

Designing Student Affairs Organizational Structures: Perceptions of Senior Student Affairs Officers

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Student affairs organizations have become complex entities and serve as a critical link to student success and the quality of the overall educational experience in collegiate institutions. Over time, new programs and services have been added to the array of existing programs and services with little attention focused on how these organizations might be designed to effectively meet the institution's mission or address student needs. This research study was designed, in part, to investigate student affairs organizational structures within colleges and universities across the United States. The focus of this study was on the design and structure of student affairs organizations, but it also investigated where in the institution the senior student affairs officer reported. It explored questions related to what changes were made in student affairs organizations and why. The findings indicated that some change has occurred in student affairs organizations, but these changes have been modest. While student affairs organi-

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zations have retained their functional structures they also appeared to be generally organized by institutional type, and as a result somewhat reflective of institutional mission. The influences of revenue source and availability of resources appeared to remain the dominant influences in the current functional structures of student affairs organizations. While some of the desired reasons for organizational redesign appeared to be strategic and environmentally oriented, the actual changes and redesigns that were reported were not directly focused on these issues. These findings have implications for student affairs organizational effectiveness in the future.

Over the last 50 years student affairs organizations have become complex, vital units within higher education institutions. The rapid growth of these units and the increased demands for diverse programs, services, and facilities have placed these units in the position of being a critical link to student success and the quality of the overall educational experience provided by higher educational institutions.

The presence of student affairs within collegiate structures actually did not become complex, independent organizational units, until the late 1960s (Ambler, 2000). As student numbers, demographics, and needs changed, new programs and services were added to the student affairs portfolios. In most cases, these new programs and services were simply added on to the array of existing programs and services with little attention focused on how these organizations might be designed to effectively meet the institution's mission, effectively meet the needs of students, and efficiently use the resources that have been entrusted to it (Ambler, 2000; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006).

Over time, it appeared that much of the concern about organizational structure within student affairs focused on where in the university hierarchy student affairs reported and whether it reported directly to the institutional president or chancellor. Even though these issues are important, there are other issues related to organizational design that are critical to ensuring organizational effectiveness. As the demands on higher education increase and change, gaining a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of these issues can be helpful in crafting

successful organizations. This research was designed in part to investigate existing student affairs organizational structures within colleges and universities across the United States. The main focus of this study was on the structure of student affairs organizations, but it also explored the issue of who the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) reported to, or where the student affairs organization resided in the larger institutional organizational hierarchy. Second, to the extent possible, it explored the question of what if any organizational changes were made, and why the changes were made. The study also attempted to determine the perceived strengths and limitations of existing student affairs structures as viewed by the SSAOs.

Student Affairs Research on Organizational Design

There is little research or literature about what type of student affairs organizational structures currently exist, how and why these organizations are designed the way they are designed, and what role and purpose structure plays in realizing the goals of the student affairs unit and their institution. Most of what we know about student affairs organizations is either anecdotal, or inferred from business organizations, or organizational research conducted within business organizations. Foundational theories of organizational design, and some of the existing writings about student affairs organizations, have been based on research conducted prior to the 1980s that placed heavy emphasis on mechanistic structural concepts such as hierarchical differentiation, formalization, centralization, and standardization (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). While these variables are still a part of the research agenda, postmodern organizational design theories place emphasis on responding and adapting to the external environment. Specifically, more emphasis is placed on organizational design and structures that are adaptable and flexible in order to improve organizational performance (Dunbar & Starbuck, 2006; Galbraith, 2002; Goold & Campbell, 2002).

It has long been held that there is no singular organizational structure model that is used by, or “fits” all, student affairs operations (Ambler, 2000; Barr, 1993; Sandeen & Barr, 2006). However, there are organizational theories and research, along with the changing nature of student affairs work, that can be universally applicable to our

understanding of organizational effectiveness and how student affairs organizations might rethink their organizational structures to enhance their role and effectiveness.

Current organizational theory suggests that organization structures should be designed to effectively meet their mission and strategic goals (Galbraith, 2002). Goold and Campbell (2002) argued that organizations designed and structured with little bureaucracy or decision constraints will have the ability to be high performing. Yet, Chickering (2003) stated that change is difficult for higher education due to its prevailing rigid structure.

