

LEADERS IN LEARNING

STUDENT AFFAIRS IN CANADA IN THE 21st CENTURY & IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT SERVICES

A paper prepared for the CACUSS Identity Project

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE: A DEFINING MOMENT	1
CONTEXT: CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION	3
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	3
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION	4
THE PURPOSE AND VALUES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS IN CANADA	9
FOUNDATIONS OF THE PRACTICE	9
CORE VALUES IN STUDENT AFFAIRS	10
EMERGING TRENDS, ISSUES AND APPROACHES IN CANADIAN STUDENT AFFAIRS	12
STRATEGIC ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT	12
INTEGRATION	12
STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH + WELLBEING	13
THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT	13
SUPPORT FOR THE DISTANCE LEARNER	13
ASSESSMENT + EVIDENCE-BASED PLANNING	13
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	14
THE ROLE & FUTURE OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT SERVICES	15
WORKS CONSULTED	17

PREFACE: A DEFINING MOMENT

There is no particular reason to choose 2011 as a defining moment for the field of student services in Canada. No anniversary to mark; no crisis imminent. And yet we find ourselves motivated to take this moment to label and situate the work that we do, to identify our contributions to higher education and to society, and to use the results of that reflective work to refine our national network, voice and professional association: CACUSS.

And while no single event or issue prompted this effort to define the work of student services, neither is it coincidental that we chose to take this moment.

The last major national statement on student services was published by CACUSS in 1989. “The Mission of Student Services” described a practice struggling to cope with rapid expansion of the post-secondary system coupled with financial restraint, challenged to meet the needs of non-traditional students, students disadvantaged by circumstance, and an increasingly culturally diverse student body. The document spoke of an “expanding worldview of education, advances in technology, the changing nature of work, increased personal mobility, and growing ethnic diversity” – phrases that could just as easily be the focus of any contemporary conversation in our field.

Ten years later, elements of “The Mission of Student Services” were revisited and confirmed as a Statement of Guiding Principles, and added to the CACUSS Governing Documents.

Today, once again, we find ourselves affirming some of the foundations and principles of student services work. And yet the context is radically different.

When the authors of “The Mission of Student Services” spoke of internationalization, they could scarcely have imagined the European Union, post-apartheid South Africa, capitalist China or the effects of September 11, 2001. They could predict an impact of technological change though they had no concept of the World Wide Web. They celebrated “more women in traditionally male dominated fields” but could not have foreseen that, only months later, 14 such women would be murdered at L’école Polytechnique in Montreal. They acknowledged the pressure on post-secondary institutions to “meet demands for both excellence and accessibility” before Maclean’s magazine published its first-ever ranking of Canadian universities.

Despite all of these changes, “The Mission of Student Services”, by most accounts, remains relevant today. This paper is not intended to supplant that 1989 document, nor the 1999 Statement of Guiding Principles; rather, it is intended to provide an additional layer to the complexity that, today, defines this field.

This paper attempts to position the field of student services, as both a practice and a federation of professions, and CACUSS, as an organization, in the context of 21st century transformation. It is written to give contemporary meaning to the work of those in the field at all stages of their careers. It paints a picture for those outside our field – for faculty, administrators, students, our colleagues around the world – of the ways in which we, as Canadians, approach holistic learning and the role that we play in facilitating learning in this country’s colleges and universities. And, above all, it was written to stimulate a conversation, to cure complacency, and to place our work as integral to the success of hundreds of thousands of post-secondary students in Canada today.

