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A Seat At The Table: The Unspoken Values And Benefits Of Student And Academic Affairs Collaboration And Partnerships In Higher Education

Tynesha McCullers
University of Vermont

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A SEAT AT THE TABLE: THE UNSPOKEN VALUES AND BENEFITS OF
STUDENT AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis Presented

by

Tynesha McCullers

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
Specializing in Interdisciplinary Studies

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Thesis Examination Committee:

Robert J. Nash, Ph.D., Advisor
Susan A. Comerford, Ph.D., Chairperson
Jason C. Garvey, Ph.D.
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

ABSTRACT

After almost two semesters as a graduate student at the University of Vermont, I decided that I wanted to do more in my second year of graduate school. It was through conversations with my colleagues that I determined that stepping out of my comfort zone of student affairs and looking into academic affairs would help develop me as not only a student affairs professional but as an educator as well. During the fall semester of 2016, I participated in an independent study where I served as a Teaching Assistant for a university diversity requirement course titled “The Political Economy of Race”. For this course I worked directly with a faculty member in the Department of Economics to cultivate a holistic classroom experience for the students in the course.

Throughout the course of the semester, I was able to witness many different dynamics that were helpful to not only the students but to the professionals in the room as well. Upon completing the semester, I determined that I wanted to do more research and explore the benefits of collaborative partnerships between faculty and staff on college campuses; my focus for this research was to be around partnerships between professionals in student affairs and academic affairs. Although there has not been a lot of research around this particular topic in Higher Education, it is beginning to be studied as colleges and universities are expected to produce more valuable experiences for students.

Through both research and experiential learning, I have found that there are benefits to collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs in Higher Education as well as drawbacks to these partnerships. I have also made recommendations for future collaborative projects between faculty and staff as well as recommendations for future research in this area. Overall, there is value in the collaboration of student and academic affairs; however, it is the duty of Higher Education professionals to understand that value and work more collaboratively to ensure that students are served holistically.

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She carried me for nine months over the course of her junior and senior years of high school. My mother, that is. She was a single mother who raised me to understand the importance of working hard, speaking up for myself, being humble, and having a strong sense of self. As an educator, my mom has always taught me the value of education.

When people used to ask me if I was a first generation college student, I would tell them, “No” and then joke that “my mom ruined that opportunity for me because she got her Bachelor’s degree”. What I realize now is that my mother didn’t ruin that opportunity for me; instead, by earning her Bachelor’s degree, she showed me that I was more than capable of following in her footsteps and going beyond those footsteps to obtain a Master’s degree. Everything I do, I do for you, mommy.

I am thankful to my dad, my siblings and the rest of my family (close and extended) for always having faith in me. Thank you to my partner for always encouraging me and to my puppy, Hershey, for staying up late with me many nights as I wrote this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

Section 1.1. My Current Circumstances

I am approximately 30,000 feet in the air right now. I am on an international flight from Paris, France to Cape Town, South Africa. There was a cute couple who got to our seating row before me and they wanted to sit next to one another but their tickets did not allow that. They asked if I would be willing to “give up” my middle seat for the window seat so that the two of them could ride side by side. Which makes sense considering the fact that this is an eleven and a half hour flight. As I look out the window to my right side, I see fluffy white clouds and a golden sun. The sun is bright, shining through the window and providing the kind of warmth that only a sun can provide. I thought it was necessary for you to know where I am because I believe that our environment can influence what we say or do and in this particular case, what we write. My long distance partnership requires a decent amount of travel on my part and that includes flights that last for hours and hours at a time. Despite my stomach being a little uneasy and my lower back giving me trouble, I can say that I am comfortable and ready to dive in to what my a lot of my time was dedicated to this past semester. But, before I can do that, I have to address what brought me to where I currently am.

Section 1.2. Sophomore Epiphany

During my sophomore year of my undergraduate career, I was introduced to the field of Student Affairs. It all started when I heard all this talk about a man named Eric. My peers were telling me that Eric was somewhat of the “big man on campus” because he worked and lived there. I heard rumors that he lived in the Quad Residence Hall in an apartment with his wife and that he went to his office everyday which was also located in

the Quad Building not far from his apartment. My friends told me that all of his bills were covered by the school and he just lived and worked with minimal cares of the world. As a sophomore student who was still learning more about my campus and the people who worked there, I could not believe the stories I was being told about Eric. I could no longer minimize my inquisitive self, and decided that I would go to the source and reach out to Eric to find out what exactly it was that he did on campus. I emailed him and requested a meeting and he obliged.

When I went to meet with Eric he told me that most of what I heard about him was true – he did work for the university and he did live on campus in an apartment with the Quad building with his wife. He continued by telling me that his utilities were covered and he had other health benefits as well as tuition benefits because of his position. He finally told me that he was my Coordinator for Residence Life and within that role it was his responsibility to maintain the safety and well-being of all of the residents living in the Quad Community on campus which was a total of seven buildings. I was amazed by what Eric was doing and wondered if it would be possible for me to do it as well; that is when he told about the field of student affairs. He told me about his undergraduate career and how he had gone to graduate school to get his Master's degree and how he ended up at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (my undergraduate institution). Eric made it a point to make some recommendations to me such as other ways for me to get involved around campus and other administrators around campus that I should reach out to, noting that each of them had different stories about how they got into the field of student affairs and adding that it was not just a Department called “residential life” that was a functional area of the field. He told me that there were

multiple offices on campus that assisted students with their development that were not directly related to academics. Per Eric's advice, I decided to reach out to multiple offices in my undergraduate institution's division of student affairs requesting interviews with directors, assistant directors, advisors, and coordinators alike. During these meetings I chose to ask them about their career path, their current position and the responsibilities it entailed, and what were some future goals for themselves specifically related to the field of student affairs. I found this practice of meeting and engaging with student affairs professionals to be helpful because it gave me multidimensional perspectives to consider in regards to my path to student affairs.

Section 1.3. The Pursuit of (Higher) Higher Education

One of the most important things that I learned when having informational interviews with different student affairs professionals was how important it was for me to not only take advantage of different experiences during my undergraduate career but also the necessity of pursuing even higher education. Not only did I need to have a Bachelor's Degree but I would also need a Master's Degree in Higher Education in order to adequately move up in the field. Although I wanted to think that my experiences during my undergraduate career should be able to speak for me as far as my passion and desire to get into the field of student affairs, I knew that I was going to have to take it a step further and get my Master's Degree. I must say that knowing and understanding this as a sophomore in college was helpful because it allowed me to plan my last couple of years at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro adequately.

During the fall semester of my senior year of college, I was studying abroad at the University of Cape Town, in Cape Town, South Africa. I had made the financially

conscious decision to apply to only two graduate schools for higher education. I applied to both the University of South Carolina and the University of Vermont. The University of South Carolina was the school that Eric and another one of my supervisor's attended and the two of them spoke very highly of their program. I knew that with their recommendations as well as the networking I had done, I would be able to apply and more likely than not, be accepted. I applied to the University of Vermont because I had been offered a summer internship with the Dean of Students office that I had to turn down because of my study abroad experience. I kept in contact with the Assistant Dean of Students, Nick, and he advised me to apply for graduate school there. With the connection that I had with Nick and his speaking very highly of the higher education graduate program at the University of Vermont, I knew I should apply and would likely be accepted. Well, I was right about both schools. My undergraduate experiences and the connections I had made with alumni from both programs assisted with me getting into graduate school and I had to make a decision about where I wanted to go. I ended up selecting the University of Vermont and began my journey in higher education in August of 2015. Over the course of my first year of graduate school many things occurred that kept me from continuing my education in the Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) program, which brings us to present day.

Currently, I am a graduate student and an Assistant Residence Director at the University of Vermont. I have been a student and in my role as an Assistant Residence Director for a year and a half now with another semester left before I (hopefully) earn my Masters of Education in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Higher Education. As a paraprofessional in the field of Higher Education Student Affairs, I am

constantly thinking, reflecting, and reinventing my role. I am a young, traditional (some would argue), professional who is just learning how to navigate the field I have desired to be a part of since my sophomore year of college.

So I am sure you are probably wondering what exactly it is that I do for a living. Honestly and interestingly enough, I do not have the slightest idea how to explain what I do. For those individuals inside and outside of the field of Student Affairs, defining what it is that student affairs professional is complicated, more time in the field does not make it easier either. When I tell people about the degree that I am working on and inform them of my working on a college campus, they will ask me about what subject I want to become a professor in. I laugh because I am nowhere near becoming a professor. None of these assumptions surprise me though. If you were to ask my mother, who I have a pretty solid relationship with, what it is that I do, she would say that I am a teacher. That only makes sense, right? Working on a college campus and getting a degree in education is equal to wanting to teach professionally. Hmm... Not exactly. Up until recently, I have always had a canned way of responding to the inquiries about what it is that I do. When I tell people that I am a student affairs professional and they would respond by asking me “what is that”, the conversation would continue and flow the following way:

Me: So like, I work with college students.

Them: Oh, so you’re like a teacher preparing to become a professor.

Me: (*chuckling awkwardly*) Umm, no, I am not a teacher or a professor, nor do I want to be one.

Them: (*looking confused*) But you just said that you were getting your degree in education and you work with college students.

Me: Yeah, I know but I am becoming a student affairs professional. Well, I am a student affairs professional.

Them: Well, what is that? Because it just seems like you a professor if you work at a college.

Me: Yep but I am not. I know it can seem confusing but I am not a professor.

Them: Then what are you?

Me: Well, my job requires me to work with college students on their development throughout their college careers.

Them: *(looking even more confused)* What do you mean their development? And how is your degree in education going to help with that?

Me: So you know how you thought I may be a professor? Well, with my degree, I can be involved in just about everything that students do outside of the classroom.

Them: *(appearing unconvinced)* Uh huh...

Me: So like working in the residence halls, in multicultural affairs, student activities and programs, service-learning and leadership or as a dean of students assisting college students with conflict and crisis response throughout their college career. Every piece of the college experience, outside of the classroom I can do with my degree.

Them: Oh okay. Sounds like a lot of options for you and a lot of fun.

Me: It can be at times but not all of the time.

Them: I just thought you might be trying to be a professor, that way you'll always have a job because students will always be looking to learn.

Me: No, not at all. *(thinking to myself "...at least not right now...")*

Believe it or not, whether their intent is to learn more about the field that I intend on being a part of, their words tend to have more of a negative impact on me than just typical curiosity. It can feel a little unsettling to not really know how to describe what it is that I do and it does not make it any easier when the person standing in front of me downplays my job and essentially insults my career choice. I became accustomed to the cheap shots at what it was that I did and learned how to navigate those awkward dialogues. I realized that it was not their fault though, they did not know what it was that I did or was planning to do with my life. I also realized that this is the hand that is dealt to a lot of us individuals who choose to go into the field of education.

Section 1.4. The Purpose of this Thesis

I am writing this thesis because it is time for such a thesis to be written. I am writing this thesis because of my experiences with higher education in the last six years and the impact it has had on me and the people around me. I am writing this thesis as both a student and paraprofessional. The purpose of this thesis is to address what I briefly touch on in previous paragraphs – the misconceptions about student affair professionals from faculty, administration, students, and their guardians. The other purpose of this thesis is to address the gap that is between academic affairs and student affairs on college campuses across the nation. How did we get here? Do we really need both student affairs and academic affairs? How can we utilize one another? Are collaboration efforts necessary? If so, why? What makes a student’s college experience meaningful? Is that really our job or yours? I intend to answer each of these questions and many more throughout this thesis with the assistance of qualitative and quantitative research, my own personal narratives, the narratives of my students, and the narratives of my colleagues in

the field of higher education. This thesis is meant to not only address and confront the division in the field of higher education but to also offer potential solutions for both administrators and faculty to consider as higher education continues to shift in our nation.

