

Supporting Student Success: The Role of Student Services within Ontario's Postsecondary Institutions

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for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario



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Executive Summary

Canada is in the midst of unprecedented growth in the postsecondary education (PSE) sector. More students are availing themselves of college and university educational opportunities than at any other time in the nation's history. The students now enrolling bring a diverse set of characteristics rarely seen within the sector previously. They are immigrants, children of immigrants, first in their family to enrol in postsecondary, Aboriginal, visible minorities, and students with disabilities to name just a few.

College and university programs and services have grown to meet the needs of these increasingly diverse learners, and are largely referred to as "student affairs and services," (SAS). One of the aims of this study was to develop a greater understanding of the scope of student affairs and services and describe the formal organizational structures of these divisions within Ontario's postsecondary sector.

We found no consistent title for the senior student affairs and services officer (SSASO) across the sample; titles ranged from Vice President, Student Services to Associate Vice Principal and Dean of Student Affairs. Despite the inconsistency of title, the reporting line was fairly consistent, with SSASOs reporting to the Provost and Vice President, Academic or directly to the President. In only a few cases, dotted line reporting structures existed between the SSASO and these senior administrators.

The portfolios for SSASOs tended to include new student orientation, student leadership programs and liaison with student government, campus involvement (clubs and organization recognition), community development (service learning and civic engagement initiatives), counselling services, health services, accessibility services (also called services for students with disabilities), career and employment services (and in some cases, cooperative education), academic skills or learning services, and services for diverse students (such as Aboriginal student services, international student services, women centres, and mature student centres). Portfolios differed in terms of whether the registrar's office and related enrolment management functions, residence, and athletics were included within the SSASO's portfolio. In general, we found the college SSASO's portfolios to be more expansive than the portfolios of the university SSASOs.

The second aim of this study was to share the voices of the staff who work in student affairs and services divisions across Ontario. Staff shared their perspectives regarding the organizational structure of their institution and how they perceived these organizational structures as helping or hindering their ability to support student success. Staff depicted and described two types of images that correspond with how they perceived the organizational structure of their institution. Spider webs tended to represent institutions where the staff perceived the organizational culture as one where supporting student success was a shared commitment between staff and faculty; where the SSASO's leadership style was directed toward finding the synergy between divisional areas, open to ideas from all areas within the division, and advocated for the division in senior administrative meetings; and where staff understood the vision and mission of the division as it supported and contributed to the institutional mission. Silos tended to represent institutions

where the staff perceived the organizational culture as one in which people worked in their discrete units and were less committed to a shared focus on supporting student success; where the SSASO's leadership style managed departments within the division more as discrete units, less open to ideas from across the division, and with greater hesitation in advocating for the division in senior administrative meetings; and where staff were less clear about how the vision and mission of the division supported and contributed to the institutional mission.

This imagery was powerful in that it spoke to two different approaches to organizational structure: one was student-focused and the other was institution-focused. Student-focused structures were those that aligned organizational structures (proximal location of departments, sub-unit reporting portfolios, policies and protocols) with the student in mind. Institution-focused structures were those that focused on the organization of the institution's business first, and appeared to value it over how students would encounter the institution as they worked through successful completion of their program of study.

The spider web and silo imagery and their relation to the student-focused and institutional-focused approaches to structure appeared irrespective of the actual organizational structure of the institution. Institutions were typically centralized, decentralized, or federated (a combination of the two former models). A centralized structure tended to have the various units within the division (health and counselling, residence, registrar, and athletics, for example) headed by a director or manager reporting to the SSASO, and providing programs and services for the institution as a whole. Conversely, a decentralized structure was one in which programs and services were managed and provided for within multiple institutional units, typically within the faculties. Finally, the federated structure (or hub and spoke model) was found at institutions in which programs and services existed with some level of centralization, and customized versions of these central services also existed at typically the individual faculty level. A critical finding from this study was that student-focused or institution-focused approaches to organizational structure could be illustrated by any of the three actual structures (centralized, decentralized, or federated). It is as possible to have a student-focused approach with a federated SAS structure as it is to have an institution-focused approach with a centralized SAS structure.

Staff perceptions of organizational culture (whether more viewed in terms of a spider web or a silo) and how organizational culture related to approaches (whether more viewed in terms of student-focused or institution-focused) also influenced the informal organizational structures used by staff in supporting student success. Institutions that used a more student-focused approach in their administrative structure also tended to use intentional communication strategies largely within the division to positive effect. Establishing communities of practice (where staff from across the division get together to share information on a specific issue) was a common strategy used to build relationships and create networks across the division and institution. Hosting town hall meetings (larger division- or institution-wide gatherings where staff and others discuss a topic or share information) was another strategy used to build relationships and reinforce a sense of common purpose, vision, and focus on mission.

These intentional communication strategies appeared to yield benefits. At institutions where these communication strategies appeared to be utilized, staff shared that it was their relationships with others in the division and across the division that enabled them to manage the

day-to-day requests of students, provide students with sound counsel, and make appropriate referrals. Moreover, collaborative ventures almost always were the result of staff calling on their network of relationships to launch a new innovative initiative or improve an existing program or service. Finally, the relationships that resulted from engaging in these intentional communication forums enabled staff and faculty from across the institution to develop a better understanding of the role of student affairs and services in supporting student success and contributing to the institutional mission.

Several levers were identified as contributing substantially to organizational structures within SAS divisions. As noted previously, Ontario's postsecondary institutions are enrolling an increasingly diverse demographic of students. Meeting the needs of today's students has often resulted in the creation of new formal organizational structures within SAS divisions. Offices for students with accessibility needs have been created in which staff liaise continuously with faculty, librarians, book store purchasers, financial aid staff, and the registrar's office to support student success. Programs and services have also been developed to support the transition and adjustment of Aboriginal, international, mature, visible minority, women and other groups of traditionally under-represented students.

While the changing demographic of today's students has had a clear influence on the organizational structures within SAS divisions, governmental and external initiatives and funding envelopes have also been important drivers in the creation and development of the offices, programs, and services designed to address the needs of today's students. The combination of an institutional response to providing support for a more diverse group of students and governmental funding envelopes to encourage institutions to respond meaningfully have been key levers in the organizational structure of Ontario's postsecondary SAS divisions.

The confluence of the changing demographics of students, increased enrolments, and governmental funding envelopes not only helped transform the organizational structure of SAS divisions, but is also intimately connected to the role of resources. Resources to fund programs and services are derived from institutionally-earmarked operational funds, provincial funding, and student fees. The challenge within most SAS divisions appears to be how to best deploy these resources equitably. When resources were perceived to be unequally distributed, some departments were perceived as "have" departments while others were perceived as "have nots," and there was a noticeable strain on maintaining focus on the common vision of supporting student success. Given the province's increased focus on providing a high quality learning experience within the context of fiscal constraint and growing enrolment, resource allocation appears to be a key lever in the organizational structure of Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

In summary, how staff perceived the institution's organizational culture was related to their perceptions of the institution's approach to supporting student success. Where staff perceived the organizational structures forming a culture characterized by spider webs, staff were also more likely to view the institution's approach to supporting student success as one that was more student-focused. Alternatively, where staff perceived the organizational structures forming a culture characterized by silos, staff were also more likely to view the institution's approach to supporting student success as being more institution-focused. The changing demographics of the student body have been recognized to some extent by governmental initiatives and funding

envelopes. Many institutions have availed themselves of this funding by further developing the organizational structure of their SAS divisions. In conclusion, two questions remain:

1. How can SAS divisions work with others across the institution (faculty, senior administrators, and students) to develop an institutional culture based on a shared commitment of supporting student success?
2. How might institutions allocate resources in ways that both incentivize and sustain a shared commitment to supporting the success of today's diverse students?

Developing thoughtful responses to these two questions appears to be the next step for the senior leaders of Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

Introduction

Postsecondary education has moved from being the purview primarily of society's privileged class to being accessible to a wider cross-section of the population (Drewes, 2008; Trow, 1973). Programs and services that support student learning and success have become increasingly important administrative components of most colleges and universities, especially as increasing numbers of historically under-represented students are recruited and admitted into postsecondary education (PSE) programs (Andres & Finlay, 2004; Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Hardy Cox & Strange, 2009; Ludeman, Osfield, Hidalgo, Oste, & Wang 2009).

Student affairs and services (SAS) refer to those administrative areas within postsecondary institutions that provide non-instructional programs and support services that facilitate students' entry, matriculation, engagement, and ultimately PSE success (James, 2010 Sullivan, 2010). Although student affairs and services have existed within North America since the end of the 19th century, very little research on the field has focused specifically on the Canadian context. Consequently, most postsecondary divisions of SAS across the country rely heavily on research conducted in the American context to inform their policy and practice.

The purpose of this particular research study was twofold:

1. The study aimed to develop a more thorough understanding of the formal organizational structures used in Ontario's postsecondary SAS divisions.
2. The study examined how SAS staff made sense of formal and informal organizational structures of the institution and division and perceived such structures as helping or hindering their effort to support student success.

Formal organizational structures refer to titles used, reporting lines, and breadth of portfolio. Informal organizational structures refer to perceptions of divisional and institutional leadership and management style, the deployment of various communication strategies and engagement in collaborative opportunities, and the relations of these to staff perceptions of work (Bess & Dee, 2008; Zand, 1981). Given the increased focus on ensuring the quality of the postsecondary experience relative to student outcomes (Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario, 2004; Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2000; Rae, 2005), this research study contributes to the knowledge of the field of SAS within Ontario specifically and the Canadian context more broadly. It also provides postsecondary institutions with evidence from which to examine their current organizational structures relative to supporting student success, and to undertake institutional change if warranted.

Review of Literature

With the expansion of SAS areas as part of the administrative lattice supporting students with their transition to and progression through postsecondary education, a literature has developed that focuses on this distinct organizational area. Extending back to the earliest conception of the field, a time in which the work of these administrative offices was referred to as student personnel services, the literature primarily details the philosophy undergirding SAS work and the organizational models and functional areas that fall within the SAS portfolio. With few exceptions, the majority of this literature is situated within the American context (see American Council on Education [ACE], 1937, 1949; Dungy, 2003; Evans & Reason, 2001; Kuk, 2009; Young, 2003).

One of the first formal statements regarding the organization and philosophy of an institutional division with the mandate to support students during their postsecondary study was the *Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV)* (ACE, 1937). Authored by a group of early pioneers in the field, the *SPPV* articulated a philosophy to guide staff undertaking student personnel work. In general, the *SPPV* held that staff working in these administrative areas needed to attend to students' individual differences, recognize student agency, and educate the whole student—all with an awareness that institutional context will likely influence how and in what ways staff engage with students (ACE, 1937). The *SPPV* identified a host of services necessary for an “effective educational program” (ACE, 1937, p. 6), as well as outlining the philosophy of student personnel work.

Prior to the *SPPV*'s delineation of functional areas, and description of how they should be coordinated across the institution, W. Clothier (1931/1994) began discussing which areas should be designated within the personnel purview. The dialogue was furthered by Hopkins (1948/1994), revisited by the second iteration of the *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1949), and later commented on by Crookston (1976/1994). Over time, the conversation has shifted from discussing which functional areas should be within the SAS sphere of responsibility to one that focuses on broader issues of organizational structure based on institutional type and mission (Barr, 2000; Hirt, 2006; Kuk, 2009; Lyons, 1993).

Although lacking as extensive a history as their American counterparts, documents and book chapters situated in the Canadian context have contributed to the organizational literature relating to SAS (see Canadian Association of College and University Student Services [CACUSS], 1989; James, 2010; Ouellette, 2010; Sullivan, 2010). An important contributor to the dialogue on organizing SAS divisions has been CACUSS. As the primary umbrella association for SAS staff in Canada, CACUSS has provided staff with a “more systematic approach to their work, including an understanding of its underlying principles and values” (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010, p. 10). Similar to the *SPPV* (ACE, 1937; 1949), a group of seasoned practitioners from the Canadian SAS field co-authored “*The Mission of Student Services*” document (CACUSS, 1989) which codified the association's approach to student services. Sullivan (2010) acknowledged CACUSS's (1989) delineation of four functions to which activities of SAS divisions fall:

1. Educational – those that help students to develop intellectually and personally;
2. Supportive – those that help students deal with the challenges inherent in intellectual, spiritual, cultural and personal development;
3. Regulatory – those that support standards of student conduct and reflect the best interest of the educational process and the individual student;
4. Responsive – those that respond to requests in the areas of research, professional development and consultation.