While it is clear that organizational design and structure play a critical role in achieving increased organizational performance, there is little research about what type of structures and design elements exist and work most effectively within student affairs organizations. Kuh (1989) indicated that there were four conventional approaches to organizing the work of most colleges and universities. These included the rational model, the bureaucratic model, the collegial model, and the political model. These models are reflective of early organizational design theory and are not necessarily consistent with postmodern approaches to organizational design analysis. As a result, they may no longer serve as a comprehensive guide to effective organizational design.

Ambler (1993) surveyed over one hundred student affairs organizations from public, private 4-year and community colleges regarding their structures. Ambler analyzed the services, organizational models, location in the university structure, nomenclature and titles, and span of control. Through his analysis, Ambler made the following observations:

- the programs and services found within the organizational units of student affairs within all collegiate types and sizes had become large, comprehensive, and very diverse;
- many student affairs programs had been assigned full responsibility for programmatic and financial operations of traditional student service auxiliaries;
- the elevation of SSAOs to the vice president and executive management level was virtually universal at all classification types of higher education institutions; and

- although he observed a growing trend for the SSAO to report to a chief administrative officer, (a) the structure of student affairs divisions had become highly complex and specialized in all types of colleges and universities, (b) the span of control varied widely among all types of institutions, (c) and the title given to both student affairs officers and staff varied widely across types of institutions.

Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh, (2006), outlined a series of traditional and potentially innovative models for organizing the practice of student affairs. These models provided an initial framework to begin the investigation of how, why, and for what purpose student affairs organizations within colleges and universities are organized. However, these models are essentially philosophical models and not really structural models. What is now needed is more comprehensive data regarding what organizational designs exist within student affairs and how these designs contribute to organizational practice within student affairs.

Method

This study surveyed SSAOs at four different types of higher education institutions across the United States: research universities, 4-year colleges, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. SSAOs from 240 institutions, representing 60 from each of the four collegiate types, were randomly chosen from lists of institutions organized by type and purposefully selected to represent all regions of the country. The questionnaires were initially transmitted electronically using an electronic survey tool; however, a large number of the respondents replied via a written format and returned the questionnaire through the mail.

Ninety SSAOs across all four types of institutions responded to the questionnaire. Table 1 reflects the distribution of the respondents by institutional type.

Each SSAO was asked to complete a survey containing multiple choice and open-ended questions (see Appendix). The questions used for this article asked the respondents about their current student affairs organizational structure and the reporting relationship within the

Table 1
Respondents by Institutional Type (N = 90)

Type	No. of Respondents	Percent of Responses
Research Universities	28	31.11%
Public	20	22.22%
Private	8	8.88%
Comprehensive College/Universities	32	35.56%
Public	27	30.00%
Private	5	5.50%
Liberal Arts Colleges	18	20.00%
Public	3	3.33%
Private	15	16.66%
Community Colleges	12	13.33%
Public	12	13.33%

institutions structure. They were questioned about how and why the student affairs organizational structure was structured the way it was, and what design changes had been made and why they had been made. SSAOs were also asked to express what if anything they would like to structure differently, as well as the perceived constraints and limitations for changing their organizational structures.

The answers to the questions were compiled and analyzed as an entire group, and also where possible, among and between the four collegiate types of organizations. The data were analyzed to determine which design and structural factors were similar and which were different among the various organizations, how the SSAOs perceived their organizational structures, and what they wished they could design differently. The written responses were reviewed, sorted, and summarized into categories and compared. The major focus of the comparisons was to determine patterns of responses. In some cases, responses were tallied and percentage of responses calculated. Of the respondents, 54 (60%) provided access to their current organizational chart, which were also reviewed. The charts were again compared by

type and structure to determine general organizational design, levels of hierarchy, clustering of units within the division, as well as where the division reported in the overall institutional structure and where individual units within the division reported.

Results

Organization Structural Similarities and Differences

Student affairs organizational structures continue to be organized and essentially operate as hierarchical, functional units across all four types of higher educational organizations. There was no indication that any student affairs units were predominantly organized under any other structural models, although there were elements of other structural models operating in some organizations. In one case, the student affairs organization appeared to be part of a geographical functional organizational model; and in a few cases, elements of a hybrid matrix structure were used by some of the larger organizations.

Geographical structures operate as distinctive structures tied to geography. For example, a satellite campus that has its own student affairs organization, that operates independent of the main campus, and reports to the local campus administrator, yet coordinates activities and policy with the main campus, would be a form of a geographic/functional structure. A hybrid matrix or lateral structure consists of a coordinating overlay placed on top of a functional unit structure that serves to organize and coordinate shared services or programs. This structure might include central research, human relations, or marketing unit(s) that serves all of the other functional units within the student affairs organization. In all of these diverse cases, it did not appear that the SSAO labeled or identified these differences, nor did they see them as unique or distinctive elements in the organizations' overall design.