CHAPTER 2: CONFRONTING OUR INDISPUTABLE PAST

Section 2.1. Brief History of Higher Education

Medieval universities and early residential colleges viewed the in- and out- of class dimensions of student life as interdependent. Between 1900 and 1920 the population of the United States tripled while college enrollment increased by thirty times (Duke, 1996). As a result of the increased enrollment, the division between intra- and extra- classroom experiences began to evolve. As one can imagine, the increase in student population weighed heavily on the physical and personnel resources that institutions of higher education were able to provide. The new demand for higher education placed constraints on colleges and universities; however, this resulted in the expansion of the American university. Sidney Rothblatt (1997) shows how this expansion correlates with a culture of mass education and how mass education threatened the holistic approach to education. According to Lamadrid (1999) expanding universities to accommodate increased enrollment contradicted the bucolic setting of the English college where tutor and student could walk together and discuss academic and personal issues (p. 26). Although the increase of enrollment was one of the first contributors to the division between student and academic affairs, it was not the only one.

Lamadrid (1999) notes that there were two other causes that widened the gap between both entities of higher education: (a) the rise of the German model of university education, and (b) the change in American higher education in the Post-World War II college and university culture (p.26). During the 19th century, the German university prized itself on the concepts of *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft* (Rothblatt, 1997). According to Lamadrid (1996), *Bildung* means education but encompasses other ideas including:

formation, a sense for what is culturally tasteful, and a civic duty to the state (p. 26, 27). The German model defines education as an “individual’s process of learning to form an aesthetic sense of culture” (Lamadrid, 1996). This particular model is “individualistic, non-residential, and centered on the mastering of a discipline” (Lamadrid, 1996). The other aspect of the German university, *Wissenschaft*, means “science” but more specifically means “knowledge” – knowledge acquired through diligent study and gained by attending lectures (Lamadrid, 1996, p. 27). There was little to no care or concern for the personal and private lives of students with the German university model. Instead there was a greater focus on “disseminating knowledge in an institutionalized form through the resources of the university” (Lamadrid, 1996). Rothblatt (1997) states that German ideals of university were vastly different from the pastoral conception of teaching at Cambridge and Oxford, which were “student-related, centered on the transmission of received values from teacher to disciple and embodied in such forms as college and tutorial” (p. 23). The German university model is comparable to the modern research institution, where faculty is rewarded for its’ ability to disseminate knowledge to students and a student’s worth is measured by their ability to assimilate that knowledge (Lamadrid, 1996). Considering this model, one could conclude that student affairs work is only valued when it assists students with acquiring knowledge in specific fields. This minimal value on the work of student affairs professionals at institutions that have this model contributes to the present day gap between student and academic affairs. Even though the German university model was becoming popular in the United States, it was not the only cause for the division between academic and student affairs. In fact, the influx of veterans returning from World War II caused the gap to continue to widen.

Veterans returning from war were rewarded for their service through the disbursement of the GI Bill. The GI Bill was a new option that made obtaining a college degree affordable, desirable, and more accessible for veterans (Lamadrid, 1996). Students with veteran status were older than traditional college-aged students and they were looking for “an academic curriculum that supported a more pragmatic approach to education” (Lamadrid, 1996). As survivors of war, the typical college experience of living in a residence hall or attending on campus events was not appealing to veterans nor did it adequately serve them. The introduction of the GI Bill and inclusion of veterans in higher education further contributed to the distinguishing cultures of both student and academic affairs.

Section 2.2. Descartes and Cartesian Dualism

Since the mid to late 1900s, the field of higher education has operated in such a way that there has been a split between what is now recognized as academic affairs and student affairs. In 1994, *The Student Learning Imperative*, framed the dichotomy by stating the following:

Higher education traditionally has organized its activities into “academic affairs” (learning, curriculum, classrooms, cognitive development) and “student affairs” (co-curriculum, student activities, residential life, affective or personal development). However, this dichotomy has little relevance to post-college life, where the quality of one’s job performance, family life, and community activities are all highly dependent on cognitive *and* affective skills. (American College Personnel Association, p.1)

Lamadrid (1999) argues that this statement “[articulates] post-college life as an interdependence between cognitive and affective skills” and that “[this] language retains the division between the cognitive and the affective (p. 26).

While interviewing an academic advisor at Duke University in the late 1990s, Lucas Lamadrid (1999) recalls the advisor stating “The problem with student affairs types is that they just don’t get it. They don’t understand the life of the mind” (p. 24). Lamadrid (1999) begins by elaborating on how this comment “jarred [him]” and how he wanted to refute the statement but instead as “[he was] a student affairs type” he thought to himself, “[The advisor] just doesn’t get it” (p. 24). He continues by acknowledging that he “missed a golden opportunity for rapprochement” (Lamadrid, 1999, p. 24). This type of exchange was not uncommon for professionals in higher education to have with one another; in fact, exchanges similar to this one still continue to this day. What conversations like this bring into question is this terminology of, “the life of the mind” and it’s relation to the roles of higher education professionals. In the context of the interview and what the academic advisor was attempting to say to Lamadrid (1999), is “what the academic sphere engages in...deals with the “life of the mind” (p. 24). Lamadrid (1999) argues that this statement alone implies “that student affairs does not engage the mind or at least not the substance of the mind” (p. 24). This theory of there being a dichotomy between the mental and emotional is founded in Rene Descartes’ philosophy. Descartes believed “that the one foundation upon which we can posit our existence with certitude is the mind” (Lamadrid, 1999, p. 25). He makes a case in *Meditations on First Philosophy* that “human self is defined by and limited to the rational mind” and “everything else which deals with the human person is incidental” (Lamadrid,

1999, p. 25). What Descartes' philosophy does is define "the mind" as its' own entity and independent of the human experience. His philosophy completely ignores the concept of experiential learning and offers it no creditability to "the mind". In the last few decades, institutions of higher education have adopted an approach similar to Descartes' philosophy and which has in turn created a Cartesian dualism in the field. This distinction views the mind as separate from the heart and thought as separate from emotion. Lamadrid (1999) asserts that institutions of higher education have used this type of dualism to "[promote] and [foster] the 'life of the mind'" and regarded it as "central to the mission of higher education" while student affairs is promoted as an "administrative branch which tends to the emotional, sensitive, and ancillary dimension of the university of college student" (p. 25).

Section 2.3. Pursuing Recognition

Student development theory gained prominence in the profession of student affairs during the 1970s (Lamadrid, 1999). The addition of these theories to the field of student affairs worked to "professionalize" and legitimize the field and provide the academic weight that it needed to gain acceptance and appreciation from the academic sector of higher education (Lamadrid, 1999). This theory to practice approach focused heavily on the affective dimension of the individual. At the time, faculty dismissed this theory of development and viewed it as "ancillary to the enterprise of higher education" (Lamadrid, 1999). The biggest emphasis in higher education was on the intellectual life, also interpreted as the "life of the mind". Zeller (1997) asserts:

Student development theory took hold as the discipline of the Student Affairs profession. Rather than providing credibility and collegiality with campus faculty,

this movement seemed to create an even greater separation of the two cultures... Academic affairs tended to students' cognitive development while Student Affairs ministered to their affective growth. (p. 10)

Faculty and administrators in academic affairs were considered to be doing the most important work in higher education while student affairs professionals were viewed as 'managers' of the out-of-class experience rather than educators (Lamadrid, 1999).

Although this perspective of student affairs professionals was regarded as true and at the time the dominant way of thinking at institutions of higher education, with time it was destined to change.

Section 2.4. Misconceptions about Professionals in Student and Academic Affairs

It is no secret that for decades, faculty, staff, and administrators at colleges and universities across the country are divided. Some of the factors contributing to this division include, but are not limited to: level of education, status at the university, functionality, as well as salary. As the factors continue to change and develop with time, the gap between academic affairs and student affairs will continue to grow. While it might be easy to blame one particular group, entity, policy, dynamic, etc. on the division between both units in higher education; it is much more complex than just one particular thing.

In addition to there not being just one cause to the division in academic affairs and student affairs in higher education, it should also be noted that each college and university may not struggle with the same issues as other counterparts. Some of the various reasons for the division amongst higher education professionals include:

institutional tradition, academic elitism, misunderstandings and misconceptions about the roles and responsibilities of professionals from both sides of higher education. These various reasons all branch out from common misconceptions that higher education professionals in academic affairs have about professionals in student affairs and vice versa.

Going into this research about student affairs and academic affairs in higher education, I had my own ideas and opinions about what both units of higher education were, how they operated and who they included. I decided, however, to use define both units by reading what colleges had to say about their versions of academic affairs and student affairs. I chose to look at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte's (UNCC) descriptions and visions of academic and student affairs because this university currently has a distinction between both units. I have included the descriptions of both academic and student affairs at UNCC below in order to compare the roles and responsibilities of both entities. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte describes their Office of Academic Affairs in the following way:

Led by Dr. Joan F. Lorden, Provost and Vice Chancellor, the Office of Academic Affairs is responsible for the planning, development, implementation, administration, and evaluation of the University's programs in instruction, research, and public service. The Office works closely with the Deans of the Colleges and the Graduate School and has responsibility for making final recommendations to the Chancellor, the Board of Trustees, and the Board of Governors concerning the establishment of new academic programs and the appointment, promotion, tenure, and salaries of faculty. The Office also

facilitates academic policies, procedures, and standards for both students and faculty, as well as publishing both the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs. (“About Academic Affairs”, 2017)

This particular description of academic affairs focuses primarily on academics. Academic Affairs at UNCC is responsible for all of the academic programs in both the Undergraduate and Graduate Colleges, makes recommendations to the Chancellor and Board of Trustees, hires faculty, and monitors research. Each of these responsibilities within this entity are solely related to the academic experience at the university.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte describes their Division of Student Affairs with both vision statement and a mission statement that I have included below respectively:

The Division of Student Affairs is dedicated to the personal, intellectual, professional, interpersonal, spiritual development of students that promotes a healthy and diverse campus community. (Division of Student Affairs Vision and Mission, 2017)

The mission of the Division of Student Affairs is to:

1. Promote student learning and holistic development that also fosters a recognition and appreciation of diversity;
2. Provide services, facilities, and physical structures which encourage interpersonal engagement, stimulation of the learning process and promotes mental, physical health and wellness;

3. Foster a campus community which promotes student involvement through enhanced interpersonal and social engagement opportunities, organizations and programs;
4. Develop and enhance collaborative relationships with students, faculty, staff, and the external community to better serve student needs and ensure high quality services and programs;
5. Develop and expand efforts that encourage student recruitment, retention, and graduation. (Division of Student Affairs Vision and Mission, 2017)

This thorough description of student affairs primary focuses include: providing students with services, building relationships and community with students, and fostering environments that promote holistic learning and development. These primary focuses are related to most if not all aspects of the college student's development. UNCC's mission of student affairs really captures the idea of creating environments that cultivate a holistic college experience for students. Another observation I made here was that there was no mention of academic development, only statements that alluded to student affairs professionals aiding with the academic experience.

One aspect of the mission that surprised me was the mention of developing and enhancing relationships with faculty. I found this aspect surprising because the description of academic affairs makes no mention of faculty building relationships or collaborating with student affairs professionals. I am only left to assume here that it is an expectation that student affairs professionals reach out to faculty and work to collaborate with them but there is not a similar expectation for professionals in academic affairs. When both of the descriptions are taken into account, it is interesting to note that even

though decades have passed and this dualism is no longer spoken of, there are still subtle ways of promoting the division of student and academic affairs at institutions of higher education.

CHAPTER 3: INDEPENDENT STUDY – TEACHING ASSISTANT

Section 3.1. Why TA?

During the spring semester of my first year of graduate school, I was exhausted. I was coming to terms with the fact that I did not like my graduate program as much as I anticipated liking it, anymore. I was in a place where I was searching for purpose and meaning in not only my life but my educational pursuits. I have always viewed myself as more of an experiential learner as opposed to someone who could learn things and keep them in my memory; instead, I thrived more on doing and learning from doing. I was the type of learner who was not completely against sitting in a lecture hall everyday but preferred putting theory to practice. I am still that type of learner who appreciates internships, field experience, practicums, etc. I believe that the most learning comes from these particular types of methodologies. While I was in the state that I was in, with my graduate program and not appreciating a lot of what was taking place within the classroom, I was taking solace in my practicum internship that I had during the spring semester. It was during this time that I was working in the Dean of Students office alongside the Assistant Dean of Students. I enjoyed going to my practicum experience a few days out of the week and being involved in a lot of the happenings with students across all departments and areas on campus. I also appreciated the opportunities that my practicum supervisor afforded me during my time there.

