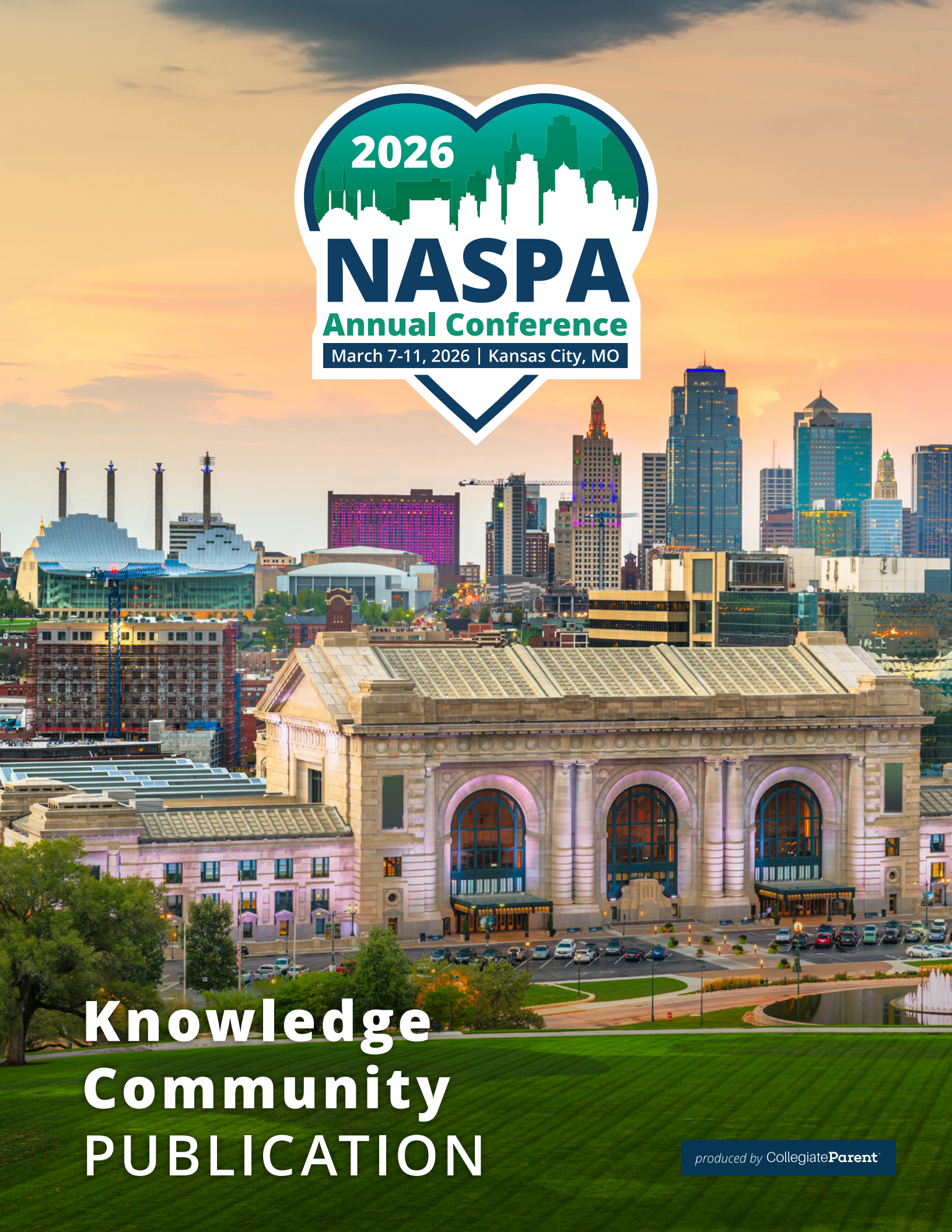

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Photo by Jake Fagan

Welcome from the National Knowledge Communities Director

Dear NASPA Colleagues,

I am delighted to share the 2026 NASPA Knowledge Community (KC) Publication with you all. This issue of the publication is particularly special as it aligns with the 25th Anniversary of NASPA Networks transitioning to Knowledge Communities, which we are celebrating in Kansas City at this year's Annual Conference. The articles represent the amazing work of our NASPA colleagues across 31 KCs, which represent functional areas and social identities. A core objective of the KC program is to create and share important, timely knowledge with our membership.

While reading this publication, you may discover KCs that are new to you. I encourage you to learn more about the KC, then follow them on social media, join the KC by adding them to your NASPA profile, and contact their leadership to learn more. I greatly appreciate the 2026 NASPA KC Publication Committee for their time and dedication in ensuring this publication was produced. Thank you to all of the authors for their time, labor, and expertise on behalf of their respective Knowledge Communities. I also express my gratitude to the KC Chairs for their partnership in making sure this publication is completed. The KC Publication is the result of the collective efforts made by our members, KC leaders, NASPA leaders, and the KC Publication Committee.

At the 2026 Annual Conference in Kansas City, we will gather and exemplify our Association's values: integrity, innovation, inclusion, and inquiry. KCs are often the starting point for our members to engage with NASPA and to find a community within the Association. I highly encourage you to learn more about the KCs by attending open KC business meetings and attending a KC-sponsored session, reception, or social as we celebrate 25 years of KCs. We hope you enjoy the publication.

Sincerely,

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2025–2026

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Administrators in Graduate and Professional Student Services Knowledge Community

Using the First-Year Experience Concept as a Model for Creating the Graduate School Experience

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Student Learning and Development
Advocacy for Student Success

For more than 25 years, the NASPA Administrators in Graduate and Professional Student Services (AGAPSS) Knowledge Community has provided a home for those who work with graduate and professional students. This past year at the preconference in New Orleans, we had the opportunity to hear from, and collaborate with, John N. Gardner, Executive Chair, and with his wife, Betsy O. Barefoot, Co-founder of the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Higher Education. For the past 45 years, Gardner has led what became known as "the first-year experience" (FYE) reform movement to improve first-year students' learning, success, satisfaction, graduation rates, and subsequent fulfillment in their chosen occupations and ways of life. The FYE is now a ubiquitous concept in both student and academic affairs, and is the standard across the country and in some other parts of the globe. (University of South Carolina, n.d.)

The student affairs profession and, in particular, NASPA and AGAPSS, can further translate the FYE ideas, values, and concepts to the world of graduate and professional students. As we do, let us first look at what the FYE is, how it was developed, and how it came to be widely accepted across institutions across the globe in adapted forms.

The FYE idea is based on a philosophy of higher education that attests (a) first-year students are a special subpopulation of the world's tertiary education students, (b) they deserve better treatment and respect than they historically received, and (c) they are best served when faculty, student affairs and other administrative staff, and student peer leaders all collaborate to provide support. This approach embraces a holistic student development model, and is translated into campus-based initiatives, courses, and services (Gardner, 2023b).

Gardner first introduced this philosophy as a faculty member at the University of South Carolina in 1982, where he had been working in partnership with faculty and student affairs professionals for a decade to make the beginning college experience much more humane. He set out to demonstrate that we could teach students "to love the University" and in so doing, greatly improve their academic and personal success and overall sense of belonging. He became the first faculty director of the University 101 course and began to implement the FYE concept (Gardner, 2023b).

Gardner, in very close conjunction with student affairs professionals, began to reach out to academic colleagues to create partnerships to develop "first-year experience" programs and first-year seminars based on University 101. Concurrent assessment and pioneering research, much conducted by student affairs researchers, demonstrated the powerful effectiveness of the FYE concept and thus justified and supported its replication much more broadly. At the same time, a series of national and international conferences offered by the University of South Carolina brought together academic and student affairs administrators, faculty, and students to disseminate and bring to life the FYE concept. The National Resource Center for the FYE was established in 1986. The FYE concept was then expanded to other critical student transitions: the sophomore, transfer, and senior year experience (Gardner, 2023a). Finally, Gardner is now launching the Graduate Student Experience (GSE) (Gardner Institute, n.d.).

For those student affairs professionals who work with and for graduate and professional students and programs, the GSE is not a new concept, but it is finally receiving a heightened level of attention and a call for new partnerships, energy, and synergies, thanks in no small measure to AGAPSS and NASPA. We believe that those in this field can agree that what the FYE concept said about first-year students fully applies to graduate and professional students: (a) graduate and professional students are a special subpopulation in higher education, (b) they deserve better treatment and respect than they historically received, and (c) they are best served when faculty, student affairs and other administrative staff, and student peer leaders all collaborate to provide support.

The Gardner Institute has defined the GSE as the range of experiences—curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular—that graduate students encounter during their academic journey. Taking a holistic view of the student experience, while encompassing intellectual, personal, social, physical, spiritual, vocational, and developmental aspects, the term represents an aspirational vision that emphasizes respect, dignity, fairness, and equitable support. The goals are better outcomes in retention, degree completion, and employment as well as well-being (Gardner et al., in press)

A partnership is now growing among student affairs professionals, graduate school colleagues, and the Gardner Institute to pursue this vision of "the graduate student experience," and the next step is to translate vision into reality through the creation of actionable steps, programs, and services that student and academic affairs professionals can use on campus (Gardner, 1986).

At first glance, this seems fairly simple and straightforward, but we are building the plane as we are flying. We need to acknowledge and address the differences in program and student types—master's versus PhD, lab sciences versus humanities versus social sciences, graduate versus professional programs, in-person versus hybrid versus online programs, domestic versus international students, and on-campus research versus remote research (Koch, in press). We also need to consider the role academic departments and program/lab leadership have had in mentoring graduate students. We look forward to continuing the discussions started at the AGAPSS preconference and the Gardner Institute's Conference on The Graduate Student Experience. To seed those discussions, let us consider the following:

- How can AGAPSS leadership work with NASPA leadership to integrate graduate and professional student services into their programming, services, and professional development opportunities and to make the support of our four million graduate and professional students a higher priority for the student affairs profession?
- Using the FYE model, how do we further integrate student services into academic programs? How could we best differentiate the types of programs as discussed earlier and then respond more intentionally?
- In addition to the previously published books (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006; Nguyen & Yao, 2022; Pruitt-Logan & Issac 1995; Shepard & Perry, 2022) and a soon-to-be-published Gardner book (Gardner et al., in press), what additional research should be explored, and how should this be disseminated?
- How should campuses incorporate the University 101 seminar model into graduate education? For example, see how Georgia Tech extended its orientation program into a graduate credit course GT6000 (Georgia Tech. n.d.) (Black & Ebelhar, in press).

We challenge and invite all student affairs professionals to become part of this growing movement and, what we believe, is the next "big thing" in student affairs and higher education, by getting involved in the AGAPSS Knowledge Community (NASPA. n.d.). In closing, throughout your professional work, as you participate in meetings, programs, and professional discussions, always remember to ask, "What about graduate students (WAGS)?"

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Adult Learners and Students With Children Knowledge Community

Enkindling Moments: Adult Learners and the Future of Higher Education

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Advising and Supporting
Advocacy for Student Success

Two semesters into the projected decline in student enrollments due to lower birth rates since the 2008 recession, often referred to as the *enrollment cliff*, many institutions face abrupt declines in traditional-age matriculants (Grawe, 2018). At the same time, *adult learners* (i.e., undergraduates aged 25–64) represent both an enrollment opportunity and a long-neglected constituency whose needs can reveal how institutions must change. My qualitative study at a public research university with a dedicated Adult Learner Support Office (ALSO) examined how adult learners perceive institutional support and define student success. One central finding—what I define as *enkindling moments*—captures how adults come to realize that college is a possibility for them: an internally generated spark prompted by factors such as life events, workplace recognition, or witnessing peers succeed. Enkindling moments illuminate why adult learners enter higher education and what supports are required (McClellan, 2026).

As advisors and student-facing professionals across campus, our responsibility is to listen to those origin stories, validate the choice to enroll, and remove predictable barriers. Doing so honors adult learners' agency, strengthens retention pathways, and positions institutions to respond equitably to shifting enrollment realities. Enkindling precedes most institutional contact, and it reframes the work of advisors and student-facing professionals—not to manufacture possibility, but to recognize, validate, and reduce barriers for students who have already chosen college against many odds (Iloh, 2017; Kasworm, 2010).

Context and Methods

The study (McClellan, 2026) took place at "Meadowlark University" (MU; a pseudonym), where ALSO coordinates adult-focused communications, study spaces, and programming. Nineteen adult learners (including students who are first-time enrollees as well as returning students) and three staff, participated across eight focus groups and three individual

interviews in the spring of 2025. A qualitative design was used with in vivo and axial coding to identify participant-generated themes and to center adult learners' own language about support and success (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2016). The analysis was guided by a framework using design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020), validation theory (Rendón, 1994), and critical adult learning perspectives (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Pseudonyms are used throughout these findings.

As enrollment pressures mount, institutions often ask whether adult learners can offset shrinking traditional cohorts. My data complicate simple supply-side answers: adult learners represent a potential enrollment stream, but their *decision pathways* (i.e., how they determine college is the next step for them) are distinct from traditional students. Enkindling moments—often personal, sometimes cumulative—must be acknowledged as the start of a recruitment and retention arc that institutions too rarely recognize. Framing adult learners as a strategic "market," without attending to the relational and design issues that shape how they access and persist, risks losing those students and the equity gains their inclusion could produce (Bellare et al., 2023; Iloh, 2017).

Key Findings

1. **Enkindling moments.** Adult learners described moments that transformed "maybe" into "I will." These enkindling moments included career frustrations, family questions, workplace encouragement, or seeing peers succeed. Sample participant statements illustrate the variety and force of these moments:

   - Bryce (27, White man, transfer student): "I think the moment came to me was I was working a dead-end job.... I just kind of wanted to get out of there and push myself."
   - Miranda (33, Latina, transfer student): "I was finally done ... living [just] to survive.... I have been wanting to be a veterinarian since I was 10. Why did I stop chasing that?"
   - Jada (29, Black woman, transfer student): "I work in social services now, and because I don't have that degree behind my name, I get paid little to do just as much work.... I'm going to go back to school and get my degree."

   These enkindling narratives map onto the literature on adult motivation, which positions career congruence, role modeling for children, and economic necessity as strong drivers for obtaining a higher education (Bellare et al., 2023; Gianakos, 1996; van Rhijn et al., 2016).

2. **Low expectations and the "sink-or-swim" mindset.** Many adult learners began college expecting little institutional care. Participants used metaphors like "sink-or-swim" and described shame or impostor feelings tied to interrupted or deferred educational pathways:

   - Daniel (44, White man, veteran): "I came into MU with an air of imposter syndrome and shame." In reference to feeling as though he missed out on the opportunity to complete higher education earlier in life.
   - Jonah (26, White man, veteran): "I expected the university to be nonresponsive." In reference to a negative first experience with academic advising; questioned whether or not to continue his journey after this.

   Prior negative experiences and narratives from their communities and society show that colleges primarily serve 18–24-year-olds. This perception contributes to low expectations that adults can be well served at public research universities, which raises the stakes of early institutional encounters (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 2010).

3. **Available versus meaningful support.** Although MU offered multiple services, participants distinguished between visibility of and relevance of the supports. Daniel

observed, "There's an overabundant amount of support available … but a lot of our services are underused." *Misfit design*—programming that assumes uniform deficits (e.g., basic tech workshops aimed at all adult learners)—alienated *in-betweeners* (i.e., 25–35-year-olds) who are technologically fluent but socially and professionally misaligned with typical undergraduate offerings:

- Everett (26, White, nonbinary, transfer student): "The messaging from ALSO felt a little saccharine [to me]."

These voices echo critiques that age-based categories flatten heterogeneity and that even the most well thought-out support measures fail when students do not perceive relevance (Costanza-Chock, 2020; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

4. **Advising as a high-stakes touchpoint within an advising ecology.** Advising frequently functions as a gatekeeper: affirming or discouraging students at critical junctures. Participants recounted both harmful first encounters (Jax, 28, White, nonbinary, transfer student: "An advisor basically was like, … Maybe you shouldn't go to college") and affirming interventions that changed trajectories (Rebecca: advisor who "hand wrote … this is how far you've come," which "changed everything for me"). When formal advising was inconsistent, adult learners turned to peers, family, employers, or ALSO for navigation—illustrating the distributed advising ecology that student affairs educators must coordinate (Karmelita, 2020).

Implications for Practice

1. **Start with origin stories, the moments that sparked adult learners' desire to enroll or reenroll in college.** Ask the following question at intake or early interaction: "What made you consider college now?" Listening validates the student's pathway and reveals nonacademic supports they will likely need (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

2. **Subpopulate the subpopulation.** Design with demographic nuance within the adult learner population. Move beyond a single "25+" category. Develop targeted communications and cohort-based offerings for in-betweeners, working parents, veterans, and career-changers (i.e., Everett's call for specificity).

3. **Low-friction and high-validation early encounters.** Ensure first-contact personnel are trained to provide empathetic, practical assistance (financial aid, course scheduling, childcare/parking logistics) and to connect students to adult learner resources or success coaches immediately (Rendón, 1994).

4. **Coordinate the advising ecology.** Create referral protocols, shared intake notes, and simple follow-up systems so a helpful first meeting is not undermined by a subsequent inconsistent one (i.e., prevent Jonah's near derailment after an absent advisor).

5. **Advocate for structural and systemic fixes that matter.** Address scheduling bottlenecks, course offering cadence, childcare visibility, parking, and employer partnerships: design elements that cumulatively shape adult learners' ability to persist (Costanza-Chock, 2020; van Rhijn & Lero, 2014).

Conclusion

Institutional strategies that center enkindling narratives and remove systemic friction can both stabilize enrollments and advance institutional commitments to inclusion (Bellare et al., 2023; Iloh, 2017). Adult learners are not a homogeneous pool to be "captured"; they are diverse adults whose pathways demand institutional humility and redesign (Dreznick, 2023; Kasworm, 2010).

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Asian Pacific Islanders Knowledge Community

Empowering API Student Success, Leadership, and Resilience Through Mentorship as Campus Infrastructure

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Introduction

Asian and Pacific Islander (API) students in U.S. higher education are often framed through the "model minority" stereotype, which obscures within-group diversity and leads institutions to overlook problems in campus climate (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Practitioners should retire that stereotype and instead attend to culturally responsive support structures that enable success for heterogeneous API populations, including Asian Americans and Asian international students (Yao & Mwangi, 2022). As such, the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments framework links students' belonging and success to environments that honor multiculturalism, offer meaningful leadership engagement, and provide sufficient campus support (Museus, 2013). Thus, mentoring becomes an effective practice because it connects students to information, relationships, and opportunities. This article highlights three mentorship programs in academic units, student affairs, and multicultural centers that can cocreate identity-conscious, equity-driven, and culturally responsive mentorship infrastructures serving API students.

Mentorship Defined

Mentorship is a structured, relationship-based practice focused on shared growth goals rather than informal social networks (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Effective mentorship programs set sustainable expectations, emphasize training and skill-building, and are centered around resource, retention, and development (Packard, 2023).

Culture- and identity-conscious mentoring helps students feel that their cultures are respected, provides meaningful cross-cultural engagement, and offers clear navigational support in the places students use (Museus, 2013). It also challenges model minority assumptions and centers racial climate and community cultural wealth as key factors shaping belonging for diverse populations (Yosso, 2005).

Mentorship also influences students' access to support, early help-seeking, and purposeful peer interaction, which enhances learning and progress toward degrees. In addition, mentoring enhances leadership development for international students; those whose primary mentor is a faculty or staff member report higher leadership capacity and self-efficacy than peers mentored mainly by other students (Shalka, 2019).

STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) -Based Peer Mentorship

The USC (University of Southern California) Viterbi School of Engineering's peer mentorship program connects domestic and international students throughout their first year to reduce acculturative stress. A data-informed matching process pairs mentors and mentees, and the program follows a yearlong timeline to maintain and ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Mentors do more than provide academic guidance; they support and engage with mentees during their first-year cultural adaptation. Mentor preparation training covers role clarity, boundaries, referable resources, and common academic procedural knowledge, such as add/drop, tutoring, and advising. The mentorship program administrators strongly emphasize holistic assessment and evaluation by all community members involved to improve the program and build a mentee-mentor pipeline, preparing students for leadership development. Over three years, 87% of participants reported a positive experience, and more than 90% reported interest in continuing or returning to serve as mentors.

Career Service International Student Mentorship

The International Student Mentorship Program, based in the university's career services office, matches international undergraduate and graduate students with volunteer international alums recruited via the career services alum database. As a semester-long opportunity that entails an application, matching process, an orientation, and a closing celebration, the program promotes career development, personal well-being, and community, and many mentors are successful entrepreneurs or established professionals. Workshops are co-hosted with other campus offices, such as the School of Business and the First-Generation Success Center, to offer a variety of formats. Mentees attend monthly meetings, set goals with their mentors, and use campus resources shared in monthly workshops. The program design emphasizes proactive communication, predictable structure, and knowledge of campus support systems. These practices build belonging and increase early, purposeful engagement with career services.

API Peer Mentoring

The Asian Pacific American Student Service Center runs the Positive Experiences, Enriching Relationships program (PEER) to help first-year API students transition to college, build community, and practice seeking help. The program pairs continuing students with mentors and anchors them in regular pod meetings, social events, and affinity-based workshops on wellness and career readiness. The program reached a cohort of about 200 students and recently expanded eligibility to first- and second-year students. Mentors, some of whom participate virtually, complete training with the Counseling and Mental Health Center, which includes learning crisis-response skills framed as "look, listen, and link" and attending ongoing mentor supervision seminars that provide logistical support and peer-learning tools. Students see PEER as an early welcome to the API community, campus resources, and sustained well-being.