In addition to the functions that CACUSS identified, Sullivan (2010) also identified a number of factors that have influenced the organizational structure of SAS divisions since the release of the CACUSS mission statement. These factors include:

- a) orienting SAS work toward student learning and achieving learning outcomes;
- b) employing strategic enrolment management techniques and processes in recruiting, admitting and retaining students with a parallel organizational placement of enrolment management functions within the SAS portfolio;
- c) contributing to broader institutional vision and strategic planning initiatives; and
- d) responding to a funding base that is often divided between the institutional operating budget and student fees.

Sullivan (2010) asserts that these factors, along with residential mix and reporting line of the senior student affairs and services officer (SSASO), guide institutional choices in terms of organizational structure.

CACUSS, as an organization, has recognized the influence of contemporary issues and emerging trends on the field and the potential impact they may have for the organizational structure of SAS divisions. In a paper prepared for CACUSS, Fisher (2011) identified: a) access, diversity and inclusion, b) student engagement, and c) accountability as contemporary issues affecting today's student affairs practice. These issues are coupled with trends such as contributing to institutional strategic enrolment management processes, focusing on integrated learning, meeting students' mental health and wellness needs, and creating diverse learning environments that attend to students' preferred learning modalities and various life circumstances, all while using assessment data from programs and services as the basis for evidence-based decision making. Together, the issues and trends articulated in the "*Leaders in Learning*" paper (Fisher, 2011) suggest that the organizational structure of SAS divisions will need to move from what Oullette (2010) described as a service provision model to a proactive student learning model.

Across both American and Canadian contexts, the literature has focused primarily on the challenges and opportunities that manifest from different formal organizational structures. In

general, the literature has discussed key considerations in light of different reporting structures, contrasting a reporting structure in which the SSASO reports to the President compared to reporting to the Provost/Vice President, Academic. This body of writing has also detailed typical functional areas that fall within the SAS portfolio, particularly in relation to the institution's residential mix and the division's role in enrolment management. Finally, the literature has discussed formal organizational structures of SAS divisions relative to various funding mechanisms, resource allocation and accountability.

The description of formal organizational structures (e.g., titles, reporting lines and breadth of portfolio) that this literature provides is helpful, but is limited in that it does not relate to the informal organizational structures (e.g., perceptions of leadership, communication strategies and collaborative partnerships) that are often central to SAS work. Moreover, the voices of the SAS staff who support student success on a daily basis are absent from the current literature. Little is known about how staff make sense of their campus' formal and informal organizational structures, or how they perceive these structures as helping and/or hindering their ability to best support student success. Guided by the following research questions, the present study aimed to contribute to the literature by situating the perspectives of staff at the centre of the inquiry. The research questions examined include:

1. What are the formal organizational structures employed in SAS divisions within Ontario's postsecondary institutions?
2. How do SAS staff perceive the organizational structures (both formal and informal) at their institution and within their division?
3. How do they perceive these structures as influencing their role in supporting student success?

Methodology

Since there is very little past research in the field of SAS in Canada, and in Ontario more specifically, the study is largely descriptive and seeks to better understand the phenomena under investigation. Because the explicit objectives of the study were to gain an understanding of staff perceptions of organizational structures, and how they perceive these structures as influencing their ability to support student success, qualitative methodology was well-suited for this project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Whitt, 1991).

Sample: Institutions

Fourteen institutions participated in this study. The institutions were drawn from the two publicly funded postsecondary education sectors within Ontario: colleges and universities. In 2002, the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act re-chartered the province's colleges with the objectives of offering

a comprehensive program of career-oriented, post-secondary education and training to assist individuals in finding and keeping employment, to meet the needs of employers and the changing work environment and to support the economic and social development of their local and diverse communities.

The five colleges that participated in this study (Table 1) were purposively selected to represent different regions of Ontario and ranged in institutional size, programs of study and student demographics. This sampling technique at the institutional level was done to create maximal variation (Creswell, 2007).

In Ontario, all universities are incorporated under unique acts of the Ontario legislature. Distinct from the expressed vocational nature of the colleges, the objects and purposes of the universities in general are: “(a) the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge; and (b) the intellectual, social, moral and physical development of its members and the betterment of society” (see for example The Brock University Act, 1964; York University Act, 1959). Acknowledging the key considerations that often guide institutions in organizing their respective SAS divisions (Sullivan, 2010), the nine universities in our sample (Table 1) were purposively selected to range in year of incorporation, residential mix and research intensity, along with intentional variation in geographic location and size. Similar to the institutional sampling strategy used for the colleges, the intent was to obtain a sample with maximal variation (Creswell, 2007).

The primary investigator contacted each institution’s SSASO via email to introduce the study and invite the institution to participate. Appendix A contains the introductory email message. Only one of the institutions contacted did not respond to the introductory email; all other institutions consented to participate and provided letters of support that were submitted as part of the study’s ethical review application.

Table 1. Institutions Participating in Study			
Participating Colleges^a	City	Region^d	Full-time Enrolment - Bachelor and 1st Professional Degree
Canadore College	North Bay	Northeastern	3,500
Conestoga College	Kitchener	Southern	9,000
Fanshawe College	London	Southern	13,000
Mohawk College	Hamilton	Golden Horseshoe	11,500
St. Lawrence College	Kingston	Eastern	6,500

Participating Universities ^c			
Brock University	St. Catherine's	Golden Horseshoe	13,407
Nipissing University	North Bay	Northeastern	5,310
Queen's University	Kingston	Eastern	14,286
Ryerson University	Toronto	GTA	17,561
University of Guelph	Guelph	Southern	16,774
University of Toronto – Mississauga	Mississauga	GTA	10,096
University of Western Ontario	London	Southern	20,362
Wilfrid Laurier University	Waterloo	Southern	11,057
York University	Toronto	GTA	39,127

Notes:

^a Full-time enrolment data for the colleges came from institutional websites.

^b Region information came from the Ontario Guide website, retrieved from <http://ontarioguide.com/regions/>.

^c Full-time enrolment data for the universities came from the Common University Data Ontario figures from each institution's website for 2009.

Sample: Participants

There was no express sampling procedure at the participant level. Study participants were SAS staff who responded to an email authored by the primary investigator inviting them to participate in a research study examining staff perceptions of the formal and informal organizational structures of their division and institution and how these structures influence their work in supporting student success. The email was endorsed by the SSASO and sent by an on-campus contact person (typically the SSASO's administrative assistant) to all staff that the institution identified as being part of their SAS division. Appendix B contains the email invitation sent to staff. This email procedure led to variation in the functional areas of staff who received the email. For instance, at institutions where the registrar's office was under the VP, Academic, these staff did not receive the email invitation. The SSASO from each institution participated in the study, as did 278 SAS staff from across the 14 institutions. The participating staff represented a wide spectrum of functional areas within the SAS portfolios across the institutional sample. Table 2 presents the staff participants' functional areas.

Table 2. Participants' Functional Areas

Aboriginal Student Services
Academic Learning Skills (typically included Writing Centre, Math Lab, Peer Tutoring)
Accessibility Services (also called Services for Students with Disabilities)
Admissions
Alumni Affairs and Development
Athletics and Recreation
Bookstore
Career Development and Employment Services
Communications
Community Life and Relations
Conflict Resolution, Non-academic Judicial Affairs
Co-operative Education
Counselling Services
Diversity and Equity
Financial Aid and Services
Graduate Student Life
Health Promotion/Wellness
Health Services
Housing/Residence Life
Information Systems
International Student Services
Leadership Programs
Library
Orientation
Recruitment
Registrar
SAS Administration
Service Learning

Data Collection

In the first phase of the project, the research team conducted a thorough document analysis, reviewing institutional charters and websites to identify how SAS areas were organized. Specifically, the research team reviewed:

- a) the reporting structure of the SAS division;
- b) the titles used to delineate positions;
- b) a description of the programs and services provided and their facilitation of student success; and
- d) the role of students in program and service planning, delivery and assessment.

In the second phase of the project, the research team visited each institution for a full day site visit. The visit began with a 60-minute individual interview with the SSASO, which focused on

understanding the rationale behind the division's organizational structure, recent changes within the division's structure, what precipitated those changes and how the division related to the broader institution.

The site visit continued with three 90-minute focus groups: the first was for those who reported directly to the SSASO and was comprised mainly of Directors and Managers of functional areas; the other two focus groups were for general staff. The purpose of the audiotaped, semi-structured focus groups was to learn of SAS staff perceptions of their division's organizational structure and how staff viewed the influence of formal and informal organizational structures on their work supporting student success. The focus group agenda began with introductions and a general description of the purpose of the research project, and participants were then asked to describe what they believed to be conveyed in the phrases "organizational structure" and "student success." It continued with the participants drawing or diagramming how they made sense of the organizational structure within their division, and more broadly as part of the institution as a whole. Some focus group members re-created the organizational chart, while others were more interpretative in their depiction.

Using the drawings as a springboard, the questions then turned to inquiring as to how staff would describe their interactions with others within the division, with faculty and with students. The discussion on interactions then shifted into questions which asked focus group participants to reflect on examples in which they felt they were at their best in supporting student success, and also on examples in which they felt they had failed to support student success. The focus group concluded with the facilitator summarizing the main points of discussion, including asking for clarification and elaboration. Appendix C contains an outline of the focus group question structure.

The site visit also included a guided tour of the SAS areas on campus. As the physical proximity of SAS units was often discussed in the focus groups, the tour of SAS areas enabled the research team to see the physical layout of divisional areas. The site visit concluded with a follow-up 30-minute interview with the SSASO which provided an opportunity for the SSASO to clarify and comment on topics discussed in the focus groups.

The site visits were completed between June and September 2010, with all but three completed during the summer months. It is possible that the timing of our data collection may have affected the number of SAS staff who were able to participate. Between summer holidays, and staff with less than 12-month contracts, the data collected represent only the perspectives of SAS staff who were available and who chose to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

After conducting the site visits, members of the research team discussed general impressions about the organizational structure of the institution. These conversations and personal insights were written in team members' memos and summaries. Once the site visits were complete, the research team transcribed the audio files from the interviews and focus groups.

From the transcripts, the research team used an open coding procedure to identify, name, and categorize phenomena (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Two research team members analyzed separately the data using the open coding process for each institution in the sample. The two members then met to compare codes and reconcile inconsistencies. The team members also met with a third person to discuss the analysis and coding. The third research team member was present during the data collection at the specific institution and served as a peer de-briefer checking the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Whitt, 1991).

After reconciling feedback from the peer de-briefer, one team member from the pair of coders prepared a detailed institutional site report. The site report described the research team's interpretation of the data based on the open coding process. This narrative report was then provided to the SSASO and a summary was presented to participants in a preliminary report sharing meeting for their feedback on the research team's interpretation of the data. We also invited staff who did not participate in the focus groups but were interested in the preliminary findings to attend a separate session. The sessions for non-participants were conducted mainly to see if the research team's interpretation resonated with their collective experience of the division and institution. This form of "member checking" was crucial in that it provided a constructive feedback loop for the participants to verify the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Whitt, 1991). The narrative site reports then became the data from which the research team began the axial coding process to relate categories and properties to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results

This study had two major purposes. First, the study aimed to develop a more thorough understanding of the formal organizational structures used in Ontario's postsecondary SAS divisions. Second, it examined SAS staff perceptions of the formal and informal organizational structures of the institution and division, and how these structures either help or hinder staff efforts to support student success. We discuss these two separate but related purposes in turn.

