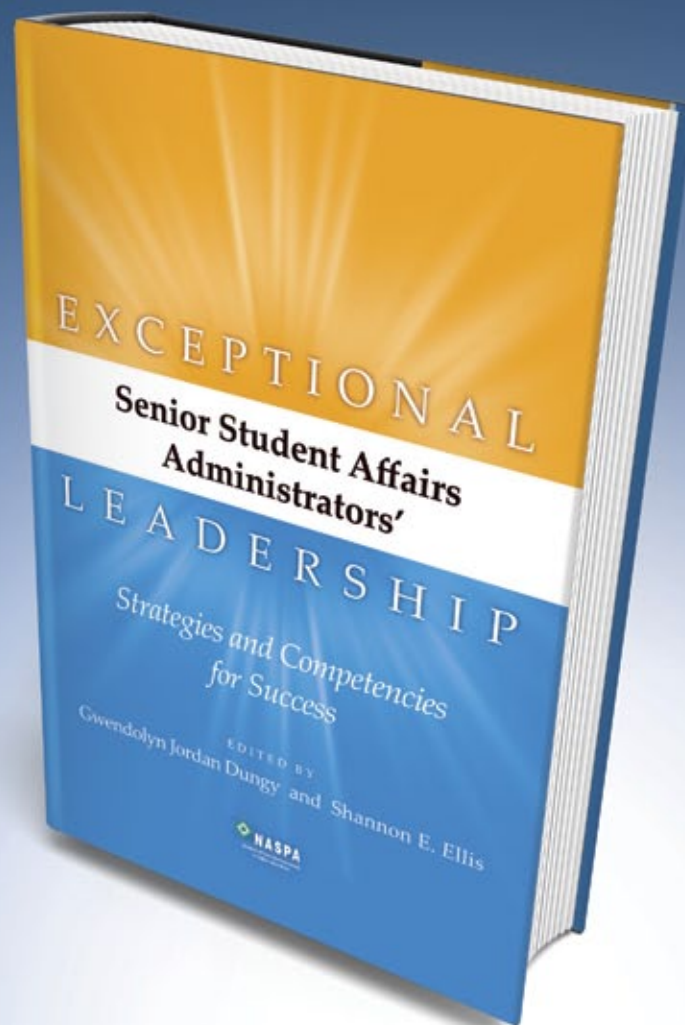


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership *Strategies and Competencies for Success*

EDITED BY  
Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy and Shannon E. Ellis



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## Praise for *Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership*

"This book is a solid contribution to the literature that challenges senior student affairs administrators to anticipate and adapt to the inevitable changes facing higher education. Valuable distinctions are made by institutional mission. I would recommend this book to any practicing student affairs professional regardless of his or her current position."

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American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

"The keen expertise, detailed experiences, and well-informed recommendations of senior colleagues found in this guide will provide tremendous value to both new and longtime senior student affairs administrators. This book displays—through real examples and personal testimony—that a willingness to learn is a competency that cannot be overvalued."

—**THERESA A. POWELL**, vice president for student affairs,  
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"This book is an indispensable and timely resource for current and prospective student affairs senior leaders who desire and seek excellence in leadership for our campuses and our students."

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"*Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership* tackles today's hot topics, such as student affairs leadership in a networked knowledge era and the rise of global higher education. This valuable resource can serve as a strategy and competency guide to success on campus, including positioning oneself on the path to a presidency."

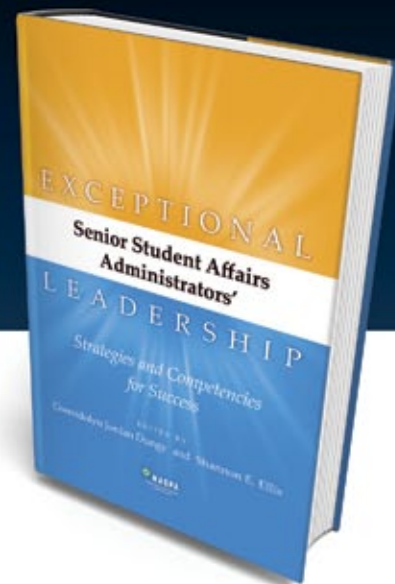
—**JOHN WALDA**, president and CEO,  
National Association of College and University Business Officers

"This extraordinary and timely book is a true gift to the literature. Written by a virtual *Who's Who* in the student affairs profession, this compilation serves both as a helpful reference and an enlightening read. Offering a combination of emerging trends, creative solutions, and useful strategies, this definitive publication belongs on the practitioner's desk-side table next to Pascarella and Terenzini's *How College Affects Students* and Barr, Desler, and Associates' *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration*."