Practitioner Reflection: What These Programs Build

Across these programs, student success is a critical component. Students with mentors are more likely to exhibit key behaviors, such as seeking help, using services, and modeling leadership, which, in turn, support their belonging, learning, and progress. Many first-generation and international Asian students read leadership as grades or titles, not contribution. Mentoring makes leadership feel reachable by

inviting participation, involvement, and recognition. As one program director notes, "Leadership became less about titles and more about service: sharing what we learned, advocating for others, and building community." In practice, mentees return as mentors to pay it forward, sustain a pipeline, and strengthen culture.

These programs build resilience through community care. Many API students arrive on campus thinking that struggle equals failure and that asking for help signals weakness and incompetence. That perspective shift happens when mentors name their challenges and create common ground by affirming, "I struggled too, and here is how I got through it." These programs use community cultural wealth—aspirational, linguistic, and social capital—to make support feel legitimate and safe (Yosso, 2005). For example, mentors model how they set goals and work through obstacles, meet in a bilingual capacity, and provide direct, practical advice or referrals. When mentors are visible, resourceful, and caring, students move from isolation to connection and silence to agency.

At a predominantly White institution, representation is catalytic. Mentorship is often the first space where someone says, "I know that pressure," naming both academic load and family or cultural expectations. Representation in mentorship is not symbolic; it expands possibilities and disrupts stereotypes practically by recruiting diverse mentor cohorts and building a circle of affinity-based staff and students who can shape training and evaluation. In all three mentorship programs, administrators see more first-time visits to advising and career services, mentees returning as mentors, and growing API presence in student organization leadership.

Implications for Practice

Student affairs professionals can leverage mentorship as campus infrastructure to advance API student success by focusing on three moves:

First, sustain, assess, and evolve with purpose. Mentorship programs should be sustained, regularly assessed, and intentionally adapted using both theoretical frameworks and practitioner-informed strategies. Effective mentorship must also respond to the evolving cultural, academic, and identity-based needs of API students.

Second, leverage data and digital communication. Data-informed decision-making, combined with effective digital outreach and storytelling, enhances the reach and impact of mentorship. Programs grounded in evidence and communicated strategically are more likely to engage diverse student populations and demonstrate measurable outcomes.

Third, customize for cultural and institutional contexts. Mentorship is not one-size-fits-all and should be designed with attention to campus climate, student demographics, and cultural nuance, particularly for underrepresented populations. Flexibility, cultural humility, and community input are key.

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Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community

Charting Progress: 20 Years of Innovation in Student Affairs Assessment

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Assessment, Evaluation and Research
Assessment

At the NASPA 2025 Annual Conference, several Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community (AERKC) current and former cochairs gathered to reflect on the past, present, and future of student affairs assessment. Michael Christakis (Vice President For Student Affairs at University of Albany and current NASPA Board Chair), Jeanna Mastrodicasa (Director Of Institutional Research at the University of Florida), Shaun Boren (Director Of Student Life Assessment And Research at the University of Florida), and Darby Roberts (Director Of Student Affairs Planning, Assessment, & Research at Texas A&M University) have chaired the KC in the past. Amelia Parnell, NASPA President and author of *You Are a Data Person*, facilitated the conversation.

Building a Culture of Assessment: The Early Days

Two decades ago, few divisions invested resources to develop a culture of evidence. In those days, convincing staff that assessment was essential was an initial barrier, although staff clearly cared about student experiences, support, and success. Early assessment focused on satisfaction and needs rather than on student learning or student success. Most student affairs staff did not have expertise in assessment methods, which created opportunities for professional development through NASPA and on individual campuses.

Early on, very few books, journals, or conferences encompassed student affairs assessment. *Assessing Student Learning and Development* (Bresciani et al., 2013) was one of the first books to focus on learning in the cocurricular. NASPA started a small assessment conference in 2004 that brought together relatively few staff and experts to contribute to a new culture of assessment.

Because there were so few student affairs assessment professionals, we had to purposefully seek each other out, which led to the founding of Student Affairs Assessment Leaders and the NASPA AERKC, Roberts said. The conversations centered around motivation, resource sharing, and creating processes and structures to serve divisions of student affairs. Building a culture was an uphill battle but started to gain traction as leaders saw the benefits.

The Current State of Affairs: Where We Are Today

Mastrodicasa said student affairs assessment still focuses on areas like satisfaction, needs, and outcomes but has also been able to garner resources in areas such as mental health and care teams by providing a compelling data narrative.

Christakis stated that student affairs assessment is "essential to our work—informing decisions, shaping practice, and guiding institutional strategy." As a vice president, Christakis frequently sees student affairs data brought into discussions about student success, student learning, sense of belonging, and retention. Parnell echoed that sentiment; she, too, said she has seen more collaboration across campus with faculty and services, such as financial aid.

Roberts has seen more campuses create dedicated student affairs assessment offices or staff positions, although not all of them have the resources or commitment to invest in these efforts. For some student affairs staff, assessment is included as part of the job description. Having dedicated staff drives systematic processes and professional development for all divisional staff. Some student affairs graduate programs have required courses in assessment and/or research, and several textbooks specifically focus on student affairs assessment and research.

More resources have been created in the form of books, journals, websites, online courses, webinars, and conferences. For example, NASPA's early assessment conference has grown into a successful Assessment, Planning, and Data Analytics Conference as part of the Student Success in Higher Education Conferences. In the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies (2015), assessment, evaluation, and research is one of the 10 competency areas. *The Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry, Improvement, and Impact* specifically advances knowledge of student affairs assessment practices. The Higher Education Consortium for Student Affairs Certification (n.d.) includes assessment and evaluation as one of the eight domains covered in the exam, indicating its importance in the student affairs profession.

Today's practices focus on making data actionable, approachable, and meaningful. For the most part, it is not about getting people to do assessment—it is about integrating assessment practices into daily lives and using the results to improve student success. As Mastrodicasa reflects, technology has allowed student affairs professionals to gather better data and report them in better ways as a part of the regular business of student affairs.

Divisions have begun to tell their story to students, parents, governing boards, donors, and legislators and to communicate the unique contribution they make in students' lives. Data play an essential role in the story, not only with quantitative results used in charts and graphs but also with qualitative results that bring individual student experiences to life.

Predicting the Future: Where Assessment Is Going

The context of higher education and student affairs is complicated, and that reality will continue in the years to come. Although predicting the future is challenging, assessment will continue to be important to demonstrate the value of student affairs in the areas of "student success, engagement, career readiness, and well-being," as Christakis said. As the field of student affairs assessment evolves and matures, more opportunities will arise to integrate data sources, analyze and interpret results, and influence how institutions focus on student success.

Some institutions focus on the return on investment and outcomes of higher education. Mastrodicasa predicted that higher education will be even more focused on "wage levels, workforce needs, and viewpoint diversity," which means student affairs will need to provide evidence of how their programs contribute. Student affairs leaders may need to start thinking about the return on investment of student affairs and what programs might need to be eliminated or differently resourced to meet the demand for institutional priorities.

As Boren said:

> *No doubt technology will continue to impact student affairs assessment. The increased expectations for reporting will be managed by technologies, including centralization of data from various sources into a data warehouse, which then automatically populates reports and dashboards. More advanced analyses, including machine learning techniques, will also be applied to these data to better predict and respond to patterns and individual student needs.*

More products will be used for data collection and analysis, but artificial intelligence will clearly influence how professionals approach data. Many institutions are also working on data warehouses to keep student data in one location.

As the field continues to mature, more publications, professional development, and tools will appear. At the same time, the people in the field will bring the data to life and make connections with and mentor others to strengthen the future of student affairs assessment.

Parnell hopes assessment will be integrated into all student affairs portfolios and become a part of preparation programs and leadership development, with investment in professional development for all staff. The number of staff focused on student affairs assessment will probably continue to grow as leadership sees the value of having dedicated professionals with specific expertise who can work well with both people and data to add value to student affairs functions. These staff will have expertise not only in evolving methodologies but also in data visualization, working with large data sets, predictive analytics, and planning. The field has come a long way, and it is exciting to look at the opportunities ahead for student affairs assessment.

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Black Diaspora Knowledge Community

Charting the Journey: The NASPA Black Diaspora Knowledge Community's Past, Present, and Future

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Introduction and Context

Since 2001, NASPA's Knowledge Communities (KCs) have provided spaces for professionals to share expertise and advance student affairs practice (NASPA, n.d.-b). The Black Diaspora Knowledge Community (BDKC), established in 2014, amplifies voices and scholarship rooted in the experiences of the African diaspora (NASPA, n.d.-a). Its mission is to increase awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of issues impacting Black professionals and students in higher education while educating NASPA members on trends through research, mentoring, and campus engagement (NASPA, n.d.-a). For Black higher education professionals, BDKC offers a powerful network of support and affirmation, creating opportunities to lead, publish, and influence policy. Through intentional programming and dialogue, members gain tools to navigate systemic barriers while celebrating cultural identity and excellence (NASPA, n.d.-a).

Historical Development of BDKC

Founded in 2014 as the African-American Knowledge Community, the BDKC began with a vision to center Black diasporic perspectives in student affairs discourse (NASPA, n.d.-a). Early initiatives focused on increasing member awareness of and appreciation for the issues unique to Black professionals and students. Efforts to create greater inclusion within the diaspora led to the name change to the Black Diaspora Knowledge Community in 2022. Milestones include signature programs, mentoring networks, and collaborations at NASPA conferences, alongside recognition programs such as the Stellar 50 and Sankofa Awards (NASPA, n.d.-c; NASPA, n.d.-a). These efforts uphold strategic priorities of professional development, equity, inclusion, and research (NASPA, n.d.-e). For Black professionals, BDKC has become a transformative space to foster mentorship, amplify scholarship, and cultivate leadership pathways that challenge inequities in higher education. Its growth reflects a commitment to empowering voices that shape institutional change and advance social justice (NASPA, n.d.-c).

Faculty Engagement and Contributions

Faculty engagement in the BDKC exemplifies a deep commitment to the NASPA core competency of Social Justice and Inclusion. Contributions to critical scholarship, mentorship, and leadership create spaces for meaningful dialogue on racial equity, identity, and the broader experiences of Black diasporic individuals in higher education. Faculty members design and participate in initiatives that address systemic barriers and promote inclusive excellence, and they ensure that the BDKC's work is grounded in principles of equity and access. Their contributions not only elevate the voices and narratives of communities that are defined with the diaspora, but they also foster institutional change and provide professional development that centers marginalized identities. Through these efforts, faculty members directly support NASPA's mission to cultivate socially just and inclusive campus environments for all.

Faculty Reflections on BDKC's Impact

Faculty reflections on their involvement with the Black Diaspora Knowledge Community highlight how this engagement has deeply influenced their teaching, research, and service, often reinforcing their commitment to equity and the power of collective action. A vibrant space where faculty remain steadfast, some of the BDKC focuses on core values such as equity, collaboration, and community. Consistent themes that have been presented revolve around transformative experiences, interdisciplinary viewpoints, and community engagement (S. N. Gladden, personal communication, November 19, 2025). Faculty involvement also strengthens the intersection between faculty and student affairs, resulting in more holistic support and belonging for Black students. In connecting the work of the BDKC with the competency of Social Justice and Inclusion, faculty create more than spaces of belonging; they also make sure that the Black voices in higher education are amplified and celebrated (S. Lemmons, personal communication, November 19, 2025).

Challenges and Future Directions for Higher Education Professionals

As faculty and staff who engage with the NASPA BDKC, we recognize the mounting challenges many of us face, including digital inequities, evolving intersections of technology, and persistent leadership disparities affecting Black professionals in higher education. Addressing these issues creates opportunities for collaborative research, innovative pedagogical models, and the expansion of inclusive digital spaces. The BDKC network has and will continue to advance antiracist leadership and prioritize social justice by fostering mentoring relationships and supporting holistic student success. As faculty and staff adapt to emerging challenges, BDKC serves as an essential hub for professional growth, providing frameworks and community to meet the demands of a rapidly changing educational landscape.

Practical Recommendations and Conclusion

It is our hope that this article serves as an impetus for faculty and staff to actively participate in BDKC events, contribute to online forums, and integrate BDKC resources within coursework and faculty development programs. Embedding BDKC knowledge in curricula and mentorship fosters inclusive teaching practices and provides invaluable tools that lead to high-impact results. Faculty and staff can advocate for institutional policies that uplift Black leaders and diaspora scholarship, aligning with NASPA Leadership and Social Justice and Inclusion competencies. By championing these strategies, faculty and staff affirm BDKC's relevance and sustain the legacy of Black Diaspora leadership and scholarship across higher education.

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Disability Knowledge Community

Artificial Intelligence and Universal Design for Learning: A New Partnership for Higher Education

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Technology
Influencing Higher Education Policy

Introduction

Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and AI-powered tools can deliver personalized Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that students with disabilities have long needed, moving beyond mandated accommodations to truly integrated, inclusive design. By partnering accessibility, UDL, and appropriate AI tools, we are no longer building ramps next to the instruction; we are integrating cognitive and well-being ramps into the learning experience itself. AI is enabling an entirely new paradigm—one in which institutions can design universally accessible environments. This shift aligns directly with UDL principles, which promote proactive, inclusive, and flexible curriculum design to support diverse learners. AI's capacity to personalize content, adjust instructional modality, and provide immediate scaffolding and individual assessment represents a profound opportunity for higher education to fulfill the long-promised goals of UDL.

The Foundations of UDL and the Changing Accessibility Landscape

UDL reframed the question entirely for higher education (CAST, 2018). Instead of asking, "How do we accommodate this student?" UDL asks, "How do we design instruction so all students can engage, learn, and demonstrate their knowledge from the outset?" UDL proposes three key principles:

1. **Multiple means of representation.** Provide varied ways of presenting information so learners can perceive and understand content according to their strengths.
2. **Multiple means of engagement.** Motivate and sustain student interest through choice, relevance, and proactive support.
3. **Multiple means of action and expression.** Offer varied ways for students to demonstrate what they know.

UDL has been overwhelmingly supported in theory, but institutions have struggled to implement it systematically. Producing multiple modalities, customizing content for wide-ranging reading levels, creating individualized scaffolding, and monitoring learner pathways are all resource-intensive tasks. Stakeholders (faculty, administrators, and staff) often lack the time, tools, or training to operationalize UDL beyond minimal adoption.

This is precisely where AI becomes transformative. AI is not simply another educational technology—it is an engine of rapid personalization. For the first time, institutions can realistically approach UDL's highest aspirations. Just as physical ramps removed architectural barriers, AI removes cognitive and linguistic barriers embedded in curriculum design. AI tools can instantly convert a text to multiple reading levels, translate it into different languages, generate an audio version, and produce visual summaries such as infographics or concept maps. This multimodality provides universal access across sensory, linguistic, and neurocognitive differences. Instead of retrofitting accommodations, institutions can now design learning experiences that flex by default.

Examples From Leading Universities

Across the country, institutions are already demonstrating what AI-enhanced UDL looks like in practice:

- **University of Washington** (2025) uses Blackboard's AI-enabled accessibility features to automatically generate tagged PDFs, improving screen-reader navigation.
- **Harvard University** (2025) and the **University of California, Davis** (Otter.ai Inc., 2025) integrate real-time captioning and note-taking tools (e.g., Otter AI) to support inclusive classroom participation.
- **Arizona State University** deploys adaptive learning systems that personalize math instruction and keep students within their zone of proximal development, increasing retention (Vignare et al., 2020).
- **University of Michigan** (2025) uses virtual AI teaching assistants to provide 24/7 content support, freeing faculty for high-touch mentorship.
- **Georgia State University** (2025) uses AI-based texting systems that guide incoming students through required prematriculation tasks, reducing summer melt.

Collectively, these examples reveal that AI can dramatically expand the reach and impact of accessibility initiatives in ways previously impossible through human labor alone.

AI as a New Stakeholder in Higher Education

A unique insight that inspired this article is the introduction of AI as a **sixth stakeholder** in the established "Crucial Collaborations" model (Lipsitz, Berger, & Berger, 2024). Traditionally, the key stakeholders involved in accommodations and academic design include:

- students
- faculty
- accessibility services
- senior administrators
- parents and families

AI now emerges as a new embedded collaborator—not a decision-maker, but as a partner that can surface information, identify constraints, generate options, and help diverse stakeholders negotiate shared understanding. AI can provide policy analysis, scenario modeling, draft solutions and feedback, and accessible summaries of complex documents. Use of AI does not replace human judgment; rather, it strengthens it by reducing the cognitive workload required to navigate complicated issues such as accommodation disputes, policy creation, or curriculum redesign. In fact, humans—not AI—must always remain the ethical decision-maker.

It is important to consider not only the opportunities that AI offers key stakeholders, but also the threats and weaknesses that this new technology brings to higher education. The following "SWOT" charts summarize some of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that AI brings as seen by the different stakeholders (Watson & Raine, 2025; Chat GPT, accessed May 25, 2025).

AI in Higher Education—Student's SWOT

Strengths

- Personalized tutoring and coaching
- Increased access to support 24/7
- Research data sources
- Support for students with disabilities
- Brainstorming ideas
- Critiquing drafts

Weaknesses

- Over-reliance on AI
- Difficulty determining ethical use
- Uneven access to AI tools
- Anxiety about surveillance tools
- Accuracy of results in question
- Cognitive off-loading

Opportunities

- Skill-building in emerging tech
- Developing career preparation
- Learn new collaborative methods
- AI mentors for college navigation
- Clinical training

Threats

- Risk of academic penalties
- Widening digital divide
- Erosion of creativity
- Data privacy concerns
- Loss of Critical Thinking

AI in Higher Education—Faculty's SWOT

Strengths

- Automates grading/admin tasks
- Enhances teaching with feedback tools
- Supports inclusive teaching
- Develop new pedagogies
- Aid in research

Weaknesses

- Lack of AI training and support
- Fear of replacement
- Hard to verify student-authored work
- Monitoring AI use adds workload
- No overall institutional AI policy

Opportunities

- New pedagogy for AI literacy
- AI can act as Teaching Assistant
- Development of new assessments
- Interdisciplinary innovation
- Student learning beyond the textbook

Threats

- Loss of classroom control
- Dependence on textbook publishers
- Legal/ethical liabilities
- Pressure to adopt AI unprepared
- Keeping up with student use

AI in Higher Education—Administrator's SWOT

Strengths

- Improves operational efficiency
- Enables strategic student support
- Boosts innovation reputation
- Enhances accessibility efforts
- Facilitates marketing & communication

Weaknesses

- Legal/AI governance uncertainty
- High AI system and training costs
- Risk of poor stakeholder buy-in
- Limited internal expertise
- Institutional policy

Opportunities

- Lead strategic advancement
- Attract tech-savw talent
- Public-private AI partnerships
- New AI academic programs
- New/Improved research
- Enhance Universal Design

Threats

- Reputational risk from bias/misuse
- Ethical data dilemmas
- AI evolution outpaces policy
- Faculty resistance
- Uncertain future

Of all stakeholder groups, accessibility offices stand to gain the most from AI by enabling them to move from reactive to proactive work, thus strengthening inclusion at scale. Accessibility offices could see:

- faster turnaround time for alternative formats
- enhanced screen-reader compatibility
- better tools for students with executive function challenges
- more inclusive design at the institutional level, reducing the burden of individual accommodations

A Road Map for Institutional Adoption

Effective integration of AI into UDL requires thoughtful planning. Several higher educational institutions are using a phased-in approach (Georgia State University, 2025; Harvard University, 2025; Otter.ai Inc. 2025; University of Michigan, 2025; University of Washington, 2025; Vignare et al., 2020):

1. **Start with low-barrier tools.** Instructions should begin with established, high-impact technologies that provide immediate improvements without complex policy changes.
2. **Build clear policies.** Institutions must articulate consistent policies across departments and clearly communicate these throughout the institution.
3. **Foster cross-unit collaboration.** Silos are the enemy of effective AI adoption. Accessibility services, IT, teaching and learning centers, faculty senates, academic affairs, and student affairs must work together to coordinate training, vet tools, and ensure student-centered implementation.
4. **Evaluate the impact of AI through data.** For continuous improvement, institutions must track how the stakeholders are affected. Although universities that fail to engage with AI risk irrelevance, both academically and in the labor market, it is essential to protect all stakeholders. During its phased integration, AI should be used safely, ethically, and responsibly with the following in mind:

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliance
- transparency in AI usage
- mandatory human oversight
- guardrails to prevent bias
- ethical guidelines for students, faculty, and administration
- continuous revision of policies as AI evolves

Conclusion

AI represents the most significant opportunity in decades to expand educational equity, accessibility, and personalization. When paired with UDL, it offers usable tools for designing learning environments that are flexible, responsive, and inclusive for *all* students—not just those who request accommodations. But realizing this promise requires intentional governance, cross-campus collaboration, and a willingness to rethink long-standing pedagogical assumptions. Institutions that embrace AI as a collaborative partner—not a threat—will be positioned to offer students a more engaging, accessible, and future-ready educational experience.

