Today we want to talk about the results of a research project that we have been working on for about four years now. The principle investigator is Tricia Seifert an Associate Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Assisting in the presentation is Jeff Burrow a 3rd year doctoral student at OISE. Other members of the research team are Diliana Peregrina-Kretz, Christine Arnold, Krista Vogt, Kim Elias and Leah McCormack.
Before we Begin

- We are very excited to share this power point presentation with you online! In the notes section of the slides we have provided some additional context to help you navigate the presentation.

- This presentation was delivered on June 4, 2013 at the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education (CSSHE) in Vancouver, BC.

- Please cite this presentation in the following format:


- If you have any questions about this presentation please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Tricia Seifert at tricia.seifert@utoronto.ca
Purpose of the Study

To understand how stakeholder groups perceive their institution's organization and approach to supporting student success.

Though the study is now in its fourth year, the overarching purpose has remain unchanged: learning about how colleges and universities support student success from a stakeholder perspective. This perspective was originally just that of student affairs but has expanded to include students, faculty and senior administrators. In the study there are two primary constructs. The first is organizational structure which includes the formal reporting lines of who reports to who; what academic programs and student support services are aligned. Organizational structure is also informed by aspects which are largely related to the institutional culture. The approach to leadership, the styles and forms of communication and coordination and a look at who (again outside of formal lines) works with whom, as well as the assumptions and values that undergird our work --- these contribute to the development of an institutional culture.

The second construct is student success. In our work, we use a broad and holistic notion of student success; one that includes academic, personal, social and professional. For a much broader discussion of the various definitions of student success, please see our accompanying presentation by Tricia Seifert and Diliana Peregrina called What Defines Student Success: A Multiple Choice Question.
In looking at the landscape, and setting the context for our work, we feel there are at least four things that are generally agreed upon. In Ontario and across most of Canada, access to postsecondary education has been a priority of many governments. Considerable amounts of money have been invested in funding additional places at colleges and universities and the participation rates have increased over time. Part of this focus on access has been directed at encouraging participation and supporting historically underrepresented groups of students into postsecondary. We can see this with targeted funding directed at First Nations and first generation students. But we also see this in Ontario with funding over the past five years directed at ‘second career’ students; individuals who are switching careers, going back to school after being in the work force and out of postsecondary education for some time.

Concomitant to this has been a growing focus on intentionally developing programs and support services to aid students’ transition to, through and ultimately out of their postsecondary institutions. This includes summer welcome, orientation and first year transition programs. It also includes peer mentoring programs, supplemental instruction, career development certificates. At the same time, there seems to be greater expectations than ever from the public, policymakers, employers, parents and students that institutions should be doing more, being more open, transparent and accountable. That they should be doing more to ensure that students are well prepared and have developed the skills they need for their future professional and civic responsibilities.
These expectations of ‘more’ come not just from external stakeholders but from inside institutions as well. Postsecondary institutions themselves view their role as much larger than simply conferring degrees, diplomas and certificates. Take a look at your own or your local college’s and/or university’s mission and vision statement and you likely will notice that these institutions envision a much larger role for themselves in society. It’s not simply transferring knowledge from faculty and instructors to students; institutions believe they help students and the community they exist in to learn, develop and grow in a variety of ways that support larger professional and civic ideals.
The Supporting Student Success research project is in its fourth year. Though it was never officially named as such, the project began with Phase 0 in 2009/10. This included a content review of student affairs and services (SAS) departments across Ontario colleges and universities. We looked at senior student affairs and services officers (SSASO) titles, the types of programs and services that fell under the student affairs and services umbrella, and the reporting lines within the department and of the SSASO to the senior administrative leader.

Phase I involved 9 universities and 5 colleges in Ontario. We reviewed each institution’s mission statement, organizational structure, and strategic plans. We visited each location for a full day and did a 1:1 interview with the SSASO, a focus group with managers and directors, and 2 or 3 focus groups with front-line staff and coordinators. The guiding research question for all of these discussions was: How did they perceive their organizational structure and culture in terms of supporting inhibiting student success?