Some of the larger organizations, mostly research universities, had adopted a functional cluster organizational model that aligned functional units with other units that provided related programs and services, and this cluster reported to an executive director or an assistant/associate vice president. It is likely that these structural

elements were added to enable increasingly complex and specialized organizations to communicate and collaborate across divisional functional unit boundaries, and to create greater efficiency in commonly used resources and services. The smaller organizations appeared to address the communication and efficiency issues by having staff assume some generalist and unit responsibility roles across functional areas and by having flatter, less complex overall structures. In cases where they existed, auxiliary units appeared to influence the design of the functional structures within the divisions. Revenue-producing units were generally grouped together as a unit, or they appeared as standalone entities within the organization. This phenomenon seemed to apply to both revenue-producing units and student fee units. Rarely were revenue-supported units clustered together with nonrevenue or institutionally supported units.

While all the organizational models were functional and hierarchical in design, there were some general similarities in the overall organizational structure by type of institution. Research university student affairs organizations resembled other research organizations, and community college organizational structures resembled other community colleges, and so on, even though there was no apparent overall model reflected by the number and specific services located in student affairs.

What appeared to distinguish student affairs organization structures in terms of size, shape, and complexity were the number and the specific functional units that made up the student affairs organizations at the various institutions. Seventy-seven respondents (85.5%) provided specific lists of the units that reported within their student affairs organization. Fifty-two distinctive units were cited as being included within at least one of the student affairs divisions. The number of units reported as part of a single student affairs division ranged from 8 to 20. During the analysis it became clear that some of these overlapped and the exact level of reported specificity was unclear. For example, some respondents indicated they had enrollment services while others stated they had admissions, financial aid, and the registrar reporting to them. It was also unclear if the respondents were reporting existing services, specific functional units, or cost centers. For example some of the respondents stated they had an office of student activities or a

Table 2
Units Reported within Student Affairs Organizations (N = 77)

Units	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Counseling Centers	75	97.40%
Residence Life	63	81.81%
Career Services	60	77.92%
Health Centers	54	70.12%
Student Activities	54	70.12%
Student Centers	54	70.12%
Campus Recreation	50	64.93%
Judicial Affairs	48	62.33%
Academic Advising and Support Services	45	58.44%
Disability Services	45	58.44%
Multicultural Student Services	45	58.44%
Dean of Students	45	58.44%
Enrollment Management Total	39	50.70%
Admissions	27	35.06%
Financial Aid	27	35.06%
Registrar	24	31.16%
Leadership	35	45.45%
Civic Engagement/Community Services	34	44.15%
Greeks	33	42.85%
International Student Services	30	38.96%
Trio Programs	30	38.96%
Orientation	26	33.76%
First Year/ New Student Programs	24	31.16%
Wellness Programs	24	31.16%
Dinning Services	24	31.16%
Housing	24	31.16%
Athletics	21	27.27%
Learning Centers	18	23.37%
Parents and Family Services	18	23.37%
Retention Services	15	19.47%
Child Care	15	19.47%
Student Assessment Services	15	19.47%
Bookstores	15	19.47%
Women's Center	12	15.58%
GLBT Services	12	15.58%
Alcohol and Drug Services	9	11.68%

Table 2, continued

Units	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Adult Student Programs	9	11.68%
Veteran Services	9	11.68%
Student Legal Services	9	11.68%
Academic Integrity Services	9	11.68%
IT Operations	9	11.68%
Commuter Programs	9	11.68%
Student Government	9	11.68%
Conferences and Special Programs	8	10.38%
Campus Ministries	8	10.38%
Student Media	6	7.79%
Student Employment	6	7.79%
English as a Second Language	1	1.29%
University Farm	1	1.29%
Human Relations	1	1.29%
Information Call Center	1	1.29%
University ID Cards	1	1.29%

student life office while others reported that student government, student legal services, and student media reported to them. As a result, the responses are reported in Table 2 in rank order by the number and percentage of responses that listed the unit by name.

Despite the large variety of units, there were no identifiable patterns generally or by type of institution regarding which units were included within student affairs and which were not. All four types of institutions, public and private, consisted of varied units, with no observable patterns. While there are some student services and programs that are more likely to be found within student affairs, there is no unit-driven definition or model of what constitutes student affairs.