Part I. Description of Formal Organizational Structures in SAS Divisions

There has been a fair amount of conversation in the field about the use of the terms "student services" and "student affairs." In some cases the two terms are used interchangeably. In other cases, student affairs is the umbrella term that encapsulates student life, student development, and student services. In fact, a survey administered as a CACUSS initiative asked CACUSS members to specifically define these various terms. One can presume part of the genesis for asking members to define these terms was to develop a common language to describe the field. From our review, we found the term "student services" used in the title of the SSASO in four of the 14 institutions, as noted in Table 3. We found the term "student affairs" used six times, and we found the generic term "students" used four times in the title for the SSASO. Although worthy of studying within a larger sample of institutions, we found the terms "student affairs" and a generic reference to "students" used more often among universities than colleges.

Term	Universities	Colleges
Student Services	1	3
Student Affairs	3	2
Student Affairs and Student Services	1	0
“Students”	4	0

Titles and Reporting Lines of SSASO

The titles of the SSASO also varied considerably among the institutions in the sample, as demonstrated in Table 4. These titles included: “Vice President” (7 times), “Vice Provost” (3 times), Assistant or Associate Vice President (also Principal; AVP) (3 times), Assistant Principal (1 time) and one institution in which the SSASO held the title “Vice-Provost and Assistant Vice President.” In three situations, the SSASO was referred to as the “Dean of Students” or “Dean of Student Affairs” in their title as well.

The different titles for the senior student officer appeared related to a specific reporting structure. All of the colleges’ SSASOs had the title “Vice President” and all reported directly to their institution’s President. Conversely, there was far greater variation in titles and reporting structures for the universities’ SSASOs, but the most common pairing was Assistant or Associate Vice President reporting to the Provost, Vice President (Academic).

	Universities	Colleges
AVP reporting to Provost	5	0
Vice President to President	1	5
Vice Provost to Provost	1	0
Vice Provost to President	1	0
Vice President to President, dotted line to Provost	1	0

Some variation still existed within this AVP to Provost characterization. One institution’s AVP, whose actual title was Dean of Student Affairs and Assistant Principal (Student Services), reported to the Vice-President, Principal, who essentially acts as the Provost. Of the three SSASOs within the universities who reported directly to the President, all reported close connections with the Provost with one having a dotted line reporting relationship to the Provost. All the SSASOs noted the merits of different reporting relationships. However, the importance of having a place at the most senior table was mentioned consistently. Several of the SSASOs also mentioned the importance of being recognized as an equal member within the academic dean’s group, particularly in advocating the value and contribution of the SAS division to out-of-class student learning. One focus group participant noted that it was imperative that their

SSASO be at the table with senior leaders as it enabled the entire university to “understand how we are weaving our services throughout the campus community and now they can see why we are doing it.”

Not only did staff view having the SSASO at the table as important for communicating about what the division was doing, but their presence at the table also helped to firmly ground the division’s work within the senior administration’s vision. Another focus group member commented,

I feel that what we’re doing is more tied to what leadership wants; and there’s a stronger line of communication between me and the leadership. Although I’ve spent probably about ten minutes talking to [Provost’s name], I know that [SSASO] is regularly talking to him and communicating about the work that I’m doing. So it feels more tied to the leadership.

Both having a voice at the table, and the importance of being valued among the dean’s team, were key considerations for SSASOs’ leadership effectiveness, as identified by Sullivan (2010). Consistent with past research (see Kuk, 2009), the one constant of organizational structure within SAS divisions was that of change. Although structures may stabilize for a period, there always appeared to be at least some tinkering around the edges. This was also the case for the titles and reporting lines of the SSASOs participating in this study. At one institution, the SSASO’s title changed from Vice President, Student Services and Human Resources to Vice President, Enrolment Management, Student Services and Recruitment, indicating a significant expansion of responsibilities and management oversight. At another institution, the growth of a branch campus in addition to the main campus resulted in the Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students separating the responsibilities of the Dean of Students position from that of VP, and hiring for this newly created position soon after our data collection. In another instance, the SSASO position was re-organized, with much of the portfolio allocated to other divisions; those student services that remained were led by the Chief Operating Officer who reports directly to the President. Thus, the constant change of titles and reporting structures appeared characteristic of the SAS field. This was in stark contrast to the organizational structure of the Academic faculties which tended to be fairly static over time.

Portfolio of SAS Divisions

There were some clear commonalities that appeared across nearly all SSASO portfolios. Using the organizational system employed by Hardy Cox and Strange (2010), with few exceptions SSASOs provided leadership for areas concerned with the first year experience and student engagement. This typically included new student orientation, student leadership programs and liaison with student government, campus involvement (clubs and organization recognition) and community development (service learning and civic engagement initiatives). They also provided leadership for what Hardy Cox and Strange (2010) referred to as “adjustment and support areas.” These included counselling services, health services, accessibility services (also called services for students with disabilities), career and employment services (and in some cases, cooperative education), academic skills or learning services, and services for diverse students (these often included, where available, Aboriginal student services, international student

services, women’s centre, mature students centre, and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Questioning and Allies centres).

Registrar

Despite similarities in the functional areas reporting to the SSASO, we identified a number of variations as well. These variations appeared frequently in the SAS units most aligned with student admission into college or university, such as enrolment management, admissions, registrar, financial aid and financial services. Specifically, the registrar was part of the SSASO’s portfolio in over half of the institutions in our sample (9 times). In all situations where the registrar was included in the SSASO portfolio, student financial aid and typically financial services also reported to the registrar. This reporting structure can serve to fortify the registrar’s office, and thus the SAS division as well, as a critical component of the institution’s enrolment management process. When the registrar reported to someone other than the SSASO, the registrar reported to the Provost, Vice President (Academic).

In terms of college/university distinctions, there was less consistency in terms of the registrar’s office, as shown in Table 5. In the colleges, it is more common for the Registrar to report to the SSASO than in the universities. Adding another level of complexity, at one of the universities, the SSASO was also responsible for academic programs and holds the de facto title of Registrar.

	Universities	Colleges
Reporting to SSASO	4	5
Reporting to Provost, Vice President (Academic)	5	0

Consistent with our previous statement that the only constant is change, there have also been changes in the portfolio of the registrar since our initial data collection. As a result of a re-organization, all colleges in the sample now have the registrar and the related finance and financial aid services as part of the SSASO’s portfolio.

Residence

It has been well documented that student residences, beyond their basic housing function, can play an important role in helping students transition to and thrive in their postsecondary educational life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). With that in mind, administrative responsibility for student residences was often (but not always) part of the SSASO’s portfolio. In our review, we found nine of the institutions had residences reporting to the SSASO, with two of these having a dual report to ancillary services or the Vice President, Finance and Administration. At the other four institutions, residences reported to Ancillary or Corporate Services. As shown in Table 6, the reporting structure tended to correlate by university/college distinction, with more residences reporting to the SSASO at the universities than at the colleges.

	Universities	Colleges
Reporting to SSASO	6	1
Dual reporting to SSASO and VP, Ancillary or Finance	1	0
Reporting to VP, Ancillary, Corporate Services or Finance	2	3
Privately managed but connected to SAS	0	1

In line with the changing nature of organizational reporting portfolios, we found that at one of the universities the dual/dotted line reporting line from residence to SAS at the time of our data collection in 2010 had been removed, and in 2011 solely reports to the Vice President, Finance.

Athletics and Recreation

Athletics and recreation are also areas that provide for student engagement opportunities and are often, but not always, within the SSASO's portfolio. With only two exceptions, athletics and recreation reported to the SSASO. At one of the universities, athletics and recreation reported to the VP, Finance and Administration. At another university, these areas were part of a dual reporting structure including the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Vice President, Resources and Operations. Finally, at one university, where athletics and recreation reported to the SSASO in 2010, these areas report to the Faculty of Education as of 2011.

Outside of the two examples where athletics and recreation reported to academic units, they reported to Vice President, Administration or Finance. This reporting structure could create a tension between the Vice President who may view the unit through the lens of revenue, while the unit manager may view and operate the unit from a student-focused lens. In other words, the SAS staff member may desire to provide meaningful accommodation and engaging physical learning opportunities, while the VP's focus may be on maximizing revenue. A focus group participant acknowledged the firm commitment to student learning held by the current person in a key institutional position, but also noted that given the reporting structure, "if they replace her with someone who handles the budget, the numbers and revenue generation, well, then a key component of the student services, at a high level here, gets lost." This is an important concern worth noting, particularly given the recent emphasis on a high quality engaging student experience, within which residence, athletics and recreation can play significant roles.

We found three other variations within the SSASO portfolio that appeared to be related to the university/college distinction. The first is related to alumni relations. Whereas none of the SSASOs at the universities have alumni affairs included in their portfolio, we found two of the five colleges in our sample do. Second, although many of the universities report some connection with campus ministries, multi-faith centres, or chaplains, we found none of the colleges had an explicit relationship with those who facilitate religious and spiritual development. This could be due to the fact that several of the universities in our sample were founded by religious groups, and thus had expressed interest in the religious and spiritual development of their students, while all of the colleges were created by acts of government as secular

institutions. Finally, with the exception of the institution in which the SSASO was also responsible for academic programs, the library did not appear in any of the universities' SSASO's portfolios, but was included in two of the five colleges' SSASO's portfolios.

In general, there are more similarities than differences within the SSASO portfolio. Most functional areas that focus on accommodation, engagement and involvement – as well as support and adjustment – were found within the SSASO's leadership purview. In more than half of the institutions in our sample, the key parts of students' matriculation, at least as they pertain to registrarial and financial aid needs, were also within the SSASO portfolio. Clear similarities notwithstanding, we found the SSASO portfolio in the colleges to be more expansive often including alumni development, library and media services, as well as in one case, applied and institutional research and business development. This presents an opportunity for a more integrated and potentially seamless learning experience. A number of SSASOs that had this type of expansive portfolio viewed it as an opportunity to be in touch with students from the time of being prospects throughout their postsecondary experience to being alumni and potential employers who might be interested in providing a co-operative education experience for the next generation of students. As several SSASOs who had this type of expansive portfolio shared, "we have a cradle to grave philosophy."

Dynamic Nature of SAS Divisions

As noted throughout this section, the formal organizational structures across the participating institutions as defined by titles, reporting lines, and portfolio were rarely static. The dynamic nature of organizational structure was even more evident within the SSASO portfolio. One focus group participant, who had recently moved into a SAS staff role after having worked previously in academic administration, commented as follows:

I was absolutely told that [change in structure] was a given and I had to be prepared for that. Because on the faculty side, there's never radical shifts that suddenly occur. I mean there are little shifts but not like what can happen in units here.

The shifts that this participant is referring to are largely those that resulted from units within the divisional portfolio being amalgamated into a new department. For example, we frequently heard about the amalgamation of career development and employment services with cooperative education. Another common amalgamation described in focus groups was between health services and counselling services. Sometimes accessibility services offices (also called services for students with disabilities) were included in this amalgamation; other times accessibility services were included with academic skills and learning support services. Areas shifting into and later out of a broader department seemed to be the norm. Several focus group members noted that as a result of their lengthy tenure at their institution, they had experienced both amalgamation and un-amalgamation depending on the circumstances of the time. The dynamic nature within SAS divisions is perhaps best captured by a comment from a focus group participant:

I have been at the college for six years and we are always changing. We restructure again and again. At first, I kept thinking that the ground would stop moving beneath my feet. But then I realized it was not going to; it was constantly going to be changing.

It is important to remember that the formal organizational structures are largely outside of the sphere of influence of most SAS staff. Even within the SAS portfolio, typically only directors of departments within the division hold much sway over the dynamic changes that take place. Considering that SAS staff have relatively little influence in terms of the formal organizational structures, the second purpose of this research was to examine SAS staff perceptions of these organizational structures and how such structures either help or hinder staff efforts to support student success. We discuss the findings from this focus of the inquiry in the next section.

Part II. Staff Perceptions of Organizational Structures

Asking focus group participants to diagram their perceptions of the organizational structure provided a lens through which to glimpse staff perceptions of how organizational structures helped or hindered their ability to support student success. Staff were encouraged to depict not only the formal organizational structures (i.e., their perception or understanding relative to the organizational chart) but to also include informal organizational structures, including the networks that characterize crucial relationships that staff have with other staff members, faculty and students in order to best support student success. While some staff depicted their understanding in the form of a traditional formal organizational chart, those that used other types of images seemed better able to convey their perceptions of the organizational culture. These perceptions were then further clarified and elaborated in the remainder of the focus group conversation.