Higher education stands at a crossroads. AI is no longer merely an efficiency tool; it is reshaping the value of a college degree. The question is no longer whether institutions should adopt AI to support UDL but how quickly, responsibly, and sustainably they can do so.

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Fraternity and Sorority Knowledge Community

Membership Trends in Fraternity and Sorority Life: Fall 2019–Spring 2024

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Assessment, Evaluation and Research
Research and Scholarship

The National Fraternity and Sorority Scorecard (Scorecard) from the Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research aggregates institutional data and creates a picture of how fraternity and sorority chapters are performing on key indicators. This project is designed to capture and benchmark the "health" of the fraternity and sorority experience with the goal of creating safe, successful, and sustainable fraternity and sorority life (FSL).

Membership is a necessary metric for understanding the trajectory of fraternities and sororities. This article examines membership trends from the 2019–2020 through 2023–2024 academic years and highlights selected differences among councils and regions of the United States. This report excludes chapters reporting zero members for the whole year (dormant, suspended, etc.) to avoid artificially lowering the average membership sizes. This report is also limited to the institutions that have submitted data to the Piazza Center each year. Since the project's launch in 2019, more than 180 institutions have participated in the Scorecard (Table 1). Most participating institutions are classified as Medium or Large, based on Carnegie classifications. With increasing participation in the project, the Scorecard will grow closer to providing an accurate picture of fraternities and sororities across the United States.

Table 1
Participating Institutions by Size and Year

Dates	Very small	Small	Medium	Large
2019–2020	0	9	32	47
2020–2021	2	8	36	52
2021–2022	0	6	22	45
2022–2023	0	5	18	42
2023–2024	0	11	35	14

Note: Sizes are based on institutional Carnegie classifications.

Overall Picture

From Fall 2019 to Spring 2024, FSL membership steadily expanded nationwide. The average chapter size increased from 66 (2019 –2020) to over 79 members (2023 –2024), with new member intake groups growing from approximately 16 to 25 members per chapter. This growth had a notable slowdown during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), which affected chapter activity and recruitment across the board. However, membership averages began to rebound in the 2021–2022 academic year, showing great momentum and engagement within the FSL arena.

Several possible factors contributed to these membership trends. The rise of social media and current governmental targets on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives could lead to a surge in recruitment from culturally based FSL organizations. The "Bama RushTok" phenomenon brought unprecedented attention to the world of Panhellenic recruitment across the nation, resulting in the growth of Panhellenic recruitment consultants, which helped young women curate their recruitment experiences to gain membership in their desired organizations (Kelly, 2025). At the same time, students entering the collegiate world sought stronger communities that led to their sense of belonging in and around their campuses (Coleman, 2024; Garcia & Duran, 2021; Ingram et al., 2021).

Interest has also expanded beyond historically large councils. National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) organizations have seen growth in new member intake, which reflects a broader recognition of the value of culturally based organizations in affirming identity and providing safe, supportive spaces (Garcia et al., 2022). Together, these trends show that FSL continues to adapt and thrive, aligning itself with evolving student needs and cultural contexts.

Council Trends

Council-level data from 2019 to 2024 highlight common growth patterns and distinct variations across FSL organizations. Table 2 presents the number of institutions submitting data for each council by year, and Table 3 presents the number of chapters represented in each council by year.

Table 2

Institutions Submitting Data by Council

Dates	Interfraternity Council (IFC)	Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)	National Panhellenic Council (NPHC)	Panhellenic Council (PHC/PHA)
2019–2020	86	42	51	84
2020–2021	91	53	67	89
2021–2022	73	43	58	71
2022–2023	63	39	53	61
2023–2024	57	35	43	58

Table 3

Represented Chapters by Council and Year

Dates	Interfraternity Council (IFC)	Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)	National Panhellenic Council (NPHC)	Panhellenic Council (PHC/PHA)
2019–2020	983	297	284	645
2020–2021	1087	391	389	725
2021–2022	949	338	323	659
2022–2023	879	285	312	587
2023–2024	761	243	253	522

Panhellenic sororities experienced the strongest gains in both chapter size and recruitment. Average chapter membership rose from 125 to 158 members, a 27% increase, and their new member class size increased by more than 50% from 30 to 47 members. This trajectory reflects the high visibility of Panhellenic recruitment, bolstered in part by high social media virality, which popularized the Panhellenic sorority experience (Beaird et al., 2021).

Interfraternity Council (IFC) organizations grew at a steady pace. Chapters' membership grew by an average of 21%, increasing from approximately 60 to 72 members. New member recruitment averages rose from 14 to 19 members. Fraternities benefited from a renewed interest in social connection after the pandemic and continued to capitalize on traditions, housing, and alumni networks.

NPHC, comprising historically Black organizations, remained intentionally smaller in chapter size, averaging around 10 members throughout the years. Although its chapter membership remained consistent, the council demonstrated dramatic growth in new membership intake, increasing from around two to eight members per chapter. This growth highlights the increased demand for organizations rooted in cultural heritage, advocacy, and a sense of belonging. Many students today seek identity-affirming spaces, and NPHC organizations meet that need (Bello-Escobar et al., 2022).

MGC organizations remained relatively consistent in chapter size, fluctuating between 13 and 15 members. The organizations experienced a slight increase in recruitment, adding three to five new members per chapter annually, representing a 71% rise. This modest growth is meaningful for students from diverse backgrounds who seek culturally relevant organizations that reflect their values and identities.

Figures 1 and 2 highlight the growth of chapter and new member class sizes by council over the five-year period. Together, these trends illustrate a dual reality where Panhellenic and IFC councils are not only recovering from pandemic-era challenges but building momentum to expand their reach and visibility. Culturally based organizations in MGC and NPHC, which traditionally have smaller chapter membership sizes, are growing at a proportionally stable rate. Their growth demonstrates that students increasingly value spaces and communities that center on identity and belonging.

Figure 1

Total Chapter Members by Council

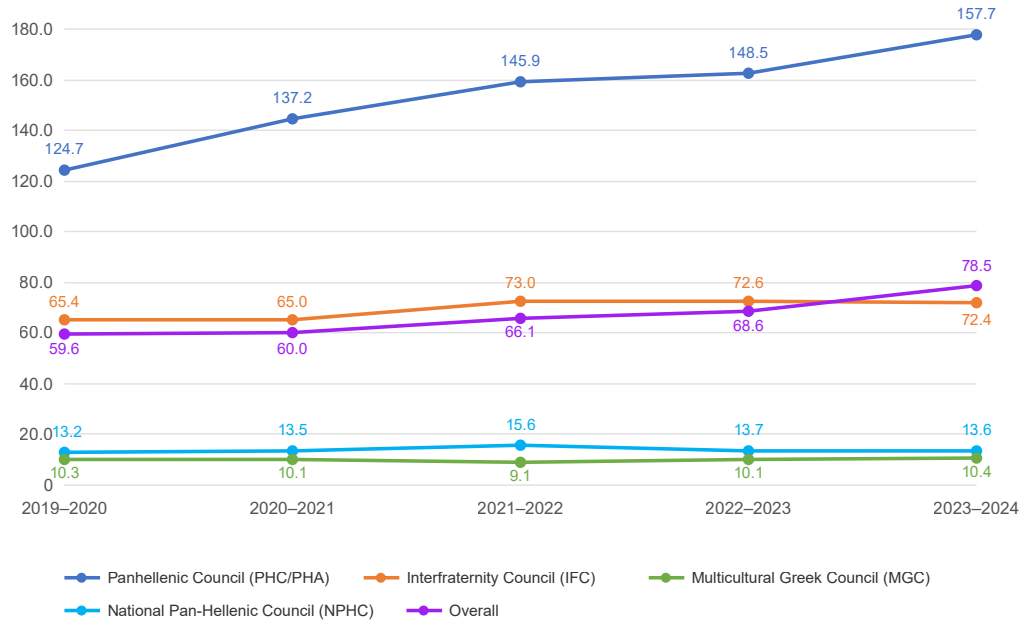


Figure 2

New Member Class Size by Council

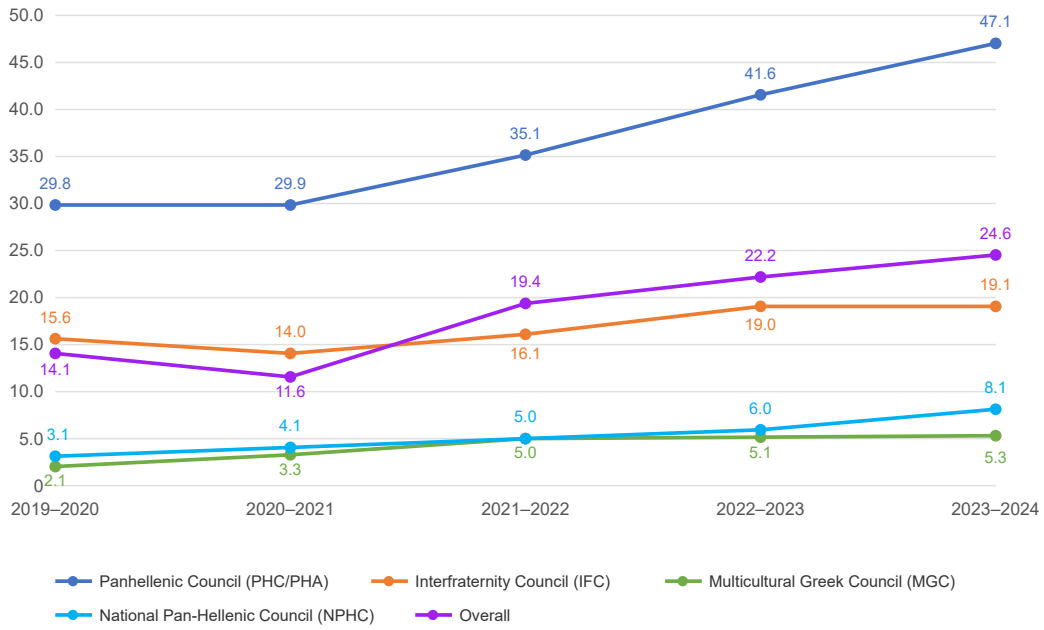


Table 4

Represented Chapters by Council and Year

Dates	Interfraternity Council (IFC)	Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)	National Panhellenic Council (NPHC)	Panhellenic Council (PHC/PHA)
2019–2020	983	297	284	645
2020–2021	1087	391	389	725
2021–2022	949	338	323	659
2022–2023	879	285	312	587
2023–2024	761	243	253	522

Table 5

Institutions Submitting Data by Region

Dates	Interfraternity Council (IFC)	Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)	National Panhellenic Council (NPHC)	Panhellenic Council (PHC/PHA)
2019–2020	37	17	26	8
2020–2021	27	22	38	11
2021–2022	22	15	31	5
2022–2023	16	14	31	4
2023–2024	18	9	30	2

Regional Trends

The South region had the most chapters included in the Scorecard data set. It outpaced the national averages for total chapter size and new member class size across all 5 years, which influenced the higher overall average. The South region has also seen the most dramatic increase in chapter size (81 to 95) and new members (18 to 31) over the 5-year period. Table 4 presents the number of institutions submitting data for each region by year, and Table 5 presents the number of chapters represented in each region by year.

The Midwest region has the second-largest representation in the Scorecard data set. Interestingly, chapters in the Midwest noted an increase in total membership during the 2020–2021 academic year (58 to 65) before returning to 2019–2020 levels in the subsequent 3 years (57, 59, 59). However, new member class sizes in the Midwest have observed a slight increase since the 2021–2022 academic year (15 to 18).

Although lower in total overall membership, chapters in the Northeast region have also grown over the past 5 years. Total chapter sizes have increased from an average of 49 to 57 members, and new member classes have, on average, increased from 13 to 16 members. As interest in fraternity and sorority life grows in this region, additional staff support may be required to serve the growing student population.

Figures 3 and 4 highlight the growth of chapter and new member class sizes by region over the five-year period. Patterns from the West region should be interpreted with caution. Although the West region shows steep declines in membership for the 2023–2024 academic year, it is important to note that only two institutions from the region submitted Scorecard data. More data are needed to better understand membership trends in this region.

Figure 3

Total Chapter Members by Region

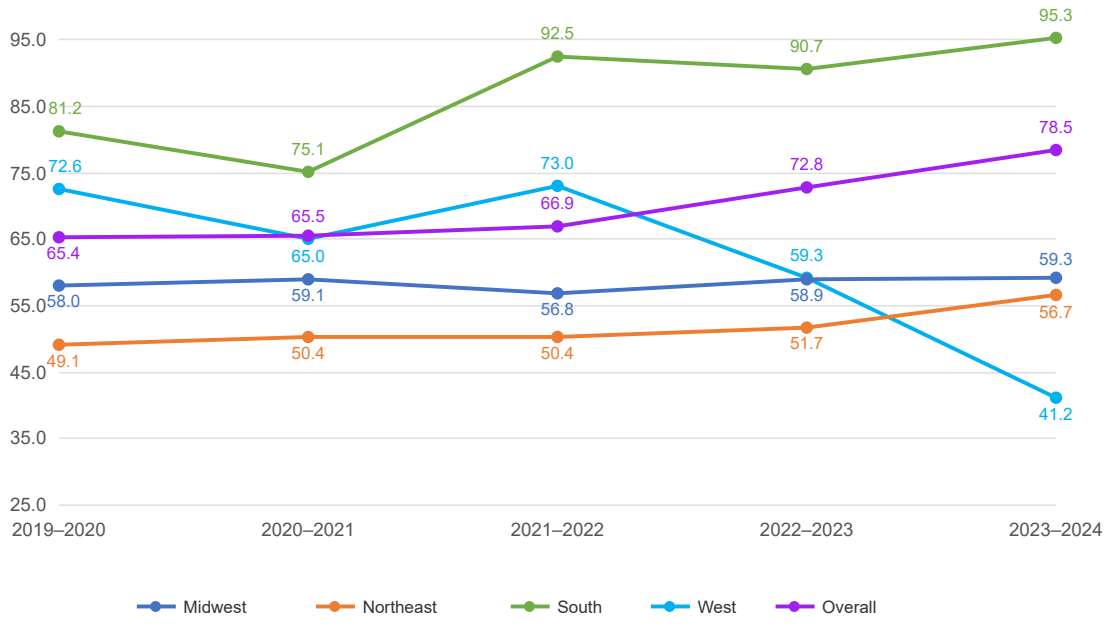
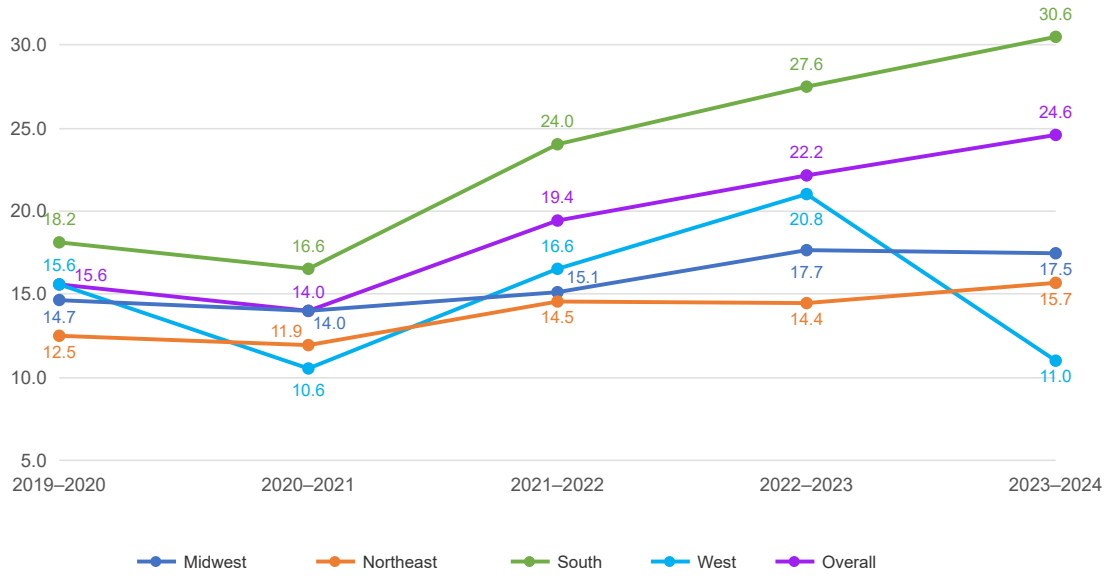


Figure 4

New Member Class Size by Region



Conclusion

After reviewing the data, the implication is clear among these trends: Strategies must balance scaling support for larger organizations. As these organizations continue to grow, their members will require greater support from headquarters and campuses. Campuses must intentionally invest in their different councils, which will include nuanced support for culturally based organizations, ensuring all students have access to community, belonging, and leadership opportunities that FSL can provide. Headquarters professionals must be aware of where their chapters are growing and allocate additional resources as necessary. However, they must also consider regional trends and contexts as they develop and implement programs to serve their growing membership.

The council and regional contexts provide additional insight into how and where FSL organizations are growing over time. With 5 years of existing data, the Scorecard can detect some trends within FSL. The practical value of the Scorecard will continue to increase as the number of participating campuses expands and as longitudinal data become available from more campuses submitting data across multiple years. Further, as time passes, more robust trend analyses can be conducted.

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Fundraising and Communications Knowledge Community

Story Selling: Why Impact Is the Heart of Student Affairs Fundraising

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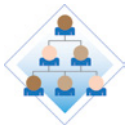

In the world of fundraising, few practices are as crucial as demonstrating impact. Donors do not just give to institutions; they give to stories, to people, and to change they can see. This is especially true in student affairs, where the transformative experiences provided to students can serve as some of the most compelling reasons to give. Yet without a strategic partnership between student affairs professionals and fundraising teams, the depth of that impact can be lost or diluted, a point emphasized by Rose et al. (2019) in *Student Affairs Fundraising: Raising Funds to Raise the Bar*, which highlights the need for intentional collaboration to maximize student-centered outcomes.

The key to successful fundraising in student affairs lies in a simple but powerful idea: **telling the story of our work**.

The Power of a Compelling Case

At its core, fundraising is about connection. It involves helping donors see themselves as part of a meaningful mission and showing them how their support can make a difference, as McDowell (2021) states. The most effective fundraising appeals are not transactional, they are relational.

In student affairs, the raw material for these connections is abundant. Student leaders growing through leadership programs, first-generation students finding community and support, mental health services helping students manage personal hurdles, and career centers launching students into meaningful employment are all examples of life-changing outcomes made possible through student affairs programming.

But if fundraisers cannot tell this story clearly and cohesively, it risks being overshadowed by more easily quantified academic or research-focused initiatives. Collaboration between student affairs professionals and advancement staff is not only beneficial but necessary to bring in funds for these critical programs.

Bridging the Gap Between Practice and Philanthropy

Student affairs professionals see the impact of their programs firsthand. They create critical moments of mentorship, connection, and personal development that lead to student success. However, although they understand their impact intuitively, they may not always translate that experience into language that resonates with donors.

On the other hand, although advancement professionals excel in building relationships, crafting persuasive messages, and driving donor engagement, they rely heavily on content from those who interface directly with students, or students themselves, to tell the story authentically.

Effective fundraising efforts emerge when these two groups work together. When advancement professionals are kept informed about student affairs initiatives, they can convey the impact to donors in a compelling way. Likewise, when student affairs staff have a foundational understanding of fundraising principles, they are more likely to share stories, outcomes, and data in ways that support philanthropic goals. This synergy is the central strategy used to educate potential donors on the importance of their giving.

Storytelling as Strategy

In *Storytelling for Grantseekers: A Guide to Creative Nonprofit Fundraising,* Clarke (2009) emphasized that storytelling is not just a communication tactic but a strategic framework for nonprofit fundraising. She argues that fundraising stories must move beyond surface-level narratives and instead "illustrate transformation," that is, show how lives were changed and not just how dollars were spent.

Clarke outlines storytelling techniques that align especially well with student affairs fundraising:

- Begin with the human experience—not just statistics.
- Provide a "before and after" experience to illustrate change.
- Integrate narrative and data seamlessly.
- Inspire emotion while backing it up with tangible results.

In a similar vein, Spiller (2018) introduced the concept of *story-selling*, emphasizing that authentic and persuasive storytelling is essential not only in commercial sales but also in any context where building trust and engaging an audience is critical. Story-selling focuses on the storyteller's ability to cut through informational clutter and form meaningful emotional connections, skills that are especially relevant in donor relations. By equipping professionals with the tools to create values-driven stories, story-selling aligns with the goals of advancement work in student affairs, where trust, authenticity, and impact drive donor engagement. These tools are most often seen with social media content or direct mail campaigns, but all of the following can be used to illustrate impact to external audiences.

Tools to Showcase Impact

To tell the story of student affairs effectively, student affairs professionals can leverage a wide range of tools and media that highlight outcomes and student experiences.

Student Testimonials

First-person accounts from students bring programs to life. Whether in the form of a quote, letter, or short video, student testimonials create immediate emotional resonance and humanize institutional efforts.

Images and Video

Visual storytelling can be just as powerful as written narratives. Photos from events, clips from programs in action, or student-led interviews all help convey energy and emotion.

Program Data

Data provide credibility. Tracking participation numbers, satisfaction rates, and short-term outcomes lends structure to the narrative and answers the common donor question, "What difference did this make?"