Towards the middle of the semester, it was explained by a coordinator in my graduate program that it was time for us to begin thinking about what kind of practicum we would like to have during the fall semester. After doing a few interviews with my top choices, I found that I was not completely in love with any of the options for practicum;

this is when I remembered that we had the option to “create our own practicum”. I thought surely this is something that I could do. I would be able to create my own experience because I could not find something that was appealing to me. I thought very critically about what exactly it was that I wanted to do and remembered seeing a syllabus for a course that was going to be taught during the following semester. This particular course was called “The Political Economy of Race” and it was taught by Dr. Stephanie Seguino; the course was also listed as a “D1” course or as a course that fulfilled a Diversity requirement for students at the university. While reviewing the syllabus, I found that I wanted to learn a lot of the material being taught and that perhaps I could use some of my skills and knowledge to potentially serve as a teaching assistant for the course. I thought surely this could be a practicum option for me – serving as a TA over the course of a semester for a D1 course. A lot of me felt like I was in over my head considering the fact that I did not have any experience in the classroom except the speeches I had given and the presentations and projects that I presented in the past. I thought surely that these experiences were similar to what teaching was like so I would be more than capable of serving as a teaching assistant. I just knew that there would be a lot of time and dedication required on my part, including reaching out to the actual professor seeing if she would be willing to have a teaching assistant and/or to meet with me to hear some of my thoughts, ideas, and goals for the upcoming semester.

I emailed Stephanie, told her I came across her course and how not only did it peak my interest but made me consider serving as a teaching assistant for the fall semester. To my surprise, she emailed me back within a day or two and requested that the two of us make time to meet with one another. I remember feeling both excited and

anxious about what she would think of me and my desire to work alongside her. Would she believe in me? Would she present a certain amount of skepticism? How was I going to navigate what felt like such an arduous task? I honestly had no idea at this rate, I mean, wasn't it simply a meeting like any other meeting? No, no it wasn't. It truly felt like this meeting was going to do more harm than good because it felt like a lot of what was taking place around me was constant chaos with a lot of mental and emotional labor on my part. I also think that these sentiments of mine around how difficult this meeting could potentially be came from the fact that I was a graduate student in a graduate program with a focus in student affairs. The field of student affairs has a history of not only being viewed as unnecessary by some skeptics but having a clear divide from academic affairs on college campuses. I thought that this, "divide" would somehow hinder me from being able to take advantage of such an opportunity as a teaching assistant because perhaps Stephanie would not see me as a "true educator", whatever that means. Whelp, I did not have any more time to continue to worry about what the meeting would be like, what assumptions the professor may have of me, or any of her skepticisms of my as a developing student affairs professional because the time had finally come for the two of us to sit down and meet one another.

Section 3.2. Our First Meeting

It did not take long for me to find Stephanie's office – she gave me really good directions to the Economics Department in the Old Mill Building. I walked throughout the department until I reached her office. The door was wide open and the sun was beaming through the windows. Pop tunes were playing and I could see a small woman sitting at a desk with her back facing the door. I assumed that this woman was Stephanie.

I stepped closer and gave the door a gentle knock to announce my presence. Before Stephanie could turn around in her chair to see me, I was immediately greeted by a large probably 100+ pound golden retriever. He barked large once and then made an attempt to jump on me. Stephanie turned around in her chair to see all the commotion and called for her dog to come to her and stop trying to engage with me in such a hyperactive way. Stephanie had a small frame and wore glasses. She had a bit of her hair at the tip of her lips and her hand was placed near the corner of her mouth to pull the hair out. I instantly noticed that her smile was gentle and her demeanor made me feel relaxed fairly quickly. She stood up to pull her dog who was too distracted by my presence to sit down and go back under the desk last she asked. She reached out her hand towards mine requesting a shake to which I obliged by reaching my hand back towards hers. She introduced herself in the process of our hands shaking and when the handshake was almost over, I introduced myself. She told me that it was nice to finally meet me and asked me was I afraid of dogs, which I responded to with a “no”. With that no, she spoke to her dog again and he went under her desk to lie down. Stephanie encouraged me to grab a seat and with that, our dialogue began. The two of us talked about the history of her course and why she began teaching it in the first place. She explained to me her learning objectives and how with each year, each group of students in the course learned and engaged with the material differently. She discussed with me how thrilled she was about having a teaching assistant come on and work with her because she never had one or had anyone express such interest in working alongside her. I remember feeling surprised by her not only her positive attitude but her willingness to engage with me and entertain the idea of me working with her. Stephanie also took the time to present some ideas and goals that she

had for me for the upcoming semester, but more specifically ways that I could support her as a faculty. I did a lot of head nodding and agreeing with Stephanie during this meeting. I was making conscious decisions not to say the wrong thing or make a mistake representative of student affairs professionals as a whole. I am not sure why I had such a collectivistic attitude about my particular professional field. I had in my mind that “us vs. them” attitude because of the constant back and forth between student affairs and academic affairs on who was more important to the college experience. I admit this caused me to be a little guarded with Stephanie but as someone who was at the time looking for acceptance from just about anyone in higher education, more specifically at the University of Vermont, I was willing to do whatever it took to not only be accepted but well regarded. During the meeting, I took the time to tell Stephanie a little bit about myself, my graduate program and my goals for the upcoming school year. I told her what drew me to her course in general and told her what little knowledge I had about her work inside the classroom and the institution as well as the work she had done outside the classroom and the institution. Her dog would come from underneath the desk occasionally to get pet by me and Stephanie; she told me he liked attention.

Section 3.3. Our Second Meeting (Receiving the Books)

The second time we met was early in August. I was not as nervous about sitting down with Stephanie as I was when we previously met one another. I was surprised that even though a few months had passed that she was still interested in working with me for the fall semester and having me take on the role of teaching assistant in her course. I think I was surprised because again, I knew very well about the disconnect that existed between the professionals in students affairs and the professionals in academic affairs.

Because I knew that some professionals in academic affairs had the mindset that student affairs professionals had no business in the classroom, I worried that a couple of months would have changed Stephanie's mind and that she may longer be interested in sharing her classroom or domain rather, with an aspiring student affairs professional.

Nevertheless, with all of these different thoughts lingering in my mind, I was still excited and grateful for the opportunity that was being extended to me and I knew that I could not take it for granted.

After such a difficult spring semester and a summer that was almost equally difficult, I found myself in a place where I was struggling to trust anyone who held a significant title at the university, especially those who had positions of authority over me. Although, I felt uneasy about a lot of what was happening around me regarding my relationship with my institution and those who worked for my institution, I was still open to giving Stephanie a chance and I was open to giving myself a chance to redeem myself and come back from the state I was in of being and feeling unfulfilled.

Similar to our first meeting, I went to meet Stephanie in her office and her dog was there to greet me as soon as I let my presence be known. I have to admit that the months that had passed, had caused me to forget some of the features that Stephanie had like I had forgotten how tall she was, the length of her hair, and if she had worn contacts or glasses. Time did not allow me to forget about how optimistic Stephanie was and it showed as soon as I walked through the door. As soon as I took a seat at the table near the window in her office, Stephanie rolled her chair over to me and handed me two different books and a UVM bookstore bag to keep them in. My heart began to race and a bit of me wanted to hug her but instead of doing that and potentially making her feel

uncomfortable, I just said thank you to her. I knew that the reason that my heart was racing was because this was the first time in a while that a faculty member that put showed some serious faith in me and my ability. Receiving the books that were necessary for the course symbolized a new beginning for me and it also symbolized me having some sort of faith restored in myself. In the midst of Stephanie explaining to me that the students would have readings in both books over the course of the semester and that these books were for me to use for myself and serve as a resource to the other students, I could only question myself and ask what exactly it was that I was planning to do this semester. I say this because when holding the books in front of me, I felt like perhaps I was in over my head. Maybe being a teaching assistant was something that I was not necessarily cut out for. I kept asking myself what kind of authority it was that I had to step from behind the student affairs line and attempting to crossover the academic affairs side of higher education. So yes, while I was anxious, excited, and hopeful about receiving those two books, there was a piece of me that felt a bit of imposter syndrome. A part of me that felt as if I did not deserve the books and that I would not be capable of fulfilling the role that I said I would. I did not open up to Stephanie about this but instead let my mind race with an interesting mix of optimism, pessimism, and self-doubt while she continued to talk to me. As the meeting continued, we went over some of the specifics of what my role would be looking like and in addition we talked about some more tangible goals that I had for myself and my role as a teaching assistant for her course. I told Stephanie that I did want to be responsible for grading the students' reflective journals and that I wanted to give input for her lectures and lead the class in activities/discussions. I also told Stephanie that I wanted assist with the reviewing and grading of quizzes, tests, and essays and that my

ultimate goal was to teach at least five lectures alone by the end of the semester. Yes, you read that correctly – five lectures. I could not believe that I even fixed my mouth to say such a thing but I did. Was I confident that I would be able to make that happen? Not exactly. But in some weird way, in that moment there was a little ounce of hope that I had for my future; there was faith that I had in myself as not only a graduate student but as a student affairs professional. I believed that I would be a capable student who was learning just as every undergraduate student in the course. I knew it would be easy for me to keep an open mind and not only learn the material, Stephanie had come accustomed to teaching, but learn different methods of facilitating a classroom. I knew that as a student affairs professional, it would be easy for me to adapt to the new environment and the group of students I would be serving. In addition to this, I was hopeful that I would be able to bring different knowledge and types of learning to the classroom experience. I only had faith in my identities of graduate student and student affairs professional here because never have I regarded myself as anything more than those two entities. Not once have I tried to label myself as anyone remotely close to a professor or future professor. I intentionally did not add the title(s) of teacher, professor, or future faculty member when speaking of towards having faith in my abilities. My reasoning for that is because I felt that for so long academic affairs and student affairs had been presented to me as separate and not equal and that my ability to become a part of the academic affairs side of higher education was all but possible.

Section 3.4. Grading

Well, the time finally came. It was time for me to fulfill one of my biggest roles as a teaching assistant for the Political Economy of Race – grading. But more

specifically, grading reflective journals from the students. Stephanie and I had told the students at the beginning of the course that it was a requirement of ours for them to keep a journal for the class detailing all of the readings, classroom discussions and activities, podcasts or news related items that they heard outside of class, personal reflections, and any questions that they may have for us or others. I thought surely grading journals would be simple and easy; in fact, when Stephanie insisted that she help and grade half of the journals and I grade the other half, I felt as though she was implying that I was not competent enough to handle reading them all of them on my own. However, I quickly realized that perhaps she wanted to grade half of the journals just so that I would not be burdened by a lot of the work. She explained to me ahead of time that I did not need to be reading the journals word for word and that skimming them would suffice. In addition to saying this, she gave me my first lesson in education – the power of skimming students’ work. When she was giving me this lesson, I remember how I felt uneasy internally. The student affairs side of me said that it would not be fair to only “skim” because I would not be able to see all of their words and all of their words mattered. I say that the student affairs side of me said this because most of my training had taught me that I needed to strive to understand every aspect of each student and that I should value their stories and experiences and that only focusing on pieces of the students was not giving them the opportunity to be their whole selves. Was I reading into this “skimming” lesson? Probably. But I was still determined to give each of them a chance through their work. Stephanie told me that I would be reading to ensure that the students had a grasp of all of the material and that they were able to not only articulate the material that was covered inside and outside of the class but that they could reflect and make personal connections

as well. The day had finally come; it was time to collect the students first set of journals after the first two weeks of class. I had made plans on this particular day of class to bring a reusable bag from Price Chopper to carry the journals in because I knew that they would be too heavy for me to get across campus. Well, I forgot that bag and still had to get the journals across campus but I had the help of someone. Stephanie took half of the journals in order to ensure that I was not overwhelmed with having to grade them all. She gave me a grading scale and told me that she trusted my judgement and that since I was familiar with the material and students that it would be fairly easy for me to get through the journals.