Relating Imagery of Spider Webs and Silos to Approaches to Structure

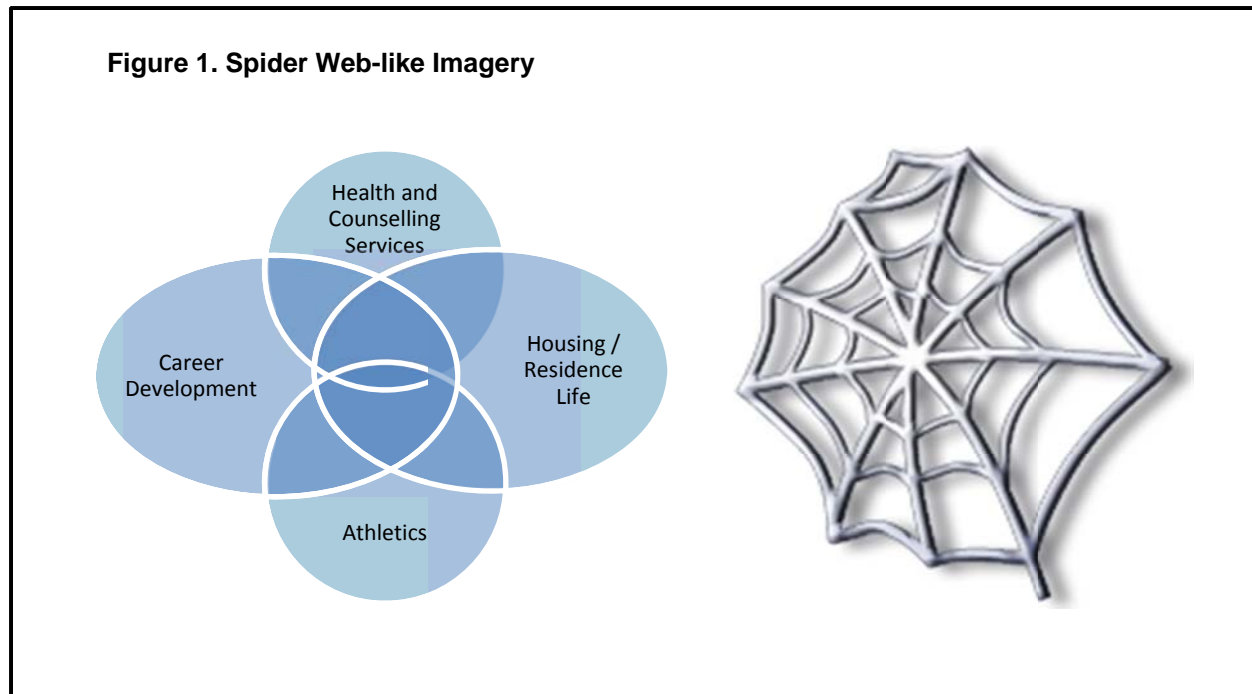
There were two main themes within the imagery of the diagrams: spider webs and silos. These two images also foreshadowed differences in the approaches institutions used to support student success. It is important to note that although the components which characterize the spider web imagery compared to the silo imagery appear mutually exclusive, it was common for each institution to have components of both images. It is thus most useful to think of spider web and silo imagery as ideal types of organizational culture, with the 14 institutions in our sample represented somewhere along the continuum.

Spider Webs

Generally speaking, spider web images were characterized by diagrams and discussions in which departments within the division were described as being connected. At times, these connections took the form of dream catchers, wheels and nets. Still others drew a multi-circled Venn diagram. Figure 1 presents replications of participants' images. In describing her drawing, one focus group participant stated, "we are not in lines. It is more of a circular type of structure. And when I look to my colleagues' [drawings], that is very much the approach they had as well."

Focus group members often identified the SSASO as critical in forging connections between the units. This style of intentional facilitation between units within the division appeared to be a form of synergistic leadership in which the SSASO helped areas within the division know more about the focus of other areas with the goal of mutual support toward the common cause of supporting student success. One participant noted about her SSASO, “she encourages you to think about the topic and [pull] people from varying areas and [see] yourself under that leadership.” This quote exemplifies how the synergistic approach modeled by the SSASO has encouraged a staff member to think about her own work in a similar fashion.

Figure 1



Synergistic leadership appeared to have the greatest impact when the SSASO focused on inspiring a vision for the division. In our sample, when the SSASO exercised synergistic leadership coupled with inspiring a vision, staff appeared to be more committed to working together. Staff recognized they shared common values and goals with others in the division. In many cases, the vision for the division derived from a broader institutional strategic plan:

With the [strategic plan], for really the first time in [institution's] history, we have a clear direction, which is linked to the academic plan. . . . [The plan's] linking of the resources to those objectives so that everyone is on the same page. . . which was not the case in the past. People would just go on their merry way. Not to say they were not doing the right things; just that it was not done in a consistent or coordinated fashion. Whereas now we have that clarity. It makes our job easier. We are not having to fight with different areas for different things because we all know what we are supposed to do.

It appeared that at institutions where the institution's strategic plan articulated concepts associated with SAS work, either using phrases like "student success" or "student engagement," the SAS staff had a better understanding of how their work contributed to the institutional mission.

At one institution, the institution's academic plan sparked a series of division-wide meetings in which SAS staff identified a set of common values that were the foundation for their philosophy of student affairs practice. The synergy between this institution's SAS units was largely due to people supporting "what they help(ed) to create." The power that the process of articulating common values had on harnessing the synergy of this division was exemplified by a quote from the institution's SSASO: "the strength of the pack is the wolf; the strength of the wolf is the pack."

Using a synergistic approach, guided by a common vision, seemed to be easier when these were complemented by a senior administration that understood and valued the role of SAS in supporting student success. Without a doubt, senior administrators set the strategic direction for the institution. For example, the tagline at one institution stated that the institution "provides the best student experience among Canada's leading research intensive universities." Placed on virtually every page of the institutional website, this articulated commitment to the student experience served as a firm foundation upon which the division has built its programs and services. More often, a commitment to student success was reflected in a host of institutional documents, frequently with the phrase "leading in student success."

In other cases, institutional statements placed value on the learning that takes place both in and outside of the classroom. Statements regarding "inspiring lives of leadership and purpose" or "developing the student, scholar and citizen" clearly recognized the role of SAS in educating the whole student.

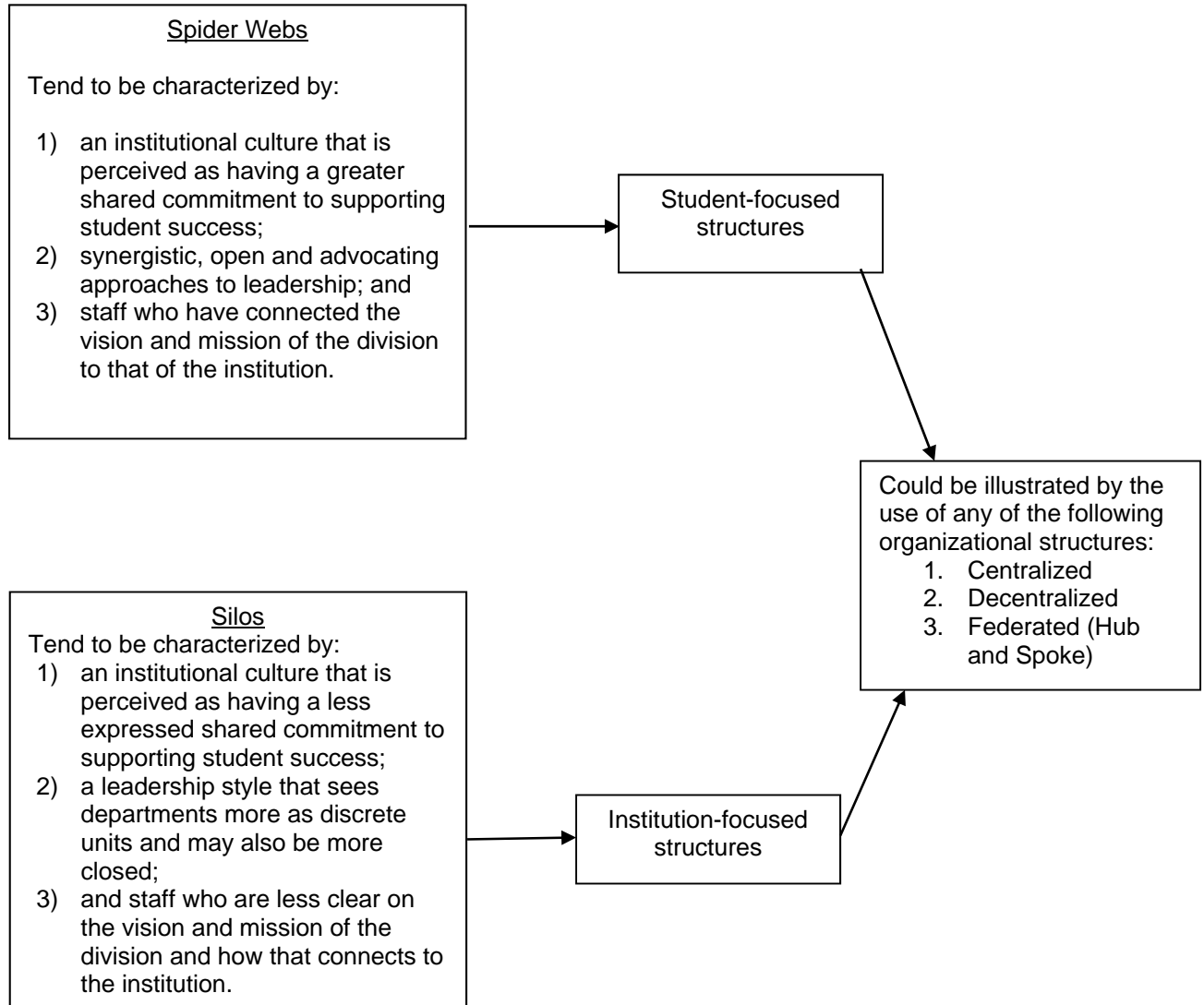
But how do these commitments take shape beyond their articulation in strategic planning documents? It seemed that enacting the espoused commitments began with the SSASO articulating to senior administrators the SAS division's contributions to the institutional mission. Although advocating in this regard was critical, it was a necessary but not sufficient component of creating a culture where student success was a shared commitment across the institution. One of the SSASOs reflected that his individual actions can only go so far. To affect organizational action on a wide scale,

It starts with the President. And if the Provost wants to have these conversations. Certainly, I can only go so far. He has to carry the ball in terms of... not only him, but the dean... the deans are important as well. So if you've got the deans and the provost on board, they can start to push their chairs to move them in the direction.

When the senior administration, particularly the Provost and President, turned their attention to student success, the message sent was that student success is "everybody's business."