We spoke with nearly 300 people and our final report which was funded by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, is here http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Supporting%20Studen
In that first phase of the research, we visited the campuses of 9 universities and 5 colleges across Ontario. The institutions varied in geographic location from east to west and north as well as centrally in the GTA. They varied in mandate, program and service offerings too. They varied by research intensiveness, graduate programs and enrollment, access mandate, degree/diploma and certificate offerings. Finally, they varied in terms of the diversity of the student community and historically underrepresented populations. We spoke with individuals who worked in a very wide range of functional areas from Aboriginal Services to the Writing Centre.
In Phase I

Student Affairs and Services staff were asked to depict and describe their institution's organization and approach to supporting student success.

Again the primary research question in Phase I, was to have student affairs and services staff (SSAO, managers/directors and coordinators/front-line staff) describe and depict how their institution supports (and in some cases, inhibits) student success. Actually, the depictions typically came first. By this, we would present the individual or the group with some blank sheets of paper and pencils and ask them to draw how students are supported at their college or university. Some drew incredibly elaborate conceptual pieces using analogies of dreamcatchers, trees, circles, Venn diagrams and more. Others stuck with more basic drawings using arrows, flow charts and even replicating organizational charts. These drawings and depictions became the foundation for our discussions.
In reviewing the drawings and depictions and later the conversations with the student affairs and services staff, we found --not surprisingly-- that a lot of it related to their interactions with college and university faculty members.

And they had a lot to say about their interactions with faculty
In discussions and drawings relating to student affairs/faculty interactions, we heard about a lot of amazing partnerships and collaborative arrangements. These included examples of faculty in residence programs, joint committee work on councils and committees and in some cases where faculty would bring student affairs staff into their class (or take their class to SAS offices) to have them lead conversations on academic skills, career planning or intercultural development.
But we also heard an equal, or greater amount of feedback (and observed through the drawings and depictions) of the challenges and frustrations that student affairs and services staff felt in interacting with faculty. In fact what we heard about most often was an inability to work with faculty, with SAS staff asserting that faculty lacked understanding and respect for the work they did and expertise they possessed. We heard people describe a divide between faculty and student affairs and that there were two sides of the house at their institution. Or that student affairs and faculty were in separate silos with little or minimal interaction between the two groups. Throughout these conversations there were a lot of thoughts shared on what faculty did, and did not know or recognize about the work of student affairs and services.

The data from the first phase of the research project helped us to realize that we had only one piece of the student success puzzle – we had gleaned the perspectives from student affairs and services staff. To get a broader and richer understanding of how institutions support student success, we would obviously need to speak to other stakeholders as well.
In the literature on faculty and student affairs, we find 4 major themes. One emphasizes the importance for faculty and student affairs to collaborate to support student success. These collaborations are beneficial for; aiding student transition into postsecondary education and helping them learn about the new academic and social culture they are entering. These collaborations can also increase student engagement by helping students developing stronger relationships with faculty and student affairs staff and ultimately increase students’ commitment to their institution. Finally, such collaborations and partnerships have been found to help improve student learning, especially in cases of first year seminars, supplemental instruction and peer mentoring programs.

Given the importance of these collaborations and partnerships and the variety of benefits they have for students and the institutions individuals have sought to identify what it is, or what qualities lead to having a successful collaboration. And while not all partnerships are virtuous or have merit, many scholars have advanced qualities and conditions that are emblematic of good partnerships. Whitt (2008/2011) provided one of the best summaries based on a review of the literature.

Successful partnerships and collaborations
1. Reflect and advance the institution mission
2. Embody and foster a learning-oriented ethos
3. Builds and nurtures relationships
4. Recognizes, understands and attends to institutional culture
5. Values and implements assessment
6. Uses resources creatively and effectively
7. Demands and cultivates multiple manifestations of leadership

While the literature and examples above point to successful collaborations, considerable research has gone into examining and debating the values and culture of those who work in student affairs. Its often been argued that the values of student affairs and faculty differ to such degree that it impedes and inhibits partnerships and collaborations. Some have argued that student affairs approach their work from a developmental, collaborative, teamwork, action-oriented perspective. Conversely, faculty, it is argued approach their work from a position in which highly autonomous work within a collegial environment results in knowledge creation. Given these differences in values and approaches, many in student affairs feel that getting faculty to respect them and their work is a significant challenge and impedes their ability to best support student success.
In reviewing the previous literature, we see a few gaps and challenges. First, much of the literature, or the master narrative, begins from the point of view that faculty and student affairs have a culture clash and this prevents partnership and collaboration. We have heard this from the student affairs side for sure; but we would ask, where is the literature that articulates the faculty perspective? Second, a large amount of the literature (published in journals and presented at annual conferences) discusses partnerships and collaborations and successful qualities and approaches to develop them.