I can tell you now that nothing felt more affirming than sitting all those journals on my desk in my apartment. Yes, it was going to take me awhile to grade them over the weekend but I was going to be grading them. I was essentially going to be completing one of my first major tasks as a teaching assistant. I also felt affirmed knowing that Stephanie trusted me to do the grading and provide the students with feedback. Although I was a little nervous about giving grades, I was ready to take on the challenge. I thought that grading would not take long until I read through the first person's journal, wrote down comments, and put a grade on the last page. It took me almost forty minutes and when I looked at the stack of journals that were waiting for me to leaf through them and give them a grade, I felt stressed. I began to ask myself "what the hell were you thinking agreeing to be a teaching assistant, let alone grade". I felt overwhelmed and I could hear Stephanie's voice in the back of my mind giving me the tip to skim through the journals but I suppressed that voice and grabbed the second journal.

After about three journals back to back, I decided to take a mental break. I checked my email and saw that Stephanie had sent me an email telling me about the journals she had already graded and what she was finding in them. Overall, she did not seem too pleased with the effort the students had put forth which was a completely different experience than I was having because the journals I had already read, exceeded our expectations and I shared these sentiments with her. I told her that I would keep grading and I would let her know how the rest of my stack turned out. She agreed and said that we should meet prior to class the following week to further discuss the journals and the grading. Although it took me almost three days to finish grading the journals, I finally finished and sent the grades over to Stephanie. It was such a relief to mark them off of my “to do” list.

Stephanie and I met before the next class so that she could look over the journals I had and see how I did with grading. I was anxious about her checking behind me because it made me feel a little incapable of the job as was being asked to do; however, I was more at ease when Stephanie explained that she wanted to check and make sure that we were on the same brainwaves with grading of the journals and we marked students similarly. With some discussion, Stephanie and I determined that the biggest challenges that the students had in their journal writing was reflecting and making personal connections and not just using their journal space to summarize. We talked about different ways to address this issue with the students so that they could fulfill the requirements in their future journals. We addressed those issues with the class the day we handed the journals back and even presented them with some examples of what a good journal entry looks and sounds like.

I am not sure if the students appreciated our feedback but over the course of the semester they got a lot better at writing in their journals and it made our jobs of grading a heck of a lot easier. Don't get me wrong, there were still a few students that did not improve and seemed uninterested in improving but this was a lesson I had to learn as a teaching assistant: that I would not always reach every student. It was a difficult lesson but it was a lesson that needed to be learned.

For the entire semester, I graded journals and every once in a while I would review the students' essays they would submit and talk to Stephanie about what I was observing. I did not feel comfortable grading their major assignments because I did not see myself as an expert in the material being taught and if I can be a little more vulnerable, I did not feel confident enough in myself to be taken seriously as a non-academic student affairs professional in a different area of higher education. I liked where I was with grading the students and engaging with the work that they produced inside and outside of class. I found that grading the students allowed me to keep track of their progress as individuals and as a group which was helpful to me as a teaching assistant. Grading also gave me the opportunity to learn more about who the students were as individuals. They would share details about their backgrounds and the personal lives in their journals that they would not dare share with their classmates. Reading their journals was a way for me to connect with them even if they did not see it that way. One more thing before I close this section, because I had to grade journals throughout the semester, I eventually took Stephanie's first lesson in teaching – the power of skimming and I would have to say that it truly saved my life.

Section 3.5. First Time Teaching

Before I get into talking about my experiences teaching as a teaching assistant, I have to tell you about the process. What process you might ask. The process of preparing a lesson plan. Because I had a supportive supervisor and faculty member, I was given a lot of support in preparing my first lesson. My first lesson that I was teaching alone was on residential segregation and the implications that it had on current issues of wealth in the United States. Although we already had someone come and talk to the class about residential segregation earlier in the semester, someone who basically laid the groundwork for me, I was still extremely nervous about having to go into further detail about the subject. After all, I did not consider myself as an expert on the topic and I did not feel as though I could measure up to Stephanie and all that I had witnessed her do with the student in all the previous weeks in the semester. Stephanie seemed surprised when I told her about the nerves I was getting from the thought of teaching the class. She affirmed me and told me that I had done great in previous classes when I spoke on certain subjects and issues and that the students had respect for me so I had nothing to worry about. I took her affirmations and pushed them to the center of my brain to access as a reminder when I was losing confidence in myself.

Stephanie went over the material that I was expected to teach a couple of days in advance making sure that I took the time to focus on certain aspects more than others. She started by showing me the PowerPoint that she normally used when she taught on residential segregation. I looked over her slideshow and made changes to adjust to what I thought the students might need more time grasping and the two of us talked about some activities that I could do with the students to make sure that they were retaining the

material. She discussed with me her experiences over the years as a professor and gave me tips on how to reach students even when it becomes difficult.

Although Stephanie gave me advice just about every class I was with her and in our private meetings, it was nice to keep receiving advice especially in one of the more stressful times in the semester. I went home that afternoon breathing a lot easier and feeling as though I was capable of doing the job I set out to do. I spent that night and the next night up and going over the material and my presentation over and over again. I wrote plenty of notes for myself and came up with some activities that I thought would help the students understand the material better. I told myself that I was accommodating different needs that students may have in regards to how they learn and retain information. I had some visual, auditory, hands-on, and group discussions ready on the subject so that just about every learning style would be addressed.

Over these two days and nights, I told everyone about the lesson plan I was creating for my class and how I was set to teach for the first time alone on Thursday. My family and friends offered me plenty of words on encouragement and some words of wisdom which was something I truly appreciate because I could tell that they could tell how important this was to me. To be honest, it felt like I was reaching some milestone. It was time for me to prove to Stephanie, my students, my family, my colleagues, and myself how good of a teacher I could be. I prepared until there was nothing more to prepare for my lesson. I sat my clothes out the night before just to make sure that I looked as professional as I possibly could on my first day of teaching. I got into bed and scrolled through my cellphone to look over my PowerPoint slides and notes until I dozed off to sleep. I felt ready.

On October 27th, 2016 at approximately 1:10pm, I stood in front of a class full of undergraduates in a black dress with specks of pinks, purples, teals, and greens, a black blazer, a black pair of heels, and a purple scarf wrapped around the edge of my head. I was scared shitless. Not because it was almost time for class to begin and time for me to finally teach but because it was almost time for class to begin and time for me to finally teach and Stephanie was nowhere to be found. I had no idea where she could possibly be. The students could tell I was antsy and asked me what was wrong. I was honest with them and told them that it would be my first time teaching and they told me that I had nothing to worry about because they knew I would be great. Well, a few of them were willing to praise and affirm me beforehand which was nice but also added pressure for me to put my best foot forward. I told them I was not as much worried about teaching as I was about Stephanie not being there; I even joked with them that I thought that Stephanie might be trying to set me up because she knew how anxious I was and she wanted to see if I would crack under pressure or if I was capable of teaching without her in the room. I was also panicked because I couldn't get the projector started and the PowerPoint up. A couple of minutes past and still no Stephanie. Class was scheduled to begin at 1:15pm and I did not want to start without Stephanie. I kept frantically checking my cellphone to see if I had any messages or calls from Stephanie but I had nothing. Approximately two minutes before class was set to begin, Stephanie walked through the door. I can tell you right now that I had never been so happy to see her in my life. She got things set up for me with the projector and with the PowerPoint and I was set to begin. Stephanie decided to grab the seat that I always sat in on the right side of the classroom and she sat down and essentially gave me the okay to start.

I stood in the center of the front of the classroom and went over my credentials with the students. I told them who I was, what my degree was in and what degree I was working on, my current role at the university, and what I would be teaching them on that day. They were all staring at me which was expected as I was the one who was speaking but I could not accept the stares so I just giggled nervously and told them I was nervous but also excited about teaching my first lesson.

I told the students that the first task I had for them would be in groups so I requested that they count off by tens. I led them in counting, told them where to go based on their number, and while they starting moving their desks and bodies to different areas of the classroom, I went to “hide” behind the podium. When they were officially settled in their groups, I gave them instructions on what to do and told them to get to work.

While they were doing group work, I talked with Stephanie and made some in the moment changes to what I wanted them to do in groups. I had them follow their group work with small impromptu group presentations to the class where they went over the subject matter they discussed in their groups. I also asked them to answer any questions their classmates might have and if they were unable to answer them, I would answer them or Stephanie would step in. After the group work and group mini-presentations, I went on to my PowerPoint and began lecturing on residential segregation. I confidently walked back and forth across the front of the room and to the computer to change the slide whenever necessary.

I got excited when students raised their hands with questions for me because it meant that they were listening and wanted to gain a better understanding of the material. In some instances, in meant that they wanted to speculate or challenge some of the

material I was teaching but I appreciated that level of engagement as well. When I was met with a challenging question by a student, I would look to the other students in the class and see their different facial expressions and encourage them to answer their peer's question. This is something that I witnessed Stephanie do a couple of times and something she encouraged me to do as well. Having other students answer their peer's questions takes the pressure off you as the professor or teacher rather and it allows the students to think more critically about the material. The students were usually eager to answer their peers and that allowed me to hold my response and encourage discussion until everyone who had input finished.

These types of experiences reminded me of the necessity of peer education and why it is important for students to teach one another. When I felt as though I could not give an answer to a student or give elaborate answers to students' questions, Stephanie would step in and add both her knowledge and opinion. I appreciated how active and engaged the class was on this particular day and it made the time pass quite quickly; in fact, I did not get the opportunity to finish my lesson because class had come to an end. I told the students they were dismissed and some of them quickly packed their belongings and headed out the door while others packed their belongings and approached me with questions and comments about my teaching. Most of them offered me positive feedback asking if I was interested in teaching and telling me that I should truly consider it because I did well and they felt like they got a lot out of my lesson. I could not believe they were lining up to speak to me because normally they were lined up to speak with Stephanie. Nonetheless, when they were leaving the class Stephanie offered me feedback about my teaching as well as positive affirmations for the lectures that would follow. I packed up

my belongings and left with a bright smile on my face. I could not believe it. I officially graduated from being a teaching assistant that simply grades papers. I had become a teaching assistant who taught and that was pretty damn special.

Section 3.6. Making Connections

During my time as a teaching assistant, I was afforded the opportunity to meet different administrators, faculty, and students at UVM and no longer at UVM. The first person that I met was a guest lecturer from the Department of Biology here at UVM; his name was Dr. Brandon Ogbunu. The purpose of his lecture was to talk about the correlation or the lack thereof, of race as a biological concept as opposed to a social construct. His lecture examined some of the beliefs that genetics determined what your race was which was quite inaccurate. I appreciated his lecture and I think that our students did too because it confirmed a few of the beliefs that the students had and it also left room for them to ask more questions on the concept of race.

Stephanie, by having this lecture towards the beginning of the semester really set the stage for the work that we would be doing around race and the economy for the rest of the semester. After Dr. Ogbunu's lecture, the students were lining up eager to talk to him about science but more specifically about biology and the implications of biology in relation to race. On this particular day, I had to collect journals from the students so I was busy trying to get them from the students while also listening in on some of the conversations the students were having with Dr. Ogbunu. Upon finishing talking with all of the students who had lined up to speak to him, Dr. Ogbunu saw me struggling to come up with a plan to carry the journals across campus and offered to assist me. I'll admit, I was appreciative of his offer and also a little skeptical of it. This was partially because I

still was not in a place where I felt as though I could truly trust faculty because of my experiences with them in the previous year. Nevertheless, I accepted Dr. Ogbunu's offer and the two of us walked over to the residence hall where I worked.

During our walk he asked me several different questions related to my role as a teaching assistant, my degree of study, my other roles at the university, and my career aspirations. I also asked him similar questions and wondered what brought him to Vermont. My skepticism of him faded as we walked and talked because of how open he was to discussing his journey as a faculty member at the university.