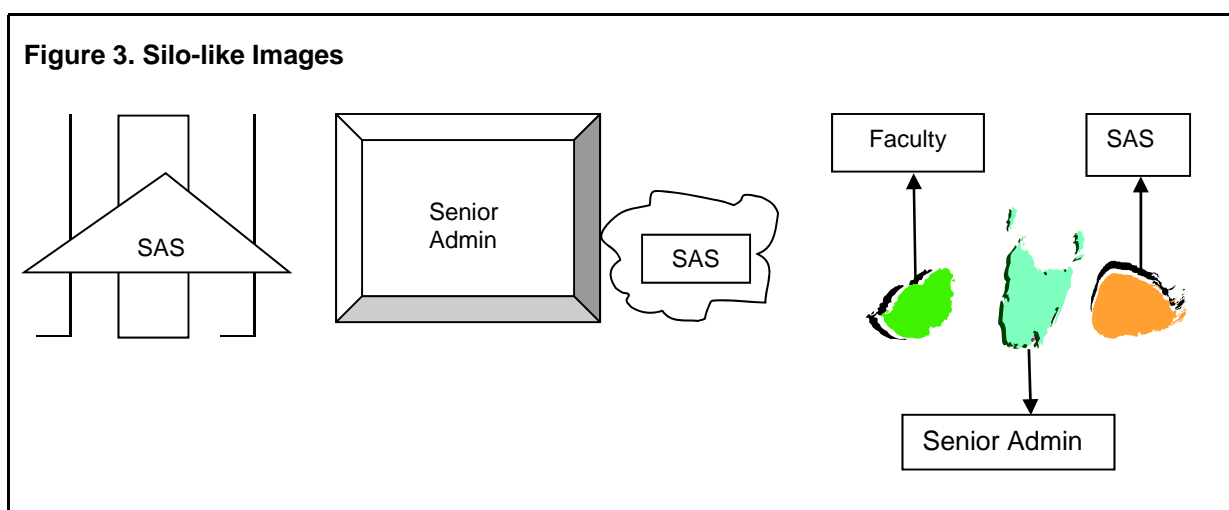
A synergistic leadership style, that was open to staff feedback and valued staff development, bolstered by a common vision and combined with a supportive senior administration, tended to result in a student-focused approach to the organizational structure. We defined a student-focused approach to the structure as one where student issues and concerns are at the forefront when determining the organizational structure. A student-focused approach to the organizational structure was often characterized by departments that serve similar or complementary functions or address common student issues and concerns being grouped together in a unit such that students were more likely to have a seamless experience. To the extent that it was practical, a student-focused approach to the structure physically located these departments in close proximity, often referred to as “the one-stop shop.” Figure 2 depicts the relation between participants’ images depicting the organizational culture and their descriptions of institutional approaches to organizational structure.

Figure 2. Relating Imagery to Approaches to and Actual Organizational Structures



Silos

In contrast to the web of connections or overlapping circles, silo imagery was characterized by separate columns (often columns of an organizational chart), actual silos, islands, brick walls and impenetrable boxes, with SAS off to the side as depicted in Figure 3.



As staff discussed their drawings, their description referred largely to their perceptions of SAS being viewed as peripheral or worse, devalued by faculty and senior administration. It was not uncommon for staff to share that they felt faculty often did not understand the role of SAS in supporting student success and contributing to the institutional mission. However, in situations where staff voiced that the senior administration did not fully understand SAS work, it appeared especially difficult for the SSASOs to effectively advocate for the division. As one focus group participant shared,

I think there have been challenges and still are challenges for everyone at [the institution] to agree that student success is the/a main purpose. And often there is the expectation from academia that it is the student services and development office staff who are responsible for that student success. Or for dealing with student problems.

Not surprisingly, these situations tended to result in an organizational culture where supporting student success was not held as a shared commitment between staff, faculty and the administration.

Silo imagery was also used to convey staff perceptions that individual departments within the division lacked connection among themselves. This “discrete units” perspective referred to units, areas, or departments within the division being managed as separate or stand alone entities. As separate entities, but with many student issues and concerns in common, some processes appeared to place students in unnecessarily complicated situations. From that perspective, silo imagery tended to result in an institution-focused approach to structure characterized by organizing departments irrespective of how students may engage with them. In many ways, this type of approach to structure privileged the unit’s “business” function over student use; in other words, the institutional status quo was valued over creating a seamless and supportive student experience.

Recognizing the Continuum between Student-focused and Institution-focused

Similar to the ideal types that the spider web and silos images of organizational culture convey, the student-focused and institution-focused approaches to organizational structure are also better viewed as ideal types with institutions in our sample being represented somewhere along this continuum. It is important to recognize this continuum as there were several situations that contributed to a tension between these approaches. In some cases, this tension was due to differences in approach between two divisions within the institution. At other times, the tension was due to differences in approach between two units within the SAS divisions. A third situation involving this tension was due to differences in approach between individual SAS staff members.

Tension between Two Divisions within the Institution

We frequently heard staff and SSASOs describe a tension between the way they would like to approach SAS work and the institution’s current approach. Sometimes this tension existed between a SAS division that wanted to be more student-focused and the reality of a broader institution resolute in maintaining the institution-focused approach to structure. This tension appeared heightened when an institution-focused structure was also defined by a decentralized academic structure. For example, at one institution enrolment management functions were decentralized and managed within the academic units, but the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) was handled out of a centralized student services division. As one focus group participant shared,

[Students] go to to the academic school to pay their fees, and then they find out that there’s something wrong with their OSAP, so they can’t pay their fees. So they end up coming to the OSAP office. The OSAP office fixes it for them, and then they head back to the academic school to pay the fee.

In this example, the institution organizationally aligned several, but not all, enrolment management functions to be handled through the faculties. However, students can get caught in the organizational abyss of this institution-focused approach, going back and forth between units in an effort to resolve the matter. The SSASO noted a certain amount of “cultural tension” in this arrangement between the SAS division and the faculties, as it can send a message to students that their time is not valued and that processes are not designed with them in mind.

Tension between Two Departments within the SAS Division

Cultural clashes or tensions were not limited to SAS divisions and other areas of the institution (like faculties). The tension between maintaining an institution-focused approach and moving to one that was more student-focused was also found between SAS units. This was often the case when areas joined SAS as the result of a re-organization. Typically, such re-organizations moved areas that had previously reported to academic units (e.g., co-operative education) or academic administration (e.g., the registrar's office) into the SAS division. The registrar's office was an interesting example because they provide an essential student service in terms of registration, on one hand, but they also work closely with the academic units in terms of degree requirements and protocol. This arrangement can place the staff of the registrar between a rock and a hard place, as evidenced by one focus group participant who commented on the challenge that students face when required courses result in a scheduling conflict:

So we [the Registrar's Office] hear stories [from faculty members who say,] 'well, we do have students that just knock off their required courses and get their [art] studios out of the way, and then they'll do their [general education requirements] and their other electives and they'll just take another year.'

In this circumstance, the staff member in the registrar's office was caught between creating schedules to meet the faculties' demands and working with students to develop schedules that allow them to graduate in four years. Fortunately, this staff member chose to work with the faculty so that faculty members could develop a better understanding of the scheduling challenges that students face. However, in this example of institution-focused protocol, the staff member could have just as easily dismissed the scheduling conflict as "this is just how it goes" and not sought to work with the faculty to develop a more student-focused approach.

Whether through a re-organization or not, we found situations where units within SAS divisions maintain an institutional-focused approach without considering or questioning how institutional structures – through their policies and protocols – may actually adversely affect students.

Tension between Individual SAS Staff Members

Even within a single SAS unit, there were tensions between staff who used a student-focused and those who used a more institution-focused approach. For the most part, these tensions seemed to exist between staff whose work resulted in more transactional outcomes for students, compared to those whose work resulted in more transformational outcomes for students. Transactional outcomes refer to the outcomes that result from situations in which students engage with SAS staff around a specific business, administrative, or operational matter. For example, students may interact with financial aid staff only in terms of receiving their financial aid award; or students may interact with registrar's office staff only in terms of filing add/drop forms. These actions result in transactional outcomes: the aid award is dispersed; the add/drop form filed. On the other hand, transformational outcomes refer to the outcomes that result from situations in which students engage with SAS staff in a way that enriches students' understanding about themselves and/or others. For example, students may participate in a

leadership development seminar or may meet with a career counsellor. These actions result in transformational outcomes: the leadership seminar introduces them to a distributive leadership model which they use in their student organization to great success or they gain greater career clarity.

The inter-departmental tension results when staff from each group interact with one another in relation to a student issue. For example, within a single unit like a counselling centre, the intake and screening processes results in transactional outcomes, but the actual issues that precipitated the appointment are addressed by someone whose work results in transformational outcomes. In general, staff described those involved in work associated more with transformational outcomes using more of a student-focused approach in which supporting student success was paramount. Conversely, staff described those involved in work more associated with transactional outcomes as upholding institutional rules and protocol even if it was counter to what would best support students. Hence, even within the same SAS team, we found conflicting approaches to supporting student success.

Tensions also existed between staff due to union membership and perceptions of what collective bargaining decisions permitted. A focus group member commented that it was not uncommon to be questioned by a fellow co-worker:

Why are you doing that? That's not in your job description and you're only classified at this level. That's someone else's [responsibility] above you. You're working above your pay grade and you should be grieving and you should be getting re-classified.

These attitudes challenged staff who held a student-focused approach to their work, making them feel that they may face a 'whack-a-mole' situation where an eager student-focused staff member pops up and says, "oh I have an idea!" only to be shut down with "whack, no you don't!" Despite these concerns, it was noted that in general staff unions were fairly flexible. The challenge was in how to negotiate the institution-focused approach characterized by the collective bargaining agreement while advancing a student-focused approach characterized by continuous improvement in programs and service delivery.

Types of Organizational Structure

Depicted in Figure 2, staff perceptions of organizational culture symbolized in either spider web or silo imagery and their relation to approaches to organizational structure were illustrated in three different types of organizational structure. We defined centralized organizational structure as SAS departments or units that were managed and provided from a central institutional unit. A centralized structure tended to have the various units within the division (health and counselling, residence, registrar, and athletics for example) headed by a director or manager, reporting to the SSASO, and providing programs and services for the institution as a whole. Many of the institutions in the study had this type of organizational structure.

Conversely, we defined a decentralized organizational structure as one in which programs and services were managed and provided for within multiple institutional units, typically within the faculties. Within a fully decentralized organizational structure, SAS staff working in similar

functional areas (academic learning skills or career development, for example) may get together to share ideas and promising practices, but the day-to-day staff management would be done by administrators across multiple units. No institutions in the study were characterized by a fully decentralized structure.

Finally, we distinguished a third type of organizational structure which appeared to be a hybrid of the two former models. We called this a federated, or hub and spoke model, in which programs and services existed with some level of centralization, but customized versions of these central services also existed at typically the individual faculty level. One focus group member described this organizational structure in the following way:

I see it as this kind of circle idea and this hub and spoke as connected with other people. It's also important in the area that I'm in – the student success centre – because we work very closely with other faculties and we . . . in fact, there are, for example, career services offices in other faculties . . . If we talk about a hub and spoke model, we are the centralized services but we have other operations that work very closely with us. This is important on that level as well; it's how I saw our connection to student services.

We heard of several examples of career development and employment services departments having a centralized “hub” office from which customized faculty-based operations were the spokes. In several of the colleges, student success advisors were “embedded” in the faculties to better meet the unique academic needs of students, but the advisors were also connected back to the central hub, which was within the SSASO's portfolio. Although no institution in the study used the federated model for all of the units within the divisions, this type of structure was particularly common within the SAS division for functional areas like career services and co-operative education or student success advisors.

We routinely heard staff lament about their division's current organizational structure. Either staff felt their institution's organizational structure was too centralized and thus unable to gain currency with the faculties, or it was too decentralized which brought inefficiency and redundancy. Some staff heralded the possibility of a hub and spoke structure. There was a sense from a number of staff that having co-workers embedded within the faculties would provide them with an “entry” into having conversations with faculty members and thus maybe a starting point for greater cross-divisional collaboration. Responding to a co-worker's suggestion, a focus group member shared,

I think that the model that you propose is almost the near perfect model where you already have these faculty teams and I think that the next step would be to bring them all into the same structure in terms of programming, implementation of programs, deliberately.

The emphasis within this quote seems to be on the word “deliberate.” A critical finding from this study was that approaches to organizational structure could be illustrated by any of the three actual structures. It is as possible to have a student-focused approach with a hub and spoke SAS structure as it is to have an institution-focused approach with a centralized SAS structure. Across the participating institutions, staff described supporting student success best at

institutions that were more student-focused and where the organizational structure was considered deliberately.

Approach to Structure Yields Different Informal Organizational Structures

In the previous section, we described how staff perceptions of the organizational culture, largely characterized by the leadership style of the SSASO and the senior administration, influenced the approach to organizational structure. Cultures characterized by spider webs were associated with the development of a student-focused approach to organizational structure, whereas cultures characterized by silos were associated with the development of a more institution-focused approach to organizational structure. This section discusses staff perceptions of how these different approaches to organizational structure relate to communication, collaboration, staff perceptions of their work, and the role of students in supporting their own and their peers' success.