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"The authors thoughtfully urge senior student affairs administrators to move beyond conventional boundaries in their field to take on roles as collegewide leaders. In wisely focusing attention on students, learning, and the core mission of colleges and universities, the book articulates a well-advised emphasis on the importance of enhanced relationships and partnerships with academic affairs to the benefit of student success."

—**GARY RHOADES**, general secretary,  
American Association of University Professors



### **Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership** *Strategies and Competencies for Success*

Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy  
and Shannon E. Ellis, Editors

Senior student affairs administrators seeking to increase their effectiveness as campus and community leaders can gain new strategies to achieve exceptionally effective leadership in NASPA's new publication *Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership: Strategies and Competencies for Success*. The book challenges the long-held assumption that the only route to a college or university presidential appointment is through academic affairs. By harnessing seven enduring competencies detailed in the book, senior student affairs administrators can better prepare themselves for top leadership positions.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

**STUDENT AFFAIRS WORK** has changed dramatically, and today's senior student affairs leaders have portfolios that encompass a wide range of roles and responsibilities. They are business people, architects, contract readers, negotiators, landlords, landscapers, and proposal writers. They are attuned to the evolving nature and demands of students in large and complex environments that know no boundaries.

At some point in all of their administrative careers, they are faced with key questions: Should they seek more leadership responsibility and assume more risk? If they want such responsibility, how should they prepare? What distinguishes those who are successful in leadership roles from those who are not?

Nothing short of *exceptional performance* as an administrator and leader will ensure success in the decades ahead. *Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership* teaches individuals how to exceed self-imposed and external limits to become confident and strong leaders.

This book is written primarily for aspiring, new, and seasoned senior student affairs administrators who seek to become highly effective campus and community leaders, including the role of institutional president. It offers career inspirations and insights as well as specific strategies and competencies to guide senior student affairs administrators in becoming exceptionally effective leaders. In particular, there is much to be learned from the stories disclosed by the 28 contributing authors—ranging from presidents to senior student affairs administrators to leadership experts—as they share the wisdom that comes with the experience of changing leadership roles, either by choice or circumstance.

Whether the authors are speaking to new administrators, speaking from the perspective of seasoned professionals, or advising colleagues who want to explore the idea of becoming a college president, they highlight the following seven competencies of exceptionally effective leadership:

- Responsibility and accountability
- Learning from personal and professional experiences
- The power of knowledge
- Listening and communicating
- Functioning in a large, networked universe
- Collaborations, partnerships, and relationships
- Innovation and creativity

This book also challenges the long-held assumption that the only route to a college or university presidential appointment is through academic affairs. As an increasing number of senior student affairs administrators aspire to the presidency, they must demonstrate that they are collegewide and community leaders. By harnessing the seven enduring competencies detailed in this book, senior student affairs administrators can better prepare themselves for top leadership positions.

The authors reinforce that today's higher education leaders need a passionate commitment to student success and institutional effectiveness. The role of the student affairs leader as educator means engaging in systemic collaboration with academic affairs to create conditions to ensure that graduates possess the kinds of skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the modern world. The specific skills are typically expressed

“It is equally important for SSAOs searching for organizational alternatives and change strategies to look beyond traditional higher education approaches and investigate what is happening in business and industry, not only in the United States but around the globe.”

(CHAPTER 2, PAGE 34)

as institutional general education outcomes expected of all graduates. They often include such competencies as appreciation for diversity, ability to work in teams, ability to solve problems collaboratively, the ability to think critically, and understanding how to innovate across disciplines, projects, and experiences. Student affairs leaders also have important roles to play in fostering individual and social responsibility, self-management, integrity, creativity, enthusiasm, initiative, leadership, and global awareness.