There were a couple of things that struck me as interesting over the course of our walk to my residence hall. One of the first things was how Dr. Ogbunu spoke to me and treated me; although, I am a student affairs professional, he did not belittle me or make it seem as though I was incapable of getting to where he was in his career. This was something that I also noticed in Stephanie but it still caught me off guard because of the meta-narratives that I had been exposed to in regards to how faculty in academic affairs viewed student affairs professionals.

The second thing that struck me was the little knowledge of university affairs and student affairs that Dr. Ogbunu had. I inquired about a few things that were simply common knowledge in my line of work that he had no insights on. He said that most if not all of his focus was on teaching his classes, labs, having office hours, doing research, and producing scholarly articles; he did not have the time to invest in what was going on around campus or what was going on for his students. Another interesting piece for me was he did not know his way around all of campus either which seemed odd to me as I had to learn my way around campus fairly quickly after arriving here. As we got closer to

the residence hall, I spoke to Dr. Ogbunu about one of my passions and potential thesis topics of bridging the gap between academic affairs and student affairs. I told him that student affairs could collaborate more with academic affairs and one way to start that is by having faculty coming into the residence halls and doing programming and he agreed with my sentiments and said that he would be eager to be a part of such an initiative. The funniest part of our entire exchange was when we finally made it inside of the residence hall and I opened my office door. It was when I opened my office door that I laughed because Dr. Ogbunu made the comment that my office was way bigger than his. Why did I laugh? Umm... I'm pretty sure it was simply because in this particular moment I felt as though I was superior to a faculty member which was never really the case as a student affairs professional. It was weird, for once I kind of felt like I mattered more and was deserving of the office that I had. I did not share these sentiments with Dr. Ogbunu though. I just exchanged contact information with him, thanked him for his help, his conversation, and sent him on his way. I valued all of those things from him because it was beginning to feel as though my narrative about faculty members was slowly being disproved – first by Stephanie and second by Brandon.

The second person I was able to meet because of my teaching assistantship was Dr. Rashaad Shabazz. Dr. Shabazz came to us all the way from Arizona State University to give a guest lecture for our class and for the university as well. Dr. Shabazz came to our course to talk to the students about the history of black people immigrating throughout the United States, the implications of residential segregation and its' impacts on the black community, as well as his book, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*. I learned that Dr. Shabazz formerly

taught at the University of Vermont for several years in the Geography Department, in fact, it was here that he earned his tenure; he had only been in his new position in Arizona for approximately two years.

Because the plan was to ensure that Dr. Shabazz was taken care of during his visit to UVM, it was important for us to make sure that he was fed. The plan was to have him eat at the Waterman Manor and then have him come over and give his lecture to the class. One of my roles was to work alongside Stephanie to identify four exceptional students to not only have lunch with Dr. Shabazz and the two of us but to have those students escort him to class and introduce him to their classmates before his lectures.

I found identifying four students to be fairly easy because the students who had been doing well since the beginning of the semester continued to do well over the course of the semester. Well, the day had finally arrived and I was anxious about meeting Dr. Shabazz not only because of the positive things that I had heard about him and the work he had done but because he was an academic, a faculty member. Even though I was beginning to have more positive experiences with faculty, I was still quite skeptical of them and I am sure that they were equally skeptical of me as I was in “their world”.

I met Dr. Shabazz, Stephanie, and the four students at the Waterman Manor and we were able to not only have a good meal but we also had multiple fulfilling dialogues. While I recognized that the time at lunch was more for the students, I could not help myself in wanting to learn more about Dr. Shabazz, his time at UVM, his career, and other pursuits. I found myself feeling appreciative of his authenticity and willingness to not only discuss the work that he had done and his research but to also discuss some pressing social issues in the nation.

When lunch was over and we began walking to class, Dr. Shabazz and I talked more about the work that he currently does as well as where he is a faculty. He told me about the “School of Social Transformation” which is the department he was a faculty in and he shared what he felt like were the benefits of working there. He asked me what I had come to consider as a dreaded question which was “are you thinking about getting your doctorate”. Any time someone asks me this question, my pulse increases and my mind races in an attempt to formulate an answer.

I don’t know if I panic when I’m asked this question because I feel like I should have an immediate answer to it or if I panic because I do not believe in my abilities to earn a doctoral degree. Whatever the case, I decided in this moment to fake it and pretend as if I was sure of myself. I told Dr. Shabazz that I was considering pursuing a doctoral degree and told him that the program he worked in encompassed many of my interests. He told me that I would probably excel in that program because I was on the right path by serving as a teaching assistant and he provided me with more insights about the program.

When we finally reached the classroom, I felt a different kind of fulfillment when I entered and saw my students’ faces. I felt like I somehow had my purpose reinforced by professor Shabazz. I held on to that moment for his entire lecture. His research and previous experience allowed him to not only spill the truth about residential segregation to students but point out different areas of privilege that they had and had probably not considered. Dr. Shabazz went unchallenged by the students which surprised me because Stephanie and I usually got questions when we were teaching. I think that the students’ lack of desire to challenge Dr. Shabazz had a lot to do with his gender identity. It is pretty commonplace for men to be the recipients of respect as they carry privilege because of

their gender identity. In addition to being a man, Dr. Shabazz was a faculty member and author, carrying a different levels of education and social status than me.

Interestingly enough, the amount of contributions that Stephanie has made to multiple fields of study, her level of education and social status in some ways surpassed Dr. Shabazz, at least in my opinion, they did. Unfortunately, the students that we were teaching every day might never make that connection given Stephanie's gender identity. I wondered about how my gender identity would impact me in I chose to further pursue higher education or potentially become a faculty member. And my wondering did not stop at simple considering my gender identity, no. I thought about my racial identity and how it could either help or hinder me in my pursuit of higher education and status as an educator and potentially professor. How long would it take for me to reach the top? Would I be passed over for promotions because of my social identities? Would there be individuals with different social identities who were less than capable than me being accepted and rewarded? Who would I be in competition with? These were all questions that I had not considered much before because of my minimal desire to continue pursuing higher education or become a faculty member. But I was beginning to wonder.

Dr. Shabazz had a positive impact on our students during his lecture that day. When it was over, I made sure to get his contact information and chat with him at the end of class because I wanted to try to keep in contact with him. After all, I could see myself at the School of Social Transformation because of professor Shabazz's planting the idea of me getting a doctorate in my mind. Maybe just maybe, I was a lot more capable of teaching than I gave myself credit for.

Stephanie was going out of the country to Austria and we chose not to tell the students in order to ensure that they would still come to class for our final guest speaker. Our last guest speaker was Jes Kraus from the office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity at the university. Jes came to class to talk to the students about affirmative action – more specifically separating fact from fiction in regards to affirmative action.

It was my responsibility to not only take role for class that day and determine which students were present and were not present, but to also introduce Jes to the class as a guest lecturer. For some strange reason, not having Stephanie in class felt weird to me and I felt as though it was my responsibility to run the class which was something I never truly experienced before. I was nervous about introducing Jes to the class. I was nervous because I had no idea how they would engage the material he was teaching or if they would spend time challenging him.

Being in front of the class felt different this time without Stephanie because all of the students and Jes were looking to me as the person in charge. I can tell you, having all eyes and attention on you when you are not accustomed to it, is strange. I anxiously introduced Jes and let him teach his lesson on affirmative action. Every once in a while Jes would look to me to both engage with him and the students and to not only pose questions to the students but to answer any that they might have as well.

I found Jes' presentation to be engaging and at times funny. Personally, I got a lot out of what he was teaching and learned a lot about affirmative action that I did not know beforehand. At the end of class, Jes asked me about what I did here at the university, my degree program, and my goals after graduation. I liked talking to Jes about myself and learning more about him during our dialogue. We also spent time talking about the

students and their level of engagement in the material. I told Jes that I would follow up with him further but I had to get to my next meeting.

Section 3.7. Working with Stephanie (Inside and Outside of the Classroom)

Because I had never served as a teaching assistant, I had no idea what to expect from my supervisor or my students. I tried not to have too many expectations for Stephanie or for the students because I thought that I really did not have anything to compare those expectations to. I could not decide how I thought Stephanie should show up for me or for our students. I also had no idea how Stephanie would teach or how she would look to me as her teaching assistant to show up for our students.

Although Stephanie and I had previously had meetings with each other to talk about ways that I could support her and support our students, we had not create an exhaustive list of things which allowed for us to add some roles and responsibilities for me. Something that I appreciated very early on when classes started was how eager Stephanie was to challenge me. Now I know that some might argue that having someone who is willing to challenge you to come out of your comfort zone so quickly might not be as helpful in retrospect and I think that there could very well be some truth to that. However, for me, for this particular circumstance, I found Stephanie's push to get me to jump in quickly helpful. In fact, I felt a strange sense of respect and belief in my capabilities when I had Stephanie "voluntell" me what I would be doing the first week of class.

My first assignment as a teaching assistant was leading the class in two separate activities around privilege and economic opportunity. In addition to leading these activities, Stephanie had also asked for me to come up with a set of debriefing/follow-up

questions to ask the students after they had completed the activities. I remember how nervous I was in planning for class on the second day not only because I only had about a day and a half to prepare but because it was only the second day of class and I did not have a lot of time to gauge what kind of students we would be working with. I had already stood in front of the class and spoke with them and interacted with them for a little bit on the first day but this did not change my level of comfort with them because I remember how much I was sweating under my arms during that dialogue.

Getting back to being assigned the responsibility of having to lead the class in activities and engage with them in conversations after the fact – when preparing for this, I overthought a lot. I am pretty sure I spent approximately two hours formulating what I considered to be my first lesson plan and all it was, was essentially questions to ask the students to help them process in small groups and ultimately the large group. I remember I even took the time to send Stephanie a full on worksheet that I created for myself with questions as well as notes and points for me to focus on the day before.

The day that I had to lead the class, well that morning, I woke up with an email from Stephanie where she praised some of the work that I had produced and prepared for the class and then there were a couple of items that she wanted me to shy away from and not include for class. Even though there was more good that came from what I had produced and sent over to Stephanie, all I could do was focus on the couple of things that she wanted me to reconsider.

I remember feeling somewhat defeated by the feedback I had received. I remember feeling like maybe this is not for me, clearly I am not cut out to teach but then another part of me felt like maybe Stephanie did not know what she was talking about

because maybe we just had different styles and opinions. But then there was another part of me that looked at the feedback like Stephanie had a lot more experience than I do and she is the expert here so I just have to take what she says and not focus too much on what needs improvement because there is not a lot that needs improvement. I did not share my sentiments with Stephanie about feeling inadequate, and not as prepared, as I originally anticipated myself being for this position as a teaching assistant. I just kept those thoughts to myself and thought that if I gave myself permission to learn then things would work out just fine.

Well that particular day in class went a lot better than I imagined it going. Stephanie taught for a little bit and then let me lead the class in activities and debrief with them. This part felt quite natural for me and I am not sure if this is because I was overly prepared for it, because of my previous experience working with students, or because of the level of support that Stephanie was offering to me while I was engaging with the students. Whatever it may have been, I decided after the fact that I truly did overthink it – a lot. In fact, I was able to reach the students a lot more easily than I originally anticipated and for that small victory, I was thankful.

As the semester continued there were multiple instances where I had the opportunity to work directly alongside Stephanie in the classroom. There were times when I was either brought up by Stephanie to engage with the class and other times when I would simply lead a lecture and have Stephanie's support. More often than not, Stephanie would lead lectures and request my support by asking for my opinion or any feedback that I had to add to what she was teaching. Sometimes, Stephanie would call on me and expect me to have answers to some questions that our students would ask. This

particular method surprised me the first few times she did it because I by no means felt that I was an expert on the subject matter in any way. I also felt as though the answers that I would provide were not as adequate as what Stephanie could provide.