Longitudinal Outcomes

One of the strongest ways to show impact is to demonstrate lasting change. If student affairs programs contribute to higher retention, graduation, or postgraduation success, those results should be shared as part of donor communications.

Donor Engagement Events

Student affairs and advancement professionals can cohost events that give donors an inside look at student programs. These experiences foster relationships, demonstrate transparency, and help donors feel part of the work.

Building a Culture of Storytelling

Fundraising success depends on more than one great story—it relies on a culture where storytelling is routine, valued, and collaborative. To cultivate this culture, institutions should:

- Encourage communication between student affairs and advancement.
- Offer training for student affairs staff to identify and share impactful stories.
- Recognize and celebrate donor impact within student programs.
- Create feedback loops so donors are informed of outcomes related to their gifts.

As Clarke (2009) noted, storytelling is a skill that can be learned and refined over time. The more it is embedded in the daily practice of student affairs and fundraising, the more natural and effective it becomes. By investing in storytelling, as both Clarke (2009) and Spiller (2018) emphasized, student affairs professionals can ensure their work is not only visible but valued.

Why Impactful Storytelling Matters More Than Ever

Today's students face complex challenges: mental health struggles, economic pressures, identity exploration, and a rapidly changing world. Student affairs professionals play a critical role in helping them navigate these realities, but doing so often requires external resources.

Donors look for ways to make meaningful contributions. When institutions can clearly show how a gift to student affairs leads to tangible change, academic success, personal development, and career readiness, they provide donors with a reason to give and to continue giving.

Conclusion

At its best, student affairs is about transformation. It is about meeting students where they are and guiding them to where they want to be—equipped, confident, and connected. That transformation is a powerful story, and it is one worth telling again and again.

Fundraising in student affairs is not just about securing dollars; it is about building relationships, deepening engagement, and opening the door for donors to be part of something greater. And it all starts with a story, told well, told honestly, and told in partnership.

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Gender and Sexuality Knowledge Community

Transforming Institutional Resources and Programs Using a More Holistic Approach for LGBT+ Students

Gender and Sexuality Knowledge Community Contributors

Social Justice and Inclusion

Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2025), state government policy changes related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in higher education affect the availability or offering of DEI offices, training, and academic courses at institutions. From the removal of centers, resources, programs, and personnel affected the formal support structure and trust in institutions (Goldberg, 2024). Higher education professionals must adapt quickly to appropriately serve LGBT+ students.

This article connects theory with real-world research and practice to better address the growing concerns of LGBT+ students. Student development theory and gay/lesbian identity development theory are foundational for understanding certain aspects of the LGBT+ student experience. Research centered on LGBT+ student perspectives and experiences provides insight on how campus resources and programming affect academic and personal development. The recommendation emphasizes applying a transgressive teaching framework to a holistic approach for building trust and recognizing the whole self.

Context and Literature

Tinto (1988) theorized that a student's integration, or lack thereof, in an academic and a social system, whether formal or informal, directly affected their progression in goals and commitments such that a lack of integration, in either or both systems, could lead to a departure decision. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), a person's identity develops through seven vectors of development that are interconnected and can be progressed independent of each other to a certain degree. These vectors tend to have associated social elements. Establishing identity, one of the vectors, "involves growing awareness of competencies, emotions, and values, confidence in standing alone, and bonding with others, and moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem," and this includes addressing and forming sexual and gender identity (pp. 173; 184–188). Thus, an appropriate environment is necessary for LGBT+ students to develop their identity.

Through interviews with individuals ranging from college aged to middle aged, Kaufman and Johnson (2004) looked at "reflected appraisals and their importance for identity development and maintenance, the situated complexity of identity disclosure and maintenance, and the importance of romantic relationships for the development and maintenance of a gay or lesbian identity" (p. 816). Positive experiences reduced self-stigma surrounding a gay/lesbian identity and increased confidence and comfort in an interviewee's identity.

Different resources and programs make a college/university campus an appropriate environment for the positive experiences that our LGBT+ students need to explore themselves in a challenging yet supportive way. According to Sanford (1967), meaningful growth happens when a balance of challenge and support exists, whereas an imbalance, such as overwhelming challenges with no support, could lead to students feeling frustrated, vulnerable, and isolated.

From the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement, Feldman and BrckaLorenz (2024) highlighted differences in perceptions, access, and use of resources across LGBT+ groups; the availability and accessibility of LGBT+ friendly resources improved the overall well-being of LGBT+ students who used them. In addition, LGBT+ programs focused on academic and personal success can be a significant factor in a student's overall experience at an institution. For example, the establishment of an LGBT+ Living and Learning Community boosted LGBT+ students' "[sense of belonging,] connectedness to peers, staff, and faculty, and engagement in activities related to campus life" because it created a dedicated safe space where students freely and confidently explored themselves with guidance and support (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2024, pp. 380–383). With the removal of LGBT+ specific resources and programming, choosing to depart from an environment that discourages their identity and fails to support their necessary development is all but guaranteed.

Recommendations

If our LGBT+ students do not see us adjust to serve them with the remaining resources and programs, then they will feel devalued and demotivated to make their own change in our campus communities (Stuber et al., 2025). Higher education professionals must renew their courage to serve LGBT+ students under the current presidential administration, and formalized LGBT+ resources and programs would show LGBT+ students that they are valued in the institution's vision and mission. We recommend that higher education professionals lean into transgressive teaching because it "[engages] the entirety of each person's being, [acknowledges] the value of their experiences and perspectives, and connects with and to the potential for learning and teaching in a mutually constructed process of growth and empowerment" (McLaughlin, 2017, p. 1). Within student affairs, professionals can adopt elements of transgressive teaching to improve their non-LGBT+ resources and programming for better holistic care, and through this new approach, they can lessen the service disparity with mindful adjustments to accessibility, program design, and communication (Kilgo, 2020). Furthermore, recognition of different LGBT+ identities and visibility of LGBT+ student affairs professionals would reassure students that the support they receive comes from a place of authenticity (Feldman & BrckaLorenz, 2024). Therefore, fostering trust with LGBT+ students through active listening and engagement on a personal level is key to mitigating the erosion of trust, ensuring their sense of belonging and well-being in different student-facing areas, so they will feel connected and supported enough to persist rather than depart (McLaughlin, 2017).

Conclusion

We, the LGBT+ community, call on the higher education community to consider the broad impact of the removal of LGBT+ centers, resources, and programming. We recommend increasing the application of a holistic approach in any student-facing role and service to better serve LGBT+ students. Through this, we reaffirm and strengthen

a safe, inclusive environment, and we demonstrate our commitment to our LGBT+ students. Most importantly, we must treat our LGBT+ students with respect and dignity to allow them to openly flourish on campus. Together, we will restore trust in out communities and make them whole.

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International Education Knowledge Community

Crises as Opportunities: Facilitating Peace Building Through Student Affairs

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Leadership
Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

Higher education holds a unique position in fostering peace and understanding during times of global uncertainty. Its central mission is to address international problems for the benefit of all (Jakubik, 2022). For example, the Peace Research Institute of Oslo reported 61 armed conflicts in 36 countries in 2024. Traditional alliances, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, have weakened as new ones arise (Momtaz, 2025). In reaction to these conflicts, students on campuses worldwide are engaged in protests informed by news and social media, highlighting the relevance of higher education's role in these global matters.

Higher education's responsibility is to help address today's global crises, which offer both challenges and opportunities. Many now recognize that future leaders—in science, philosophy, law, business, education, and counseling—are found on college campuses. Shaping a better tomorrow requires us to move from dialogue and empathy to concrete, proactive solutions. To counteract the causes of war and conflict that threaten peace, we must consider all perspectives, listen actively, and engage in dialogue that promotes a deeper understanding of previously overlooked views.

The Moral Imperative of Higher Education

Peace, or its absence, has a direct impact on quality of life for all. Therefore, colleges and universities have both the challenge and opportunity to promote peace through creative, nonviolent methods as advocated by Galtung (2010). The moral imperative as Kohlberg (1981) suggests in Stage Six of his theory on moral development is that we pursue peace for all as individuals even if it comes with a personal cost. Scholars like Bernardo and Baranovich (2014) argue that higher education bridges theory and practice in peace studies by developing practical strategies for peacebuilding. For instance, they explored armed conflict in the Philippines through the lens of student affairs, focusing on leadership and responsibility. Similarly, Boyer's (1990) idea of the Just Community urges shared responsibility as global citizens, whereas student affairs theories, particularly Kohlberg's theory of moral development, akin to Kantian philosophy (Moody-Adams, 2025), emphasize responsibility for others and a wider sense of care.

Galtung suggests that peace requires addressing conflict effectively, not simply eliminating it (Ercoşkun, 2020). His perspective implies that although conflict is inevitable, we are responsible for managing it in ways that reduce harm. Colleges and universities provide a setting where students from diverse backgrounds interact daily inside and outside of class, learning from each other and their mentors. This environment is ideal for respectful conversations about current global events, including conflicts, with the goal of increasing understanding and generating ideas for ending those conflicts.

Student Affairs and Peacebuilding

Numerous student affairs organizations worldwide—including NASPA, IASAS, NASAP, ACPA, MENASA, and EucA—advance student development and well-being for broader societal benefit. Student development theory emphasizes justice, empathy, and dialogue, which are critical to peacebuilding. These principles are foundational to Kohlberg's (1981) and Gilligan's (1993) theories of moral development, as well as Mezirow's (2018) theory of transformative learning. When applied, these theories support peacebuilding by encouraging empathy and meaningful dialogue.

From Disdain to Dialogue

Although many are quick to outline the problems of discord and dissatisfaction on college campuses, few provide actionable ideas that can move us from expressing disdain to engaging in dialogue. There is limited recognition that a global leadership crisis is contributing to these issues. Reasons likely include recent attacks on academic freedom and freedom of speech on college campuses in the United States, fear of being deported for international students studying in the United States for arbitrary reasons (Jurecic, 2025), and the existence of authoritarian leadership in countries around the world. The net impact has had a chilling effect on dialogue due to fear of action from the U.S. government and from those abroad. Thus, there seems to be more disdain than dialogue.

Platforms for Global Dialogue

NASPA's International Symposium gathers student affairs practitioners globally. Although its main purpose is advancing student affairs, the event could also provide a platform for conversations about global conflict within higher education, allowing for sharing perspectives, fostering empathy, and exploring mutually agreeable solutions. In a world with frequent international conflicts—such as tensions between the United States and Canada—there is a pressing need for new approaches. Student affairs practitioners are well positioned to lead respectful, meaningful dialogue that addresses these challenges.

Getting Started With Peacebuilding

Bernardo and Baranovich (2014) advocated for starting peacebuilding by recognizing the harm in simply complying with or justifying ongoing conflicts. They emphasized the need to move beyond compliance and avoidance to address the root causes of conflict, such as competition for resources, poor communication, and unwillingness to engage with those who have different beliefs. Genuine

progress requires bringing parties together in environments with clear engagement rules, listening for understanding, and working toward acceptable solutions for all involved.

Although many things can go wrong, livelihoods and lives remain at risk as we defer to politicians who have not brokered peace globally. This is an opportunity for those in student affairs to lead, as Bernando and Baranovich (2014) suggested. By committing to dialogue and embracing our roles as facilitators, we can turn the myriad challenges we face that threaten our peaceful existence into lasting opportunities for peace. The steps we take today, guided by empathy and inclusion, have the potential to facilitate a more peaceful world for generations to come.

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Latinx/a/o Knowledge Community

Honoring 25 Years of the NASPA Latinx/a/o Knowledge Community

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Introduction

Since its founding in 2002, the NASPA LKC has played a vital role in the development of Latinx/a/o student affairs professionals. Approaching the 25-year milestone in 2027 invites reflection on past achievements, present commitments, and future possibilities.

This article charts the LKC's historical trajectory, highlighting defining moments of leadership, political action, and structural innovation. We also explore two key themes, Latinx/a/o leadership in student affairs and sociopolitical consciousness, before concluding with ofrendas, or offerings of critical reflection, for our community.

Historical Overview of the NASPA LKC

El Origen: A Gathering of Purpose (2002)

The LKC was established at the 2002 NASPA Annual Conference in Boston, initiated through the efforts of Dr. Laura Valdez and Dr. Salvador Mena. This founding meeting emphasized community building, advocacy, and mentorship. That same year, a sun-inspired logo designed by Dr. Terry Mena and artist Keith Parks symbolized the community's shared cultural values.

Support from allies, such as Gwen Dungy (past NASPA president and recipient of the first Amigo/Amiga Award in 2004–2005), helped the LKC root itself within NASPA and expand its influence. In addition, past Co-chair Dr. Sara Mata prioritized fundraising, and as a result, the LKC has a healthy endowment, which provides additional resources to support initiatives and members.

Building Community and Belonging (2007)

In 2007, the LKC introduced the Pre-Conference Institute during the NASPA/ACPA Joint Meeting in Orlando. Affinity spaces emerged: the Compadre Circle (formerly the Latino Male Summit), led by Dr. Dennis Camacho and colleagues, and the Comadre Circle, led by Dr. Susana Muñoz and a team of Latina leaders. These spaces fostered connection, reflection, and leadership development. In 2023, Dr. Nanette Vega led the LKC 20th-anniversary celebration, celebrating two decades of achievements and excellence. The event was held at the NASPA Conference in Boston with more than 200 attendees, including all past LKC chairs.

Political Consciousness and Action (2012)

In 2012, the LKC took a public stance against Arizona's SB 1070 anti-immigrant legislation by boycotting the NASPA Annual Conference, which was held in that state. Under the leadership of Dr. Michelle Espino and Dr. Juan Guardia, this act of resistance solidified the LKC's commitment to justice, solidarity, and community advocacy.

Structuring the Future (2014)

The LKC became the first NASPA knowledge community to adopt a formal strategic plan, laying a foundation for sustainable leadership development. It also formalized leadership nomination processes and gained representation on NASPA's inaugural Commission on Equity and Inclusion. Leaders during this period included Dr. Terry Mena (chair), Dr. Angela Batista (vice chair), and Dr. Joel Pérez (vice chair).

Escaleras: Developing Future Leaders (2015)

Launched in 2015 by Dr. Mary Jo Gonzales, Escaleras: Student Affairs Latina/o Leadership Institute addressed the underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o professionals in senior administrative roles. Hosted at the University of Rhode Island, this initiative created a cohort-based model with mentorship from senior leaders. A decade later, Escaleras remains a key leadership pipeline.

Moments of Transformation (2016)

Two major developments marked 2016. First, the LKC created its Leadership Manual and presented its first historical timeline: "Learning From Our Past, as We Move Toward Our Future." This institutional memory project was led by the History Committee and supported by key leaders of the LKC.

Second, a community-wide survey, led by Dr. Connie Cabello, Dr. Sandy Rodriguez and Aaron Miltenberger, initiated discussions around a potential name change to better reflect gender inclusivity. With 56% of 313 respondents supporting a change, the LKC renamed itself from "Latina/o" to Latinx/a/o—embracing intersectional identities and reaffirming its commitment to inclusion. The name change support was led by Dr. Bri Serrano and Dr. Eddie Martinez.

Scholarly Milestones (2018 and 2023)

In 2018, NASPA published *Latinx/a/os in Higher Education: Exploring Identity, Pathways, and Success*, edited by Dr. Angela E. Batista, Dr. Shirley M. Collado, and Dr. David Pérez II. This seminal text offered research-based insight into Latinx/a/o student and professional experiences in higher education. It expanded understanding of identity and success, becoming a vital scholarly resource for leadership and equity work. Many LKC members contributed to the publication, including Dr. Sofia Pertuz and Juan Carlos

Matos. In addition, every 2 years, the LKC continues to publish a manuscript in the KC Publication highlighting the importance of mentorship and the rich legacy of the LKC.

25 Years of LKC Leadership

The LKC has thrived because of its commitment to collective leadership rooted in cultural affirmation and shared purpose. We honor the 28 individuals who have served as national cochairs:

- 2002–2004: Dr. Salvador Mena & Dr. Laura Valdez
- 2004–2006: Dr. Jacob Diaz & Dr. Tonantzin Oseguera
- 2006–2008: Jason Casares & Dr. Clarybel Peguero
- 2008–2010: Alex Gonzalez & Adriana Alicea Rodriguez
- 2010–2012: Dr. Michelle Espino & Dr. Juan Guardia
- 2012–2014: Dr. Terry Mena & Dr. Nadia Palacios
- 2012-2014: Dr. Terry Mena & Dr. Angela Batista
- 2014–2016: Dr. Angela Batista & Dr. Joel Pérez
- 2016–2018: Dr. Joel Pérez & Dr. Sara Mata
- 2018–2020: Dr. Sandra Rodriguez & Dr. Maria Genao-Homs
- 2020–2022: Dr. Martha Enciso & Dr. Delmy M. Lendof
- 2022–2024: Dr. Evelyn Ortega & Dr. Freddie Sánchez
- 2024–2026: Dr. Nanette Vega & Juan Carlos Matos
- 2026–2028: Dr. Bri Serrano & Dr. Reggie Robles

Key Themes in LKC's Legacy

Latinx/a/o Leadership in Higher Education

The LKC has developed multiple leadership pathways, from early-career mentorship to senior-level training programs such as *Escaleras*. Leadership development has remained deeply rooted in community values, cultural knowledge, and relational praxis such as the *Consejos y Consuelos* series, and *Blooming*, which has been led by emerging LKC Leaders such as Hugo Yepez in collaboration with the Gender and Sexuality KC.

Sociopolitical Consciousness and Action

The LKC's legacy of advocacy encompasses political resistance (e.g., the 2012 Arizona boycott), support for inclusive practices (e.g., the shift to Latinx/a/o), and a focus on immigration and racial justice. These efforts reflect an ongoing commitment to standing with marginalized communities and challenging systemic inequities.

Ofrendas of Critical Reflection

As we celebrate 25 years of leadership, we offer the following ofrendas—critical reflection questions—for current and future LKC members:

1. How can we ensure that the LKC continues to be a space for intergenerational femtorship, mentorship, queertorship, and leadership?
2. What does it mean to lead with cultural humility in an evolving Latinx/a/o community? (i.e., leading a community that is expansive beyond racio-ethnic identity)
3. How do we continue to respond to political, social, and educational shifts affecting our communities?
4. In what ways can the LKC be a model of intersectional leadership across NASPA and higher education?
5. What new structures are needed to support the next generation of Latinx/a/o scholars and administrators?

Conclusion

As we honor 25 years of the NASPA Latinx/a/o Knowledge Community, we reaffirm our commitment to equity, cultural affirmation, and collective leadership. From its origins as a grassroots initiative to its current national impact, the LKC continues to foster the development of Latinx/a/o professionals who transform higher education. Let this milestone be not just a celebration of the past but a call to action for the future.

Men & Masculinities Knowledge Community

Nurturing Wards of the State: Empowering Foster Care Youth to Higher Education

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Advising & Supporting
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In my mid-20s, I became the legal guardian of a 16-year-old cisgender male teenager. He felt his social workers and family's advice and encouragement unwarranted in preparation for being an independent adult outside of social services and welfare systems. Policies and procedures that govern the social services system allowed him a level of autonomy and freedom in his decisions without consequence. An example of this freedom is allowing him to travel to family without supervision which allowed for few experiences with drugs and alcohol on the journey to the intended family home. The family did not have influence on choices being made by him either which led to familial confrontations and eventually the social worker transporting him back to the group home to repeat the same actions by the start of the following weekend. This experience, combined with years of other observations of foster care children and those who were not in traditional home settings, inspired me to ask the question, "How can we help boys in foster care advance their education?"

Foster care is a term used to describe instances where a youth is removed from the care of their biological parents and placed in the care of extended family or other community members by the legal system (Kirk et al., 2011). Kirk et al. (2011) found that 46% of foster care youth are with relatives, and 23% have been placed in group homes, which typically have five or more other foster children of all ages. Reunification, allowing foster care youth to return to their parents, occurs at a rate of 55%, on average. Only about half of foster youth possess a high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED), compared to 70% of non-foster care students who graduate with their high school diplomas (Wolanin, 2005; Unrau et al., 2012). Black and brown children receive less support for postsecondary education from family and educators because of noninclusive curriculum and pedagogy, financial illiteracy, and lack of socialization through mentorship (Elliot & Fitzgerald, 2023; Gross et al., 2020; Osgood et al., 2010). For example, students that were a part of foster

care may find navigating postsecondary systems like financial aid overwhelming considering the language and requirements that can be complex. As a result of the minimal support and mentorship for postsecondary education, higher numbers of Black and Hispanic men in the foster care system have difficulty finding employment (Fuligni & Hardway, 2004). This article focuses on the support available to foster care students, and their self-concepts, as they approach high school graduation and transition into higher education

Foster Youth Support

As foster care students mature, they must receive support from peers, family, and other adults who can provide resources and guidance for a smooth transition into adulthood and higher education (Osgood et al., 2010). Caregivers of children in foster care often believe that planning for careers and resources once the student becomes an adult is the social worker's responsibility (Maseko, 2023). However, it is not their sole responsibility to aid the foster care student; rather, the guardian and all the other adults in that person's life, including faculty and staff, must share the job of assisting the student once they have enrolled at an institution of higher education. Student affairs professionals have been tasked with ensuring a positive experience for students from diverse backgrounds (Murphy, 2021). Financial barriers, including the family's inability to contribute or understand financial aid processes and options may also prevent these students' from attending postsecondary schools (Gross et al., 2020). Many administrators and faculty are unaware of the barriers to entry to the postsecondary institutions for these students. Access to coaching, financial aid, and housing has been established as a factor contributing to the success of foster care students in postsecondary education (Elliot & Fitzgerald, 2023). Some universities have implemented programs to assist students who have experienced the foster care system (Gross et al., 2020). For example, the University of California, Riverside, has implemented the Office of Foster Youth Support Services, which aids students who are in foster care and aged out of the foster care system, are considered financially independent, and are ages 16 to 26 while enrolled at the university. This supportive program offers priority housing and registration to the students involved and eligibility for additional financial awards (University of California, Riverside, n.d.). The demographics regarding whether a student was in foster care are privileged information; a student would have to self-identify to participate in this program.