It is also known that effective leaders must have the ability to move from problem identification to proposed solutions on their own initia-

tive. Political awareness and competence is critical and means understanding who their constituents are and how to serve them. For student affairs leaders, their obvious first constituency is students. But to be effective, they must also understand that their colleagues in other major divisions of the college or university, such as the president and the board of trustees, as well as the expectations that flow from the needs of modern society, are also key constituencies. Enthusiasm and joy for the work is another essential condition, since this will fuel the sustained high energy needed to perform leadership responsibilities.

Most important of all is the understanding that leadership is about leading people, exerting positive influence, and modeling the way toward achieving a common vision and purpose. Ultimately, people will follow leaders who possess the kinds of personal characteristics worthy of following. Many of these characteristics flow from intense self-awareness and insight into an individual's own human relations skills, personal strengths, and weaknesses. Others require such personal attributes as integrity—the alignment of one's behavior with the principles and values espoused; courage in the face of setbacks; and determination to see priorities through to completion. As Stephen Covey reminds us, in order to build trust and teamwork, leaders must first be trustworthy.

Recognizing that new times, roles, and responsibilities demand new competencies, the authors hope this book provides individuals with the opportunity to open up, recreate, and amend the work of student affairs as they explore the expectations, competencies, and strategies of exceptionally effective senior student affairs administrators in today's context, and, more importantly, in the future tense. Thinking in

the future tense was particularly important to the authors. They view this book as a prelude to the new job requirements and expectations of senior student affairs administrators from this day forward. The senior student affairs leader of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be shaped less by the practices of those leaders who came before and more by the wisdom of forward-thinking leaders who are attuned to the evolving nature and demands of students in a larger and more complex environment that knows no boundaries.

## CHAPTER 1

### *The New World of Student Affairs*

**THIS CHAPTER, PREPARED** by Larry Moneta and Michael Jackson, presents a fresh look at the leadership of the student affairs organization in higher education and challenges some conventional assumptions about the work of senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) in American colleges and universities. This discussion is offered in the context of the rapid change occurring in higher education through the emergence of distance education programs, for-profit colleges and universities, and budget realities that are forcing cuts in student affairs on many campuses. It is also in the context of student affairs operations being drastically reduced on some campuses. While the authors do not see this as a trend that all campuses will follow, it is a cautionary tale.

These challenges surface the ever-present question, “What is student affairs worth?” Currently, the vast majority of campuses value the contributions student affairs makes to the education of students. That said, there are some dilemmas inherent in the work for which there are no easy answers, particularly during difficult economic times and the rapidly changing face of higher education. The tension of the roles, responsibilities, and effectiveness of student affairs programs are under continuous scrutiny.

“Because of the contraction of higher education and the expansion of alternative ways to earn college degrees, our successors will need ‘just in time’ skill sets to handle the revolutionary changes under way in American and international higher education.”

(CHAPTER 1, PAGE 8)

## CHAPTER 2

### *Don't Fence Me In: The Senior Student Affairs Officer in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Community College*

**SSAOS IN THE** 21<sup>st</sup>-century community college must respect and build on their profession's legacy, while recognizing the need to expand traditional boundaries, develop new skills and competencies, and challenge their colleagues in academic and student affairs to reconceptualize how student support services are designed, delivered, and assessed. This chapter, by Marguerite McGann Culp, identifies the skill sets that SSAOs must bring to the table. It also describes their role in helping community colleges become learning-centered institu-

tions committed to student success. Lastly, it outlines strategies SSAOs can use to help institutions understand the importance of expanding student affairs, empowering SSAOs, and stopping efforts to downsize and outsource. To demonstrate these points, the author provides examples of highly effective SSAOs in action.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Student Affairs Leadership in a Networked Knowledge Era*

**HAVE YOU OBSERVED** that the traditional strategies of creating change in your organization trigger more problems than they used to? Are decisions made outside the institution complicating your work more than in the past? Do you and your peers struggle to synthesize an overwhelming amount of data into practical knowledge?