I found myself struggling as a teaching assistant in this area because some days I felt like a teacher and other days I felt like a student. It is truly strange, I know, but I did feel that way. I did not let these particular sentiments keep me from engaging with the students and with Stephanie. As Stephanie continued to challenge me to engage with the students every day and to think off the top of my head, I found myself becoming more confident in not only my abilities to be a leader in the classroom but I also became more confident in my role and title of teaching assistant.

Stephanie's methods involved challenging and supporting me especially in regards to how I showed up in class and how I showed up for the students. Never did I feel as though I was not valued or I did not have anything positive to contribute to the class and the students. Stephanie made me feel as though I was her co-teacher and that I was a scholar in my own right. She allowed the space for me to learn and grow over the course of the semester and she definitely boosted my level of confidence in myself and in my understanding of what a positive teaching (working) relationship can and should look like.

When I first went into my role as a Teaching Assistant, I did not necessarily anticipate spending a lot of time outside of the classroom with Stephanie. When I say time outside of the classroom, I mean spending time doing work that was indirectly related to the type of work we were doing inside of class. Stephanie has spent a lot of her

free time outside of class and work in general doing a lot of research and advocacy around issues of race and racism.

A good chunk of Stephanie's research is around recognizing, understanding, and confronting conscious and unconscious bias within many different police departments across the state of Vermont. Stephanie has compiled a lot of her research and worked alongside police chiefs so come up with solutions to some of these issues and presented her research all over the state and for multiple audiences. In addition to doing research, Stephanie is also a photographer that has created and presented work around issues of not only race, sex/gender, but also religion. There were a few instances over the course of the semester where I just had to step back and ask Stephanie how exactly did she do all the work that she did (a lot of it without pay or any other incentives). She would always smile at me and say "I just make time for it all because these are all things that I am passionate about".

She would then go on explaining how she got into the work she was doing out of hobby and how she kept up the hobby over the years. This was something that I truly admired and appreciated about Stephanie. Without knowing, she was showing me what dedication looked like and how to invest myself in a cause or multiple causes and remain sustained even in the difficult times. Even though I was simply Stephanie's teaching assistant, I felt as though I was someone who was open to assisting her with other projects and joining her various movements. In some instances, I felt like I could follow Stephanie wherever she was willing to take me. To me, her work outside of the classroom was having just as much of an impact as the work she was doing inside the classroom. I will say that I do believe that I was fortunate to have worked alongside someone who was

so much more than a faculty member but in some instance an activist in areas that impacted me and those I love and care about on a day to day basis. As I sit here and write this, I cannot help but wonder if this is why I was so receptive to Stephanie and our dynamics inside and outside the classroom. I do think this is why it was very easy for me to trust her and her methods: because in my opinion, Stephanie not only “talked the talk” but she “walked the walk”.

Section 3.8. The Last Day of Class

Well... It finally happened. The last day of class arrived and I was set to teach a lesson on reparations using an article from *The Atlantic* by Tah-nesi Coates. Although it was the last day of class and my last time teaching this particular group of students, I was still very much anxious and nervous about my lesson plan. On this day, I opted to divide the class up into ten groups with each group having roughly three to four participants each. After getting them in their groups, I gave each group a different section of the article to focus on. In addition to giving them their particular sections of the articles, I gave them the following expectations: summarize your section, describe how the author uses it to make a case for reparations, and make any connections that you can with any of the previous units in the course.

Something that I had learned earlier on in the semester is how to work with the time that I had to make sure that information was not only shared with the students but that they had time to grasp the content or make note of it for later. This day was unfortunately no different, while Stephanie was running through the last bits of her lecture from the previous day of class, I was switching my lesson plans around to accommodate the time I was losing to Stephanie’s lesson.

When the lesson had finally come to an end, Stephanie grabbed a desk and asked that I too, grab a desk to sit in next to her alongside but still in front of the students. It was in this moment that I felt like for the first time this semester, I was an equal to not only the students but to Stephanie as well. Once we were both seated she thanked the class for all of their hard work over the course of the semester and told them that she appreciated their willingness to not only stay engaged in the material but to challenge themselves, their beliefs, and their peers over the course of the semester as well. I was also quite proud of the students for everything that they had done this semester and their overall willingness to learn, teach and be patient with me over the course of the semester. My heart was happy because I felt as though the students had somehow achieved something wonderful by completing the course.

My thoughts were interrupted by Stephanie turning to me and saying that she wanted to thank me for all of my hard work and dedication to the course and the students this semester as her teaching assistant. What followed her words were applause and cheers from the students. My heart began beating faster as I came to realize that the applause was for me. Then suddenly, my mood shifted. I listened as she addressed the class and with each of her words, I felt my heart begin to sink. It sank because I knew that I would no longer be coming to this class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It sank because I knew that I would not be interacting with these same students anymore. It sank because I knew I would not be grading anymore journals. It sank because I knew I would not be creating anymore lesson plans. It sank because I knew that I would not be able to spend time with Stephanie, who had become somewhat of a mentor to me, anymore. My heart sank because I knew that it was the end of what felt like an era. And though I knew

I would be losing a lot, I knew that I would also be gaining more from future students and faculty because whether I wanted to accept it or not, I found my purpose – teaching.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Section 4.1. Historical Contributions to the Division

As previously noted in an earlier chapter, there were many different historical factors that contributed to the trend of division amongst student and academic affairs at institutions of higher education in the United States. These factors included: (1) the rejection of the English university model primarily associated with both Oxford and Cambridge, (2) the adoption of the German university model that focused solely on the dissemination and assimilation of knowledge between faculty and students, respectively; (3) the increase of enrollment at colleges and universities between the early 1900s and 1920s, placing physical and personnel strains on institutions, (4) the introduction of mass education to higher education, (5) the establishment of the GI Bill and the addition of veterans, different types of students, to the college campus.

Though there is being some emphasis placed on partnerships between academic and student affairs at institutions of higher education, one thing has become more apparent. When dialogues around the collaboration of academic and non-academic units take place, they are usually among student affairs professionals with minimal faculty involvement. Historically, student affairs professionals are more eager to partner with faculty and administrators in academic affairs to aid with the educating of students holistically. While there may various reasons for the academic affairs professionals' minimal level of interest in working with student affairs professionals over the last few decades, Wessell (1978) states, "Academic units have generally been reluctant to associate with [non-academic units/areas], assuming very little could be gained through any cooperative efforts" (p. 12). It is still unclear of what type of "gains" would be most

appealing to faculty; however, I would argue that using tenure as a means to encourage collaboration would make faculty more willing to partner with student affairs professionals on projects and curriculum.

According to Rehnke (1992), "...factors that contributed to the continued separation of faculty and student affairs [include]: specialization, pressure for research and scholarship, disdain for student personnel work on the part of academics, and financial competition" (p. 4) Although these factors were listed as contributors to the divide between student and academic affairs in higher education during the early 1990s, one could see the consistent impact that these factors have had in the last 2 ½ decades. As the division between student and academic affairs continues to persist, we as a field must work to acknowledge the historical factors that contribute to the gap and work to address those factors.

Section 4.2. Toxic Separation?

In recent decades, the separation between student and academic affairs has been called into question by both faculty and student affairs professionals. There has been an increase in the belief that this division is toxic and negatively contributing to unfulfilling college experiences for students pursuing higher education. Knefelkamp (1991) argues that the separatist structure in the American system of higher education:

...results in an apartheid system that reinforces false dichotomies between and among faculty members and student affairs personnel, our personal and professional lives, our mind, our body, and our spirits, our ability to think and to feel and to act, and our ability to be both passionate and purposeful about what it is that we wish to achieve. (p.6)

What Knefelkamp brings to the light is how detrimental the division of academic and student affairs can be on professionals in higher education. She notes the physical and emotional impact that this dichotomy can have on professionals in both units on college campuses. Knefelkamp (1991) says that “‘apartheid’ is not a word to be used lightly” (p.6). She continues by making a case for the use of the term “apartheid” to describe the division of student and academic affairs.

Metaphorically, various “apartheid” systems exist in the United States; that is, separate cultures exist in separate territories, each with little knowledge, understanding, or respect for the other. Academic affairs and student affairs in American higher education are two such cultures. This separateness and disdain – evident, for example, in off-the-cuff remarks and in private conversations – has been more detrimental to students than anything else in American higher education. (Knefelkamp, 1991, p. 6)

Whether professionals in academic or student affairs want to admit it, side remarks are made about one another publicly and privately. Consciously and subconsciously professionals in higher education can disrespect one another by downplaying each other’s roles and responsibilities, criticizing each other’s level of work ethic, questioning each other’s level of education, disregarding each other’s time, and interrogating each other to determine the level of commitment they have to students.

The separatist structure in American higher education has “hurt the educational system and the students as well as faculty and student affairs professionals as members of a group and as individuals” (Knefelkamp, 1991, p. 7). Because it is becoming more well-known how unfavorable the results of the division of academic and student affairs can be,

professionals in higher education should take time to reflect and think critically about how they contribute to the dichotomy and how they can work to no longer contribute to such a damaging dichotomy.

Section 4.3. Institutions Already Taking a Collaborative Approach

Since the mid-to-late 1970s, colleges and universities have been creating mergers between academic and student affairs as a response to budget cuts, lack of resources, and just the overall need for higher education professionals to work together and learn from one another for the benefit of students.

For the last decade, Duke University has maintained a Faculty-in-Residence Program where faculty members at the university have the opportunity to live in residence halls on campus amongst students. The university's purpose of implementing such a program is as follows:

As a residential university, Duke works to foster an environment in which learning and living are increasingly intertwined. To encourage greater interaction between students and faculty members (and their families) and to expose undergraduates to role models who integrate intellectual activities into their daily lives, the Office of the Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education (DUE) and the Office of Student Affairs sponsor the Faculty-in-Residence Program. (Overview of Faculty-in-Residence (FIR) Program, 2012).

The Faculty-in-Residence Program at Duke University has been quite successful over the last few years. Students have been more engaged, better retained, and successful over the course of their undergraduate careers. What this collaborative effort between academic

and student affairs shows is the benefit of having effective partnerships for the advantage of the students, higher education professionals, and ultimately the institution.

Beginning Fall 2017, the University of Vermont will be implementing a new residential curriculum that will include: themed housing, classes linked to the first-year experience and the housing theme, and most importantly faculty and student affairs collaboration. While it is unfortunate that I will not be here to experience the changes that the University of Vermont will be making with its' new Residential Learning Community model; I am hopeful that the intentional partnerships that will be created and fostered will aid not only with student engagement but with student retention as well.

Section 4.4. Benefits of Collaboration between Student and Academic Affairs for College Students

There are several different benefits that college students face when their institutions foster environments where student and academic affairs professionals are partnering with one another to cultivate holistic college experiences for undergraduates. Institutions that are currently committed to collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs are finding that students acclimate better to the institution, are more engaged, learn more effectively, and are able to confidently make academic and career decisions.

Students attending institutions with partnership programs were able to acclimate better to their institution (Nesheim et. al Whitt, 2007). The adjustment and transition to the social and academic demands of college education was smoother for students at schools facilitating such programs (Nesheim et. al Whitt, 2007). According to Nesheim

et. al. Whitt (2007), “Partnership programs fostered (a) effective transitions, (b) a sense of community, and (c) persistence in college” (p. 440).

The types of programs that assisted with the traditional student’s academic and social transitions from high school to college, include: learning communities, developmental courses, and first-year programs (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). It has been found that students participating in such programs gain more knowledge about institutional processes and resources and developed greater confidence to navigate the institution (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). When interviewed about their participation in partnership programs, students reported learning about “where to go for help” and “how to work the system” at their institution (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007).

Collaboration between student and academic affairs at some institutions meant creating a sense of community for students. Programs were associated with connecting students with their institution early in their college careers. According to Nesheim et. al Whitt (2007), “Programs fostered a sense of belonging among students within residences, seminar groups, and other academic and social groups” (p. 441). Students participating in such programs were able to connect with adults and peers who were well versed in the college experience, cared about them, their level of content and success in college (Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007). A student participant of the DePauw Year One at DePauw University said:

I really like how we went through orientation with our seminar group. That way you weren’t just alone on campus...After the first night I was glad I was here. I had made the right decision. I had made friends already. (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 441).