The process of developing this paper

This paper represents the evolution of a conversation that has been playing out in the field of student services in Canada for several years, with no clear starting point and, likewise, no foreseeable end point. It became important to CACUSS to put words to paper, to document the conversation – a process that became known as The CACUSS Identity Project. This paper represents the work, influence and input of several thought leaders in our field, namely:

- *David Hannah, Ian Cull, Peggy Patterson and Heather Cummings, who completed reviews of existing foundational documents relevant to the field;*
- *Heather Lane Vetere, who reviewed historical documents, conducted the initial consultations with identified leaders in student services and engaged the CACUSS membership in preparation for this paper;*
- *Nona Robinson, who provided an advance copy of her forthcoming PhD thesis exploring the values of Canadian student affairs practitioners;*
- *Donna Hardy Cox and Carney Strange, who, along with several other leading student service practitioners, made a landmark contribution to the field in 2010 with the publishing of Achieving Student Success: Effective Student Services in Canadian Higher Education.*
- *Members of the CACUSS Board of Directors, who generated the project scope and terms, commissioned it and serve as its stewards.*
- *Numerous other writers, critics and leaders in higher education whose work has informed and influenced our practice.*

A note about terminology

The original terms for this project included the task of providing definitions to a number of the terms frequently used in our field – among them, the terms students services, student affairs, student development, student life, student success. This ultimately proved a rather futile exercise and was deemed less critical than defining what we do and how we do it.

For the purposes of this paper, I've used the term that most of the leaders who contributed to the conversation use to describe the broadest array of functions and approaches: student affairs.

*– Deanne Fisher,
author*

CONTEXT: CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Historical Context

The role of student affairs staff in Canadian higher education shifts with the policy and programmatic aims of the institutions we serve. Our relatively flexible nature is probably one of the reasons we, as a class of administrative staff, have both grown in number and in scope of responsibilities on the Canadian campus over the past 135 years. Our roots rest within the policy framework of *in loco parentis*, a context in which we served “in the place of” parents and existed largely to regulate and discipline student behaviour and, with the emergence of a significant number of women in higher education, to protect them.

The post-war era saw institutions of higher education take on the challenges of reintegrating veterans and, with that shift, a new set of services and responsibilities for us – functions that eventually expanded to all students and form the basis of much of our work today.

The contemporary Canadian college and university system is shaped by its access agenda of the past several decades – an imperative to educate a greater proportion of the Canadian population, lifelong, and prepare them for participation in a labour market that values knowledge, innovation, sustainability and creativity, and in a democratic system that requires compassion, critical analysis and agency. Student affairs work has naturally, therefore, evolved once again.

In 2009, there were almost 3.5 million students enrolled, full and part-time, in more than 200 universities, community colleges and institutes peppered throughout this geographically vast country. And while the system has proven itself to be flexible enough to respond to regional, national and even international demands, it is also one that is relatively homogenous and static in terms of its primary characteristics:

- **A predominantly public system:** The vast majority of colleges, universities and institutes in Canada are provincially-funded, public institutions. Though some have a history embedded in a religious tradition, almost all are now secular in nature. As a result, few student affairs practitioners perceive themselves as in the service of the nation’s elite or a particular class of society but, rather, are motivated to provide opportunities for social mobility to all qualified students. That said, there is widespread acknowledgement that, even in this public system, higher education remains elusive to many Canadians, particularly to those of lower socio-economic status and those marginalized by dominant institutional cultures.
- **Shaped by geography:** Because higher education is the responsibility of the provinces, regional needs are often prioritized. The impetus to serve local needs first is even more pronounced when examined through the lenses of language, First Nations, Métis or Inuit needs, or the rural-urban divide.
- **Limited institutional differentiation:** Despite limited federal policy in the sector, and a tendency to respond to regional needs, there is surprisingly little variation in types of

institutions across the country. The system is characterized by **two primary types** of institution: universities and community colleges. The role of student affairs is a reflection of the needs and aspirations of the student population in each type of institution.

Relationships between the two sectors differ across the country – from high functioning transfer systems, to patchwork articulation agreements, to highly separate and siloed.

- **Considerable institutional autonomy:** In the university sector in particular, institutions enjoy a high degree of independence from government, though many would argue this is changing. At the moment, policy direction in most areas of student affairs is seldom issued provincially or nationally. Rather, institutions, for the most part, design and implement their own services, programs and policies.

