiences allowed them to “often” or “very often” interact with students with different races or ethnicities, 85% with students from different economic backgrounds, 50% with students from different religious backgrounds (23% did not know), 40% with students from different political backgrounds (10% did not know; 20% said “never” or “almost never”), and 42% with students with different sexual orientations (15% did not know; 15% said “never” or “almost never”). Eighty-eight percent of participants received feedback, and the top three types of feedback were one-on-one meetings (78%), 48% via email (48%), and end of the semester evaluations (44%; no students in registered student organizations had end-of-the-semester evaluations). *Learning outside of the classroom* occurred not just through general participation, but also via training and professional development opportunities; 100% of participants participated in at least one of eight training and development topics (95% interpersonal skills, 85% diversity, 77% role-specific training, and 73% problem solving). Seventy-seven percent indicated training and development positively impacted their experiences.

Next, ANOVAs were conducted to determine the differences among the three categories of involvement (registered student organizations, university programs, and student employment). Only four were statistically significant. The perceived impact of professional staff ( $F=3.52$ ,  $p=.047$ ), interaction with graduate staff ( $F=60.154$ ,  $p=.000$ ), participating in training ( $F=3.434$ ,  $p=.05$ ), and interactions with peers with different political views ( $F=4.842$ ,  $p=.022$ ) were significant. Post-hoc analysis indicated student employees were more likely to report higher perceptions of the impact of professional staff (mean diff,  $d+0.333$ ,  $p+.085$ ), and were more likely to interact with graduate staff than students involved in university programs ( $d=0.889$ ,  $p=0$ ). Similarly, participants registered student organizations were more likely to interact with graduate staff than participants in university programs ( $d=.889$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and interact with peers with different political views than those involved in university programs ( $d=1.875$ ,  $p=.034$ ).

Finally, t-tests were run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between students involved in paid and unpaid experiences, and two were: student employees were more likely to interact with graduate staff, ( $t=3.618$ ,  $p=.002$ ) and they perceived greater impact of training on their experience ( $t=2.067$ ,  $p=.05$ ).

### **Interview and Open-Ended Survey Questions**

Three categories emerged from the interviews and open-ended questions on the survey: self, context, and connection. “Self” was defined as participants’ personal ways of participating in the experiences and the influence on themselves, and included three themes: life-changing, development, and a sense of purpose. Participants indicated the experiences provided opportunities for personal, professional, and skill development. In addition, the purpose of the experiences mattered; participants wanted to be part of experiences making positive differences. “Context” referred to the environments the participants were working/participating in and included five themes: time, leading peers, diversity, feedback, and learning in different settings. “Connection” referred to interpersonal development perceived to be a result of the participants’ involvement with the experiences and included two themes: sense of belonging and interactions. Participants asserted their experiences helped them feel connected to groups of people providing support and encouraged growth. The most positive comments related to the impact of staff and highlighted their support, availability, and helpfulness.

## **DISCUSSION**

Four of the Center for Postsecondary Education’s characteristics of high-impact practices (2015) were clearly pres-



ent across the experiences. All of the participants indicated *working with their peers*, and 97% indicated working with peers had a positive impact on their experiences. Peers were perceived as providing support and mutual reliance. One-hundred percent of the students perceived they were engaged in *learning outside the classroom* including training and professional development opportunities, most in at least two different topics. Most of the participants (88%) received *feedback*, and about half of them received it in at least two ways. Students indicated feedback was essential and produced growth. And students perceived the experiences to be *life-changing*.

One characteristic was less present. Regarding *interacting with diverse others*, results were mixed. Seventy-seven percent of participants spent time interacting with students of races different from themselves often or very often, and 85% with students from different economic backgrounds. Participants were less likely to know if their peers had different religions or sexual orientations, and when they did know, they were not as likely to interact with them (50% and 42%, respectively). The area of the least interaction with differences was political views—20% said “never” or “almost never,” and only 40% indicated any interaction with students with different political views in their experiences.

Another characteristic, *considerable time and effort*, was harder to determine. The amount of time spent in the experiences varied widely: from 24% spending 4-7 hours to 10% spending 20+ hours; the mode was 8-10 hours (41%). And what was or did participants or staff perceive to be, ‘considerable’? The results and findings did not help define this characteristic.

The final characteristic is *time and quality of interaction with professional and graduate staff*. Seventy-six percent of participants met either weekly or bi-weekly with professional staff or graduate staff, and they felt staff were available, supportive, and helpful. All participants indicated their interactions with professional staff positively impacted their experiences, and 89% said graduate student staff had. Such impact seems to align with *meaningful interaction with faculty*.

The findings did reveal additional potential characteristics of high-impact extracurricular experiences. *Sense of belonging* emerged as a theme. Participants described positive feelings and meaning attached to belonging to groups or staffs. *Purpose* also emerged as a theme, as participants indicated they wanted to work towards specific goals and be part of activities making positive differences on or off campus.

To summarize, the combination of the results and findings gives campus activities professionals a better idea of the characteristics of “high-impact” in extracurricular experiences at this institution. The experiences reflected most of the Center for Postsecondary Education’s (2015) characteristics of high-impact experiences. Our results strongly suggested significant learning took place outside of the classroom. Interactions with peers, professional staff, and graduate student staff, as well as the feedback received, were significant and meaningful. Students considered the experiences to be life-changing. In addition, sense of belonging and the purpose of the experiences seem to matter on this campus. But there were gaps related to some dimensions of ‘interactions with diverse others,’ and ‘considerable time’ and effort was unable to be defined.

## IMPLICATIONS

Student affairs practitioners should consider replicating this study with students in other extracurricular experiences that may be high-impact. This study was exploratory; conclusions could be modified, confirmed, or expanded with replication. In addition, there are other perspectives to include and understand, particularly the perspectives of marginalized groups and males, who were underrepresented in the sample. Given the conclusions of this study, future researchers and assessors may want to include questions on the survey related to sense of belonging and purpose, and to determine what ‘considerable time’ means. The group feels it is important to assure interview questions are open-ended so participants can describe their experiences in an unguided way. Perspectives of the professionals who develop and facilitate these experiences would also be valuable.

This study tentatively demonstrates that most of the Center for Postsecondary Education’s (2015) characteristics

of high-impact are applicable when designing extracurricular experiences to be high impact: learning facilitated outside of the classroom, meaningful interactions with staff and other students, frequent and substantive feedback. Further, sense of belonging and purpose of the activities (making positive differences) are also important characteristics to consider. The scope and nature of ‘interactions with diverse others’ and ‘considerable time and effort’ were not supported by the results and findings. However, they should be considered as characteristics for high impact extracurricular experiences and additional studies, given their importance in student engagement (Kuh, 2008), and given that these results are tentative.

If student affairs practitioners are to actualize Kuh’s (2009) call to “create enough opportunities so that every student has a real chance to participate” (p. 698) in high impact practices, they must ponder, articulate, and share how the experiences they oversee include the characteristics of high impact practices. They should also assure articulation of the positive differences students can make, and nurture a sense of belonging in groups and staffs. Endeavoring in this valuable work supports the academic mission of institutions and can cultivate campus cultures that foster student success (Kuh, 2009).

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