It is evident here how feeling a connection to peers early on during the college experience can help ease the stress of being in a new place around new people; it allows student to not feel alone.

Institutions that incorporated some form of collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs found that students were retained over the course of their college experience. Students who were involved in programs or groups cited their involvement as a reason to stay at their institution. According to a student participant of University of Maryland's College Park Scholars, "I was considering transferring out of UM, but the main reason I don't want to transfer is because I want to finish Scholars" (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p.441).

A student's level of engagement in their institution says a lot not only about the institution, but the student's satisfaction with the institution. Effective partnerships between student and academic affairs at colleges and universities "[foster] student engagement both in and out of the classroom" (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 441). The forms of student engagement that collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs foster include: campus involvement, academic engagement, civic engagement, and interactions with faculty and students (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007).

Students participating in programs that required partnerships between faculty and staff members were more likely to have some additional campus involvement. Participation in these programs also increased students' awareness of other campus activities and events, as well as clubs and organizations to get involved in. Some students credited their involvement with these collaborative programs, to their learning and becoming more aware of other activities and organizations that they would not otherwise

have known about or considered (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). A student participant in New Century College (NCC) at George Mason University stated,

Seeing the drive in different organizations makes you want to go out and do – to get involved on campus and campus organizations....I worked in this treatment place for ex-offenders, [mostly] a minority populations....So, I [decided to] get involved with [multicultural issues on campus]. Now I have a leadership role.

(Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 442).

The student's testimonial, makes it reasonable to assume that partnership programs can lead to finding other interests that cater to a student's desire to give back to their campus community and society as a whole. Having the support and guidance of both faculty and student affairs professionals can entice students to explore other opportunities that cater to their goals and aspirations.

When discussing the benefits of having programs at institutions that required collaboration between student and academic affairs professionals, students' level of academic engagement always came up. Students who participated in partnership programs "became engaged in their learning and spent time studying and using academic success resources" (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 442). One educator at the University of Maryland reported that students participating in the College Park Scholars program "[seemed] more aware of knowledge and learning for its own sake than for other motives" (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). Another educator participating in the University of Arizona's Student-Faculty Interaction Grant experience, commented that the level of academic engagement was enhanced by the program. This educator observed "increased class attendance and student interaction, decreased behavioral and disciplinary problems,

and increased out-of-class interaction with faculty and subject material” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007).

In addition to enhanced levels of academic engagement, partnership programs increased students’ level of civic engagement on campus. Institutions with collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs, reported that there was an increase in “students’ awareness of and involvement in community service, service learning, community activism, and civic opportunities”, when students participated in such efforts (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). It is noted that students were able to “[volunteer] with local community agencies and [advocate] for social justice issues” in their programs (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). Students participating in such partnership programs that required community engagement began to realize their ability to impact local communities (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). A student participant with The Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy at Siena College stated, “I also feel like I should get out there more and volunteer more without getting credit for it” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 442). Another student participant at Siena College added that, “[They’ve] learned that you don’t need to do everything to help. You don’t need to be everything...but if you put effort into what you actually do...you can make a difference.” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 442)

According to Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007), almost all of the partnership programs that they observed, reported increased interactions between educators and students, inside and outside of the classroom (p. 442). These programs presented several different opportunities for student involvement with faculty outside the classroom. In addition to that, these partnership programs encouraged activities and meaningful conversations in

and outside of class (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). It was noted that students participating in these programs felt more comfortable when interacting with faculty because they were beginning to see faculty as “real” people (Nesheim et. al. 2007). A student at the University of Arizona stated that,

[The Faculty Fellows Program] is not so formal, you actually go and talk to your professors. You get to know them on a personal level so when you’re in class it’s easier to approach them for office hours. You get to know them as a human instead of just a person who talks at you. It’s given us a lot more camaraderie as faculty and students (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 442).

Students feeling comfortable enough to approach their faculty is necessary and beneficial to their undergraduate experience as the majority of them cite that their primary purpose of going to college is to get their education and be academically successful.

In addition to an increase in interactions with faculty, students in partnership programs mentioned that as a result of participating in these programs, they had positive interactions with their peers. Students were able to have meaningful conversations with their peers inside and outside the classroom as participants in these programs (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). Some partnership programs created and fostered friendships among students that may not have happened if the students were not participants in these programs (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). A student at Villanova University said,

In thinking about my friends from my freshman year in St. Mary’s [residence hall], one of the things that attracted me to them was they were so incredibly different from me. I had never come across people like this before and it was interesting to get their point of view and we disagreed about things and would

argue about things, but when push came to shove, I knew I could count on them (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007).

With this example, one could argue that participation in partnership programs, enhanced the learning process of students by providing multiple opportunities for collaborative learning between peers. Students were able to not only able to hear different perspectives from one another and learn from another but they were also able to challenge one another inside and outside the classroom.

Collaborative efforts by institutions “yielded a wide range of learning outcomes, encompassing curricular and co-curricular experiences as well as in-class and out-of-class endeavors” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443). Student learning was highly valued by these partnership programs and seamless learning opportunities, experiences, and environments were fostered (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). It was noted by both students and educators, that a variety of student learning outcomes came from these partnership programs. These outcomes “[included] helping students to (a) make connections between in-and out-of-class experiences, (b) think critically, (c) take responsibility for learning, (d) understand themselves, and (e) understand others” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443).

When students participated in programs that required collaboration between academic and student affairs, it was easier for them to make connections between their “curricular and co-curricular experiences and to integrate cognitive and affective knowledge” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443). Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007) examined the Residential Leadership Community (RLC) at Virginia Tech and found that the RLC was able to integrate student experiences from both inside and outside the classroom (p.

443). A RLC first-year student participant stated, “You could offer the coursework but it wouldn’t be the same experience if you didn’t live in the dorm. When you live in the dorm, you see what you learned [in class] put to work” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443). According to Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007), experiential and/or active learning within partnership programs allowed for students to make connections (p. 443). They found that students were eager to engage in hands-on experiences that allowed for practical application (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). A student participating in the Boyer Learning Laboratory at Carson-Newman College said,

In class the prof tells you about a person but in the Boyer Lab you get to talk with the person....The effect stays with you longer and has a greater impact because you are more active in the learning and not just being told something (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443).

Based on this student’s experience, it is evident that having some knowledge dispersed to them in class and iterated in a lab with someone else speaking to information shared by a professor makes them better understand the material and make connections.

Partnership programs facilitated critical thinking among student participants (Nesheim et. al. 2007). Educators at institutions that had partnership programs reported that “students learned to think, use evidence, and pose questions”, all skills essential to the critical thinking process. Students taking service-learning courses with the Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action (CILSA) at Saint Mary’s College of California stated they were “learning to think critically regarding non-related coursework” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443). One student noted,

[CILSA] also makes you question the things that you're taught in other classes. Because I know about the WTO [World Trade Organization] and the impact of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], now in other courses I'll bring those issues up. If it weren't for [these courses/instructors] that encouraged you to examine the larger issues, I think I would probably just sit there and take it all in and think that I knew about the WTO did (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 443 & p. 444)

According to Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007) students participating in partnership programs "experienced an environment that emphasized achievement and success" (p.444). Students desire to learn was enhanced by these programs promoting high expectations and standards (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). Institutions with collaborative efforts between student and academic affairs were able to foster accountability; as individuals and peers, students took on responsibility for the learning process (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). According to Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007), "Students in First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs) at the University of Missouri expressed responsibility for learning and for helping each other learn" (p.444). Students participating in these FIGs were more likely to implement their own study groups, quiz each other on notes, and help prepare one another for exams. Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007) stated that, "Hall coordinators observed students pounding on one another's doors, urging their peers to wake up and get to class" (p. 444). Other ways that students in FIGs would hold each other accountable included: giving someone a "hard time" if they skip class, asking each other if they have studied, and encouraging each other to come to their room to study. Collaborative efforts

between academic and student affairs at institutions “helped students engage themselves and others in the learning process” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 444).

Participation in partnership programs raised students’ self-awareness and self-understanding (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). Some of these programs encouraged self-reflection and “led students to a greater understanding of personal identity” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 444). An example of this practice took place in the Chicago Quarter at DePaul University. Students a part of the Chicago Quarter were required to reflect on their personal opinions, experiences, and thoughts when it came to different issues. Educators over the Chicago Quarter said that students “have to think for themselves and have their own opinions” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 444). One student participant of the Chicago Quarter reported greater self-awareness stating, “I’ve learned a lot about myself and my strengths and weaknesses, [including] time management, how I deal with stress, what my limits are” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 444). Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007) also found that these type of programs increased the self-confidence of participants, noting that “students became confident to ask questions, speak in class, and interact with peers and faculty” (p. 444).

While learning about themselves, students also reported “they developed a greater awareness and understanding of the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others as a result of participation in partnership programs” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 444). Students participating in collaborative programs between student and academic affairs described having “eye opening” experiences and being exposed to and challenged by opposing worldviews. Programs were able help students “[gain] a greater sense of empathy” and “challenged [students] to confront their beliefs and value systems

(Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 445). An alumna of the External Programs at Messiah College stated that being at the Philadelphia campus was “perception-changing” because it allowed for her to confront the stereotypes she had of urban areas (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). This experienced allowed her to see that “this is a home for people, and this is my neighborhood too” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p.445). An increase of awareness around cultural differences in society increased as a result of partnership programs (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). Students in these programs were able to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds and were exposed to issues of race and class (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). In addition to being exposed to issues of race and class, student participants were able to confront their own bias, prejudices, stereotypes, and privileges. A White student a part of the Multicultural Awareness Council (MAC) at Portland Community College (PCC) “noted that her involvement with MAC ‘taught me I really need to understand and really focus’ on the variety of cultures at PCC” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 445).

Although it is rarely considered, collaborative efforts between student and academic affairs at institutions influence students’ (a) choice of college, (b) major, and (c) choice of career (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). When students are making decision about what college to attend they take into consideration what type of programs the college offers. A couple of students participating in the CILSA program at Saint Mary’s College, indicated that the reason that they chose to attend Saint Mary’s was because of the CILSA program. Another student remarked that “Saint Mary’s College was nice, but CILSA was the catcher”. According to Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007), “Although not typically a stated goal of the programs, the positive impact programs had students’

decisions to attend their institution was discussed by many educators” (p. 445). Students’ participation in partnership programs enhances their “exposure to and understanding of their academic discipline” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 445). Some students participating in North Carolina State University’s (NCSU) First Year College Living-Learning Community (FYC) “asserted [that] they had no idea what they wanted to do with their lives upon entering college, but FYC helped them choose a major” (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 445). In fact, one student stated,

FYC allowed me to see all the resources on campus, and helped me develop my interests and explore options. It’s been immensely helpful, because I found I really do love chemistry and biology and things like that. I hope to go to medical school, and biological sciences is the track. (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007, p. 445)

Some partnership programs assisted students with their selection of their career (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). According to Nesheim et. al. Whitt (2007), students were able to gain career-related experience via teaching, research, internships, etc., which helped them make decisions about their future careers (p. 446). A student participant with the Center for Service Learning at Brevard Community College noted that her service involvement gave her a wide range of experiences and she considered a career in politics because of that involvement (Nesheim et. al. Whitt, 2007). As colleges and universities consider collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs, they should note partnership programs abilities to recruit and retain students.

Section 4.5. Benefits of Partnerships between Student and Academic Affairs for Higher Education Professionals – Stephanie’s Perspective

Over the course of this thesis, I have used qualitative research to support the idea that collaboration between academic and student affairs is beneficial to both students and higher education professionals. While I have relied heavily on research and have spoken to my own experiences as a teaching assistant, I have not presented the perspective of a faculty member. With that being seeing, I have chosen to include Stephanie’s perspective on working with me, a student affairs professional, as a teaching assistant. When I asked Stephanie about the benefits of collaboration, she said:

The benefits of having as a TA someone who is not necessarily on the academic route of education are great. I base this on my experience with Tynesha “Ty” McCullers. Because of her background in student affairs, as a TA, she was sensitive to classroom dynamics and adept at identifying responses to various issues in this domain. Regular TAs who are majors in the field one is teaching in typically do not possess this level of insight and as a result, in some ways can be less effective.