Within this context of a relatively young system of higher education typified by its public and regional orientation, the characteristics of the student body cannot be neatly or succinctly described. The higher education system has experienced periods of tremendous growth in enrolment, but beneath that growth, rests an increasing diversity of needs that the student affairs practitioner has learned to understand. Indeed, students – their backgrounds, motivations and learning needs – have added layers of complexity to the traditional delivery of higher education. The student affairs role, as a result, has shifted over the past century from the disciplinary and guidance role to a key feature of each college and university's efforts to attract and retain students from an increasingly more stratified population base.

Contemporary Issues in Canadian Higher Education

Today, despite the fact that the system is under provincial jurisdiction, a national conversation on higher education has emerged. The tensions between excellence and accessibility, between student agency and entitlement have long been building. Indeed, by the turn of the millennium, observers of the higher education system in Canada began to describe it as being in a state of crisis. The forces of consumerism, credentialism, anti-intellectualism and the dominance of the research agenda, even in the college sector, are eroding education, claim scholars and social critics. For student affairs, these phenomena represent, yet again, an opportunity for transformation. What were characterized as challenges twenty years ago can now be seen clearly as opportunities – opportunities that student affairs practitioners are particularly suited to advance.

Aboriginal Education

Educational institutions have played a particularly negative role in this country's relationship with its First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. A federal policy of assimilating Aboriginal people by removing children from their families and communities and placing them in residential schools controlled by the church has left a devastating legacy and continues to affect participation in education at all levels. Eurocentric models of education – including its persistent focus on the individual and the rational – continue to relegate Aboriginal ways of knowing and

learning to the margins of mainstream institutions. Despite a national constitution that affirms pre-existing treaty rights, the right of Aboriginal people to control their own educational system has never been fully realized, particularly in the higher education sector.

Colleges and universities across Canada are engaged in an effort to play a more positive and proactive role in increasing educational attainment and economic prosperity among Aboriginal people. Through curricular changes, outreach programs, culturally-appropriate services such as counseling, financial aid, and child care, and, most importantly, facilitating a sense of community and belonging for Aboriginal people within the institutional setting, some improvements in participation have been realized, particularly in the college sector. But the barriers persist. Less than 8% of Aboriginal people in Canada had attained a university credential according to the 2006 Census, compared to over 23% of the non-Aboriginal population. (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009) The emergence of a specialization in student affairs in aboriginal student services is one indicator of many institutions' commitment to continued progress in this area and the development of NASSA – the National Aboriginal Student Services Association – as a division of CACUSS in 2003, signifies the growing importance of this role at the national level.

Access, Diversity & Inclusion

Expansion of the post-secondary education system in Canada continues to be a high priority across the country. Coupled with this growth is a steady focus on ensuring academic merit as the basis for admission and a system of both provincial and national needs-based student financial aid. This resolute determination to create an accessible higher education system has, in the 21st century, dramatically changed the landscape of most institutions and is now manifested in a nationwide effort to create inclusive campuses.

The need to improve access to French-language higher education, particularly outside of Quebec, has led to the development of several institutions providing instruction, and support services, in both of Canada's official languages and with respect and sensitivity to francophone culture.

Access for people with disabilities has grown substantially, giving rise not only to a growing legion of specialists who can assess and arrange appropriate accommodations, but prompting the development of a layer of specialized knowledge and skill throughout the field. It is now an expectation that practitioners in student affairs are equipped to ensure full integration of students with disabilities into the campus experience.

Higher education plays a settlement role for immigrants to this country, providing opportunities for retraining and re-integration into the professions and trades and, for many families, a dream of a better life through the education of their sons or daughters. Canada's longstanding approach to multiculturalism permeates the country's campuses as well.

Policy goals around access have become increasingly sophisticated – focusing not only on aboriginal status, race and ethnicity, or disability – but on key factors influencing participation

rates. Among them: the level of education of the parents in a family. Programs focusing on first generation students now exist across the country, further demystifying higher education.