These are all symptoms of living in a world of increased connectivity and the resulting challenges of working in a world of geometrically multiplying data. In this chapter, Cynthia Cherrey and Kathleen Allen reflect on some of the implications of these outside forces for student affairs and higher education; describe the significance of the new, networked knowledge era; and examine the reality of our work in relationship to the traditional expectations our organizations hold of student affairs leaders.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Type of Institution May Matter: The Senior Student Affairs Officer As Leader in Different Settings and Under Different Circumstances*

**A GROUP OF** authors representing institutions of different types and sizes share their insights in this chapter. For instance, Barbara Snyder (“A Big Place Requires a Big Picture”) reveals, “After 35 years of practice, there are still situations that are new and decisions that require a different perspective, where one has to rely on past experiences and the wisdom developed over a lifetime of professional commitment.” Joanna Iwata (“The New Nexus of Transformational Leadership Within Different Collegiate Settings”) reflects on her experiences, explicitly labeling them “lessons from experience.” For example, having had positive results with a strategy to assess the strengths of staff members early in her leadership position at one institution, she repeated the strategy at subsequent institutions. Others delve into additional themes such as Sarah Westfall’s “Success As a Small College Senior Student Affairs Officer,” John Laws’ “Competencies for the Community College Senior Student Affairs Officer,” and Brian Sullivan’s “From Professional Ownership to Intentional Coproduction: New Competency Demands.”

## CHAPTER 5

### *The New, New Senior Student Affairs Officer*

**“NEW” MEANS FRESH** and unused, sometimes surprising, often mysterious, and typically unknown. “New, new” adds a layer that enhances the difference and heightens the originality, innovation,

and creativity of the subject it describes. To be new on the job is one thing, but to be “new, new” means bringing a set of competencies that create the professional edge on which others aspire to perch. “New, new” student affairs administrative leaders are out front in their thinking, vision, strategies, and tactics. They offer a new set of leadership skills and management practices shaped by technology, inclusiveness, and the global awareness that is characteristic of the postmodern world. Today’s new SSAO holds the potential to be the leader whose time has come to help position higher education for future success.

In this chapter, Shannon Ellis discusses that once-in-a-lifetime career status of being a *new* SSAO in the *new* world of higher education. She recommends that anyone who has taken on the responsibility of new leadership for a student affairs organization should aspire to excel in executing the following six key competencies: (1) be self-aware, (2) inspire excellence, (3) be an institutional leader, (4) develop and sustain relationships, (5) lead change, and (6) think and act strategically.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Competencies for the Seasoned Senior Student Affairs Officer*

**SEVERAL VETERAN SSAOS** reflect on their experiences throughout this chapter and shed light on the qualities and skill sets that constitute a strong, talented leader. For example, Larry Roper (“The Search for Authentic Leadership”) says, “In each of my professional situations I feel I was able to distill learning from experience.” One of the most poignant revelations in Roper’s contribution is his description of how he learned through experience that his student advocacy style and tendency to evaluate situations on the basis of his personal opinions were out of place in his role as an SSAO. As a leader, he was responsible for advancing the mission of the college rather than standing up for his personal opinions. This experience helped him “transform advocacy into strategic leadership.” In other words, he discovered a way to move from “just talking about issues to finding approaches to achieve success with particular issues.”

Karen Pennington (“It Takes a Village To Be Effective”) gives a vivid example of real-time reflection or analysis when she describes receiving a call about a missing student from the chief of police. She shares the questions that ran through her mind in the moment based on her professional experience. She notes that while caring and compassion are the natural responses, as a senior student affairs administrator, her mind jumped immediately to questions about rules, responsibilities, and political fallout, because *someone* is going to be held responsible.

Other authors in this chapter reflect on the factors that affect how administrators do business today and also well into the future. In “A Commitment to Serving Our Changing Communities,” Jesus Carreon challenges, informs, and encourages SSAOs to understand and accept the reality of ongoing change. Like

“An exceptional senior student affairs officer is able to tell the story of his or her institution, express to the board what national best practices are for similar institutions, and move seamlessly among multiple stakeholders with a clear vision for the student affairs division and institution.”

(CHAPTER 6, PAGE 119)

Pennington, he stresses the need to be aware of what is occurring on the regional, state, and national levels that has the potential to affect higher education, the institution, and students in general. Ellen Heffernan (“View From the Top”) suggests that aspiring leaders learn all they can about fundraising, enrollment, benchmarking, academic programs, and how their mission and programs relate to the “national constellation of colleges and universities.”