As much could be learned from what was not revealed as was revealed about the respondents' organizational structures. There was little indication from respondents that organizations were being designed to cope specifically with the challenges coming from the external environment, or specifically to address the organizations' strategic goals. Only a small number of respondents indicated that they had a

focused marketing/PR effort. A number indicated that they had committees to deal across division boundaries with issues or programs, but most of these focused on specific issues and were not part of a permanent organizational structure. Some respondents indicated that they had a parent's/family program, a person assigned to community relations or a person assigned to manage planning; but most organizational structures and respondents did not reflect such specific external focused roles within their revealed structures or responses. In fact, 37(41.1%) of the respondents indicated that they did not have a student affairs strategic plan, and only a few indicated that they used it for organizational redesign-related assessment.

Span of Control and Organizational Hierarchy

In addition to the wide variation of which functional units were included in student affairs, the biggest structural differences across all institutional types appeared in the areas of span of control and hierarchical levels. The number of units that reported to the SSAO ranged from 4 to as many as 17 units, and the number of direct reports to the SSAO varied just as much. The hierarchical levels within organizations also varied. All of the organizations appeared to have at least three levels of hierarchy; but many had four, five, or more levels. The number of levels was not always related directly to organizational size. The variation in the span of control within the division, and the number of hierarchical levels, did not appear to be directly related to organizational type either. For example, having large spans of people reporting at various levels or having three rather than four or five levels of hierarchy did not appear to be directly related to the size or type of institution. However, research universities tended to have more overall complexity in their structures than the other organizational types. It also appeared, upon looking at a number of response items, that these variations could be related to the availability, or the perception of availability, of organizational resources within the division.

The perceived and/or real availability of resources might be a factor that has influenced the design of student affairs organizations, especially in relation to levels of hierarchy and spans of control. Where the SSAO respondents expressed concern about the shortage of or need for more staff within their organization, the student affairs

organization appeared to be flatter and the SSAOs and their directors appeared to have more units reporting directly to them. In most of these cases, the SSAOs also expressed concerns about having too many direct reports, or no resources to hire a desired associate or assistant senior level person. These phenomena were present across all types of institutions regardless of institutional size or type. These initial observations are only suggestive and should be explored more directly in the future.

Reporting Structure for Student Affairs

Fifty-nine (65.5%) of the SSAO respondents indicated they reported directly to the institutional president or chancellor. Eighteen (64.28%) of the respondents were from research universities and indicated that they reported to a provost. Seven (58%) of the respondents from community colleges and 6 (33.3%) from Liberal Arts Colleges indicated they reported to a senior vice president or other vice president/dean within their institutions. All comprehensive college SSAOs indicated that they reported directly to the president. Sixty-nine (76.6%) of the SSAO respondents indicated they were members of the president's cabinet, and 78 (86.6%) indicated that they had direct access to the president on a regular basis to discuss critical issues. When asked to describe the nature of the contact the SSAO had with the person in the organization they report to, they described the context of these contacts as being meetings, e-mails, phone conversations, and daily interactions. They also described the nature of the contacts as collaborative, friendly, professional, and positive.

Changing the Student Affairs Structure

A number of SSAO respondents, 69 (76.6%) indicated they had redesigned some parts of their current student affairs organizational structure at some point during their time as the SSAO. Most reported that these changes had occurred when the SSAO first assumed the role of SSAO. The changes presented by the SSAOs were, for the most part, modest design changes, such as shifting reporting lines among various units or merging two units together.

The SSAO respondents were asked why they decided to redesign all or part, of their student affairs organizational structure. A summary of

their responses indicated that they redesigned their organizations for the following reasons: (a) to address financial concerns, (b) to meet strategic priorities, (c) to enhance efficiencies and effectiveness, (d) to promote teamwork and collaboration, and (e) to reduce hierarchical approaches to decision-making. Some SSAOs indicated that although they desired to make changes in their organizational structure, they believed that the political consequences were too great, or they needed to wait for some of their staff to retire before they could make desired changes.