Self-Concept

Mentorship is a vital support for foster care youth as they transition into adulthood (Massinga & Pecora, 2004). This guidance is imperative because many foster care students face ever-changing settings (i.e., home, school, peer relationships, and guardian relationships), which may lower their self-confidence (Voget, 2021). Lowered self-esteem in turn affects their feelings of belonging and their ability to succeed in college (Hail, 2023; Massinga, 2004). A team that includes biological parents, guardians, caseworkers, social workers, attorneys, and other court-appointed personnel can help these students as they transition through the various new environments. However, this team does not typically include educators or others who represent the student's educational interest (Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2021). The lack of representation from secondary school administrators who can review the student's academic file and are authorized to represent those interests in judicial proceedings would be beneficial in providing needed support, coaching, and the opportunity to establish resources to overcome barriers in accessing postsecondary education. Life skills training and preparation are crucial in equipping foster care students with the necessary skills to manage their affairs and livelihood (Massinga & Pecora, 2004). Some of the higher risks that foster care children may experience are homelessness, substance abuse, and low educational attainment (Maseko, 2023; Osgood et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Recommended amendments to current policies and practices in public services offered to foster care recipients nearing the age-out period include providing scholarships to help students attend college and involving teachers, administration, and the biological family in the planning and transition of care. Once the student has aged out of foster care, the support for the undergraduate student lies with their family and the community built on the college campus. The minimal support can make transitioning into higher education difficult and starting with evaluating their completed K-12 education and offering guidance on pathways and options for postsecondary education or career technical education should be composed at the secondary education level. Foster care youth in college may be more receptive to student services and faculty, more motivated in their studies, and more self-reliant (Unrau et al., 2012). The NASPA competencies of social justice and inclusion promote the opportunity for higher education administration and faculty to support students who have fewer familial supports and may not be familiar with campus resources. There needs to be a promotion of campus organizations and groups that would be beneficial in aiding students that were involved in foster care students understanding the policies and practices that govern various departments such as registration, financial aid etc. Institutions should garner partnerships and opportunities that allow students that have aged out of foster care to benefit from mentorship, especially in preparation for life after the degree is obtained and determining the next steps in building their career and life.

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Military Connected Knowledge Community

Planting Seeds for Success: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Supporting Veteran and Military-Affiliated College Students Through Six Dimensions of Wellness

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Veteran and military-affiliated students bring unique and complex experiences to higher education, which requires a more nuanced approach than traditional student support models (Melidona & Wright, 2024). Standard college resources, including academic counseling and financial aid, often fall short of addressing the needs of this population, which can involve navigating trauma, transitioning to civilian life, and redefining their identity. A more comprehensive, trauma-informed, and wellness-centered framework is necessary to ensure their holistic success.

A trauma-informed approach is critical for supporting veteran students because their trauma may not be limited to combat exposure. It can also stem from the rigors of enlistment, prolonged separation from family, and the loss of autonomy inherent in military service. Institutions can design policies and practices that acknowledge this diversity of experience to avoid retraumatization, particularly within administrative or appeals processes that can feel bureaucratic and unforgiving (Kelley et al., 2013; Shalka, 2024). This approach recognizes the lasting impact of military culture and its clash with the more self-directed, civilian culture of higher education. To bridge this military to civilian transition, practical and accessible support recognizes that veteran students often prefer in-person support, structured guidance, and connections with peers who can relate to their military experiences.

When a trauma-informed approach is guided by the National Wellness Institute's (2023) six dimensions of wellness: emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual, it functions as a comprehensive framework for addressing the

whole student's needs. These dimensions align with broader institutional goals, such as fostering personal development, civic engagement, and overall student success often found in higher education mission statements. By addressing these multiple aspects of well-being, colleges can help veteran students thrive academically and personally.

The Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program exemplifies this approach. As a national initiative under the Veterans Health Administration's Office of Mental Health, VITAL aims to provide student veterans with seamless access to care. The program at the Jesse Brown Veterans Administration Medical Center, for instance, employs a dedicated team of clinical professionals and peer specialists to connect students with resources from the VA Health Administration, VA Benefits Administration, and the broader college community. This kind of outreach is often initiated through less stigmatizing entry points, such as addressing questions about educational benefits, rather than an intake that begins with assessing mental health or posttraumatic stress. This approach allows veterans to first test the reliability of direct support before engaging in more vulnerable conversations.

Beyond specialized programs, institutional practices can be tailored to the veteran experience. As highlighted by Ellison et al. (2016) and Barmak et al. (2023), essential practices include providing dedicated spaces for veteran students, requiring specific new student orientation for veterans, and offering one-on-one appointments to address individual needs, such as transfer credits derived from a Joint Services Transcript. A designated veteran student center or lounge could provide an important physical space for connection and support, making services more accessible and effective by meeting veterans where they are.

Trauma-informed work requires a deep understanding of the strengths and limitations of campus- and community-based resources that specialize in addressing veteran and military affiliated needs. How each may be used to enhance one another can be clearly communicated through a comprehensive intake process. This goal is achievable only when intensive effort is made to eliminate information silos and runaround commonly found in higher education (Kerr et al., 2020). The goal among professionals charged with supporting this population is to establish positive rapport through active engagement with administrative leaders within and beyond higher education to establish timely outreach and streamline services based on an integrated intake that reduces redundancy and stress. Maxient, a case management software system, has proven to be an effective platform to achieve this goal.

Building trust is foundational to any effective veteran support system. Over time, consistent and reliable on-campus support from programs like VITAL can help veterans overcome initial hesitancy and distrust. Sustained engagement not only helps veterans access a broader array of services but also fosters peer ambassadors who encourage others to seek support based on their positive experiences.

One of the most significant outcomes of consistent, dedicated support is the development of self-advocacy and self-determination skills. These skills are not typically cultivated during a military career, which emphasizes collective action and adherence to a strict hierarchy. However, these skills are essential for a successful transition to civilian life. By teaching student veterans how to advocate for their own needs and rights, college programs (such as those offered by disability resource, academic enrichment, career or counseling services, and civic engagement) and leadership opportunities (available through student government, student organizations, and intramurals) can empower them to embrace a new sense of autonomy and confidence.

The long-term goal of veteran support efforts is to address the six dimensions of wellness comprehensively. Through an open-door policy and collaboration with campus partners, colleges can integrate VA, campus, and community resources

to provide coordinated support. A social work-informed lens, characterized by empathy, respect, and empowerment, creates a safe environment where veterans can navigate their unique challenges. Streamlining the intake process for student veterans by integrating support services from the VA, the college, and the community is highly beneficial. Simplifying access to resources for veterans allows them to discover all their options in a unified manner, while also highlighting the collaboration between the institution and external stakeholders.

A trauma-informed, wellness-centered approach helps institutions truly serve veteran and military-affiliated students by creating spaces where their stories and experiences can be shared and their strengths can be enhanced. Veterans bring invaluable qualities like discipline, resilience, and problem-solving skills to higher education. By providing consistent support and nurturing partnerships, colleges can plant the seeds for success, equipping students with the skills and resources they need to achieve holistic well-being and paving the way for a successful transition into civilian life and academic achievement. This comprehensive framework benefits not only veteran students but also enriches the entire academic community through their unique perspectives and leadership.

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Orientation, Transition, and Retention Knowledge Community

Bridging the Transition: Orientation as a Catalyst for Graduate and Professional Student Well-Being and Success

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In the field of orientation, transition, and retention (OTR), the focus is naturally on the incoming undergraduate students; however, the graduate and professional students often fall through the cracks. The mindset that graduate students may have already experienced college and therefore require less support must shift because they face many of the same challenges as undergraduates (Hullinger & Hogan, 2014). Graduate and professional student orientation programming is most successful when OTR professionals understand and address the unique needs of this population (Briant-Spratling & Valdovinos, 2022). To provide effective programming, it is important to first understand who today's graduate students are and the challenges they face.

Today's Graduate and Professional Student

Graduate and professional students represent a highly diverse population across demographics, enrollment status, and academic programs, creating a unique challenge for OTR professionals. In the fall of 2023, graduate enrollment was predominantly female (59%) with significant racial and ethnic diversity, comprising approximately 60% full-time students. Programs in health care, law, business, and education saw the largest enrollments (Lanier et al., 2024; Okahana et al., 2020). Beyond these statistics, this population encompasses a diverse range of life experiences that differ significantly from those of their undergraduate counterparts (Guentzel & Nesheim, 2006).

These differences shape student needs. Challenges that graduate students face are often heightened by work, family, and financial pressures—for instance, balancing full-time jobs while taking classes or relying solely on student loans when working is not an option (Evans et al., 2018; Webber & Burns, 2020). In 2020, nearly one-quarter experienced food insecurity, over a third faced housing insecurity, and average debt reached $80,000 to $100,000 (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; Mallinson, 2020; Webber & Burns, 2020). Mental health concerns are also significant because graduate and professional students are six times more likely than the general population to experience anxiety and depression (Evans et al., 2018). These realities highlight the crucial role of OTR professionals in fostering a sense of belonging, which has a profound impact on well-being and persistence (Strayhorn, 2012), as well as sharing campus resources to support student success.

Considerations for Graduate and Professional Orientation and Transition Programs

Effective orientation for graduate and professional students requires an intentional approach that extends beyond the traditional model. Orientation should also be used to build connections among peers and the institution. One effective strategy is engaging current students as orientation leaders. As much as OTR professionals know about the student experience, upper-level students are best positioned to give an authentic insight into their program and provide realistic tips for success (Briant-Spratling & Valdovinos, 2022). Observing how their peers navigate campus can help build a new student's sense of connection.

Equally important is connecting students with campus resources through intentional collaborations with campus partners to infuse the socialization process with opportunities to learn how the campus will support their success as a student (Eberle et al., 2022). Within this is an opportunity to create space for family involvement, which can be especially impactful, since students in demanding fields such as law and medicine are more likely to seek support and access resources when their families are informed and engaged (Organ et al., 2016; Selvaraj & John, 2020). Families can be engaged in a variety of ways, including panels, resource fairs, and socials to gain tools to support their students.

With a growing distance learner population, well-designed online modules can set students up for success by providing information about academic expectations, campus resources, and important skills such as time management and even basic citation training (Yao & Garcia, 2022). Although online modules are an essential part of onboarding for online students, these modules can also be used for residential students as a repository for resources and policies that students, and potentially families, can reference.

Finally, there is a growing trend to include extended or reorientation programming to provide opportunities for students to build confidence, resilience, and belonging (Higginbotham & Mastrogiovanni, 2019). Orientation is often described as a "fire hose of information," leaving new students overwhelmed. Through reorientation programs, OTR professionals can distill the initial experience down to the most pressing information. Information regarding second-year curriculum, internships, and board exam study strategies can be presented at a time when students are ready to receive that information.

Conclusion

A misconception persists that graduate and professional students are fully prepared to begin their programs because most have already completed their undergraduate study (Pontius & Harper, 2006). In reality, they report similar fears and anxieties to undergraduates during this transition, and orientation programs can help alleviate this problem (Hullinger & Hogan, 2014). It is OTR professionals' responsibility to design programming that recognizes and supports the needs of graduate and professional students.

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Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention, Education, and Response Knowledge Community

An Age of AI and Manifested Masculinities Toward Violent Ends: The Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence

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Narrow conceptions of masculinity and their negative impact on men, boys, and society are not new. After the COVID-19 pandemic, discussion of an epidemic of loneliness, depression, and other mental well-being concerns also increased. Men are particularly vulnerable because they often eschew professional mental health support as being antithetical to a masculine ideal (Mokhwelepa & Sumbane, 2025). Suicide rates for U.S. men are 3.5 times higher than for women, with a recent study demonstrating that high traditional masculinity, competitiveness, emotional restriction, and aggression are major factors (Coleman et al., 2020). Promundo's "Man Box" study with young men (defined as ages 18 to 30) in the United States affirmed an overwhelming association between harmful, restrictive masculine norms and poor health-related behaviors (Reichert & Nelson, 2020). Young men were more than twice as likely to have thought about suicide in the past month, three times more likely to report binge drinking, and more likely to have been in a traffic accident and to report depressive symptoms. Similarly, well-established literature crosscuts multiple academic disciplines related to sexual violence. What has emerged as a new topic of interest for student affairs practitioners is how these concerns intersect in new(er) forms of technology. This article addresses how online spaces such as the "manosphere" and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies affect both the resurgence of restrictive masculinity ideals and the perpetuation of violence against women and femme-identified individuals. The article also suggests some ways in which student affairs practitioners can resist these trends and offer opportunities for healthy self-development to our male and masculine-identifying students.

Contemporary Masculinity

Hypermasculinity posits that men must dominate over other genders and demonstrate their power openly and provocatively. This form of masculinity posits that traits such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, physical strength, toughness/invulnerability, emotional coolness or control, and being heterosexual are necessary for others to consider the individual a "real man" (Wedgwood et al., 2022). What results is an overly rigid conception of masculinity with young men especially vulnerable. High school and college aged men who overemphasize their masculinity may demonstrate increased aggression, heightened risk taking, and low academic achievement (Zernechel & Perry, 2017). This pressure to conform to a rigid view of masculinity does not usually result in a lasting sense of pride or accomplishment for that individual but instead an inherently fragile framework of performative gender that illustrates how tenuous the performance of this version of masculinity often is (Stanaland, 2025). Despite these pitfalls, a recent report highlights in the past 6 to 8 years a growing embrace of this version of masculinity in the United States, with most men (63%) indicating that they wish they were more masculine (Gupta et al., 2025).

Intersection of Masculinity and Technology

In an era for men marked by increased loneliness and heightened financial pressures (Gupta et al., 2025), many men turn to online spaces for community. One online space touted as a safe haven for today's men is the manosphere—a collection of websites and forums in which hypermasculine, misogynistic, and anti-feminist views prevail. Topics discussed range from "looksmaxxing" strategies to make oneself more conventionally attractive to "pick-up artists" promoting strategies for seducing women. In this online space, women and girls are villainized for practicing bodily autonomy, "rejecting" men sexually, and choosing not to be submissive. Manosphere ideology normalizes gender-based violence, leading to devastating consequences for women and girls (United Nations Secretary General, 2024).

Today's technological advancements provide myriad opportunities for causing harm. Expanded app functionality, AI, and increasingly advanced digital technologies can be misused to track and harass others. Deepfakes, AI-generated photos and videos, replicate an individual's likeness and present an entirely new threat to bodily autonomy, whereby artificially made explicit photos and videos can be created and distributed without a person's knowledge or consent. Deepfake videos can cause substantial negative impacts to the individuals targeted, such as damage to the victim's reputation or mental distress accompanying a violation of bodily autonomy (Hancock & Bailenson, 2021). If men and boys do not approach the use of AI with a critical eye, the technology has the potential to reinforce attitudes and behaviors that promote gender-based violence.

Considerations for the Future

Is there hope? The short answer is no and yes. AI and other emerging technologies are widely available, with no reset button, although that does not prevent adding necessary guardrails. Despite tech companies' wish to remain profitable, legislators, commercial partners, and investors can voice the need for redirection and better control of these new technologies. This would have a cascading effect on all of society, including higher education.

We also must include educators to prioritize accountability for those perpetrating harm. People do not simply become abusers in a vacuum; they learn predatory behaviors and are enabled by others. K–12 schools must create sequenced learning around boundaries, consent, and sexual violence that include technology-facilitated abuse. Student affairs practitioners must continue to uplift programming, prevention education, and support services that amplify messages of affirmative consent, bodily autonomy, respect, and inclusivity.

Although emerging technologies can bring about new opportunities for connection and support, they can also be exploited to further abuse others. As student affairs practitioners, we are limited in our ability to

affix guardrails to AI, but we are positioned to create spaces where we can provide students the tools and resources to engage with this new media in ways that are respectful and understanding of the broader societal implications.

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Socioeconomic and Class Issues in Higher Education Knowledge Community

Venturing Beyond: How Institutions Can Ease the Transition for Students With Foster Care Experience

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Some matriculating students may view college as an expectation or formality; however, for those with foster care histories, a college acceptance is a meaningful milestone with the power to transform their lives. Although all college-going students should be able to revel in the excitement of starting their higher education journey, students with these backgrounds may face distinct challenges and adversities. Based on research and personal experiences, this article provides practical recommendations for institutions committed to supporting these students. This population is often associated with first-generation and nontraditional students, and research indicates they face a multitude of obstacles. Moreover, as their intersecting identities usually create a confluence of difficulties, higher education institutions must be prepared to provide students from this frequently overlooked population with the best opportunities to succeed. This overview explains how higher education institutions can enhance the access, matriculation, retention, and graduation rates of these deserving young adults.

Meeting Students Where They Are: Reimagining Recruitment and Outreach

Traditional college recruitment strategies often assume that prospective students have a "nuclear" family structure, reliable internet access, and the ability to visit campus (Okpych et al., 2025). For youth in foster care or with histories of foster youth, these assumptions rarely hold true. Admission offices and college recruiters must fundamentally rethink their outreach by going directly where students are. That is, recruiters and universities must establish partnerships with foster care support agencies and visit group homes, independent living programs, juvenile justice centers, and community-based organizations that serve and support these youth. Universities and personnel must be proactive and show students that colleges genuinely want them.

Beyond physical presence, institutions must create more awareness about specialized campus programs designed to support students with foster care experience. Many eligible students never apply for available resources simply because they are not aware of these programs. Marketing materials, campus tours, and recruitment conversations should explicitly highlight support services, mentorship opportunities, and dedicated spaces for students from foster care backgrounds. This visibility sends a powerful message that these students belong and that the institution has intentionally prepared for their arrival.

Creating Identity-Affirming Spaces and Representation

Identity-affirming opportunities and departments should be woven throughout the campus fabric. Students with foster care experience need to see themselves reflected in the campus community, particularly in positions of leadership and authority. Those who hold visible leadership roles across campus departments signal to students from foster care backgrounds that their success is possible. Representation matters profoundly for students navigating the numerous challenges of foster care history and racial and intersecting identities in postsecondary education spaces. Black youth and LGBTQ+ individuals are often overrepresented in the foster care system (Tuyishime et al., 2025) and need spaces where they can feel a sense of belonging on campus. This includes establishing dedicated programs or resource centers specifically for students with experience in foster care and homelessness (Skobba et al., 2023). These spaces provide community, reduce isolation, and offer specialized support that acknowledges the journey these students have traveled. Furthermore, peer mentorship programs that connect current students with foster care experience to incoming students can create invaluable networks of understanding and support that traditional mentorship models may not provide.

Addressing Basic Needs: Housing and Food Security

The transition to college presents additional challenges for students from foster care because they often age out of the system when they begin college, so they frequently encounter barriers related to basic needs (Amechi, 2023; Johnson, 2020). Unlike most peers who have stability at home and can return to their family during breaks, students with foster care experience often have nowhere to go when the residential halls close (Johnson, 2020; Skobba et al., 2023). It is important for institutions to develop year-round housing solutions that allow students to remain on campus during winter, spring, and summer breaks. One solution can be temporary/emergency housing that bridges the gap in transitional residential hall availability.

Food insecurity represents another critical barrier that institutions must address (Johnson, 2020; Okpych et al., 2025). Campus food pantries, meal voucher programs, and expanded meal plan options for students with financial constraints can alleviate the stress of food scarcity. However, these resources must be marketed in ways that reduce stigma and ensure accessibility. Institutions should also examine whether their existing meal plan structures accommodate

students who cannot rely on family financial support and consider offering flexible payment options or scholarship programs designated for meal plans.

Academic Exploration and Support

Students with foster care experience may lack familial and community guidance that helps many college students select majors and navigate academic pathways. Without parents or guardians to discuss career options, these students benefit enormously from robust major exploration programs during their first year. Institutions should provide structured first-year experience opportunities to investigate various fields of study through shadowing experiences, informational interviews with professionals, and low-stakes exploratory courses that allow students to sample different disciplines before committing to a major.

Academic advising is a crucial resource that contributes to the success of this population (Gamez & Lopez, 2021; Randolph & Thompson, 2017). Advisors working with students from foster care backgrounds must understand the intersecting challenges these students face, from housing instability to financial uncertainty to potential trauma histories. Rather than simply reviewing degree requirements, advisors should take a holistic approach that considers how life circumstances affect academic progress. Institutions might consider assigning specialized advisors or case managers who maintain smaller caseloads, thus allowing for the deeper relationships and more frequent check-ins that support retention and success.

