

A GUIDE TO BECOMING A SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

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Foreword by
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WHY STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS SHOULD PURSUE SCHOLARSHIP (AND WHY WE DON'T)

During your first appointment of the day, an international student weeps in your office because this system called U.S. higher education is so strange to her. You hand her a tissue before you can even savor the first sip of your morning coffee. At the same time, your colleague across campus is trying to figure out how to create a field for preferred names in the student information system because transgender students have requested this. And as the clock barely reaches 9 a.m., the veterans services director has been on hold for the past 30 minutes with the federal government. When, during this or any similar morning, does a student affairs professional have time to even think about putting together a conference presentation or writing a paper for publication?

For many reasons, including the examples just given of the “tyranny of the urgent” (Sriram, 2011, p. 1), student affairs professionals don’t pursue scholarship created through presenting and publishing. Saunders, Register, Cooper, Bates, and Daddona (2000) concluded that the profession of student affairs has seen a decrease in scholarship by administrators. This book, we hope, will help those very people who should be sharing their experiences to further the knowledge and practices that will ultimately help students. We are writing this book because we believe in the value of student affairs professionals viewing themselves as scholar practitioners.

What is a *scholar practitioner*? Kidder (2010) defines such a person as one who “engages in research and scholarly endeavors while continuing in the role of an administrator” (p. 1). To become a scholar practitioner, Schroeder and Pike (2001) insist that the fundamental question to ask is this: What

should an individual know and be able to do with this knowledge in order to be effective? In other words, how can scholarship be applied to the practicalities of student experiences?

This book is intended for beginning professionals, those in their mid-careers, and even senior student affairs administrators who have had many years to reflect on the profession itself and their personal journeys through it. We use the words *professionals* and *practitioners* interchangeably, and we also refer to *administrators* knowing that not all those in student affairs view themselves as such. However, most of what is offered in this book can be applied to all student affairs professionals regardless of their title or years in the profession.

The Push for Scholarship

It isn't enough to say we want a professional to become a scholar practitioner. We need to share why it's important to identify as one. Scholarship is leadership and takes us from practice to influencing the field of student affairs. Allen (2002) posits,

Leadership involves fulfilling seven different roles that help practitioners make meaning of their work, increase their understanding of the whole system, identify key relationships within our practice, connect the past with the present and the future, identify what is missing in the present and articulate alternate visions of our future, identify emergent practices and theories, and create connective wisdom for the field. (pp. 149–150)



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In *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer (1990) calls for us to expand our understanding of what constitutes scholarship: “The work of the scholar means stepping back from one’s investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one’s knowledge effectively to students” (p. 16). Moreover, Boyer offers a view of scholarship that calls for us to think of research beyond creation or discovery, and that is research of integration, application, and teaching.

Since 2001, the national student affairs organizations American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators

in Higher Education as well as their respective journals have explored topics on scholarship in student affairs. There has been a call for more scholarship and the expansion of our view of scholarship. And in 2006, NASPA held a summit on scholarship (Jablonski, Mena, Manning, Carpenter, & Siko, 2006) that has served as a catalyst for reframing scholarship in student affairs. Carpenter (2001) extended Boyer's work to student affairs and included the "scholarship of practice" (p. 183), calling on student affairs practitioners to use theory and scholarship in their daily interactions. In addition, both NASPA and ACPA jointly published *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* (ACPA & NASPA, 2010), which advocates using theories to inform our practice and contributing to the field through our reflections.

Student affairs scholar practitioners must hold fast to the idea of their own continual learning, which, in turn, further benefits students. This learning cannot occur without reflecting on one's own practice, attitudes, and mindset. According to Dewey (1910), "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought" (p. 2). When we engage in reflection, we allow ourselves to question what happened in a given situation and to view the event from a contextual distance to determine whether we have experienced any growth. We must reflect critically, see ourselves as both teachers and learners, and come to know ourselves within the processes of research itself.



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Yes, our voices are important, but we must be able to articulate *why* our voices are important for the profession to develop. How can we relate what happened to us and what we learned from it so our peers can benefit? In this sense, as student affairs professionals we must see ourselves as educators and teachers not only to the students we serve but also to our colleagues.

Dewey (1910) goes on to say that educators need to "cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions" and to "develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded" (pp. 27–28). Student affairs professionals are in the best position to test the myths about what really works for students to have access to, persist in, and graduate from

college. We experience daily how some policies, though well intended, don't always translate well to students. As "street-level bureaucrats" (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005), we have developed, through our daily interactions with students, the grounding for the conclusions we draw of what works. In other words, we have much to share and offer in how we can improve this thing called college. Without scholarship, without presenting and writing, these stories and voices will be lost.



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Why We Don't Write

What keeps us from writing when we know how important it is for our own growth and for the health of the field? Student affairs professionals can blame the immediacy of our daily work for not identifying as scholar practitioners. But this may be too easy of a scapegoat. In this section we suggest several other reasons why we don't pursue scholarship. If we understand the causes, then we can strategize and do something about them.

Not Enough Reading

If we are not reading research, we are probably not contributing to it. Carpenter (2001) states, "Any student affairs professional not reading the literature, not becoming knowledgeable of research and theory, is not acting ethically. Students have a right to expect that student affairs professionals are knowledgeable of appropriate theories, current research, and proven best practices" (p. 311). More important, our practice must be guided by theory and research. Reading research provides practitioners with a solid foundation for developing and improving programs and services. It takes us beyond anecdotal knowing to knowing that has been examined, and it adds legitimacy and intention to our work.