Intentional Communication Strategies

We found institutions that used a student-focused approach to structure were more likely to create intentionally a variety of communication venues for staff to share their own and learn about others units' programs and services. Participating institutions used a variety of communication strategies in this regard. One example was the community of practice strategy, which is a form of intentional communication emphasizing relationship-building, learning and seeking opportunities to collaborate. Several institutions had examples of communities of practice coming together to discuss student leadership, campus community, mental health, or other common issues. One focus group participant noted that the focus of these purposeful meetings

[was to discuss] common issues that we all face in terms of dealing with students and what's everyone doing. I think it's a little easier than the thousand e-mails that we get every day and just going through that. It's a lot more effective and efficient.

Another intentional communication strategy employed by several institutions was the "town hall." The town hall was larger than a community of practice and tended to be a division-wide gathering, but in one instance was open to staff and faculty from across the institution. It often was developed with the objective of building cross-unit relationships, sharing information, discussing emerging issues and trends and providing professional development. Some focus group participants shared that it was not until the town hall that they fully recognized the breadth of the SAS division. Others stated that they learned about the multitude of gifts and talents that their co-workers possessed, and that getting to know them as people beyond their work roles made them more approachable in the office. At the institutions where some form of town hall meetings existed, we heard nothing but positive comments. One focus group participant stated, "I don't really know why it is that it works well. Other than people talk to each other and share a common vision."

At the end of the day, it appeared that the value of these intentional communication strategies – both the communities of practice and the town halls – was that they helped staff develop

relationships. The importance of underground and informal networks was exemplified in the comment of a focus group member: “it is really important that I retain the relationships I have in that area, because I could not do things I wanted to get done if I did not have them.” Without exception, staff shared their beliefs that it was their relationships with co-workers from across the institution, their personal underground network, which enabled them to make thoughtful referrals, offer sound advice and best support student success regardless of the division’s organizational structure.

Collaborating for Improvement and Innovation

Consistent with the student-focused approach to structure, which seeks to create a seamless experience to support student success, we also found institutions undertaking interesting collaborative efforts. We characterized collaborative ventures as those that were focused on improving a program or process or those that launched new initiatives on campus. At most institutions, fall orientation is a hectic time, known for long queues in offices all over campus. One institution in the study aimed to eliminate queuing for books for its residence students. The collaboration between residence, registrar, financial services and the bookstore resulted in “Books on Beds,” a program in which course books are pre-purchased with direct student account billing and available on the student’s residence bed upon their arrival.

At another institution, the collaboration was between student identification cards, IT services and residence. The goal here was also directed at reducing the beginning of term queues. Residence students simply provided to the student identification unit a picture of themselves that met specified guidelines, and the image was processed into a proper institutional ID and included it in the students’ residence check-in materials. These examples highlight the effectiveness of SAS staff collaborating to better support student success.

In addition to collaborative ventures oriented toward improving programs and services, we also learned about innovative programs geared toward supporting student success. We heard at length from a number of institutions in our sample about how students’ mental health needs were increasing. Faced with a clear student success issue, at one institution staff from counselling services, library and media services, and marketing and communications collaborated with a host of local community agencies to launch a mental health web portal that provides information about 24/7 emergency services and community resources, as well as stress management tools for students feeling overwhelmed. Focus group participants offered this collaborative venture as an example when asked, “when have you felt that you were working in a way that really supports students?” A focus group member shared, “people jump on good ideas,” and this project generated great interest on the part of many units who saw value in the collaboration.

This is not to say that examples of intentional communication strategies and interesting collaborative ventures did not take place at institutions with a more institution-focused approach. What we found, however, was that these institutions often had greater communication challenges. When managers and directors were focused less on how their programs and services connected to the broader student-focused whole, which is characteristic of a more institution-focused approach, communication breakdowns were more likely to occur. The

communication challenges were heightened at institutions situated in a multi-campus program and service delivery model. It was not uncommon to hear of situations where decisions at the main campus had been made without having been communicated to the other campuses. According to one focus group member,

People forget to tell other campuses about what is going on. I will give you an example of what I did myself and I did not realize I was doing it. I had knowledge I did not know I should share with [co-worker's name] because they were talking about doing scheduling in [branch campus location] into the evening ...So the silos are built because you get into a frame of mind and you are dealing with those people and you forget about the impact that that decision may have.

Moreover, we found communication challenges particularly amplified at institutions where the academic structure was decentralized. Regarding the communication challenges in a highly decentralized academic structure, one focus group participant commented,

It is very difficult to provide consistent service if every school has the ability to opt in or opt out and change things proposed. For example, Co-op where there are a million exceptions....it is very difficult to do student success initiatives of any type and get it imposed across the college...a huge lack of consistency!

These statements from focus group participants highlight the communication challenges described by staff at multi-campus institutions and at institutions with a more institution-focused approach.

All institutions struggled to some degree with communication, and it is unlikely that a perfect communication structure for sharing information exists. The persistent challenge around communication in a complex and expanding organization suggests the importance of creating conditions where intentional communication strategies exist, such as communities of practice and town halls, such that they may help to create underground and informal networks of relationships between staff from across the institution. We found that when staff have relationships with others from across the division and institution, they were more likely to collaborate for improvement and innovation.

Levers that Influence Formal and Informal Structures of SAS Divisions

The spider web and silo images that related to institutional approaches to supporting student success, whether these were student-focused or institution-focused, were important perceptions shared by focus group participants and SSASOs. In addition to imagery and approaches largely related to organizational culture, staff also described several factors that influenced both the division's formal and informal organizational structures. First, we heard at length about the role that the changing demographics of students play in organizational structure. Participants also discussed how their divisions have responded to governmental and external initiatives and funding envelopes, largely to meet the needs of changing student demographics and the overall growth of the sector. Finally, we learned about the challenge of scarce resources in light of increased need within a near universal system of postsecondary educational provision.

Changing Demographics of Students and Increased Enrolments

Without exception, staff discussed the changing nature of their work largely due to the changing demographic composition of the student body. Today's postsecondary student body is more representative of the broader population than ever before. They are direct-entry students who are technologically savvy and have utilized some form of digital device virtually their entire lives. They are mature students who are coming to postsecondary for the first time. They are Second Career students (initiated by the government in March 2008 and released as a three year, \$1.5 billion Skills to Jobs Action Plan initiative) who are upskilling and re-skilling in order to have more opportunities in the shifting labour market. They are Aboriginal students who may be leaving their communities for the first time. Students also enter PSE with a growing list of learning and physical exceptionalities. They may need testing accommodations in order to concentrate fully. They may require interpreters, Braille textbooks, audiobooks, or a reader. Increasingly, they come to our campuses with mental and emotional health needs to an extent we have not seen in previous generations.

Not only are there more diverse students coming to postsecondary institutions with more diverse needs, there are simply more students overall. The overwhelming feeling in terms of the amount of work and the number of issues was so great that staff can become, as one focus group member shared, "so bogged down in the muck of it that they forget the person that's sitting in front of them because they have 101 things to do before they get to the bottom line." The feeling of doing more with less appeared to drain staff motivation and morale. The combination of growing enrolment, a greater diversity of needs to address, and static or reduced staffing levels often left SAS staff feeling overwhelmed. Summing up the sentiment from focus group participants across the institutional sample, one participant stated, "We have many more demands and way less people."

Governmental and External Initiatives and Funding Envelopes

One of the ways that institutions have responded to the changing demographics of students while meeting their access mandate has been to seek out targeted governmental initiatives and funding envelopes. Governmental funding envelopes can help to address the overwhelmed state of SAS staff in meeting a multitude of demands within the context of reduced staffing levels. We learned that connecting the governmental funding opportunity with institutional missions and strategic plans was key in maximizing benefits provided by the funding.

Within this study, we encountered numerous examples of government funding and initiatives being used to further SAS divisions in the programming and support they provide to student groups already on campus. These initiatives often served as mechanisms to fully develop the institutional mission set out in its charter. For example, research intensive universities' uptake of government funding to expand graduate education was commonly discussed, an example of seizing on governmental funding envelopes in an effort to advance further the institutional mission. With a foundation already in place to support this specific government target, SAS staff commonly cited coping with these expanding demands with much success overall.

We also heard, perhaps even more frequently, of situations in which institutions used government funding to increase access to new groups of students who had previously not attended postsecondary institutions. New organizational structures were developed at several participating institutions to provide access and support to meet the changing demographic of students, such as services for students with disabilities, Aboriginal student services, international student services and mature students. However, in situations where the governmental funding was the impetus for developing these services and a pre-existing foundation was not in place, SAS staff voiced frustration with the amount of start-up work new programs and new Centres have when accompanied by inconsistent funding and unclear institutional commitments.

When governmental funding envelopes for new initiatives were taken on with limited consideration of its coherence within the institution's strategic plan, the outcomes were generally not positive. Misalignment of funding initiatives with the institutional mission, strategic plan, and or target student population were all cited as reasons for this limited success. Participants cited several examples of governmental initiatives/funding envelopes that influenced the organizational structure of their division, including the Second Careers Program as well as access programs targeting first-generation, Aboriginal and international students. These funding envelopes were created at a moment in time, and largely represented the priority of the day as opposed to an enduring institutional commitment toward expanding access and supporting the success of these new students.

A lack of continued resource commitments can impact negatively on staff morale, as can the appearance of unfocused institutional objectives and decreased student retention. Staff expressed fears of job loss, frustration in having given their time and hopes to initiatives that hang in limbo, program cut-backs and the consequences for students who may no longer be adequately serviced. A focus group participant described,

The Aboriginal and First-Generation job was a government allotment of money that was supposed to go to March 31, and then had a proposal for more money so it got extended to the end of June. But currently, as we sit right now, I don't know what I'm doing next year.

SAS staff across institutions commonly cited targeted initiatives for which they got "all geared up" and then were later informed the institution "would not be funding it anymore."

Seizing on governmental funding envelopes without consideration of how it fits into the institution's strategic plan can come across as the institution being unfocused with respect to its core objectives and mission. This lack of focus may have real consequences for students, like first generation students who enrol at an institution under the assumption that there is a supportive environment committed to their success, only to find that the commitment was tied to the duration of a funding envelope and not part of the broader institutional mission.

Resources: A 'Have' vs. 'Have Not' Dilemma

Resources were a common concern voiced by staff, irrespective of institution. The perception was that there was a lack of resources, given the demands of today's SAS work. However, not all areas within SAS divisions lack resources. In some cases where the departments are revenue-generating, they may be fairly resource-rich. In other cases where the units are student fee-funded, in which resources grow with student enrolment and the unit has been able to successfully negotiate for increased funding with student government groups, they may be well resourced as well. The challenge lies in providing synergistic leadership using a student-focused approach that minimizes the tension between units of a division which are, or are viewed to be, well resourced, and those which are not. This tension can also be viewed through the lens of have and have not units within a division.

One SSASO described this tension, stating that some units “are well resourced, because they're a complete ancillary service ... [and] some departments are poorly-resourced and because of that, struggle to keep up.” Staff identified that having multiple funding models has clear implications in their being able to develop new programs and services and maintain provision of current ones. One staff member explained the persistent uncertainty that results from the student fee allocation process:

There are student fees, but there's also... ancillary fees that have been tacked on to pay down the debt. So if we asked for an increase in our budget for the next year, then certainly they have a say [the students] and there's quite a bit of discussion around this. We all sit around the table and fight for our slice of the pie increase or support each other.

In the quote above, the staff member describes the challenge of lobbying for student fee increases. The process requires staff from student service areas which are student fee-funded to “fight” for their pot of funds or to work collaboratively so that the funding can go further. In the best case scenario, scarce resources force student fee-funded areas to communicate with one another, identify common programming and services, and work together to provide these in an integrated fashion. In the worst case scenario, scarce resources result in student fee-funded areas, as the ‘have nots,’ retrenching, looking to protect their “slice of the pie.”

On the other hand, at many campuses in our sample, housing and residence life were considered as ‘have’ departments because they were an ancillary service, able to generate revenue by setting room and board fees. By having greater direct administration over their financial resources, housing and residence departments were often early innovators, developing new experimental programs. Although there are enormous benefits in having a single unit pilot test new programs before scaling them up for wider implementation, this can come at the expense of other departments feeling “they are not able to launch great ideas to support student success because of scarcity of fiscal resources which often manifests in less staff.” Staff from fee-funded units described the complicated, and often cumbersome, process of requesting fee increases through student government. Thus, the multiple modes of resource allocation seemed to exacerbate the “have/have-not” mentality.