Tutoring services, study skills workshops, and academic coaching should be readily available and actively promoted to students with foster care experience (Gamez & Lopez, 2021; Geiger et al., 2018). Many of these students attended multiple high schools because of placement changes, so they may have educational gaps that will require additional academic support in college. Normalizing the use of these resources and integrating them into students' first-year experiences can prevent academic struggles from escalating into crises.

Connecting to Resources Beyond Campus Boundaries

Colleges and universities exist within broader communities, and institutions should actively facilitate connections between students and resources in the surrounding area. This includes additional educational opportunities, health care providers, mental health services, legal aid organizations, employment, and community organizations (Gamez & Lopez, 2021). Many students with foster care experience are unaware of connections to community resources that their peers might learn about through family networks.

Partnerships with community agencies can create pipelines for internships, part-time employment, and postgraduation opportunities while students are still enrolled. These connections serve dual purposes by providing immediate support and building the professional networks that students will need as they move toward independence and career development. Colleges should maintain updated resource directories and employ staff members who specialize in connecting students to both on-campus and off-campus support systems.

A Collective Commitment

Supporting students with foster care experience requires more than isolated programs or well-intentioned efforts (Johnson, 2020; Okpych et al., 2025). It demands a comprehensive, institution-wide, community-wide commitment to addressing the multifaceted needs of a population that has often been underserved and overlooked. From the moment admissions recruiters extend outreach to vulnerable youth through the day students cross the graduation stage, every touchpoint matters. By implementing these practical strategies around recruitment, representation, basic needs, academic support, and community connection, institutions can transform the college experience for students whose resilience

has already carried them further than many imagined possible. These young adults deserve institutions that match their determination with equally committed support systems. When colleges get this right, they do not just change individual lives—they interrupt cycles of disadvantage and create new possibilities for future generations.

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Student Affairs Partnering With Academic Affairs Knowledge Community

Beyond Support: Leveraging Academic- and Student Affairs Partnerships to Boost Student Success

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When higher education professionals talk about "student success," it is often framed around quantifiable factors such as test scores, grade point averages, or retention rates. Yet any seasoned practitioner knows success is rarely a simple metric or straight path—rather, it is the sum of countless classroom moments, advising sessions, cocurricular experiences, and the invisible scaffolding of care that holds students up when they stumble (Weatherton & Schussler, 2021).

That is why collaboration between student affairs (SA) and academic affairs (AA) is no longer just "nice to have"—it is a necessity, an essential ingredient in the formula for student success. This truth hits right at the heart and mission of the Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs (SAPAA) Knowledge Community (KC). By serving as a hub for dialogue, practice sharing, and professional development, the KC demonstrates that cross-functional partnerships do not just help departments and campus personnel; they also provide support and infrastructure that fuels student success by dismantling silos, integrating curriculum, and creating conditions for optimized learning.

Breaking Down the Silos

Walk across any college campus and you will quickly sense the divide. AA offices anchor one part of campus, often in imposing buildings filled with faculty, deans, and classrooms. SA is placed elsewhere—in residence halls, advising centers, and student unions where the "out-of-classroom" learning happens, at least theoretically.

But students do not experience their lives in silos or separated systems. College life occurs in every nook and cranny of campus, whether online or in person. Breakthroughs happen in chemistry labs and in late-night conversations with one's resident advisor. Students learn *who they are* in history class, through music and art exhibits, and while leading campus clubs. Indeed, learning is seamless and cuts across academic and social divides. The same should be true for the professionals and partnerships that provide the services sustaining their success.

Consider this: A student struggling in biology may not need academic tutoring, although that is important. They may need stress management strategies, peer mentoring, or food security assistance through a campus pantry because it is difficult to *pass the test* when you are stressed, lonely, or hungry. Without coordination across SA and AA, those basic needs risk falling through the cracks. With collaboration, however, students receive holistic care—and a far greater chance of success.

Breaking Barriers at a Small Liberal Arts College

When a liberal arts college in the Midwest noticed that science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors had higher dropout rates, they launched a partnership between faculty and student affairs staff. Together, they created "Success Pods" pairing faculty advisors with residence life coordinators. Success Pods are small, high-touch cohorts where STEM faculty link arms with residence life staff to track students' progress, identify barriers early, and intervene before "wrestle becomes withdrawal." In practice, weekly touchpoints, shared data, and coordinated nudges make students feel seen, supported, and heard. Dropout rates dropped by 12% in just 3 years.

Partnerships as Leadership Labs

One overlooked benefit of SA-AA partnerships is how they function as leadership laboratories for higher education practitioners.

When SA and AA professionals collaborate on shared projects—say, (re)designing a first-year seminar or creating a living-learning community—they are forced to stretch beyond their typical comfort zones (Strayhorn, 2019). That stretch builds muscle in skills that are indispensable for leadership:

- **Communication.** Bridging disciplinary jargon and unit-specific cultures requires clarity and empathy.
- **Strategic Thinking.** Aligning student services with academic goals fosters a campus-wide view of student success.
- **Change Management.** Collaboration often means reimagining entrenched processes, navigating resistance, and championing innovation.

These experiences don't just support students—they expand professional horizons, strengthen cross-functional understanding, and improve institutional effectiveness.

Leadership in Action

> *At a large public university, student affairs leaders teamed with faculty to design a "First-Year Futures" program. Faculty embedded career modules into general education classes, and SA staff ran reflection workshops incorporating free, online versions of standardized tools like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Learning Styles Inventory, and an abbreviated StrengthsQuest. Faculty gained skills in applied learning design; SA staff acquired assessment expertise. Both groups walked away as stronger educators and leaders.*

From Cocurricular to Curricular—and Back Again

The most exciting SA-AA collaborations blur the line between "cocurricular" and "curricular" experiences. They treat every student encounter, inside or outside the classroom, as a chance for development and growth.

Take living-learning communities, where faculty integrate coursework with residential life programming. Or consider career readiness initiatives that embed internships and service learning into academic requirements while student affairs staff provide reflection workshops, intergroup dialogue, and mentoring.

At one institution, AA advisors worked with SA leaders to design a holistic "Passport to Success" for first-year students. Faculty wove mentoring checkpoints into syllabi, and student life professionals organized peer-led workshops on navigating campus resources. The result? Higher retention rates, stronger engagement, and—perhaps most importantly—a culture where students felt no one was left behind, a true *sense of belonging* (Strayhorn & Johnson, in press).

Building Professional Learning Communities

Collaboration is not only about initiatives, it is also about cultivating professional learning communities among practitioners themselves.

The SAPAA KC provides a model. Through webinars, conference sessions, and collaborative projects, the KC offers professionals across divisions a chance to share strategies, troubleshoot challenges, and learn from each other. These networks help practitioners see beyond their local campus contexts and recognize patterns across higher education.

Strategies for Cultivating Strong Partnerships

So, what does it take to build partnerships that endure beyond a single project or person? Successful collaborations share a few common threads:

1. **Shared Goals.** Start with a common definition of success—retention, graduation, equity, or student well-being. Shared purpose creates momentum.
2. **Cross-Functional Teams.** Include voices from both sides of the house—faculty, staff, and students—so initiatives reflect the full student experience.
3. **Integrated Assessment.** Measure outcomes that cut across academic and student life (e.g., engagement + grade point average, persistence + wellness).
4. **Intentional Communication.** Translate jargon, honor different expertise, and prioritize listening.
5. **Celebrating Wins.** Recognize both student outcomes and professional growth that emerge from the collaboration.

Looking Ahead

Higher education is in a moment of reckoning. Enrollment challenges, rising mental health needs, and demands for accountability press on every corner of the institution. No single division—academic or student affairs—can carry these burdens alone.

But together? The possibilities are endless.

When we move beyond support toward genuine partnership, we do not just help students survive college—we equip them to thrive. We do not just expand professional development—we grow leaders with the courage and capacity to reimagine higher education, both now and tomorrow.

The work of the SAPAA KC reminds us that the boundaries between academic affairs and student affairs are porous, and perhaps unnecessary. What matters most is the student journey and the professionals who guide it.

If the future of higher education belongs to those who can collaborate, innovate, and lead with both head and heart, then SA-AA partnerships are more than inspiring. They are imperative.

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Student Career Development Knowledge Community

Surviving the AI Shake-Up: Redefining Career Services for a World Without Entry-Level Jobs

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In today's rapidly evolving job market, technological advancement is colliding with workforce development in unprecedented ways. Entry-level positions once provided college graduates with foundational tasks that helped them learn workplace skills and build experience. Increasingly, however, these tasks are being automated by artificial intelligence (AI), leaving fewer opportunities for students to gain essential early career experience. This situation creates an "experience paradox": Employers expect graduates to arrive with relevant skills yet offer fewer opportunities to build them. This article examines the implications for higher education and argues that work-integrated learning (WIL), combined with AI literacy and uniquely human skills development, is now essential for career readiness.

AI Disruption of Entry-Level Jobs

AI is transforming employment, especially at the entry level. Routine tasks, such as data entry, customer service, and administrative support, are increasingly automated by generative AI tools. Recent research shows that firms adopting generative AI have significantly reduced hiring for junior positions while continuing to expand senior roles, a shift described as "seniority-biased technological change" (Hosseini & Lichtinger, 2025). For entry-level jobs, which are particularly concentrated in repetitive work, the impact is acute. What remains are roles demanding advanced skills, such as critical thinking, complex problem solving, and digital literacy, that graduates once developed through entry-level experience.

Labor market data confirm this shift. Organizations adopting generative AI have cut junior hiring since 2023 while expanding senior ranks (Hosseini & Lichtinger, 2025). In tech, headcount for software developers aged 22 to 25 dropped by nearly 20% between 2022 and 2025. The Wall Street Journal (Lahart, 2025, para. 1) similarly reported that artificial intelligence is "profoundly limiting some young Americans' employment prospects" as AI tools replace entry-level tasks. Recruiters note that employers have "all but stopped requesting entry-level staff" (Hosseini & Lichtinger, 2025, p. 2). In effect, AI is erasing the bottom rungs of the career ladder.

The Entry-Level Experience Paradox

Employers today reinforce the challenge new graduates face by placing heavy emphasis on prior work exposure. In 2025, more than 80% reported valuing candidates' internship and industry experience, underscoring that previous workplace learning remains a decisive factor in hiring (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2025). At the same time, many "entry-level" job postings now require one to two years of prior experience, further raising the bar for new graduates (Hosseini & Lichtinger, 2025; Levanon et al., 2025). This expectation creates a paradox: Graduates are required to show experience for "entry-level" jobs even as traditional roles that once provided it are disappearing. Without these on-ramps, students struggle to develop not only technical skills but also broader competencies, such as teamwork, adaptability, and cross-functional awareness, that are best gained in real workplace contexts.

The effects are already evident in the labor market. The Burning Glass Institute warns of "structural shifts that systematically disadvantage new college graduates" (Levanon et al., 2025, p. 2). For the first time, a bachelor's degree no longer guarantees access to professional work. In the United States, unemployment among recent graduates has risen to about 5.8%, surpassing the national average of 4.2% (St. Louis Fed, 2025). In Canada, youth unemployment has surged by about 5.5 percentage points since 2022, climbing to levels typically seen only during recessions (Van Wonderen, 2025). Increasingly, graduates are expected to "start their careers in the middle as opposed to the beginning," doing at 22 what previous cohorts did at 30 (Levanon et al., 2025, p. 9). Without scalable solutions from higher education, many will remain underemployed and underprepared.

Work-Integrated Learning: A Scalable Solution

Work itself is changing in ways that compound challenges for graduates. Beyond automation, professional success is increasingly defined by collaboration across remote and hybrid teams, project-based roles, and continual technological adaptation. Careers are no longer linear; they require transferable skills, adaptability, and lifelong learning. This shift makes the traditional sequence of "education first, then work" obsolete. Students now need integrated experiences that blend academic learning with real-world application, cultivating not only subject expertise but also resilience to thrive in an uncertain economy.

WIL has emerged as a scalable, inclusive, and future-focused strategy to meet this demand. Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada (n.d.) defines WIL as "a form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting" (para. 2). Effective WIL involves an engaged partnership among students, postsecondary institutions, and employers or community hosts. In practice, WIL includes co-operative education (co-op), internships, service learning, industry research and projects, and apprenticeship. These programs allow students to apply knowledge, adapt to changing contexts, and develop a professional identity before graduation.

Evidence shows that WIL enhances employability and career outcomes. Participation is positively correlated with graduate employability and the development of practical skills for career success (Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024). Most importantly, WIL develops the competencies employers demand—problem solving, communication, teamwork, and navigating workplace dynamics. As entry-level roles decline and work becomes more fluid, WIL is the critical mechanism for providing experience once gained through early-career jobs. For higher education, this means WIL must evolve from a "nice-to-have" enhancement to a baseline expectation for all students.

Recommendations for Higher Education Leaders

Scaling WIL requires intentional leadership. For student affairs and career services professionals, six actions stand out:

1. **Establish Institutional Frameworks:** Define standards, outcomes, and assessment methods for WIL, ensuring consistency and quality.
2. **Integrate WIL Across Curricula:** Design developmental pathways where students progress from introductory exposures to advanced projects.
3. **Build Robust Employer Partnerships:** Cocreate programs with employers, shaping project scopes and evaluation criteria.
4. **Ensure Accessibility and Equity:** Provide stipends, transport support, and flexible options so all students can participate.
5. **Measure and Communicate Impact:** Collect evidence of WIL's effects on employability and institutional outcomes to secure ongoing investment.
6. **Integrate AI Literacy and Human Skills:** Equip students with fluency in AI tools while doubling down on uniquely human capacities—empathy, ethical judgment, intercultural competence, and leadership. These skills ensure graduates can both partner with technology and deliver irreplaceable human value.

Conclusion

The disappearance of entry-level jobs under AI intensifies the experience paradox, demanding systemic responses from higher education. WIL has the potential to be the most effective strategy to bridge the education-to-employment gap. Combined with AI literacy and the cultivation of essential human skills, WIL prepares graduates not only to withstand disruption but also to shape the future of work. For higher education leaders and career services professionals, embedding WIL at scale is no longer optional. It is the foundation of career readiness in the age of AI.

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Student Government Knowledge Community

Preparing Student Government Leaders for Campus Crises and Emergencies

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Educational crises and emergencies are happening across primary, secondary, postsecondary, and graduate education and even in education policy. In higher education, college student government leaders are often at the forefront of campus and community response to crises, emergencies, and tragedies. For example, at Elizabeth City State University in 2025, six people were injured after a shooting on the campus quad; as a result, students pushed the University of North Carolina system for greater safety measures (Weissman, 2025). The student body president, alongside 33 student leaders, sent a letter to system leaders to draw attention to campus safety and the absence of a statement about the shooting. It is not uncommon for student government leaders to make statements in this way or to pass resolutions and legislation in light of campus, community, and global crises. These activities include students' attempts to respond to and combat local, national, and international issues of social justice and injustice (Goodman et al., 2021). For example, in 2020, University of Minnesota Student Body President Jael Kerandi penned an open letter to the university president and Board of Regents demanding the university to sever ties with the Minneapolis Police Department after the murder of George Floyd (Larson & Kerandi, n.d.).

Given that educational crises and emergencies continue to proliferate in higher education (Zdziarski et al., 2020), this article offers several examples of how student government advisors and administrators can support student government leaders across response and communication, individual leader health and well-being, and campus and student crisis recovery. We also call for student government advisors and administrators to use trauma-informed practices that not only center students but also build a foundation for student leader support systems.

Response and Communication

In the immediate aftermath of crises, student government leaders often become the most visible representatives of the student body. Although not always consciously aware, their peers may look to them for information, reassurance, and advocacy, whereas external stakeholders, including the media and alumni, may interpret their statements as reflections of the campus climate and possibly the university administration's position itself. This dual role makes preparation for crisis response and communication essential—preparing students to both take on their roles as highly visible members of campus leadership and intentionally building student government leaders into the administration's communication design strategies.

Advisors and administrators can support student leaders by clarifying expectations. For example, *Will students issue statements independently, cosign with administrators, or contribute input to institutional messaging?* Clear protocols established before a crisis ensure that communication is both timely and coordinated. These protocols should empower students to fulfill their duly elected role as amplifiers of the greater student interest and help them contribute indispensable perspectives to administrative response processes.

Student governments also serve as informal conduits of information when students may be hesitant to trust or engage with administrators. During emergencies, many students reach out directly to student government officers for updates and support or to amplify concerns. Preparing leaders for this responsibility includes training in message framing, transparent communication of what is known or unknown, approaches to handling sensitive information that is not yet ready for mass audiences, and active listening practices.

Trauma-informed approaches are especially critical (Shalka, 2024; Sommers et al., 2024; Thompson & Carello, 2022) because student leaders often process the same fear, grief, or anger as their peers and may repress these emotions to fulfill their leadership responsibilities more effectively. Advisors should provide templates, communication guides, and role-playing exercises during leadership training so that leaders can practice balancing empathy, accuracy, and advocacy. Advisors should also facilitate introductory meetings at the start of student government terms with institutional spokespeople and integrated marketing and communication to build rapport, trust, and authenticity early on. These approaches empower student government leaders to respond to crisis situations that effectively streamline communication, model student-centered leadership, validate students' voices in the institutional process, and lay the groundwork for recovery practices. By treating student leaders as essential mechanisms in the institutional decision-making process, student leaders are not only empowered to be more effective communicators but are also sustained and supported as whole individuals amid crises.

Individual Student Leader Health and Well-Being

Crises and emergencies deeply affect the student leaders tasked with navigating them. Student government presidents, vice presidents, and representatives often feel pressure to perform as public representatives while simultaneously managing their own stress, grief, and academic workloads. For example, over the years of doing student government research, leaders have shared about the "cost" of these roles, in that many prioritized their leadership position over coursework, sleep, and social outings. For some, the role—and managing crises specifically—took its toll on their mental and emotional health, some seeking therapy and familial support as a result. Advisors must recognize that the emotional burden of leading during crises can leave student leaders vulnerable to burnout and compassion fatigue.

Institutions can better care for student leaders by deliberately embedding well-being practices into student government training and advising. This may include offering excused absences from classes when

leaders are asked to speak at services, providing structured debriefs after emotionally intense events, or ensuring student leaders have direct access to counseling services and campus wellness resources. In the case of the latter, directly introducing students to these services at the start of their appointments can mitigate any preconceived notions of these services and demystify the access process. Advisors should also model trauma-informed care, checking in about professional responsibilities and how student leaders are coping personally. Moreover, trauma-informed advising should involve creating intentional spaces for solidarity. For instance, in 2021, a senior student affairs officer convened all women in the student assembly after a sexist campus incident—modeling collective care, affirming identity, and empowering student leaders to respond from a place of community-elevated strength (Goodman, 2021).

Leadership development training should equip student government officers with time management, conflict navigation, and stress regulation skills to help them balance their dual roles as students and crisis responders. Establishing consistent, supportive communication between advisors and leaders—such as weekly one-on-one meetings—creates a safe space for reflection and resilience building. Caring for the well-being of student leaders is not only about sustaining individuals; it is about ensuring they can lead effectively and empathetically during campus crises.

Campus and Student Crisis Recovery

After immediate response to crises, student government leaders often play a central role in the recovery and healing process. They may be expected to attend or even coordinate memorials, vigils, and remembrance events, as seen at Middle Tennessee State University in 2024 when the Student Government Association hosted a vigil to bring students together after the death of a peer (Reynolds et al., 2024). These roles carry symbolic weight, positioning student leaders as both advocates and caretakers of collective memory on campus. As Middle Tennessee State University Student Government Association President Michai Mosby said in a statement posted to Instagram, their vigil served as a place to "remember, to find comfort, and to support one another in the strength of our community" (MTSU SGA, 2024). Advisors can prepare leaders by offering guidance on event planning, public speaking during times of grief, and navigating the emotional labor associated with representing peers in moments of mourning. Where administrative entities might remind the campus community of mental health services on campus, encouraging student leaders to directly incorporate these services at events promotes visibility and dismantles stigmatization associated with seeking out new wellness resources.

Recovery extends beyond memorials to structured opportunities for dialogue and community rebuilding. Student leaders can partner with administrators to host open houses, roundtables, or listening sessions where students can voice concerns about safety, institutional accountability, or systemic inequities. These spaces foster trust, especially when student governments help share agendas and moderate discussions. Advisors can provide additional support by coaching leaders on facilitation skills, conflict management, and inclusive practices that ensure all student voices are heard and valued in future practice. To prepare future student leaders for the reality that crisis recovery is part of their role, advisors should include honest discussions about the expectation to engage in recovery efforts with realistic examples so that these responsibilities do not come as a surprise. Trauma-informed advising ensures that student leaders are equipped to navigate these responsibilities while maintaining their own well-being, which strengthens the institution's resilience.

Conclusion

The authors of this article were once student government leaders who managed educational crises and emergencies in different ways. Simply put, crisis work is an inevitable part of the job of elected student government. As institutions navigate crises

and emergencies differently, it is imperative that administrators and student government advisors work closely with the very students elected to these spaces—these are whole humans who are more than just the leaders serving in these roles. They are students, too, and many are equally affected by the continued crises both locally and around the globe. As crises continue to occur, these relationships will be critical to securing student safety, well-being, and forward movement during and after.