But with so much research on partnerships how do we make sense of the narrative that argues that cultural differences make partnerships and understanding so challenging. Furthermore in reviewing the literature, it’s virtually always from the student affairs point of view; there appears to be virtually no literature which actually examines the knowledge, understanding and awareness that faculty have of the work of student affairs and services staff.
So we return to our primary purpose, that being to understand how stakeholder groups perceive their institution's organization and approach to supporting student success.
And we move into Phase II. This saw us going back to 13 of the campuses (9 universities and 4 colleges) but we expanded our data collection to get a 360 degree view of our key constructs. In Phase II, we interviewed senior administrators, faculty, student leaders, students and student affairs and services staff.

We used the Senior Student Affairs and Services Officer to help us identify individual within each of those groups to speak with and we asked those who agreed to interviews to recommend colleagues who might be willing to be in focus groups. In total, we spoke with more than 350 people. Again, our process was very similar to phase I. We asked participants to draw/depict how they saw their institution supporting student success and we asked the participants to describe their roles, both as individuals and in partnership or collaborations with others, to support student success.
In this presentation, we focus exclusively on the data from faculty interviews and focus groups; however the analysis process used is virtually identical to our analysis process for all of our stakeholder data. The first step was that team members listened to the audio files and transcribed each of the interviews and focus groups. At the end of each transcript, a brief summary of the primary themes discussed was created. This helped lead us to develop large overarching domains (e.g. leadership, communication, collaboration) that seemed to characterize the data. From that, we began to describe the elements of each domain more specifically, the types, forms and example of a domain like leadership.

For the particular analysis that generated these findings, we examined specifically the descriptions of the knowledge, awareness and interactions that faculty had of and with student affairs and services. We split the transcripts and drawings between two researchers; each looking at 35-40. While reviewing the transcripts, we examined the drawings as well and compared them to the participant descriptions. The combination of these two forms of data led us to create a categorization for each participant. The researchers then recoded the other half of the codes and compared them for differences to ensure consistency.

Data Analysis

1. Data were transcribed
2. Overarching domains developed
3. Explicated codes developed
4. Reviewed & coded visual data from individual faculty
5. Categorized based on interview and visual data
6. Split and reviewed for consistency of coding approach (Bagnoli, 2009; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Crilly et al., 2006)
Findings
What you will see next is a two-minute video that the research team created. In the reviewing the transcripts and the drawings, we found four categories of knowledge/awareness and interaction best fit the data collected. Based on these data, we have created ideal types which represent drawing that reflect each type. We use the video format as it show the order in which the elements of the drawing came together.

THERE IS NO VIDEO IN THIS VERSION.
The first category were faculty members with little or no awareness of the work of student affairs and services. In some cases faculty reproduced their institution's organizational chart from the academic point of view. Individuals in this category either placed student services on the side, and drew them as a single standalone unit, or in some cases the faculty member was prompted by the interviewer to describe if or where student affairs/service might appear in their drawing.
This quote highlights a faculty member with little to no awareness of the work of student services at their college. They had to be prompted to include them on the map, and at that point the faculty member was unsure where they ‘fit’, but indicated that they do not have a significant presence in their mind. Moreover the faculty member has student services as a single block, with no apparent awareness of the units and departments within the division.
The second group has a basic understanding of the work of student affairs and services. Some of their drawings had elements of an organizational chart but more often they began to take the form of a chain of support that included multiple individuals and parts of the college or university. In these cases, faculty were aware of some of the services available to students often mentioning the registrars office, financial aid, and sometimes support services. Note that in these cases, it is the student that interacts with the service; there is no link from the faculty to the services. The services mentioned were typically ones that would be considered student services, not student life (meaning rarely did this include leadership programs, co-curricular organizations and clubs, athletics or intramurals, etc.).
In these cases, we begin to see some functional knowledge of areas within student affairs and services. This particular faculty member noted that they have worked with library staff in the past, but had little knowledge of the student development office. And in the cases where faculty member had knowledge about specific programs/services, it was often in terms of accommodations for students with accessibility needs. These are cases that students bring to them, so faculty are aware of the service, but may not be interacting with the staff members within the service area. Faculty interactions with accessibility accommodations, in our data, were often a point of contention.
The third category sees faculty awareness growing and recognizing connections between services and programs for students and themselves. In these cases, faculty were able to name more of the programs and services and could begin to speak in more detail about what role those programs and services played in the lives of students. Some were also able to talk about the relationship between services, noting that it’s hard for students to get the equipment and assistance for accommodation if a bursary or grant has not come through yet. These drawings were also more likely to have the students in the middle of the drawing and to have the faculty interacting with some of the programs and services themselves.
In this third category, faculty began to take on referral roles. The knew they had some expertise to discuss challenges the students have or opportunities they may be seeking. But they were also typically aware of and concerned about speaking beyond their knowledge and expertise base. These faculty took comfort in knowing there were others at their college or university that they could refer the student to for more specific, specialized support and assistance. The key in this case is that the faculty know who the students need to contact; and in some cases, they would facilitate that connection for the student. Not all connections have positive results. This is the area we began to see some territorialism.