Access will continue to be a major theme for higher education in Canada as demand continues to grow. One study revealed that 85% of 15-year-old Canadians expect to attend university or college. (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009) And while policy-makers continue to emphasize the relatively benign concepts of access and diversity, the student affairs practitioner understands all of the implications – complex, overlapping and often messy – of providing a learning community that is truly inclusive.

The Globalization of Higher Education

The knowledge-based global economy has placed higher education as critical to the success of socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development. The truly global marketplace for higher education has come to fruition as evidenced by the more than 90,000 international students studying in Canada today, growing frequency of exchange agreements between institutions, and the emergence of campuses of Canadian universities in other countries. This shift has been described as the most radical change and renewal higher education has ever undertaken. (Fullan & Scott, 2009)

But globalization, for the student affairs practitioner, is not simply about numbers, or the mobility of people and sharing of human capital. It represents an unparalleled educational opportunity, a chance to reposition culture, difference, and humanitarianism as more than intellectual concepts and to provide an effable and emotional experience through human interaction.

The World Declaration on Higher Education, adopted in Paris in 1998 at the first World Conference on Higher Education sponsored by UNESCO, provided these challenges, among others, to the higher education community worldwide:

“It must take the lead in moving our society from mere economic considerations to the deeper dimensions of the greater good for all humankind, including world peace. In doing this, it must address social needs and promote solidarity and equity, and both preserve and exercise academic and scientific rigour, originality and impartiality.”

“Higher education must place students at the centre of its focus within a lifelong learning perspective so that they are fully integrated into the global knowledge society of the twenty-first century. Students must be considered as equal and fundamental partners and stakeholders in their own education, with the right to organize themselves as they see fit within the context of their education institutions, systems and communities.”

For the Canadian student affairs practitioner, complacent in a country built on a unique approach to multiculturalism and characterized by the harmonious co-existence of many

cultures, this challenge shakes us from our arrogance. The mere existence of communities of difference on our campuses does not bring about understanding, build capacity to solve complex global problems, or develop the leadership necessary to bring peace and justice to the world. But the tools are within our grasp. And student affairs practitioners, from counselors to student life programmers, are well positioned to lead efforts to fully realize the social benefits of internationalization.

Student Engagement

The traditional bifurcation of the student experience into, on the one hand, the traditional and passive lecture model of classroom instruction, and, on the other, the out-of-classroom, value-added hands-on experience, is increasingly being recognized as ineffective. Decades of student research, in both Canada and elsewhere, have provided evidence that what matters most in creating an effective educational environment is less about *where* the learning takes place, and more the level of student effort, involvement and time invested in the experience.

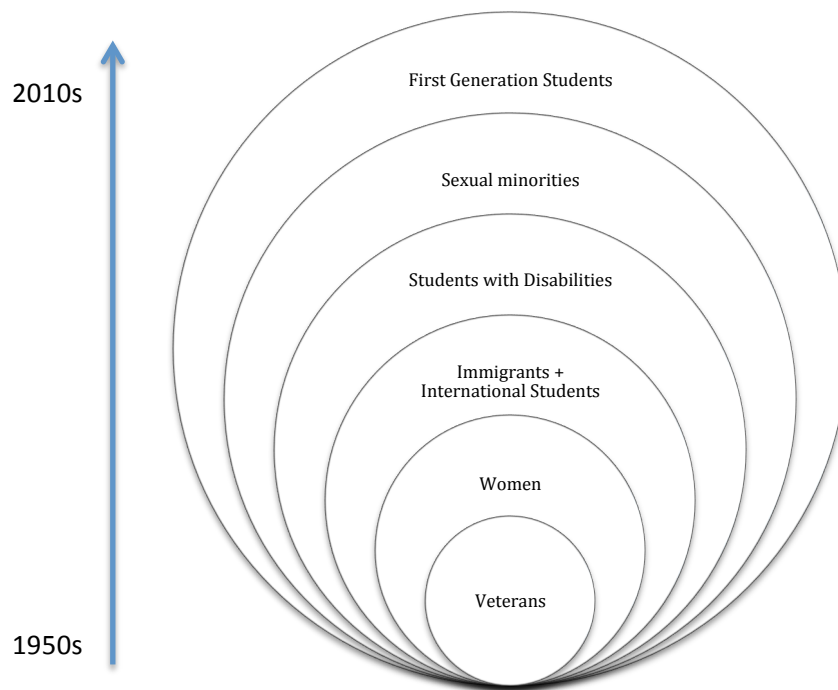
Brought to light most acutely through such tools as the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the move toward using measures of student satisfaction and engagement as indicators of a quality experience is leading to new expectations for student affairs. Integrated learning experiences – such as service-learning, study abroad, facilitated study groups and learning communities – are the result of partnerships between student affairs, faculty and academic administrators. At the same time, business leaders have suggested that the so-called “soft-skills” of college and university graduates are lacking. The curriculum alone is not providing the opportunities most students need to develop communication and teamwork skills, self-motivation and problem-solving abilities the contemporary workplace requires.