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Student Leadership Programs Knowledge Community

Leading Through Change: Designing Sustainable Student Leadership Pathways

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In the shifting landscape within the field of higher education, student leadership programs face increasing demand to adapt to the changes in student needs, limitations in resources, and ever-changing institutional priorities. Traditional student success models that relied solely on either vision or structure are seen as unsustainable for the long-term future. The Leadership Identity Development model demonstrates that lasting leadership growth occurs when internal meaning making (vision) is integrated with external systems of practice (structure) through mentorship and reflection, creating a foundation for sustainability and adaptability across generations (Komives et al., 2006). To ensure impact and effectiveness, leadership initiatives will require both adaptive visioning and structured frameworks that allow programs to grow with students while maintaining continuity and offering scalability. Such balance between innovation and stability enables leadership programs to evolve without losing their core developmental purpose.

This article highlights a multiprong framework designed to guide students from entry-level involvement to advanced leadership opportunities, through a structured yet flexible framework that connects practice to theory and aligns with the Leadership Competencies developed by NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA–College Student Educators International (ACPA/NASPA, 2015).

The Multiprong PILLARS Student Success Model

The foundation of this approach is a seven-prong framework that identifies key areas in student development:

- **Purpose.** Help students identify and grow their sense of purpose early in college to set the stage for meaningful academic and cocurricular decisions.
- **Identity.** Guide students to define who they are and understand how their identity connects to the broader community and institutional context.
- **Leadership.** Create opportunities for students to engage in leadership from the outset. This includes space to make mistakes, learn from them, and build resilience (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007).
- **Learning.** Reinforce that leadership and learning are inseparable. Students are taught not just course content but how transferable skill sets are acquired and sharpened during college.
- **Advancement.** Support students in academics by focusing on time management, tutoring, and study skills. This ensures that grades and classroom performance are tied to broader goals.
- **Relationships.** Teach students to cultivate social capital alongside academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Students learn that building and sustaining relationships are essential for personal and professional growth.
- **Support.** Destigmatize need and reinforce that support is not optional—it is expected. At this stage in life, students benefit from networks of assistance, whether through advising, mentoring, or resource access.

Together, these seven PILLARS provide a comprehensive framework for growth. The connection of each area creates measurable benchmarks that allow students to see their progress.

From Theory to Practice

At the David and Frances Brain Center for Community Engagement, PILLARS is not introduced as a theoretical construct but is embedded in all our programming. Students engage with all seven pillars, at different levels of intensity and independence depending on where they are in their journey.

Entry-level students typically have high levels of structured interactions and many touchpoints. This approach allows staff and peer mentors to help guide their development and growth. Upperclassmen, on the other hand, may have few touchpoints and may engage in transitioning opportunities such as community work study, social innovation internships, or independent leadership roles. This approach allows staff to be more consultive while still providing assessment and reflection.

The framework's progression ensures that all students engage with the seven pillars in ways that foster personal development and the growth of transferable skill sets. We emphasize communication skills and help students articulate their unique qualities and strengths in ways that provide a competitive edge beyond campus. And by structuring pathways that move from high touchpoints to independent practice, PILLARS establishes a sustainable model of leadership development that is scalable and personalized.

Teaching Students How to Do College

The PILLARS framework is grounded in the idea that students must be taught how to "do" college. This means equipping them with practical and relational toolkits in addition to academic skills that aid in persistence and help cultivate success beyond the campus.

For many students, the greatest challenge is developing initiative, or their ability to take knowledge

from the classroom and apply it in real-world scenario. Others are comfortable with application but struggle to grasp the theories and structures that frame their experiences. PILLARS acknowledges these differences by providing tailored opportunities for growth, while addressing deficits in their confidence and fostering peer-to-peer interaction that builds their motivation and accountability.

The model prepares students for the realities of college life and beyond by teaching them application and theory and by emphasizing that academic capital and social capital are equally important (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 1993).

Sustainability and Replication

To ensure sustainability, we have integrated PILLARS into every leadership cohort. This alignment ensures that staff transitions, shifting resources, or evolving student interests do not disrupt continuity.

The processes supporting the model are replicable for other institutions:

- **Structured cohorts** provide consistency while allowing flexibility.
- **Reflective practice** ensures that students internalize lessons across all seven areas.
- **Succession planning** and documentation allow programs to continue without interruption.

Conclusion

The PILLARS Student Success Model demonstrates that leadership development is inseparable from teaching students how to succeed in college. By addressing Purpose, Identity, Leadership, Learning, Advancement, Relations, and Support, the model offers a road map that is comprehensive and practical.

For Baldwin Wallace University, this model has not only strengthened student leadership programming but also provided clarity, scalability, and resilience. For the field, it offers an adaptable framework that ensures students are not left to figure out "how to do college" on their own but are guided through a structured, intentional pathway toward success.

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Success Coaching Knowledge Community

The Coach's Playbook: Strategic Approaches to a Sustainable Career in Higher Education

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Introduction: Coaching Beyond the Now

Success coaching is rapidly growing into a versatile approach that combines advising, mentoring, and student affairs. This evidence-based, holistic support strategy has proven effective in improving long-term retention and graduation rates, particularly for students from historically underserved populations, when implemented through established coach-student relationships (Bradley et al., 2024; Valentine et al., 2023). Success Coaching's fundamental purpose is to assist students in achieving goals through tailored support and encouragement. While institutions recognize coaching as crucial for student retention and engagement, the career development of the coaches themselves is often overlooked. How does one advance professionally in this new discipline? In what way can coaching be seen as a sustainable career instead of a short-term role?

Coaching Impact: Evidence-Based Growth

The acceptance of coaching as a higher education practice is now undisputed. Over the last decade, research has consistently documented measurable student gains. To illustrate:

- **Retention and persistence:** Capstick et al. (2019) determined that academically at-risk students who received coaching exhibited improved academic results and higher persistence rates when compared to their counterparts without coaching.
- **Community colleges:** According to Rodriguez et al. (2020), coaching was effective in community colleges, where non-traditional and first-generation students frequently encounter complex obstacles.

- **Focused growth:** Simmons and Smith (2020) underscored the significance of peer success coaching interventions for African American and Latinx students, fostering persistence and engagement.

The influence of coaching is growing, extending beyond academics. The American College Health Association (2020) reported an increase in wellness coaching to address holistic student requirements. In addition, randomized controlled trials in financial coaching showed enhancements in savings, credit ratings, and debt management for young adults (Modestino et al., 2019; Theodos et al., 2018). These findings collectively present a clear picture: coaching is a versatile, empirically validated practice with outcomes that are beneficial for students and institutions.

Career Sustainability: A Field Worth Exploring

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital is insightful here. In the same way that students use cultural and social capital to achieve success, coaches must develop and convert their professional capital, skills, networks, and institutional legitimacy, to facilitate career advancement. In line with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, a coaching career progression can be viewed as a transition; it demands self-assessment, the identification of resources, and implementing mechanisms to facilitate successful adaptation. Given this, for sustainability, coaching needs to be more than work; it should be a professional identity integrated into key strategic alliances, extending beyond student relationships.

Strategic Alliances: A Framework for Professional Development

Strategic partnerships are the most promising avenues for student impact and coach career advancement. Collaborations enable coaches to grow from service providers to institutional collaborators, collectively influencing the 3 P's: policy, pedagogy, and practice.

Internal Academic Partnerships

Engaging with faculty and academic departments directly enhances coaching's significance. Departments and coaches can team up to add coaching to seminars, modules, and interventions. These partnerships enhance coaching, transitioning it from a supplemental role to an integral one.

Student Support and Co-Curricular Partnerships

Success coaching inherently overlaps with counseling, advising, multicultural affairs, and career services. The formalization of partnerships between these offices will guarantee comprehensive support for students, enabling coaches to broaden their skill sets. Kuffuor et al. (2024) illustrate how incorporating intercultural competence frameworks with change management strategies can reshape student support units into inclusive, adaptive ecosystems. Participation in these initiatives provides coaches with significant experience in organizational change, which is helpful for future leadership positions.

External Partnerships and Cross-Sector Collaborations

Collaborations external to the campus are also critical. Farruggia et al. (2020) determined that partnerships between universities and nonprofit coaching organizations improved student transitions and retention. These partnerships also aid career paths, giving coaches experience in leadership, grant writing, and project management. In this context, external collaborations improve both organization capabilities and individual career paths.

Essential Elements for Career Advancement

Research and practice integration reveals several insights into how coaches can strategically develop their careers and improve student outcomes.

1. **Cross-functional skills translate to leadership.** Participation in organizational change initiatives (Kuffuor et al., 2024) provides

coaches with versatile capabilities applicable to administrative, leadership, and faculty-related positions.

2. **Reflective practice sustains longevity.** Burnout can be avoided, and adaptive leadership can be achieved by coaches through integrating intercultural learning and reflective supervision.

3. **Strategic partnerships create career bridges.** Collaborative efforts, whether through curriculum design, wellness programs, or nonprofit partnerships, lay the groundwork for a transition from coaching to a broader scope of leadership opportunities.

Developing a Professional Identity: Coaching as a Profession

The primary contention lies in culture; coaching should be considered a calling, rather than a means to an end. Institutions bear the responsibility of investing in partnerships to standardize coaching as an essential component of both student achievement and institutional strategy. Coaching should be viewed as a profession built on collaboration and long-term progress, not a quick fix. This view highlights the inherent link between the victories of coaches and the accomplishments of their students.

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Sustainability Knowledge Community

Recentering Indigenous Knowledge in Sustainability Education

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The Diné expression *Shí éí hózhó náhásdlíí'*, which loosely translates to "I am in harmony with the beauty earth," serves as both a way of life and a framework for rethinking sustainability in higher education. Indigenous ontologies, or ways of being, are grounded in reciprocal relationships with land, community, and generational wisdom. In recent years, the NASPA Sustainability Knowledge Community has joined with the growing voices of native scholars in discussing how these principles can align with campus sustainability and student affairs goals. Before exploring future partnerships, one must acknowledge that higher education and settler colonialism carry long histories of harm toward Indigenous communities. From land dispossession to assimilationist schooling, universities have contributed to systemic inequities that undermine Indigenous sovereignty and lifeways (Whyte, 2017). As sustainability and environmental justice become imperatives to the mission of academia, student affairs professionals and educators have an ethical responsibility to ensure Indigenous voices and knowledge systems are not just included but centered.

This article explores the role of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in environmental justice (EJ) education, the case for culturally relevant pedagogy, and best practices for building symbiotic partnerships that create inclusive spaces for all students, not just Indigenous students. Two case studies, the Oak Savanna initiative at Portland State University (PSU) and Arizona State University's (ASU) intentional partnerships with Navajo Nation leadership, illustrate complementary approaches that amplify student voices and build mindful partnerships with tribal communities.

Purpose of Research in IKS and EJ

IKS offers frameworks that are relational and deeply rooted in place, where stories are theories (Brayboy, 2005). Unlike Western science, which often claims universality across contexts, Indigenous epistemologies embrace contextual truths and reciprocal responsibilities to land and community (Wilson, 2008). In EJ research, IKS provides essential tools for understanding ecological systems and how climate change affects marginalized communities most dependent on natural systems.

For student affairs practitioners, using these tools means expanding beyond traditional programming to incorporate place-based learning, cultural storytelling, and collaborative projects that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing. These Indigenous knowledge systems are sacred and honor the EJ education that has occurred for millennia. By foregrounding Indigenous perspectives, universities contribute to the development of inclusive academic environments that legitimize diverse epistemological frameworks while successfully improving student engagement (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Ajaps and Forh Mbah (2022) emphasize that critical pedagogy of place is essential for challenging colonial narratives and empowering students to connect learning to their local community. For Indigenous students, culturally grounded support services are crucial, and dedicated spaces can help students connect with their peers and positively affect retention. Students can develop a sense of belonging, speak their first language freely, and embrace their cultural traditions. This belonging affirms identity, resists isolation, and strengthens students' ability to thrive academically, while developing skills that will help them give back to their communities and the university (Brayboy, 2005).

Case Study 1: The Oak Savanna Initiative at PSU

The Oak Savanna Initiative at PSU demonstrates how student voices can catalyze sustainability projects rooted in Indigenous knowledge. When a campus building was renovated, students recognized the adjacent block as one of the last undeveloped greenspaces on the urban campus. With university support, they advocated to restore the space as an oak savanna "food forest" reflective of the Kalapuya peoples and their descendants within the Grand Ronde and Siletz tribes. For millennia, tribal communities have cultivated oak savannas as biodiverse ecosystems providing food, medicine, and cultural resources. Reestablishing this landscape on campus created a climate-resilient greenspace and a living classroom where students could learn about socioecological histories.

This initiative evolved into a comanaged partnership involving the Indigenous Nations Studies program, student affairs, the architecture program, and other community partners. The oak savanna now houses the Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Knowledge Center, which offers courses, student services, ethnobotany walks, annual salmon bakes, and space for cultural practices such as canoe carving. This project illustrates how empowering student voices can generate transformative sustainability initiatives that endure through collaborative governance and shared stewardship.

Case Study 2: Tribal-University Partnerships at ASU

A second pathway to sustainable partnerships emerges through direct collaboration with tribal leaders. In 1995, shortly after Peterson Zah (Diné/Navajo) completed his term as president of the Navajo Nation, ASU President Lattie F. Coor invited him to serve as Special Advisor to the President on American Indian Affairs, a role designed to build trust and long-term partnerships between ASU and tribal nations (ASU News, 2012). Zah's role was the first of its kind at a major U.S. university. His leadership emphasized that sustainability is not merely an academic field but a way of life embodied through cultural teachings.

Zah played a key role in building enduring partnerships between ASU and the Navajo Nation, including retention initiatives and the establishment

of programs that address community needs while preparing students for leadership roles during and after their tenure at ASU. His work embodied the importance of top-down commitments alongside grassroots efforts. By creating institutional structures and partnerships grounded in reciprocity and K'é (kinship), Zah demonstrated how universities can move beyond symbolic inclusion toward systemic change. Today, ASU Indigenous initiatives, such as the Office of American Indian Initiatives, the American Indian Student Support Services, and the Labriola National American Indian Data Center, continue this legacy by partnering with community organizations that address not only academic success but also holistic wellness, language revitalization, and cultural continuity within the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. This legacy furthers the foundational and monumental work that chéii (grandpa/honorable elder) Peterson Zah advocated for all Indigenous students at ASU.

Best Practices in Building Sustainable Relationships

These case studies highlight complementary approaches to partnership building and can inform other universities' sustainability initiatives. The following guidelines can be used to promote sustainability through Indigenous partnerships:

1. **Cultivate relationships with Indigenous students and communities.** Recognition should go beyond land acknowledgments toward meaningful participation in decision-making.
2. **Support existing initiatives.** Attend events, partner with organizations, and build from community strengths, rather than imposing new agendas.
3. **Engage community leaders early.** Establish trust with tribal elders and leaders before project design, maintain their involvement throughout the project cycle, and cocreate initiatives that reflect community needs.
4. **Commit to long-term reciprocity.** Systemic partnerships should extend beyond single projects or grant cycles.
5. **Adapt institutional structures.** Rather than inviting Indigenous communities into preexisting frameworks, be willing to interrogate existing policies, funding, and space utilization to reflect Indigenous lifeways.

Conclusion

While implementing these guidelines, campus leaders must acknowledge their unique position to leverage institutional systems to benefit student populations. By aligning Indigenous student advocacy with community partnerships, we can help cultivate campus environments that embody the Diné teaching of hózhó, reminding us that balance and harmony must guide our relationships with land, community, and heritage. By centering Indigenous voices, we can help universities move toward transformative change. These collaborations not only strengthen Indigenous communities, but also enrich higher education's capacity to prepare all students for lives of responsibility, reciprocity, and stewardship.

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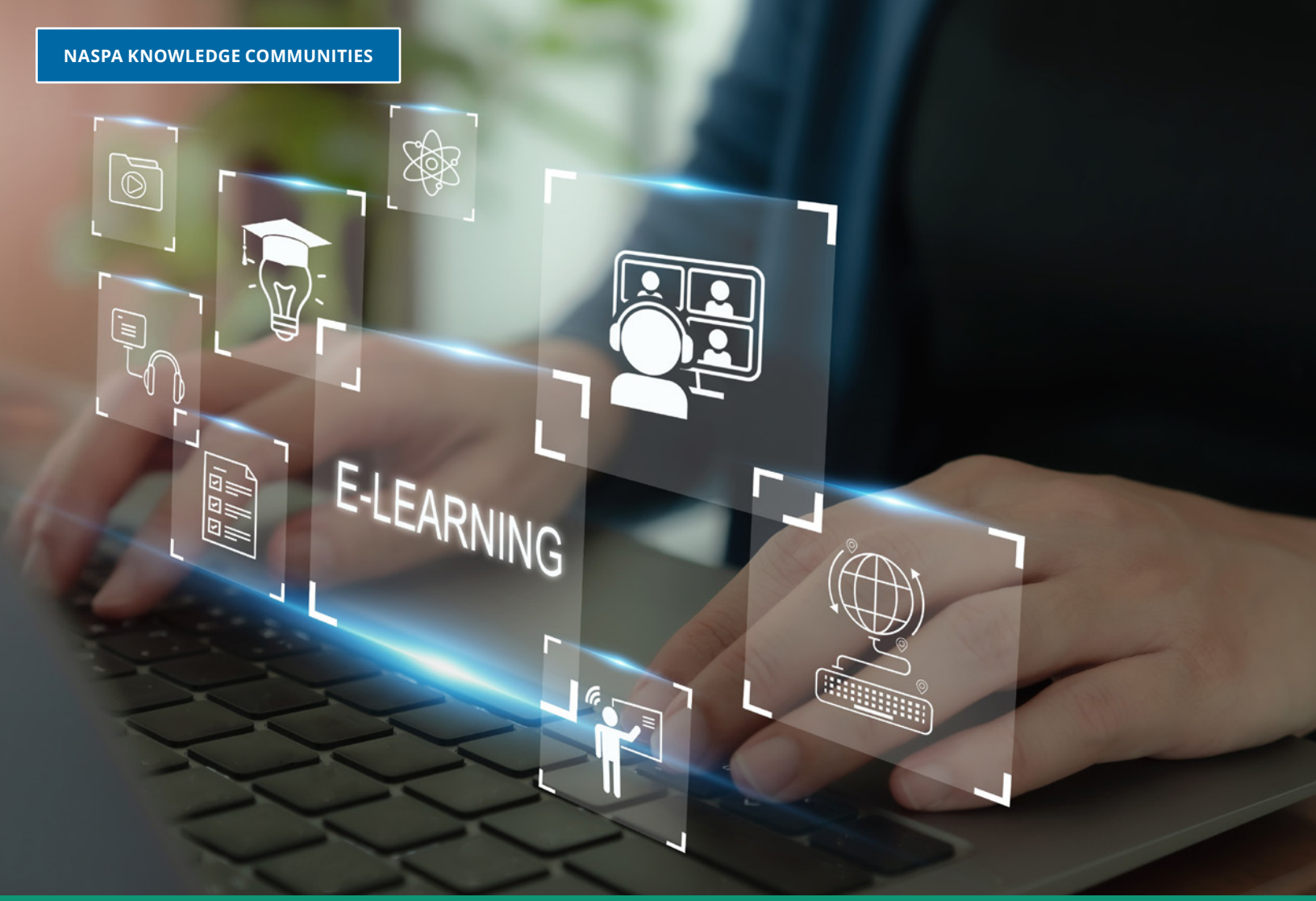

Technology Knowledge Community

Beyond the Basics: Technology Competence, Adaptability, and Organizational Strategy in Student Affairs

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Higher education is experiencing a profound digital transformation. From enrollment systems to online advising, from learning management platforms to virtual student organizations, technology has become an integral part of how colleges and universities function. For student affairs professionals, technology presents both opportunities and challenges. It enables new forms of student engagement while simultaneously demanding new skills, adaptability, and critical decision-making. A gap exists in the literature surrounding technology usage in student affairs despite the recognition by ACPA–College Student Educators International and NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education of technology as a core professional competency for student affairs educators (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) parallels earlier educational revolutions such as the introduction of the internet or massive open online courses (MOOCs) in its potential to reshape pedagogy, assessment, and administration (Jacques et al., 2024). Generative AI is a form of artificial intelligence that can create content such as text, images, videos, audio, or code based on prompts imputed by the user (Stryker & Scapicchio, 2025). As noted in NASPA's 2024 report *The Transformative Potential of Artificial Intelligence*, AI now acts as a strategic partner in student success, integrating adaptive analytics and personalized support into higher education operations (Brady, 2024). Thus, student affairs educators must not only remain competent in digital systems but also develop AI fluency.

Historical Foundations of Technology in Student Affairs

The relationship between technology and student affairs has always been managed by institutions at large. Some of the earliest campus technologies consisted of computers the size of rooms (McMurray & Hoover, 1984). These were developed for research purposes in the 1940s, with use for student affairs lagging. By the 1970s, institutions began exploring the role of technology in admissions, housing, and career services (Peterson, 1975). Management information systems were introduced as tools for recordkeeping and planning. Resistance was common, with faculty and administrators concerned about privacy, autonomy, and academic freedom.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the expansion of management information systems, email, and early databases brought more widespread use (MacLean, 1986). Still, the culture of higher education adopted technology slowly compared to other industries (García et al., 2024). However, in the 21st century, higher education began to experience a shift toward an increase in internet access and online learning. Student affairs offices were required to adapt to online orientation, virtual advising, and electronic case management (Herridge et al., 2020a; 2020b).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these shifts and forced student affairs professionals to rapidly pivot to digital service delivery. What had been a gradual adoption became an immediate necessity.