When asked if any part of the student affairs organization had been restructured or reassigned to a new supervisor in the last 10 years, 51 (56.6%) of the respondents indicated that such changes had been made. The changes that were mentioned included: (a) moving enrollment service units out of student affairs to either academic affairs or a separate division of enrollment services, (b) moving the entire division of student affairs within academic affairs, (c) merging health and counseling services, (d) moving multicultural programs to a vice president for institutional diversity, and (e) moving the access office into student affairs. There was no mention of any changes that would provide a different approach to organizing resources, or structuring differently other than traditional functional units moved to report to other existing units.

When asked what they would change if they could redesign all or part of their student affairs organization structure, the SSAOs responded with the following areas: (a) bring units not currently within student affairs into student affairs; (b) create assistant or associate vice president positions; (c) reduce the direct reports to the vice president; (d) have units report to different supervisors; (e) create functional clusters; (f) increase collaboration around issues with academic; and (g) create changes to support student retention, student success, and student learning. No one mentioned organizing their resources in any way other than functionally and hierarchically and no one mentioned creating a flatter organizational structure.

When asked to explain what was constraining them from reorganizing their current structure to their desired model, the respondents cited the following general issues as their main reasons for not pursuing their desired changes: (a) lack of financial resources, (b) insufficient

staff, (c) the traditional separation between student affairs and academic affairs, (d) time, (e) attitudes of faculty, and (f) current campus climate.

Discussion

While student affairs structures remain primarily functional in nature, some are beginning to adapt elements of alternative structural designs that enable them to manage the increasingly complex nature of their organizations. These changes appear to have been implemented out of necessity, and it is unclear if they were grounded in current organizational theory. There does appear to be general structural similarities among similar types of organizations. This may indicate that student affairs organizations are moving toward structures that more closely represent institutional mission. This may be related to a recent use of benchmarking metrics where comparisons with similar types of institutions are being used as institutional standards.

There does not appear to be any direct relationship between organizational type and the number and variety of organizational units found within student affairs, the number of hierarchical levels, and the spans of control. What constitutes student affairs organizationally is complex and not easy to define. Organization by institutional type might be the closest structural model currently in place to provide organizational definition to student affairs units (Hirt, 2006).

There is some evidence that there may be a relationship between structure and revenue sources and/or perceived availability of resources. Where SSAOs expressed concern for resources or a lack of resources, their organizational structures were often flatter and they often experienced more direct reports. The influences of revenue and available resources appear to continue to play a dominant influence in the current functional structures of student affairs organizations. These findings and the assessment of student affairs organization structural elements remain fairly consistent with the findings of Ambler's (1993) study.

While student affairs organizations seem to be increasingly reporting to the president through other senior administrators, this phenomenon

may be more of a reality in research universities and community colleges than in other types of collegiate organizations. Research universities and community colleges appear to be moving away from directly reporting to the president. At the same time, most SSAOs, especially those at other types of institutions, still report directly to the president; and most SSAO respondents report having ongoing regular contact with the institution's president and continue to serve as members of the executive team. These findings indicate that the complexity of the institutional organization and the desires of the institution's leadership may be the dominant influences on where in the institution student affairs reports. It also appears that SSAOs still have access to institutional leadership regardless of where they report.

Student affairs organizations appear to have changed but only modestly. For most of the SSAOs structural redesign and change was perceived as changing organizational units from one supervisor to another or moving units in and out of the student affair's organization. While this is a form of organizational redesign, this type and level of change does not really address the fundamental dynamics of functional, hierarchical structures and their ability to address new challenges. Few of the SSAOs indicated any interest in restructuring their organizations differently than functional hierarchies, and most viewed barriers to organizational change in terms of human and fiscal resources that they perceived were not available.

Different types of institutions appear to share general design and structural features within their student affairs organizations. These similarities would likely be reflected in the institution's mission and, as a result, should be evident in the organizational structure as well. There is some evidence that this is the case in student affairs organizations. At the same time, over 40% of the SSAO respondents indicated that they did not have a strategic plan and there is only modest evidence that student affairs organizations are being redesigned to address strategic missions or plans. While some of the desired reasons for organizational redesign appear to be strategic and environmentally oriented, the changes described were not actually focused on these issues. The approach to organizational design described, do not adequately address how the student affairs organization will respond to the institutional strategic goals and the

greater environment outside of the institution. So while organizational structures appear to be somewhat mission-related they do not appear to be tied as closely with strategic goals and objectives.