Education, at many Canadian campuses, is now being positioned as a shared responsibility. It requires cooperation of academic and student affairs but also involves such intangibles as the built environment, commitment to quality service, and sense of community. Again, we see student affairs staff across the country leading collaborative initiatives to tackle weaknesses in the fragile ecosystem of student success.

Accountability

For 30 years, the post-secondary sector has been in a state of steady growth driven by policy objectives of accessibility – more students and from all backgrounds – while continuing to prepare students for both the world of work and the responsibilities of citizenship, and serving as the location for open debate of critical and controversial issues. All of this has been accomplished in the context of declining public support relative to other revenue sources. So it should come as no surprise that we are now witnessing a resurgence of concern over the quality of post-secondary education we deliver.

Maclean’s magazine has now been publishing rankings of Canada’s universities for more than 20 years, joined by other publications and forms of external critique. The pressure to demonstrate effectiveness emanates from within, as well, as colleges and universities engage in reform initiatives and seek evidence of the effectiveness of those changes. And, perhaps most acutely, the demand for quality comes from the students themselves – manifested in all manner of feedback both in day-to-day interactions, online and through political pressure. Sometimes characterized as entitlement, this consumer-oriented approach is both troubling but also understandable. Student affairs practitioners, with our deep appreciation for context and student development, are poised to serve as mediators in this growing conflict between students and the institutions that serve them.



Higher education has, throughout Canada’s history, been seen as a vehicle for economic mobility and social equity. Successive policy initiatives have focused on increasing access and retention for disadvantaged or marginalized populations. As a result, the field of student affairs has grown in scope and complexity and today includes many specialists who work with specific populations of students.

THE PURPOSE AND VALUES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS IN CANADA

Foundations of the Practice

The foundations of student affairs practice can be traced to many sources and influences. Elements of indigenous knowledge may permeate the field, influencing our beliefs and ways of understanding. Certainly the Canadian legal and policy framework, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the equality rights it affords to all Canadians, is a tacit though palpable underpinning of the work of student affairs practitioners. Core institutional values, such as freedom of speech and academic honesty, are fundamental. A less obvious, though nonetheless profound, influence are the bodies of research and literature of several fields, including young adult psycho-social development, education, leadership and community development, which often give meaning to the work. And, finally, the impact of the considerable body of scholarly work in student development, as well as some of the foundational documents in student affairs emanating from the US, have certainly been felt north of the border.

These influences are all subtly evident in the 1989 “Mission of Student Services” published by CACUSS:

“The primary purpose of Student Services is to develop programs and provide services which support and promote student-centered education. Student Services professionals have expertise in assessing and identifying the factors that can enhance the development of students. Student Services personnel act as informed partners in the shared tasks of shaping and maintaining a campus community where students can learn inside and outside the classroom.”