Stephanie continued by speaking to having me present in the classroom, even though, I was not necessarily on the academic route by stating the following:

The fact the TA is not on the academic route is not necessarily a drawback. They are academically trained and therefore familiar with a classroom environment. In although, the TA was deeply knowledgeable about the topic, if not the specific economic theory being taught. Hence, the overall benefits of having a TA for me where very significant.

I did not want to just have Stephanie speak to the benefits of having a student affairs professional as a teaching assistant, which is why I inquired about the costs. When I asked Stephanie to tell me more about the costs and how those worked in tandem with the benefits, Stephanie responded:

A cost of such collaboration is time invested in integrating the TA into the course, and working with this person on planning and/or teaching a class. I don't view this as a burden. The benefits far outweigh the costs of time. But professors who do take on a TA of this kind should be aware in advance that they will need to spend some time training, especially to ensure this is a valuable experience for the TA him or herself.

Stephanie's perspective about our collaboration on her course, speaks to the benefits of partnerships and what higher education professionals in academic affairs should look forward to if they choose to work together collaboratively.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 5.1 Intro to Recommendations

Through pragmatic methods of research, I was able to determine both the benefits and drawbacks to partnerships between academic and student affairs in higher education. The findings of my research have led me to come up with a list of recommendations for both units of higher education to consider as they work in collaboration with one another to cultivate a holistic college experience for students.

Section 5.2 Holistic Education and Seamless Learning Environments

In the last few decades, it has been determined that the division between academic and student affairs is no longer adequately serving students during or after their college experiences. My research of institutions across the country determined that institutions with collaboration and partnerships between student and academic affairs supported undergraduate education being holistic and fostered learning environments that were seamless or without bounds. Holistic education “goes beyond the intellectual development of the student. It includes in and out-of-classroom experiences; the total campus community is involved in the education...and education of the whole person – social, civic, psychological, physical, spiritual, and intellectual development” (Rehnke, 1992, p.4). This type of education focuses on the “whole person” that the student is and can become. Institutions that take a holistic approach to educating students, recognize that the college experience should be more just about students’ ability to learn and retain information; but that it should also be about students exploring and embracing who they are and who they want to be over the course of their undergraduate career.

Knefelkamp calls upon institutions of higher education to create “The Seamless Curriculum”, where both academic and student affairs professionals are “work[ing] together to provide holistic student education, an education of the whole person” (Rehnke, 1992, p. 4) Kuh (1996) defines “Seamless Learning Environments” as environments that “are characterized by coherent educational purposes, comprehensive policies and practices consistent with students’ needs and abilities, and a widely shared ‘ethos of learning’” (p. 136). Students attending institutions that embrace the concept of seamless learning will be able to make connections between their experiences inside and outside the classroom. These students will also find that there are no limitations or bounds to their learning. Educators at institutions with seamless learning environments will find that students are more engaged in both their curricular and co-curricular activities at the institution. Students at colleges and universities with these types of environments will ultimately find that students are likely to be retained over the course of their college experience as well.

Section 5.3. Saying “Hello” from the Other Side and Learning

About Each Other’s Positions

In addition, to professionals creating and advocating for holistic education and seamless learning environments, it is necessary for professionals in both student and academic affairs to learn more about the roles and responsibilities in both units. Professionals in higher education currently do not have an adequate understanding of the primary and secondary duties of their counterparts and therefore, are left to make assumptions about one another’s performance in the college setting. Knefelkamp (1991) questions this dynamic by asking:

How did academic affairs and student affairs, living side by side for years on the same campus, evolve into separate cultures, with so little knowledge of one another? Who do faculty members not know the background and academic training of student affairs personnel, and vice versa? Why is the daily life of a professor or a counselor or an admissions officer generally not known? (p. 6)

All of these questions that Knefelkamp poses really get at the division between academic and student affairs. More often than not, higher education professionals in academic affairs are unaware of the primary and secondary roles and responsibilities of professionals in student affairs and vice versa. “Student affairs staff traditionally are considered experts on who students are, whereas faculty are regarded as experts on what and how students learn; the gaps in one group’s strength are filled by the strengths of the other” (Price, 1999, p. 75). Although, student affairs professionals are traditionally responsible for understanding students’ developmental process and academic affairs professionals are traditionally responsible for teaching students specialized material and subject matter, that does not mean that there is not room for shared responsibility.

Professionals in academic affairs responsibilities include: teaching, researching, publishing, mentoring, tutoring, and advising. Faculty, depending on their position or their institution, can take on one of these responsibilities or a variety of them over the course of their tenure. Professionals in student affairs responsibilities include: advising, teaching/educating, fostering diverse/inclusive communities, mentoring, tutoring, advising, counseling, and building bridges. Ultimately, academic and student affairs professionals are both responsible for being educators, whether institutions of higher education acknowledge it or not. It is important for educators in higher education, to not

only acknowledge the differences in their roles and responsibilities but also look for the similarities as a way to bridge the gap and collaborate more often.

Section 5.4 Schuh's Principles to Effective Partnerships

Institutions engaging in conversations about implementing partnership programs on campus, need to have these conversations before the programs are formed, while they are in the process of being developed, and after they are formed (Schuh, 1999). Without having key stakeholders (staff, faculty, administrators, etc.) a part of conversations around the implementation of collaborative efforts at institutions, students will be left to determine the purpose of such efforts on their own or reach out to potential stakeholders who may be misinformed and uncaring. It is necessary that all key stakeholders are engaging in dialogues around partnership programs to ensure that everyone at the institution is on the same page. Schuh (1999) names nine different principles essential to effective partnerships on college campus. He states that the following principles demonstrate effective partnerships,

1. **Student learning is an essential part of the institution's missions** (p. 86). "Both mission statements and goals must be used to be useful, and evidence suggests in all too many cases we are not using them" (Gardiner, 1994, p. 108).
2. **Student learning is the organizing principle of the student experience** (p. 86). "Institutions with an ethos of learning are blessed with more than a few boundary spanners, people who move among the functional silos, articulating the institution's mission and vision with language that

acknowledges and respects both classroom and out-of-class learning”
(Kuh et. al. Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994, p. 64)

3. **The learning process for students is seamless** (p. 87). According to Kuh (1996), “The word *seamless* suggests that what was once believed to be separate, distinct parts (e.g., in-class and out-of-class, academic and nonacademic, curricular and cocurricular, or on-campus and off-campus experiences) are now of one piece, bound together so as to appear whole or continuous (p. 136).
4. **Credit experiences require out-of-class activities** (p. 87). “Courses employing service-learning encourage students to ask the larger questions of life beyond the bounds of most traditional courses. Not only does service-learning have the potential to help students learn the content in a particular discipline, it also asks students to consider the context of a discipline and how its knowledge based is used in practice” (Enos and Troppe, 1996, p. 156).
5. **Student affairs staff coteach courses with faculty** (p. 88). While some faculty might disagree with this sentiment, as it is not commonplace for student affairs practitioners to teach courses; first-year seminar courses and diversity education courses are the type of courses in which most of the content in these courses has been mastered by student affairs professionals (Schuh, 1999). In addition to first-year seminar and diversity education courses, courses with content that focuses on leadership

development, career planning and development can also be taught via student and academic affairs partnerships (Schuh, 1999).

6. **Students describe learning as continuous** (p. 88). “Effective learning environments elicit the convergence of all the student’s learning experiences” (Schroeder and Hurst, 1996, p. 175).
7. **Faculty interact regularly with students outside the classroom** (p. 89). According to Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996), “Student-faculty contact and student learning are positively related, and it would seem that finding ways to promote such contact is in the best educational interests of both students and institutions” (p. 155).
8. **Institutional committees and task forces include balanced representation of faculty and student affairs practitioners** (p. 89). “Working together, faculty and student affairs professionals can combine talents to better serve students and the institution” (Garland and Grace, 1993, p. 62).
9. **The development of learning communities is widely supported on campus** (p. 90) Kuh (1996) argues that “all members of an institution must work together to link programs across the academic and out-of-class dimensions of students’ lives” (p. 137).

In addition to Schuh’s (1999) nine principles essential to effective partnerships between academic and student affairs, there have been many other suggestions to institutions considering implementing collaborative efforts on their campuses. Lamadrid (1999) asserts that “collaboration requires communication” (p. 28). Including faculty in

student affairs work, demands that student affairs educators communicate with faculty, other administrators, and students frequently (Lamadrid, 1999). An example that Lamadrid (1999) notes is Bellarmine College's efforts to bridge the gap between academic and student affairs which include: having faculty and student affairs practitioners working together in the residence halls, planning and coordinating student orientation together, and managing co-curricular programs (p. 29). Lamadrid states, "The common denominator of these three foci is the message of community" (p. 29). If students find that there is a strong sense of community among faculty, staff, and administrators on their campuses, they are able to better transition into the campus community and engage with all stakeholders within the community.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Although they were originally modeled after the English university model and proponents of educating the “whole person”, historically institutions of higher education in the United States favored the German university model. The German university model created and fostered campus communities that contained aspects of Cartesian dualism. This type of dualism, conceptualized by Descartes, kept mind separate from heart and knowledge separate from emotion. In terms of higher education, this division presented itself via the separation of academics and student affairs. The current model of most institutions of higher education in the United States follows the German university model. For the last almost half a century, some colleges and universities across the country have begun to shift their institutional model and practices and approach educating college students more holistically through the use of partnership programs.

As it currently stands, institutions of higher education that have implemented collaborative efforts have found that students acclimate better to their school, are more civically and academically engaged, feel more comfortable making decisions about their major and career choice, learn about themselves, their peers, and their environment holistically. These institutions are also finding that partnerships are contributing to student success and retention. Although there are many colleges and universities that are shifting to a more holistic approach to education through the use of partnerships, others remain unconvinced and are continuing with the German university model.

As a graduate student and paraprofessional who has attended two different institutions of higher education, my experience has for the most part always been a solid split between academic and student affairs. In fact, the idea that both units at colleges and

universities should be joined together has been something I struggled with understanding. I chose to be a teaching assistant to get a better understanding of the “other side of education”. This experience allowed for me to learn the primary roles and responsibilities of a faculty member, how to teach college students, as well as how to engage with them both inside and outside of the classroom. Even though, early on, I was fearful of taking advantage of the opportunity to teach, I had to quickly change that mindset. Palmer (1998) says, “The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that the teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require” (p. 11). As a teaching assistant, I learned multiple things, including how to be courageous and have an open heart towards my students. This type of attitude ensured that all of us could learn in an environment that felt very much like a community over the course of the semester. My experience as a teaching assistant also taught me the power of collaboration between professionals in academic and student affairs and allowed me to see firsthand the benefits for students, professionals, and the institution as a whole. Prior to my working alongside a faculty member as a teaching assistant, I thought that the division between academic and student affairs was necessary and tradition; however, my experience has made me think very differently and become an advocate for student and academic affairs partnerships.

As the future of higher education is considered, Murphy (1989) advises that “the distance that exists between student and academic affairs should best be viewed as past history (p. 377). I, too, agree with Murphy’s sentiments and encourage institutions of higher education to take a more holistic approach when it comes to educating college

students. Schools can do this by increasing the amount of collaboration between academic and student affairs and cultivating seamless learning environments. When college and universities begin to implement collaborative efforts between student and academic affairs, they will quickly begin to notice the multitude of benefits that students, higher education professionals, and institutions will reap.

The first African American congresswoman and the first woman to run for president, Shirley Chisholm, once said, “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair”. I brought my folding chair and I am certain that I will not be the last one to do so. And while I am an advocate for bringing folding chairs, I am an even greater advocate for folding chairs not needing to be brought at all; because, my vision of higher education includes everyone already having a seat at the table.

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