Organizations reviewed in this study rarely appeared structurally as well integrated and cross functional programs and services. While some respondents indicated that they had committees and task forces to deal with these issues, few organizations appeared to be designed to address cross unit or divisional collaborations. Overall, it does not appear that student affairs organizations have truly made a shift to new ways of organizing and doing that require new approaches to thinking and collaborating across organizational lines. Most SSAO respondents appear to be happy with their current organizational structures and do not plan to make any significant changes in the near future.

This study had a number of limitations. While it focused on organizational structure, it did not effectively provide definitions and parameters for adequately defining the unit models reflected in student affairs organizations as precisely as originally desired. Second, it was not designed to capture the processes of organizational design or the thinking of SSAOs as they struggled with organizational issues. Both of these issues need to be examined more specifically. Development of more precise assessment and survey instruments for modeling effective student affairs unit alignment and resources would greatly enhance the understanding of successful student affairs organizational models.

Additional research is needed to understand the changing nature of student affairs work, its interplay with organizational structures and redesign, and the overall impact of these components on organizational effectiveness. Research is called for related to overlay and matrix structures that appear to be emerging in some student affairs organizations, and whether these organizational elements have any relationship to organizational effectiveness. Additional research is also needed to clarify the relationship between organizational design with institutional and divisions missions and strategic goals.

Implications for Practice

It remains unclear to what extent SSAOs' perceptions and their existing organizational structures will impact student affairs work as they engage future challenges and opportunities. The findings of this study seem somewhat curious in that student affairs organizational structures have not changed very much in the past thirty years, yet the issues they face have changed, and the larger higher education organizations themselves have become increasingly complex. Student affairs organizations appear to have, in the majority of cases, retained the traditional, functional structures that have evolved over the past 80 years; and there is little indication that there is a desire to change these structures very much, if at all.

At the same time, the issues being faced and philosophical orientation being espoused by student affairs practitioners and scholars seems to have shifted away from a previous focus on extracurricular life and administrative services, served well by functional structures, to strategic missions and goals that are learning and academic centered. While some of the rationale and desire for change revealed in this study appears to be strategic in nature, there is little evidence that the changes that have been made within existing organizations actually served the purposes and goals that have been identified.

It also does not appear that student affairs practitioners fully comprehend the dynamic nature of organizational design, and the need to adapt organizational structures to changing needs and strategic priorities. In today's higher educational world, organizational structures may need to be more flexible and adaptive, and they should not be viewed as structurally fixed and seldom if ever changed. Second, redesigning structure consists of much more than deciding who reports to whom and which units or cost centers comprise a specific supervisory unit. Organizational design is not solely about acquiring new divisional units, more staff and resources, or developing new programs and services to add to the list of already existing services. It is not solely about whether the unit reports to the president or a provost or how many and which units are distributed among organizational leaders.

Organizational structural design is about how individuals, groups, and systems organize their time, energy, and resources to accomplish goals. Restructuring organizations is about aligning resources and strategies to addressing institutional and divisional strategic goals, and how to become more efficient and effective in the allocation and deployment of resources, especially human resources. Redesign is about adapting and being able to change priorities in the midst of changing institutional direction. There was little evidence from this study that more than a few student affairs organizations are engaged in organizational redesign from this perspective and at this level.

The goal of an ongoing design process should be on crafting an organizational structure that best “fits” the environmental needs of the institution and most effectively promotes the strategic goals of the organization. The first step is for a student affairs division is to have a strategic plan that is aligned with the institutional strategic plan, and is used as the guiding vision for its organizational design and resource allocation process. It is evident that many student affairs divisions do not have a strategic plan and only a very few reported using the plan as part of their ongoing design and review process.

As student needs change and the demographic dimensions of students shift, the organizational structure of student affairs will need to adjust to these changes. Given the restraints on new resources and increasing accountability, the student affairs organizations of the future are more likely going to be asked to restructure existing resources to serve changing needs and new student demands than receive additional allocations. Thinking that redesign requires the infusion of new resources may be problematic in the changing, resource-starved higher education climate of the near future.

Conclusion

Student affairs will face new challenges and new opportunities in the years to come, and organizational redesign will likely be a significant factor in helping to realize organization effectiveness. Current student affairs organizations continue to operate essentially within older organization paradigms and functional, hierarchical structures that may not be sufficient to face new challenges. If these organizations are

going to be adequately able to address the future, they most likely will need to reassess and redesign their structures and operating processes to more directly reflect their mission, purpose, and goals. In the future, effective student affairs organizational structures will need to model new approaches to organizational design, and adaptability, and not rest on the traditions and success of the past.