Most leaders within the field agree that this statement, though broad, remains an accurate description of the role today. And most also agree that the role of student affairs has broadened over time. There are now more than 25 sub-specialties in student affairs that can be identified on Canadian campuses. The deliverables of any student affairs unit within a college and

Functional Areas of Student Affairs

*Aboriginal student services
Academic advising
Accessibility for students with disabilities
Admissions
Assessment
Career development
Counselling
Diversity and equity programs
Employment services and preparation
Enrolment management
Financial aid and awards
Health care services
Health & wellness promotion
Housing & residence life
International mobility
International student services
Judicial affairs
Leadership development
Learning support & strategies
Management & leadership
Mentorship programs
Orientation & first-year experience
Policy development & administration
Registrarial services
Retention services
Safety and security
Service learning
Student communications*

universities vary widely from campus to campus but can generally be encapsulated into the following four functions:

- Identify and address barriers or impediments to participation and success
- Facilitate active participation in the campus and wider community
- Support students in their pursuit of academic and personal growth and well-being
- Build an environment that facilitates learning, development and purpose.

Core values in student affairs

Beneath a description of *what* we do and *how* we approach it rests a set of values that help to explain *why* we do it. The work of student affairs in Canada is characterized by a set of values and approaches that are almost tacit to those experienced in the field and yet quite distinct to both this country and this community of practice:

- **Responsibility to the institutional mission.** The student affairs practitioner aligns programs, services, policies and approaches to act in congruence with the mission and purpose of the institution in which our work is situated.
- **Appreciation of the whole student.** Learning involves the heart, mind and body in a process of growth and development. Learning is also contextual. Life circumstances are part of the context that can either facilitate or hinder learning. Learning has no starting point or end point. It serves as a lifelong guide to self-actualization.
- **Respect for difference.** We build campus climates that reach for something beyond tolerance, based on genuine curiosity, appreciation of different ways of knowing, and a willingness to face our own biases.
- **Acknowledgement of student autonomy.** As adults, students have a legal and moral right to agency and self-determination, including the right to organize. We work to counter paternalistic and disenfranchising attitudes on our campuses.
- **Focused on student success.** Students create their own definition of success; our role is to support and challenge each student to reach it.
- **Dedication to experiential learning.** Helping students reach their full potential involves room for active experimentation, risk-taking and linking theory to practice, thinking with doing.
- **An emphasis on the common good.** Our policies and practices support interdependence among individuals and the development and maintenance of collective rights and responsibilities.
- **Commitment to democratic principles.** We demonstrate in our decision-making transparency, a sincere appreciation of many voices and conflicting points of view, and accountability to students, institution and the public. We share power willingly and work collaboratively with students to develop a shared vision and achieve common goals.
- **An orientation toward social justice as an outcome.** We understand education as a process of transformation. We are motivated by the faith that, ultimately, our collective ability to see beyond our own privilege, perspectives, wants and needs is critical to achieving social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The most fundamental shift in student affairs work today is the development of a paradigm that exists beyond the concepts of access or participation, beyond grades, retention or even graduation to a new understanding of student success. In this paradigm, success is understood to be defined in many different ways, by many different people, but ultimately is defined by the learner. We understand that this iterative process of creating – and attaining – a personal definition of success involves tensions, and is inherently uncomfortable. Student affairs work is about creating a learning environment where it is safe to explore those tensions and discomforts and where, ultimately, learning becomes a way of life.

EMERGING TRENDS, ISSUES AND APPROACHES IN CANADIAN STUDENT AFFAIRS

Change in the field of student affairs is fueled by a range of factors including: government and institutional policy, technological advances, the media, research, critical incidents and global events, and social and economic trends affecting students, potential students, and their families. Our ability to respond to these factors is a product of our own creativity, diligence, professional collaboration and, above all, leadership.