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Not Expected of Positions and Not Valued

Unlike tenure-track faculty, student affairs practitioners do not have the same pressure to publish results of their impact on student learning and development. Studies show that supervisors give little incentive to student affairs practitioners to pursue scholarship (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Saunders & Cooper, 1999); the reason for this may be that many midlevel managers in student affairs underutilize and undervalue assessment and research skills (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Saunders & Cooper, 1999; Sermershein & Keim, 2005).

Second-Class Citizen Syndrome

Kimbrough (2007) suggests one reason that 85% of chief student affairs officers and nearly 48% of deans of students have terminal degrees may be that there is a “climate in higher education that has discounted the importance of student affairs work” (p. 278). Earning an advanced degree connotes, in part, a metaphorical membership in the academic community. Kuh and Banta (2000) noted cultural-historical barriers to a perceived lack of respect for student affairs professionals that grew partially from faculty historically being given tasks that they did not want to do, many of which were noncurricular. This resulted in faculty spending more time on research and scholarship and less time on what is now considered the realm of student affairs. Student affairs professionals may feel inferior to their colleagues in academic departments not only in degree obtainment but also in their research skills, and thus less likely to publicly share research through presentations or publications.

Inadequate Academic Preparation

Professional skills in reading and doing research are necessary for scholarly writing. Unfortunately, some graduate student affairs programs may not adequately prepare practitioners to write and publish. According to Jablonski et al. (2006), “Even students from some of our best programs are inadequately trained in research, evaluation, and assessment. Even when they are rudimentarily trained, they frequently lack a conception of the values of scholarship and their obligation to consume and contribute to research in the field” (p. 187). Furthermore, student affairs professionals who have been out of their graduate programs for a while may feel too distant to the research skills and thus less competent in their ability to do research and publish (Saunders et al., 2000; Schroeder & Pike, 2001).

Silos on Campus

When was the last time you ventured more than a few buildings away from your office? How about even down the hall? The university has become more

fragmented (Boyer, 1990), which can lead to a lack of coherence in students' educational experiences. To foster a holistic student journey, rather than a "miscellaneous heap of separate bits of experience" (Dewey, 1902, p. 5), educators across the university need to be intentional in student learning. College, therefore, can be more of an accumulation of inextricably linked experiences and not separate, discrete entities. This intentionality can occur only when educators actually *talk* with each other. Building community often is a precursor to scholarship.

Lack of Motivation

The job descriptions of student affairs professionals typically don't include scholarship, unlike those of their peers in academic departments. If research and scholarship are not valued by supervisors (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Saunders & Cooper, 1999) and staff are not expected to participate in such, it would not be surprising that there would be little motivation or incentive to engage (Schroeder & Pike, 2001).

Our Challenge to Student Affairs Professionals

You now know the importance of being a scholar practitioner, and you now understand better the reasons student affairs professionals might not engage in research and scholarship. Here is our question to you: If you could give voice to those who were marginalized, if you could change the field of student affairs through your voice, if you could create better collaborations across campus with our academic colleagues, and if you could share your insights with parents, students, and other invested stakeholders so that they will know what we contribute to student learning and development, why wouldn't you? Unless student affairs practitioners, those who work most closely with students, take the time to present or publish, changes to the field will not be informed by those most knowledgeable to improve practices, programs, and services. It is our hope that this book will provide the vehicle for you to engage in scholarship.

Structure of the Book: Much to Write About

We have organized this book with great intentionality. As you have read, we firmly believe that student affairs professionals need to identify as scholar practitioners to further the daily good work they are doing with students. For this reason, we spent the majority of this chapter sharing our thoughts about

why presenting and publishing need to be priorities for all student affairs professionals regardless of title or years of experience.

In the chapters that follow, we provide helpful information about presenting and then move on to the world of publishing, including writing strategies to keep you going. We end with conversations with senior student affairs officers about scholarship in the profession.

Presenting at a conference may seem less daunting than submitting writing for publication, and, thus, we focus on this first. There are a variety of conferences—local, regional, national, and international—and those new to presenting may want to ease into it by submitting a proposal for a local or regional conference. Those more seasoned may desire to challenge themselves and pursue acceptance at national or international conferences. If you have the research bug (and research doesn't have to be in a lab or statistically overwhelming), you may just want to write that paper or book. Certainly, presenting and publishing are not mutually exclusive. Technology has afforded other modes of publishing, which we also discuss. The latter part of the book provides strategies to facilitate the presenting and publishing processes and offers stylistic writing guidelines. We are well aware that you may have a few of these texts on your shelf (or on your Kindle or bookmarked on your desktop). However, we offer these in one place for ease of use. We hope that new professionals through chief student affairs officers will use this book as a guide for their scholar practitioner selves throughout their careers.

But first, we'd like to talk about feedback. Why do we dedicate an entire chapter to feedback and why so early in the book? Well, do you like to be told how you can improve what you're doing? What are your recollections of getting a graded paper back in school or that annual evaluation at work? We hope that you have positive, happy thoughts associated with feedback, but we surmise that you, like most human beings, probably don't. As scholar practitioners, however, collegial feedback is a must. We invite you to read on.