Appendix:

Student Affairs Organizational Design Questionnaire

This study is intended to gain insight into the organizational design, structures, and practice models currently being used within student affairs organizations in colleges and universities across the United States. We appreciate your taking time to provide us with your response to the following questions. Please feel free to use whatever space you need to answer the open-ended questions. Our goal is to acquire brief but thoughtful explanations about why student affairs organizations are designed the way they are.

- 1) What is your College or University Type?
 - a. Research University
 - b. Comprehensive College or University
 - c. Liberal Arts College
 - d. Community or 2-year college
- 2) Is your institution
 - a. Public
 - b. Private
- 3) How many years have you been SSAO at your institution?

- 4) What do you perceive to be the mission of the Student Affairs Organization at your institution? You may wish to provide a formal mission statement. (Please attach to the returned questionnaire.)

(Appendix, continued)

- 5) Do you have a division strategic plan?
—— Yes —— No
- 6) Did you provide the leadership for the development of the Division's Strategic Plan?
—— Yes —— No
- 7) How do you envision your organizational design contributing to the realization of your strategic goals in the near future?
- 8) To what extent, if any, have you adapted your organizational structure to assist in addressing your strategic goals?
- 9) What units are part of the Student Affairs Organization at your institution? Can you list them and also provide an organization chart? (You can remove the name of the college or university if you desire to do so. This information is being provided for analysis, and it will not be portrayed as specific organizational charts or refer to any organization by name.)
- 10) How many people and units report directly to you within your organizational structure?
—— People —— Units
- 11) Does this arrangement work from your perspective?
—— Yes —— No
- 12) If you could change anything about your current direct reporting structure, what would it be?
- 13) Do you have a basic educational philosophy that guides your decisions on how you have designed the student affairs components? If so, can you briefly explain?

(Appendix, continued)

- 14) Can you briefly describe what you believe to be the greatest strengths of your current student affairs organizational structure and its component parts?
- 15) Did you design the organizational structure you are currently using within student affairs?
- Yes —— No
- Designed part of the current structure, but not all of it.
- 16) Who designed the current structure you are using? (Can you briefly explain?)
- 17) If you inherited either the current structure or a different structure, do you believe you have full authority to restructure all or part of the organization?
- a. Yes, some of it (please explain)
 - b. Yes, some but not all of it (please explain)
 - c. No, (please explain)
 - d. N/A (Did not inherit either the current or a different structure)
- 18) Please indicate if you decided to redesign all or part of your student affairs structure.
- a. Redesigned all
 - b. Redesigned some
 - c. Did not redesign at all
- 19) Please explain why you decided to redesign or not redesign all or part of your student affairs structure.
- 20) In the past 10 years or so, was any part or all of the student affairs organization restructured or reassigned to a new supervisor?
- a. Yes, restructured only
 - b. Yes, reassigned to a new supervisor
 - c. Yes, restructured and reassigned to a new supervisor

(Appendix, continued)

- 21) Please briefly explain what was changed and why it was changed.
- 22) Who do you report to with the college or university organization?
- a. President
 - b. Provost
 - c. Senior vice president
 - d. Other vice president or vice provost
 - e. Another person in the organization _____
- 23) Are you a member of the president's cabinet? If so, what does that entail?
- 24) How frequently do you have contact with the president of your organization, and what is the nature of that contact that you have? Briefly explain.
- a. A few times per week
 - b. Once a week
 - c. A few times per month
 - d. Once a month
 - e. A few times a semester
 - f. Once a semester
 - g. Less than once a semester
 - h. Almost never
- 25) What is the nature of the contact you have with the person you report to in your organization?
- 26) Do you have direct access to the president on a regular basis to discuss issues and concerns privately with him/her?
- 27) How does the communication channel from you to the president work? Please briefly explain.

(Appendix, continued)

The following questions asked the respondents to choose from a lengthy summary of the Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh organization model (2006) and to comment on why they chose a specific model. These questions were not dealt with in this article; and because of their length, they were removed from the reprint of the questionnaire.

- 28) If you could redesign your current organization into a new model, what would you chose? Or would you not want to pick a new organizational model?
- 29) Briefly explain what is constraining you from reorganizing your current structure to create your desired model.
- 30) If you could or wanted to redesign all or part of your student affairs organization, what would you change? Why would you change it, and what do you believe would be achieved by the change you would make?
- 31) Is there anything else about your organization's structure or the process of its design that you would like to share with us?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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