## CHAPTER 7

### *The Road to the Presidency: Competencies for the Senior Student Affairs Officer Who Will Be President*

**FORMER SSAOS WHO** are now college and university presidents discuss their respective paths to this pinnacle role and the knowledge they gained along the way. Kathleen Hetherington (“The Road to Presidency”) describes her extensive student affairs journey, from a work-study student, to financial aid

officer, to dean of students, to president of a community college. One of the most valuable lessons Hetherington learned from her various roles is the importance of “knowing what you don’t know.” She describes how she had to “get past the fear of asking the proverbial ‘dumb question.’”

Walter Kimbrough (“Just the Facts”) shares valuable insights, such as suggesting that because of a climate of increased accountability, presidents should be more engaged in campus assessment and should be familiar with national studies for comparative purposes. In other words, anecdotal data alone are unacceptable.

Other presidents also contribute thought-provoking information to this chapter, such as Karen Whitney’s “Advice From a New President;” Dean Bresciani’s “It’s About Preparation;” James Appleton’s “The Senior Student Affairs Officer as President;” Charlene Duke’s “Leading With Vision and Practicality;” Jesus Carreon’s “Are You Book *and* Street Smart?;” and Cliff Wood’s “Preparing for a Presidency, Even If It Isn’t Your Goal.”

“Student affairs as a profession, a field of scholarly knowledge and practice, and a path of preparation for executive leadership roles has changed dramatically since the days of dons and deans of students.”

(CHAPTER 7, PAGE 180)

## CHAPTER 8

### *The Student Affairs Innovation Imperative*

**IN THIS CHAPTER,** Laurence Smith explains why senior student affairs administrators need to accept accountability as the norm, now and into the future. He says leaders in higher education have feelings and frustrations about the problems of attrition and time to degree, but fall short in owning the problems. He gives higher education an elbow to the ribs when he asserts that the traditions and structures of colleges and

universities “inoculate them against and insulate them from outside pressures and interference.” While these traditions and structures may have protected colleges and universities in the past, Smith warns that a convergence of forces—such as higher education’s dependence on public funds and the nation’s need for qualified graduates—will increase the demand for accountability for outcomes related to the student experience.

## CHAPTER 9

### *The Senior Student Affairs Officer As Leader in the Global Context*

**JAMES MONTOYA AND** Marc Wais make it clear in this chapter that leaders must have a basic understanding of the global forces that affect higher education—and students in particular. They suggest that being informed about the countries from which their international students come is a first step in increasing their knowledge. This kind of knowledge can lead to opportunities in other parts of the world. The authors give an example of a colleague who is working in Education City in Qatar. In order to do his job, he has had to learn about Arab culture and Islamic traditions, as well as how to manage a staff in an international environment.

## CHAPTER 10

### *The Leader as an Agent of Hope*

**IN THIS CHAPTER,** Eileen Hulme illustrates the role of hope in leadership when she describes a terrible year in her life. First, there was a murder on campus just as the faculty senate was giving the president a no-confidence vote and the NCAA was reviewing the men’s basketball program. In her personal life, Hulme grieved three significant deaths in her family, and then discovered that she was seriously ill with a life-threatening disease. Her response to these experiences is truly inspiring: “What I learned about life during those 12 horrific months taught me how to live. If not for 2003, I might have died having never truly understood the transformative dimension of hope, the healing power of the compassion of friends and strangers alike, and the true meaning of life.”

Hulme outlines how to develop the attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors of leaders who use the energizing power of hope to promote goal-directed behavior. She concludes that without hope, it is impossible for student affairs divisions to function at their full potential.

## CHAPTER 11

### *Tying It All Together*

**THE MEN AND** women who have contributed to this book have shared their insights on effective leadership as one would share with a friend or colleague who asked, “What do you think I need to be an exceptionally effective senior student affairs administrator?” and “What skills or competencies do I need if my goal is to become president of a college or university?” Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy summarizes some

of their insights in this concluding chapter and identifies seven common threads of exceptionally effective leadership: (1) responsibility and accountability; (2) learning from personal and professional experiences; (3) the power of knowledge; (4) listening and communicating; (5) functioning in a large, networked universe; (6) collaborations, partnerships, and relationships; and (7) innovation and creativity.

Her summary is prepared in the hopes that it will inspire senior student affairs administrators to read more and learn more from the leaders who have shared their experience and wisdom in this book. To round out the chapter, she includes comments from others working in higher education who talked with her about what they see as competencies for exceptional leadership in student affairs.