“Faculty are a big part of their lives. Probably where they land first if they have issues, even if they are registered with a service department they still land in a faculty office first. Its really important how we deal with that first interaction. We have an academic responsibility, and a human responsibility too. We draw a fine line between not being counselors, cause we are not. We are academic advisors if they have those issues and we have very good services if their issues are of a different nature.”

[Male faculty member, College].
The final category were faculty that drew and/or described student learning as a shared responsibility. Most often these drawings were far more detailed or employed analogies to describe the ways students were supported. In these cases, faculty described their own role for advancing student learning but could extend that to a number of student affairs and services programs, and would also articulate the role of peers in supporting learning and in some cases the external community. These drawings were quite detailed and faculty showed great awareness of services and programs. Often these are what some may call a faculty champion, but the more important element is that the faculty member acknowledged the multiple stakeholders involved in supporting student learning and success.
In quotes that articulated shared responsibility for learning, faculty often described the multiple parties involved, and did not describe territorial issues over who should be most involved with students. Instead, they describe the roles that different groups played, sometimes on their own and sometimes in partnership and collaborations. An example could be a faculty in residence program, or the integration of an intercultural skills development module within a course. A third example could be a faculty member who participated in a supplemental instruction program helping to create material for student leaders to deliver to first year students.
Throughout this project, we came to learn that even among our selected faculty -- faculty who were by and large were more likely to be aware of student support programs and services and have engaged in collaborations with SAS staff than an average faculty member --- knowledge of the programs and services offered was still relatively low. It would be great if faculty knew about residence life and student leadership in addition to perhaps having some awareness of the registrars office and accessibility. However, we would argue that to support students at the most basic level requires a knowledge of what the faculty member can do, who they can call or contact in a moment of crisis. This quote highlights the faculty member taking ownership over this in saying that when I am with or witness a student in a moment of crisis, I have a responsibility for getting them to the next level of support. Once the crisis hits, its too late to learn; faculty members need to know this information in advance.
So if we go back and look at our four categories, we can picture them being part of a house. In the basement, we have the faculty with little to no knowledge of programs and services to support student success; the main floor is occupied by those with some awareness. Then in the upper, usually smaller floors we have those faculty who recognize some connections and those who view student success and learning as a shared responsibility. Overarching and providing support for all of this is the institutional senior leadership. They provide the walls, the structure the framework and in some cases are the key drivers of the culture that exists at the college or university.
Looking back, we again must acknowledge that our sample is not representative and if anything we spoke with a set of faculty who were likely more knowledgeable of student affairs and services than the typical faculty member. And even with that sample, we still had a large number of faculty in groups 1 and 2. What part-time sessional and faculty who may teach online or at satellite campuses know about programs and services to support student success, we cannot comment.

That said, we assert our findings have implications for practice on our campuses. They call on us to think about how new faculty are welcomed to our institutions. What place is there to educate about programs and services to support student success during new faculty orientation at departmental meetings or through periodic email correspondence? What ‘go-to’ guides and resources are developed for faculty and are brought to their intention? How are those who provide the roof over the institutional house (senior student affairs officers, provosts and deans) developing awareness among faculty about the programs/services available to support students and the shared responsibility of stakeholders across campus to support student success?
For faculty who may be reading this we would love your feedback. Student affairs and services want to reach out to you. What are the ways, mechanisms and vehicles for them to do so?

Our Question to You

SAS want to reach out so
As faculty members or teaching assistants how, where and when can SAS reach out to you?
Thank you to all of our partner institutions, participants and funders.

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