One way that some institutions have begun to solve an element of the resource challenge, irrespective of approach to organizational structure, has been to rethink resources (Love &

Estanek, 2004). Love and Estanek (2004) suggest that by developing more resource awareness, staff have recognized the value of students as true partners and collaborators in creating their learning environment. Students volunteer to staff innovative programs and services across the province's colleges and universities. They are orientation leaders and peer helpers, paraprofessional residence dons and peer tutors. We heard about students developing workshops that reach thousands of other students. According to one staff member, "I mean they are saving staff so much time and developing skills themselves." Done well, institutions that tap student energy as a resource not only enlarge their sphere of influence because they have the capacity to reach many more students, they also create a multitude of opportunities for students to learn new skills and apply what they have learned in the classroom to their learning environment. Similar to the staff that "support what they help to create," students who create these programs and services are engaged and invested in the programs' and services' success.

Students can also be resource generating. In addition to being resources themselves, they often help staff connect to other resources. Because students are all over the campus, we heard about their multi-faceted perspective and ability to connect SAS staff with other SAS staff and with faculty. One focus group participant shared, "I get a lot of information from students. Just hearing about things." Still other focus group members noted that students were often key to establishing a connection between a SAS program and a faculty member who would often be less likely to say 'no' to a student.

The confluence of the changing demographics of the student body, coupled with increased enrolments during a time of fiscal constraint, has left many staff feeling overwhelmed. Governmental and external initiatives and funding envelopes have been leveraged to bring in additional resources to address the needs of a changing student body and to provide increased levels of staffing. All of these levers are intimately connected to the broader lever of resources and resource allocation, which in turn play a tremendous overarching role in influencing the organizational structure of SAS divisions. The availability of resources appeared to determine the creation of offices, programs and services designed to meet the needs of students. Recognizing the value that students can bring to the resource equation was a critical means of extending and generating resources.

The next section brings together the findings regarding formal and informal organizational structures as they pertain to organizational culture, approaches to structure and the levers that influence the structures of SAS divisions.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

When the research team shared the preliminary findings reports with participating institutions, one question was at the forefront of most participants' minds: what is the ideal organizational structure for SAS divisions? The overarching conclusion from this study was consistent with findings from previous studies (see Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006); institutional context, culture, and mission cannot be overlooked. A "one size fits all" organizational structure for SAS divisions simply does not exist.

This report concludes with implications for practice. We discuss the findings from the study in terms of their implications for macro and micro level considerations influencing organizational structures of SAS divisions. Within the macro section, we first discuss the findings in terms of organizational context and culture. Next, we consider the results relative to several of the organizational levers that influence the organizational structure of many SAS divisions. Within the micro section, we turn to implications for the day-to-day work of SAS staff. We consider the results from the study in terms of developing staff and encouraging them to reconsider their role as both service providers and educators. We conclude by discussing the role of a supportive supervisor and the perception of students as learners, agents and partners in relation to creating a culture for collaboration.

Changing Approaches to Structure Comes with a Change in Culture

A number of institutions in the study talked about a continuous evolution of their administrative structure. Departments within the SAS division were amalgamated and unamalgamated. Departments across the institution were moved from the portfolio of one VP to that of another. There appeared to be a persistent search for the perfect organizational structure. The overarching finding from this study is that there is no perfect structure; no “silver bullet” structure exists that solves the challenge inherent in providing leadership to an institution seeking to realize its mission. We urge institutions to abandon such a search and to re-focus their energies on what in the organizational culture needs to change such that supporting student success is a shared commitment across staff and faculty. Those institutions that engage students themselves in having a role in this commitment appeared to benefit greatly.

How might an institution move beyond the search for the “silver bullet” structure to a focus on developing a shared commitment for student success? One approach may be for the SAS division to understand institutional priorities as they are articulated in the strategic plan. Prepared with this knowledge, staff can discuss widely how the work they are doing advances the vision embodied in the institutional strategic plan. Most SSASOs in the study described how they shared their division’s work with senior administrators and deans. But we also heard from many institutions how they were beginning to collect, analyze and use assessment evidence to support these claims. Nurturing a culture of improvement – where programs and services are regularly assessed relative to their mandate and objectives – can be valuable in demonstrating the contribution of student affairs and services to broader institutional goals.

Another approach to developing a shared commitment toward student success is to draw on the resources and talents of the institution, writ broad. We heard about institutions that used town hall meetings to generate ideas, discuss challenges, share information and best practices, and develop relationships. Often these town hall meetings were within the SAS division, and in one situation it was institution-wide. What if the town hall communication strategy was rolled out and invited students, staff, faculty, alumni and community members to be part of the dialogue? The result might be a groundswell of interest from a broader stakeholder group committed to developing a culture where student success is at the fore and shared among stakeholders.

Finally, developing a shared commitment toward student success must be undergirded by all stakeholders feeling they are supported to take risks. Faculty are not likely to initiate a

collaborative integrated learning opportunity with their student affairs colleagues if they are not supported by their department chair, Dean, and Provost/Vice President, Academic. Career services staff are not going to collaborate with the Vice President, Development to bring alumni to campus for a student/alumni mentorship program if they do not feel alumni are recognized as being part of the broader community supporting student success. This study illustrated how critical it is for senior administrators to articulate their support to take risks in developing new collaborative ventures, but we assert that support must be actualized at all levels, including the Board of Governors. A shared commitment for student success can only exist when it is supported and celebrated from the top down as well as from the bottom up.

Think Intentionally about Using Government Funding to Grow Division and Mandate

Government funding and allocation has often influenced the organizational structure of institutions, programming and student demographics. As a result of government funding initiatives we often heard circumstances where the SSASO restructured units within a division, reallocated and created new senior management positions, and reassigned the focus of staff to assist on tasks of government priority. As a result, SAS division managers and staff have been required to provide assistance to a changing student demographic, provide new programming options and develop accountability measures. As government targets and initiatives change with the release of the annual budget each year, so too does the focus and resources dedicated to specific units within SAS divisions. Announcements such as the government's plans to increase Ontario's PSE attainment rates to 70 per cent, adding 20,000 new spaces to colleges and universities; 15,000 new graduate spaces to be created by 2011–12 (Government of Ontario, 2011); budgeting \$74-million over the next five years to operate a new centralized credit transfer system (Ministry of Training, College and Universities, 2011); and creating new bursaries for first generation Ontario students all directly influence SAS divisions.

A change in the demand for the initiative, or a shift in government commitment or in the ruling political party, could result in the funding being either discontinued or designated elsewhere. Internationally, the Australian PSE sector serves as an example of what can happen when institutions rely heavily on a single funding source; international students are currently one of the largest sources of funding for many universities in Australia. However, due to recent economic constraints and decreased interest in international study by foreign students, a sudden decline in funding has had detrimental impacts on the organizational and programmatic functions of many Australian postsecondary institutions (Hilmer, 2010). In creating organizational structures that truly support student success, it is important that new initiatives are not only supported with government funds or other revenue streams, but also supplemented with institutional dollars.

The appeal in seeking government funding for areas in which an institution is not committed should be done with the caveat that these "limited time funds" may not provide a sustainable operation in the future. If the initiative for which funding is sought does not parallel the institutions' long-term strategic plan, then energy, resources and time would best be spent elsewhere.

Developing inclusive postsecondary communities that represent the rich diversity of Ontario must take place on two fronts. First, developing SAS divisions to meet the needs of the vast array of learners who attend our institutions must be intentional and well-considered. Second, provincial and federal governments must more purposefully consider an institution's intentionality and the existence of foundational support structures when awarding resources. This will help to ensure stability in Ontario's postsecondary educational programming for the long-term.

Finally, SAS divisions must ensure that even with expanding enrolments and growth under government guidance, they continue to serve new student needs with the same quality that those before them were served. Extending service hours, and providing family health care, child care and financial assistance are necessary for SAS divisions serving international, adult, first-generation and transfer students. The way SAS divisions provide service must evolve with the changing student body.

In summing up the study's macro implications, it is necessary to recognize the role that provincial and institutional funding protocols have in both developing a shared commitment to student success and intentionally using targeted funds to best support the success of a wider student demographic. Functional areas within SAS identified that the funding mechanisms of operational budget funding, student fee allocation, government funding and ancillary funding often resulted with some "have" areas able to launch new programs and services due to easier access to resources and some "have not" areas less nimble in meeting the changing needs of students because of challenging resource allocation processes. A similar tension between the "have" and "have not" faculties exists within the broader university. Fields of study with a clear occupational focus (e.g., commerce, engineering and law) are often perceived as "have" faculties while the Faculty of Arts & Science, particularly some of the smaller departments within this faculty are perceived as having far fewer resources. Developing a truly shared commitment to student success will be difficult if stakeholders perceive (and experience) such unequal access to resources. One way to incentivize and then sustain a shared commitment to student success may be through an open and transparent funding process that is based on SAS divisions and others' articulation and demonstration of contributing to the institutional mission through cross-area or cross-divisional engagement in support of student success.

In the province's *Putting Students First* plan, the Minister John Milloy (2011) stated that "quality is at the heart of putting students first" and implied that quality requires intentionality and a demonstration that institutions take achieving excellence seriously. Without a doubt, this type of new provincial funding protocol may result in consternation on the part of postsecondary institutions. However, it may provide provincial incentive for institutions to follow suit in their own funding protocols, rewarding those areas that demonstrate their collective approach to address teaching and learning skills for the 21st century, in class learning with out of class application, and services to support success with faculty in the classroom. A new funding protocol may be precisely what is needed to jump start institutions to develop a shared commitment to student success.

Developing Staff to be Excellent Service Providers AND Educators

In addition to the macro level implications from this study, there are implications for supporting student success in one's daily work. It was not surprising to hear that different types of work and the outcomes that result from those interactions often engender different approaches. In the complex campuses of today, measures need to be implemented that recognize that postsecondary learning environments have changed, often dramatically (Kezar & Lester, 2009), but that many of the day-to-day processes that comprise these environments have not necessarily evolved. Despite the student learning that postsecondary institutions proudly tout, institutions are often slow to be learning organizations themselves. One of the key principles of a learning organization is reflecting on institutional practices, policies, procedures and structures with the goal of improving outcomes (see Senge, 1990). Many have called on SAS divisions to model a learning organization in an effort to integrate institutional resources for the purpose of educating the whole student (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2004). Findings from this study suggest that re-orienting the work of all SAS staff such that they view themselves as service providers and educators may relieve the tension between what is perceived to be work that has transactional versus transformational outcomes for students.

Keeling (2008) urged the field to think beyond the binary of being either a service provider whose work results in transactional outcomes for students, or an educator whose work results in transformational outcomes for students. Rather, Keeling urges SAS staff to view their work as both providing excellent service and education. Work areas that have a primary responsibility for dissemination of instructions – or detailed rules and regulations such as records and registration, financial aid, fee payment offices or book and resource purchase areas, for example – often have regular lists of rules to be followed. Staff interaction with students involves similar tasks that may be repetitive. One student seemingly resembles another, and the routinized nature of these brief encounters encourages the use of structured approaches that may lean towards efficiency of procedure without consideration of the whole student experience (Brown, 2011).

Yet, within work that is associated primarily with transactional student outcomes, there are opportunities for staff to also have transformational encounters. Although staff may disperse hundreds of OSAP awards in the first week of class, there are also times in which financial aid staff can be instrumental in helping students solve a financial issue. Educating students about financial management is an important transferable and transformational skill beyond postsecondary life. Similarly, it is important for students to receive high quality and timely service. If students have to wait long periods to meet with a counsellor, receive academic accommodation, or take part in a leadership development program, the transformational and educative potential of these interactions may be diminished. It is equally important that those whose job is often associated with transformative student outcomes have a keen sense of customer service and an awareness of the challenge that those who focus on transactional student outcomes face as part of the intake process.