While there are many local trends and issues and new approaches within each specialty in student affairs, the national conversation is dominated by a few key shifts in thinking. The following issues are national in scope, cutting across all institutional types and sizes, and involving multiple communities of practice:

Strategic Enrolment Management

The connections between admission and student retention and success are being acknowledged and strengthened by institutional processes often led by the student affairs portfolio. The approach known as Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) engages and links financial plans and enrolment targets with marketing, scholarships, first year experience programs and other efforts designed to attract and retain students most likely to succeed in a given institutional environment. While plans are often financially-driven, the student affairs practitioner brings to this process an understanding that institutional fit is critical to student success.

Integration

The emergence of a mass education system in Canada has brought many students to campus for whom old models and expectations of extra-curricular involvement are either not valued or out-of-reach. Today's student is more likely to view the higher education experience as one of accumulating the required courses to earn a diploma or degree, motivated to meet instructor expectations and, sometimes, driven by grades. Time outside of classes is more often spent working or on long commutes to and from campus, rather than in rehearsal halls, gymnasias, or political meetings.

Unfortunately, this focus on the purely academic comes at the expense of the development of soft skills and social capital traditionally acquired outside of the classroom. The solutions, for the student affairs practitioner, rest with creating an integrated experience for students in which skill development and a sense of community is built into, or as a coupling with, the classroom experience. Supplemental instruction, service learning, and leadership development are all examples of this integrated approach put into practice. The approach requires deep

collaboration with individual faculty members and librarians, and a mindshift for the student affairs practitioner, who can provide as much a support to the faculty as to the students.

Student Mental Health + Wellbeing

Virtually every campus is struggling to support growing numbers of students with stress, sleep and mood disorders, anxiety, depression and more serious conditions, to teach students how to deal with debilitating emotions, and to identify and prevent suicide and violence. The emphasis on mental health adds a layer of complexity to the longstanding approach to supporting healthy choices as a means of achieving academic success and lifelong health. This challenge warrants new approaches: multi-disciplinary teams in health and wellness centres; a focus on building resilience in students as a key coping mechanism; and an approach to both physical and mental health that acknowledges the social and environmental factors and engages the entire community in solutions.

The Built Environment

Steady enrolment growth has brought pressures on the physical campus that place the student affairs practitioner as the champion of spaces that facilitate the social rather than, or in addition to, formal learning. Building a learning environment that invites student-to-student and student-faculty interaction, that facilitates collaboration, that provides security, access and dignity for people with disabilities, and opportunities for religious observance, has become an increasing challenge as institutions focus on the more utilitarian aspects of campus development. Yet, particularly in the Canadian context of the commuter campus dominated by students with many other responsibilities who are unlikely to add a scheduled workshop or meeting to their already crammed agenda, providing space for spontaneous encounters and informal learning is critically important to their development.

Support for the Distance Learner

The reality of Canada's vast geography coupled with physical space constraints on college and university campuses point increasingly to distance education as a viable route to providing access to higher education to a broader cross-section of the Canadian population. The challenge inherent in this model, however, is that the benefits of the learning environment, co-curricular experiences, and support services are much more difficult – though not impossible -- to deliver. Student affairs leaders must be resolute in advocating for a well-rounded and supportive experience for online learners and creative in the development of new models of delivery in areas such as disability accommodation, career planning and experiential learning.

Assessment + Evidence-based Planning

Accountability for the student affairs practitioner is two-fold. Within the institutional administrative and governance context, we must justify expenditures and resources required to

support and engage students. But we are also accountable to students directly – sometimes formally through a council or budget approval process that requires their support. And, within our own professional community, there is a somewhat self-imposed drive toward developing evidence of our impact. Assessment in student affairs is slowly becoming built into program development and the work that we do on a daily basis, and forming the basis for decision-making that is less anecdotal and instinctual and more focused on what the evidence tells us about the effectiveness of our work.

Information Technology

Much has been written, and continues to be written, with conflicting conclusions, about the impact of technology, instant access to information, social media and distraction among the so-called “digital natives”. Although there are many good examples of the innovative use of technology in the field, student affairs has, in general, been slow to adapt to the changes in the way people communicate, access information and learn through new and emerging tools. Protection of personal privacy has been a primary, and justified, concern. But the field now risks losing its connection to stakeholders by focusing largely, sometimes exclusively, on traditional forms of communication, including email. Adapting to the new media environment has not simply been a matter of using new tools for the student affairs practitioner; social media brings with it a set of values – extraordinary transparency, constant feedback, and authenticity – that, while consistent with student affairs values, have rarely been practiced to such a degree in institutional environments.

THE ROLE & FUTURE OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT SERVICES

With the field of student affairs in flux, and emerging as a collection of leaders in integrated learning, it is natural for the national professional association to revisit its purpose and mandate. Leaders and members of CACUSS have described the organization as having the potential, though not necessarily the capacity, to:

- Provide education, training and professional development to its members
- Support, guide and direct professionals in student services
- Serve as the professional and intellectual home to practitioners of its professions
- Generate and disseminate new knowledge and best practices
- Represent members and lobby on educational policy matters
- Support the development of evidence-based guidelines and policies
- Create opportunities for shared learning and collaboration

At this juncture in its development, CACUSS, as an organization, faces a number of intriguing directions that represent the will of the membership. Yet all must be considered within the limits of resources.

1. Advocacy: *What role should CACUSS play in bringing profile to our work at a national scale?*

There is ample evidence that the social and development aspects to student learning are being sidelined in both provincial and national policy. Can we play a role in changing the image of what colleges and universities do, provide an understanding of how and where learning happens, and generate a mindshift away from enrolment toward student success as national policy objective?

2. Research + Assessment: *Does CACUSS have capacity to organize multi-institutional assessment activities?*

The move toward learning outcomes and an evidence-based planning culture is a promising trend but, to date, most assessment is localized within the institutional context. Should CACUSS focus resources on creating consortia for data collection and sharing for benchmarking purposes? Could CACUSS make more effective use of existing national resources such as the Canadian University Survey Consortium, National Survey of Student Engagement or College Survey of Student Engagement?

3. Member Outreach + Engagement: *How can CACUSS use technology and social media more effectively?*

In a country as geographically dispersed as Canada, new technologies have the greatest potential to connect and unify people who cannot meet frequently in person. Yet the leadership of CACUSS has not taken advantage, to any great extent, of tools such as webinars, blogs, wikis

or social media to improve member engagement. Is the membership ready to adapt and engage in new ways?

4. Organizational Structure: *Does the organizational structure of CACUSS support collaboration in the most effective way?*

Currently, CACUSS is composed of six “divisions” representing five areas of specialization in student affairs (health, counseling, disability services, aboriginal services, judicial affairs) and a more general student affairs division, that has become somewhat of a “catch-all” for those not covered by the other five. There are no formal mechanisms for connecting and sharing within sub-specialties such as first year experience or career development. And while there is some regional representation in the governance structure, CACUSS has no regional structure to facilitate engagement among institutions provincially. Finally, there is no structure within CACUSS to facilitate collaboration between institutions of a similar nature – such as francophone institutions, large research institutions, or special focus institutions. Should CACUSS re-evaluate its structure, and re-allocate resources, to create more meaningful opportunities for collaboration? Are there major fields of practice, regions or institutional types missing from CACUSS? If so, does the structure play a role?

5. Professionalization: *Should CACUSS actively support professionalization of student affairs?*

Today, CACUSS is perhaps best described as a federation of professionals and practitioners. Certainly, many members – physicians, nurses, social workers, lawyers – are already licensed members of regulated professions. Others may be members of unregulated professions with formal membership requirements, codes of ethics and disciplinary procedures to deal with misconduct. And most are practitioners with a wide array of educational backgrounds and experiences that have brought them to the field. The professionalization conversation that has emerged within CACUSS in recent years is focused more on professional preparation and competency, rather than on any strict adherence to standards of practice. What are the implications of the drive toward professional preparation and competency for student affairs in Canada? What is the appropriate balance between experience and graduate level education required for success in this field? And is CACUSS the right organization to lead a move toward professionalization in the field of student affairs?

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