Service provider and educator, transactional and transformational; the dimensions of these different work approaches and outcomes require staff to have an enhanced understanding of the broader process while recognizing the potential of their work to educate the whole student. Moving beyond this artificial binary necessitates a commitment toward staff development. One

method to be considered to sustain excellence in student affairs practice is the use of professional learning communities or communities of practice (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000). These communities could be oriented within a functional area, bringing staff within the unit together to discuss an emerging trend. Communities of practice for front line staff to share promising practices in regard to the more transactional components of their work may be a powerful tool for institutions committed to becoming a learning organization (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Staff could use the professional competency areas for student affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Seifert & Billing, 2010) as the basis for learning, as well as design cohorts for professional development.

In summary, there is a time when interactions result in “transactional” outcomes and there is a time when interactions result in “transformational” outcomes within SAS work. In developing innovative interventions for students to navigate their path in a college or university, it is beneficial for teams from different areas of the institution to discuss approaches to their work while considering the whole student experience. Where possible, the design of work could include cross-functional teams that offer integrated services to stimulate staff growth and student development. These engaged staff sustain their professionalism by meeting regularly to improve practice via learning communities. The results of these interactions will aid in providing intentional solutions geared to supporting student success for diverse constituents.

Collaborating Broadly Best Meets Student Needs

One of the primary research questions of this study was to understand how informal structures can support student success. The research findings from this study have highlighted many examples of innovative and collaborative practices present at colleges and universities in Ontario. Consistent with the nature of informal organizational structures (Zand, 1981), these are not activities typically found in job descriptions or on organizational charts. However, this study found that institutions where collaborations, partnerships and program development were most prevalent were characterized by strong supervisory support and a view of students as partners in learning. Without both of these in place, collaborations and program development were more likely to be one-offs rather than a part of the divisional culture.

At its heart, collaboration and program improvement is about change; change in control, change in thinking, and change in expectations. Accomplishing these changes requires a willingness to consider current issues from new perspectives or involve new partners. These collaborations – whether between SAS units or with faculty members or external partners – are not easy. For staff to invest time and effort into collaborations, they must feel that their supervisors support not only the outcome of collaboration, but the process of engaging in collaboration. One participant described this support in the following way:

[SSASO has] been empowering his staff. [Other focus group members nod in agreement.] Whereas before it was like, ‘I’ll have to check with the manager,’ now you kind of get the feeling that you can just go with it and seek out your peers for answers. You do not have to go to the boss.

This approach encourages staff to go beyond the formal organizational structure and identify the individuals they believe have the ability to solve problems and engage in partnerships. Knowing that their supervisor supports both the process and product of collaboration, staff feel confident to take chances and develop and pilot new ideas.

Though support from supervisors is an important element of developing collaborations, SAS must also consider how they view the role of students. Do the staff members consider the students simply as beneficiaries of the programs and services provided by the SAS staff? Or do they work from a position that understands and supports student agency in the learning process? A perspective that views students mainly as the beneficiaries of service is akin to a “customer-service perspective” rather than a focus on student learning and development, which focus group participants considered a student development perspective.

At institutions where students were viewed as partners, we heard about SAS staff having significant interactions with the undergraduate student government, student participation on SAS committees, as well as a host of peer mentoring and leadership programs. By placing some ownership and responsibility in the hands of students, they become more involved in their own education and “feel very much a part of student affairs.” Though there were many cases where students were the beneficiaries of a program or service (and there were many situations where this is rightfully the case), these examples highlight a willingness of SAS divisions to involve students at a level which creates an expectation that students have a stake and responsibility in planning their own education.

When staff felt supported by their supervisor for both the process and product of collaboration, and they also viewed students as partners in learning, incredible collaborations oriented toward improvement or innovation were possible. One institution in the sample described an innovative supplemental peer instruction program that was based out of the residence halls. This program was coordinated by a staff member specifically charged with student transitions. The initiative included high-achieving upper year students and facilitators; the registrar’s office to help group the first year students into similar classes; residence life to accommodate students in the same community; and faculty members to help develop the study sessions. This collaboration involved partnering with many different SAS and academic units. It required a willingness and belief that upper year students, in concert with SAS staff and faculty, can provide meaningful learning opportunities to first year students to support their success. This collaboration also required considerable support from a host of academic and SAS departments, financially and otherwise, to enable the partners to work together. Without support from managers, this collaboration would not be successful. If staff did not consider students to be capable partners in the program, staff may have led the sessions rather than upper year students.

All SAS staff and SSASOs would agree that collaboration and program development can support student success. However, the findings from this study indicate that the most frequent collaborative ventures, and seemingly those with the greatest impact, occurred in situations where staff identified support for participating in and seeking out these opportunities and where students were viewed as partners in learning. Collaboration requires intentionality, a commitment to go beyond one’s existing comfort zone and office, the willingness to reconsider

current practices, and take a chance that there may be a better way — one that involves more campus partners — all with the objective of supporting student success.

These initiatives rarely happen by chance. The demands and expectations of students in today's colleges and universities are growing while resources are not. Working in isolation is not a best practice for supporting student success. Institutions more orientated to collaboration and program development were found at colleges and universities, with large and small student bodies and narrow and expansive SAS portfolios. The formal structure and characteristics were rarely a factor in the development of these initiatives. Instead informal organizational structures were the key element supporting student success.

In conclusion, we found that a “one size fits all” organizational structure for SAS divisions simply does not exist. Organizational structure aside, what staff seemed to find the most important in supporting student success was an approach to structure that was student-focused, which in turn appears to hinge on developing an organizational culture in which supporting student success is a shared commitment among all stakeholders. Leveraging governmental funding envelopes thoughtfully and intentionally can help toward this end, as the latter can provide additional resources in times of fiscal constraint. Perhaps the greatest means of creating a shared commitment to student success comes from supporting people involved in all dimensions of the educational endeavour to meaningfully engage with each other in support of student success. From students to staff to faculty to alumni to community members; all can play a role in creating integrated programs and services that support student learning and success.

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Appendix A

Letter to Institution Inviting Participation in Research Study

Dear [SSASO],

My name is Tricia Seifert and I am an Assistant Professor in Higher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. With support from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), I am launching a research study to investigate the role of student services in supporting student success within the Canadian postsecondary context. More specifically, this research will examine the vast difference in organizational structures in student services/student affairs in Ontario's postsecondary sector and how these different structures support student success. I believe this study is particularly timely as administrative units focused on supporting success for an increasingly diverse student body continue to develop and yet very little has been written on this topic.

I am intentionally inviting institutions that represent the broad array of postsecondary opportunities across the province to participate in this study and I believe my research team could learn a tremendous amount from you and your colleagues at [institution's name].

I have attached a description of the project to this email. In this brief description, I provide the rationale for the study and its overarching purpose, benefits to participating institutions, the institutional resources the study will need (mostly in terms of time, place, and additional documents to enrich the data collection), the data collection and analysis methods, timeline for the study, and the dissemination plan. Please review the project description and feel free to contact me with any questions you have.

I sincerely hope that [institution's name] chooses to participate in this research study. I will contact you in the coming days to answer any questions you might have regarding the study. If you could please inform me of your interest in participating by February 22, 2010, I would appreciate it greatly.

I look forward to learning about how you and your colleagues support student success.

Sincerely,
Tricia Seifert
Assistant Professor
Theory and Policy Studies (Higher Education) Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto 416-978-1840 (ph)

Appendix B

Letter to Staff Inviting Participation in Research Study

Sent from on-campus contact person to institutional student services staff.

Date: three weeks before focus groups are to be held

Subject: Supporting Student Success: Student Services Research Study

Dear [insert institution's name Student Services Staff Member],

As a valued member of [insert institution's name] student services division, we know that you are deeply committed to helping students attain their postsecondary educational goals. Understanding how student services staff view the organizational structure of their student services division and how the organization of programs and services influences their work in supporting student learning and success is critical if we are to create the best student experience.

With full support from [insert chief student affairs officer's name], the [insert institution's name] is pleased to participate in a research study focusing on the role of student services in supporting student learning and success on our campus. This study is being conducted by Dr. Tricia Seifert from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Dr. Seifert and her research assistant will be on campus [insert date] and invite you to attend one of several focus groups during their visit to discuss your impressions and experiences as a student services staff member. The focus groups will consist of seven to ten people and will be 90 minutes in length. All reports from this study will maintain the confidentiality of participants' responses. Your contribution to this study will help develop a better understanding of how student services divisions support student success in Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

If you are interested in participating in one of the "Supporting Student Success – [insert institution's name] focus groups, please click on the online RSVP link below to sign-up for a time to attend one of the focus groups.

Dr. Seifert is happy to answer any questions you may have about this study. Please email her at Tricia.Seifert@utoronto.ca.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

[Name of on-campus contact person]
[email of on-campus contact person]

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol

90 minute session

- I. Settling in (5 minutes)
 - a. Welcome interviewee or focus group participants to the session.
 - b. Introduce ourselves as the research team
 - c. Describe the voluntary nature of participation. Thank and dismiss those who are not interested in continuing their participation.
 - d. Describe the purpose of the study
 - e. Clarify terms
 1. What do we mean by organizational structure?
 2. What do we mean by student success?
 - 3.
- II. Ask the individual or focus group members to introduce themselves, in which office they work, and briefly, what they do in their role (8 mins)
- III. Warm up – org chart drawings
 - a. Ask participants to draw their perspective of how their department fits it into the organizational whole of the division and where the division fits within the larger institution (3 mins)
 - b. Ask participants to pair up with two or three others to compare org chart perspectives (5 mins)
 - c. Reporting out (5 mins)
 1. What similarities do you see across the different perspectives?
 2. What differences did you find?
- IV. Ask broad questions of individual/focus group
 - a. Drawing on the conversation we just had about how you perceive the student services division's organization,
 1. How would you describe the division's or your department's approach to interacting with students?
 2. How would you describe your interactions with faculty colleagues?
 3. How about with other student services colleagues?
 4. With external stakeholders (parents, sponsors, alumni, community partners)? (15 mins)
 - b. How do students contribute to your department's programs and services? (10 mins)
 - c. Tell us about a time when you felt the organizational structure allowed you and your departmental colleagues to support student learning and success in an exceptional way. What was happening? (10 mins)

- d. Tell us about a time when you felt the organizational structure may have inhibited you and your departmental colleagues from supporting student learning and success. What was happening? (10 mins)
 - e. Has the organizational structure of your division changed overtime? How? What prompted these changes? And what do you perceive have been the benefits and disadvantages of this modification/alteration? (15 mins)
 - f. [Time permitting], on the paper in front of you, jot down values that inform your work with students. In a moment, we will share these with each other. (Give 2 minutes to write. Then ask who would like to share – 3 mins)
 - 1. How are these values reflected in your department and division?
 - 2. How shared are these values among the members of your department?
 - 3. What changes would you make in the division to better reflect these values? (10 mins)
- V. Wrap-up (10 minutes)
- a. Summarize the main themes of the conversation – what did the moderator hear? Go around the room to see if the participants agree with the summary and to see if they have anything to add, amend, etc.
 - b. Have we missed anything? Is there anything else that you wish to share that we haven't asked?
 - c. Thank participants for their time. Ask if they have any questions. Provide contact information if participants have anything additional they would like to share. Thank participants again for their time.

Appendix D

Letter Inviting Participants to Share in Preliminary Findings Meeting

Hello [participant's name],

I hope this finds you doing well and that your term is coming to a strong close. I wanted to give you some information regarding where we are with the “Supporting Student Success” research study. We have completed 14 campus visits and transcribed 42 focus groups and 25 one-on-one interviews.

At this point we are eager to share our preliminary findings with you. We will return to [institution's name] on [specified date] and will be holding a series of “preliminary report sharing” meetings with the various groups who participated in the research. As you were part of our afternoon focus groups, we invite you to take part in the meeting from [specified time] in the [specified location]. We will be hosting other meetings for those who participated in the morning focus group as well as those who were not able to participate.

There is no need to officially RSVP your attendance but we hope you will be able to come and be part of the preliminary report sharing. If you are not able to attend but have questions about the research project, please do not hesitate to email me at tricia.seifert@utoronto.ca

Best wishes,
Tricia

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