Technology as a Professional Competency

The recognition of technology as a professional competency by ACPA and NASPA (2015) represents a significant shift in how student affairs defined professional readiness. Technology competency is not limited to tool usage; it encompasses digital literacy, ethical practice, and inclusivity. At the foundational level, professionals are expected to remain current on adoption trends, troubleshoot basic issues, and demonstrate adaptability in the face of change. At advanced levels, digital competency includes leading technological innovation, cultivating digital identity, and embedding universal design into practice.

Framing technology as a competency also reorients the field from viewing technology as additional work to understanding it as core to student affairs identity. As Ahlquist (2016) argued, digital identity and literacy are now essential dimensions of professional practice. Technology enables new ways of reaching students but also reshapes what it means to be present, to build community, and to engage ethically in a digital society.

When considering AI fluency, Crompton and Burke (2023) identified five common AI applications in higher education: assessment and evaluation, prediction, intelligent tutoring systems, AI assistance, and student learning management. These applications parallel student affairs practices, such as advising, communication, and retention initiatives. AI tools can analyze engagement data to identify at-risk students or automate basic interactions to free time for relational work (Brady, 2024). When AI implementation is guided by intentionality and human-centered design, it can advance both operational efficiency and student belonging (Agnew et al., 2025).

Competency Versus Adaptability

Although many professionals feel competent with current technologies, fewer are supported in adapting to emerging tools (Herridge & Schiffecker, 2024). Competency alone is insufficient when technology shifts quickly; adaptability is the true marker of sustained effectiveness. As Ahlquist (2016) argued, digital literacy is not simply about tool mastery but about the ability to navigate disruption.

AI magnifies this dynamic. As Jacques et al. (2024) argued, AI is not just another technological advancement—it reshapes how knowledge is produced and applied. It helps institutions transition from basic digital adoption to strategic, research-informed integration. It is important to incorporate AI not as a replacement but as an extension of human expertise.

Equity and Inclusion

Technology is often framed as a neutral tool, yet it can reinforce inequities. Access to hardware, connectivity, and digital literacy varies widely across student populations and institutional contexts. Student affairs professionals must therefore approach technology as both functional and deeply tied to equity.

The ACPA/NASPA competency underscores the responsibility to model inclusive practices, ensure accessibility compliance, and cultivate digital citizenship (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). This competency aligns with calls to embed universal design principles into technological decisions, to ensure that tools work for all students rather than privileging some. For example, a one-size-fits-all platform may not meet the accessibility needs of students with disabilities or the engagement patterns of first-generation students. Equity requires continual assessment of who benefits and who is left out.

Ethical integration of AI raises additional considerations around bias, privacy, and transparency. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) noted that many AI applications in education lack critical reflection on ethical risk. NASPA's 2024 framework for responsible AI identified three guiding principles: transparency, equity, and data stewardship (Brady, 2024). Castillo-Martínez et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of a critical and creative lens that focuses on using AI as a tool rather than a decision-maker.

Recommendations for Practice

Using ACPA and NASPA (2015), Herridge and Schiffecker (2024), and NASPA (2025), recommendations for practice include:

1. **Advance Technology Competency Beyond Basics**
   Training should move beyond "how-to" sessions to focus on digital literacy, adaptability, and ethical use. Professionals must be equipped to engage students in responsible digital citizenship and identity development. Institutions should embed cultural competence into technology training initiatives, recognizing that digital tools can unintentionally reproduce systemic inequities unless faculty and staff are prepared to navigate diverse student needs (Liu & Parnther, 2021).

2. **Institutionalize Continuous Assessment**
   Regularly survey staff and students to assess the effectiveness of technology. Use environmental scanning and peer benchmarking to anticipate future needs.

3. **Center Equity in Technology Decisions**
   Apply universal design principles to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. Recognize diverse departmental needs rather than assuming uniformity.

4. **Foster a Research-Informed Culture**
   Encourage practitioner–research collaborations, case studies, and the dissemination of assessments. Leverage digital professional learning communities to strengthen intra- and interinstitutional dialogue. NASPA's 2024 report highlighted a phased implementation model of rapid implementation, capacity building, scaling, and strategic transformation that

can guide student affairs toward sustainable innovation (Brady, 2024).

Scholarly Model of Technology Integration

A scholarly approach to technology integration in student affairs requires reimagining digital competence as more than technical training. Using ACPA and NASPA (2015), García et al. (2024), Herridge and Schiffecker (2024), and NASPA (2025), a scholarly model of technology integration calls for a holistic orientation that includes:

1. **Critical Reflection**
   Interrogating assumptions about technology, its equity implications, and its role in shaping student development.
2. **Adaptive Leadership**
   Modeling openness to technological change and cultivating cultures of organizational agility.
3. **Ethical Stewardship**
   Ensuring responsible data use, protecting digital identity, and upholding accessibility standards.
4. **Evidence-Informed Practice**
   Embedding assessment, research, and scholarly dissemination into technology-related decision-making.

Conclusion

Technology is a core competency in student affairs, not an optional enhancement. However, true effectiveness depends on adaptability, equity, and evidence-based decision-making. Institutions risk falling behind unless they align technology integration with the lived realities of their students and staff. As NASPA's 2024 report asserts, AI should augment, not replace, the human relationships central to education (Brady, 2024).

By embedding the ACPA/NASPA Technology Competency and advancing NASPA's strategic commitment to research and scholarship, student affairs professionals can reframe technology as not just a tool but a strategic asset. AI has ushered in the next era of competencies. Thus, student affairs practice requires moving beyond the basics and cultivating digital literacy, adaptability, and a scholar-practitioner philosophy.

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Transracial Adoptee and Multiracial Knowledge Community

Who Is a "Real" American?

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Social Justice and Inclusion

Inclusion and Social Justice

For much of 2025, the United States has been shaped and reshaped by new legislation, policies, and practices from the Trump administration. One practice that has been contentious is immigration deportations, using Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) staff to detain and deport people in the United States. In Chapter 5 of Project 2025: Mandate for Leadership, The Conservative Promise, titled "Department of Homeland Security," one goal described is that "prioritizing border security and immigration enforcement, including detention and deportation, is critical if we are to regain control of the border" (Heritage Foundation, 2025, p. 135). The question of immigration, borders, and national security is not new but found renewed energy after the attacks of September 11th, 2001; the Department of Homeland Security was developed in response to those attacks. Park (2002) wrote that "the scapegoating of minorities in general and immigrants in particular in the name of patriotism has always been a staple of politics" (p. 128). Whether the year is 2001 or 2025, issues of immigration are evolving, and sometimes revolving, as national tolerance for immigration is contextualized by politics and economics. So, where does this leave Americans who immigrated to the United States through intercountry adoption, often as babies or children, to be united with their adoptive American family?

The United States has a varied history with intercountry adoption. Intercountry adoption, also known as international or transnational adoption, is the process through which an orphaned child from one country is adopted by a family from a different country. In the 1960s and 1970s, the availability of White babies to adopt decreased, due to the use of birth control, while at the same time, the baby boomer generation was reaching the age of parenthood (Nelson, 2016). As the boomer generation considered starting families, other cultural factors, such as the Civil Rights Movement, furthered the practice of international adoption to desegregate American society, since many White Americans were comfortable diversifying their families. Social service agencies and religiously affiliated organizations facilitated international adoption for U.S. citizens, which resulted in adoptions of international children of color. The expansion of formalized adoption began to produce growing pains in the 1980s as adoptive families struggled for acceptance as normal American families. Families and the members who comprise a family are typically demarcated by borders based on genetics, bloodlines, and marriage. However, the very nature of adoption results in shifts in those borders (Baden, 2008). For many international adoptees, their identity encompasses both their birth country and American citizenship, blurring the borders of two cultures.

Some adoptees may experience questioning from peers, their families, or strangers about their blended families. Judgments about multiracial families, combined with skepticism about the authenticity of family ties due to adoption, can affect transracial adoptive families and individuals (Baden et al., 2013). about the topics of adoption, adoptee identity, and immigration can be difficult to discuss with family members, causing a gap in understanding or communication about valuable information for adoptees.

Adoptees who were over age 18 in 2000 were not granted automatic citizenship through the Child Citizenship Act of 2000. This legislation allowed foreign-born children adopted by American parents to automatically become citizens if they were under 18. But before that law was passed in 2000, it was up to parents to ensure their internationally adopted children were naturalized (CBS Philadelphia, 2017). Adoptive families took the necessary steps to ensure their adopted children had the correct documentation. However, recently, for some adoptees, completing processes like applying for a passport has become a nightmare. Adoptees found that their documents were not as complete as they believed them to be.

This was the case for one adoptee in Minnesota. WCCO News interviewed Astrid-Ira McCarthy about her process to renew her documents. “She said she grew up having no reason to believe she was not always a U.S. citizen, and that hasn’t changed in light of her new discovery” (Mayerle, 2025, para. 2). Eventually, she was able to work through the process to receive her missing document to clarify her U.S. citizenship, but it was not without fear and frustration. “‘It’s been really stressful every day. I worry, if she gets pulled over in a traffic stop, is she not coming home that day? I don’t know at any moment. If she had any interaction with law enforcement … are they going to keep her?’ wife Lex McCarthy said” (para. 9). Like McCarthy, many adoptees face this situation, which may feel heightened due to the current push for immigration detainment and deportation. The organization Adoptees for Justice, led by intercountry adoptees, has provided support to adoptees through online meetings and resources to help them navigate this process. The group has advocated for the U.S. Congress to pass the Protect Adoptees and American Families Act, which would provide citizenship to adoptees who were legally adopted by U.S. citizens as children raised in the United States (Adoptees for Justice, 2025).

College students now are younger than the Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2000, but there may be graduate students or returning adult students who are adoptees and want to get their citizenship questions answered. Immigration concerns for college students

are often connected to a student's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals status or, for international students, their F-1 or J-1 visa status while studying in the United States. However, it is essential for student affairs educators to acknowledge the stress this situation may cause for their adoptee students and to consider ways to support them in feeling valued and seen. The first step is exposure and understanding of this issue. If student affairs educators are unaware of this immigration issue affecting adoptees, they cannot effectively advocate for those students or the support they may need from their institution. Student affairs educators who advocate for adopted students contribute to their retention and sense of belonging.

This issue creates fear and concern for intercountry adoptees, so it is essential for student affairs educators to understand the experiences of adoptees, the racial and cultural borders they continually navigate, and the ways they require support within higher education institutions. The mandates of Project 2025 may be in place for a long time, so the support and advocacy that student affairs educators can provide for adoptee students is crucial to building intentional belonging across campuses in the United States.

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Undocumented Immigrants and Allies Knowledge Community

Educators in the Storm: Ethical Foundations, Advocacy, and Support for Undocumented Student Success

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Personal and Ethical Foundations

Advocacy for Student Success

Supporting undocumented students is not charity; it is an ethical imperative. The ACPA/NASPA (2015) Professional Competency Area of Personal and Ethical Foundations requires educators to act with integrity, engage in self-reflection, and demonstrate a commitment to justice. When faced with exclusionary immigration policies, these foundations compel us to resist neutrality and embrace advocacy.

The metaphor Educators in the Storm speaks to the turbulence undocumented students endure, yet, as suggested by a now-deleted tweet from Annamma, storms can naturalize systemic violence. Immigration policies are not natural occurrences; they are deliberate systems of control and regulation. To meet our ethical obligations, educators must confront this reality directly.

We draw from our experiences across California, Georgia, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, and Utah—contexts shaped by divergent politics but united by the struggles of undocumented students. Guided by Simpson's (2007) notion of ethnographic refusal, we reject silence and tokenization. Instead, we claim visibility, responsibility, and action as educators accountable to our students' futures.

Anti-Immigrant Policies and Their Legacies

The Trump administration did not invent hostility toward immigrants; it amplified and expanded structures that perpetuate the legal violence immigrants have endured for decades (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). Policies such as the travel ban, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, collaboration between the Department of Homeland Security and the Internal Revenue Service, cuts toward the Violence Against Women Act, and attempts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals deepened fear and precarity among undocumented students.

Higher education institutions often responded inadequately. Some issued hollow statements of support, disconnected from protections like legal representation and financial aid (Juica Varela, 2020). Others remained silent. Students quickly discerned the difference between symbolic solidarity and genuine advocacy, which requires translating institutional values into tangible support.

Ethics in Action: Teaching, Advising, and Refusal of Neutrality

In teaching and advising, neutrality is a myth that privileges the status quo. To uphold our ethical foundations, we must reject the illusion of objectivity. Borders, detention, and surveillance are not abstract; they shape our students' daily lives.

Salazar et al. (2022) urge institutions to move from undocufriendly to undocuserving spaces. This requires structural transformation—removing barriers in admissions, hiring, and aid; embedding immigrant justice into curricula; and equipping educators to advocate beyond campus walls. For student affairs professionals, ethical responsibility means affirming undocumented students' humanity and ensuring they are not left to navigate hostile systems alone.

Emotional Labor and Institutional Accountability

Supporting undocumented students is deeply emotional work. Student affairs professionals often function as counselors, advocates, and first responders (Cisneros et al., 2021). However, without recognition and resources, this care work risks exploitation, particularly when carried out by undocumented educators themselves (Reyna Rivarola et al., 2022).

The rise of Undocumented Student Resource Centers represents resilience and a source of hope. However, many operate under precarious funding and rely heavily on a small number of overextended staff (Cisneros & Reyna Rivarola, 2022). Institutions must move beyond symbolic support and invest in sustainable structures that honor the expertise and labor of educators working on the front lines.

Higher Education Is Not Neutral

It is a disservice to pretend that higher education institutions are neutral arbiters of knowledge. They are deeply entangled in systems of exclusion. De Genova and Tazzioli (2023) argue that borders are not merely geographic; they are embedded in policies that govern hiring, financial aid, and access to resources. During heightened immigration enforcement, it is even more crucial to remember that educators are responsible for advocating for and amplifying their students' voices.

Radical Love as Resistance

At the core of advocacy lies radical love, a love that refuses to abandon undocumented students in the face of systemic oppression. Undocumented love is mutual aid, collective resistance, and unwavering commitment (Pelaez Lopez, 2018). This love is not sentimental but political. It demands action, insists

on belonging, and sustains communities when institutions fail to do so.

For educators, radical love means showing up, challenging harmful policies, and imagining futures where all students are affirmed. It also means fostering counterspaces for undocumented students to resist and feel empowered (Salazar et al., 2023). Through this love, ethical commitments become advocacy for student success.

Strategies for Advocacy and Success

To move beyond symbolic solidarity, we propose strategies that align with both ethical foundations and institutional goals for advocacy:

1. **Fund and sustain Undocumented Student Resource Centers** with professional staff and comprehensive programming, such as student development opportunities, staff training, and community outreach events.
2. **Eliminate citizenship barriers** in scholarships, student employment, and compensation, such as stipended graduate assistantships.
3. **Provide emergency financial aid, legal assistance, groceries, transportation, and housing support.**
4. **Integrate immigrant justice** into strategic plans, curricula, celebrations, and campus-wide initiatives to foster inclusion.
5. **Expand trauma-informed advising and culturally affirming programming** in mental health and student services across campus.
6. **Create healing spaces and peer networks** that validate students' lived experiences.
7. **Train faculty and staff** to understand and respond effectively to the challenges faced by undocumented students, as well as to address frequently asked questions in their areas of expertise, such as admissions, career counseling, and financial aid, without requiring immediate referral to another office.
8. **Partner with community organizations** to expand access to legal, health, wellness, and housing resources.
9. **Ensure confidential and affordable mental health services.**
10. **Hold institutions accountable** to structural change, not symbolic gestures.

These steps operationalize personal ethics into collective action, bridging the competency of ethical foundations with the strategic goal of student success.

Conclusion: We Are Responsible for Student Success

Supporting undocumented students is both an ethical responsibility and a strategic necessity. Our labor cannot be tokenized, nor can undocumented identities be reduced to data points. We stand not as caretakers of pity but as co-architects of resilience, demanding that institutions live up to their commitments.

We call on colleagues to transcend allyship and embrace collective struggle. Our work is not about helping students merely survive; it is about helping them thrive in educational landscapes that affirm their humanity.

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Wellness and Health Promotion Knowledge Community

Developing Intentional Team Building Practices

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Advising and Supporting
Professional Development and Engagement

Students arrive on campuses today with a wide range of intersecting, and sometimes competing, needs. Some are looking for crisis support, whereas others are trying to find a sense of belonging. Meeting these needs requires a team.

For professionals in health and well-being, this truth is especially clear. Day after day, staff sit with students at some of their hardest moments, such as after experiencing harm. But who makes sure that these professionals do not shoulder these burdens alone?

The answer is simple: strong teams. Without teams that are intentional, connected, and grounded in trust, the staff who care for our students risk leaving. With these teams, the staff find belonging, safety, and resilience—the same things we want students to experience on our campuses (Cravens et al., 2015).

Belonging and Psychological Safety

Much like students, staff need to feel like they belong. Belonging has been consistently shown to be a key factor in retention (Silver et al., 2024). When people feel they are part of a community, they stay, and they do their work more fully. Psychological safety also matters just as much as belonging. Staff need to know that their voices matter.

Trust as the Foundation

Strong teams thrive on trust. Initially, trust might only be professional (Alexopoulos & Buckley, 2013). We trust a colleague because of their title or their position in the organization. But over time, trust deepens and becomes personal.

Personal trust is what allows colleagues to lean on one another, not just for tasks but for care and empathy. Research confirms that trust is a critical determinant of collaboration (De Montigny et al., 2019). Without it, teams are transactional. With it, teams become transformational.

The Messy Work of Team Development

There is no formula or singular approach when it comes to developing teams. But we know that without intentionality, even our best practices can fall short.

Think about departmental retreats. When done well, retreats allow staff to connect, welcome new colleagues, and reconnect with mission. But too often, retreats become little more than long meetings. Meetings and retreats each serve a purpose, but they are not the same. Retreats should center relationships, not just deliverables.

Team socials face similar challenges. They can provide lower-stakes opportunities to connect, but they are not always accessible. After-work gatherings may exclude those with evening commitments. Midday socials may leave out staff who must remain on site for clinics to stay open.

The problem is not that retreats or socials are inherently bad. It is that they are too often treated as one-off events. Belonging cannot happen once or twice a year. If we truly want strong teams, belonging must become a practice, not an event.

Restorative Practices: A Pathway Forward

Restorative practices (RP) can help achieve this goal. RP is most often associated with student conduct on campuses, but at its heart, it is about relationships. RP is described as strengthening relationships, encouraging dialogue, and creating processes that support community (International Institute for Restorative Practices, n.d.).

RP matters for staff's health and well-being because teams are just microcommunities. They share values, responsibilities, and goals. Just as communities need processes to build trust, address harm, and reaffirm belonging, so too do teams. Scholars have shown that RP can foster social connection, strengthen norms, and provide paths for healing, all vital for those working on the frontlines of student well-being (Abrams, 2023). One pivotal component of RP is the use of circles. Gathering in circles provides a structured way for communities to build relationships, discuss specific problems, and prioritize other's humanity (Abrams, 2023; Mrowka et al., 2024).

How Restorative Practices Can Shape Teams

Here are three ways that RP might show up in practice:

1. **Building relationships.** Even colleagues who have worked together for years may not know each other meaningfully. The use of circles within RP allows for intentional connection to develop. Structured prompts in circles can invite small acts of vulnerability, which help staff see each other as people, not just as roles (Abrams, 2023). Leaders can set the tone here. When they model appropriate vulnerability, they give others permission to do the same.
2. **Navigating conflict.** Conflict is inevitable. But ignoring it plants seeds of dysfunction and mistrust. In health and well-being work, unresolved conflict can directly affect the ability to respond cohesively to crises. RP provides a way to address conflict while preserving relationships. By focusing on behaviors rather than individuals, teams signal that harmful actions must change but individuals still belong, which supports accountability and restoration.
3. **Developing shared identity.** Finally, RP invites teams to cocreate their own agreements. These agreements go beyond meeting etiquette; they reflect how colleagues want to treat each other daily. By creating a shared identity, teams can more easily recognize when behaviors stray from values, and they can restore relationships before the damage becomes permanent.

Practice, Not Event

The lesson here is simple: Team building is not an event. It is a practice. Retreats and socials can be useful, but without ongoing processes, they cannot

sustain belonging and trust. RP reminds us that building strong teams is not about one-off activities; it is about embedding relationship-centered practices into our routine activities.

For health and well-being staff, their work is too vital, too demanding, and too human to be supported by weak or fractured teams. If we build the foundation now, before the next crisis, we ensure staff can lean on one another when it matters most.

Of course, RP requires guidance. Trained facilitators can introduce the philosophy, model the practices, and help teams integrate them. Over time, training staff sustains the work. This practice not only equips them with skills but embeds RP values into the team's DNA.

Conclusion

Strong teams are essential. They are what make it possible for staff to stay in this work, to care for students without losing themselves, and to create departments that reflect the very values of higher education: that people matter, that relationships matter, and that healing is always possible. If we want students to feel they belong and are safe and supported, we must want the same for the staff who care for them.

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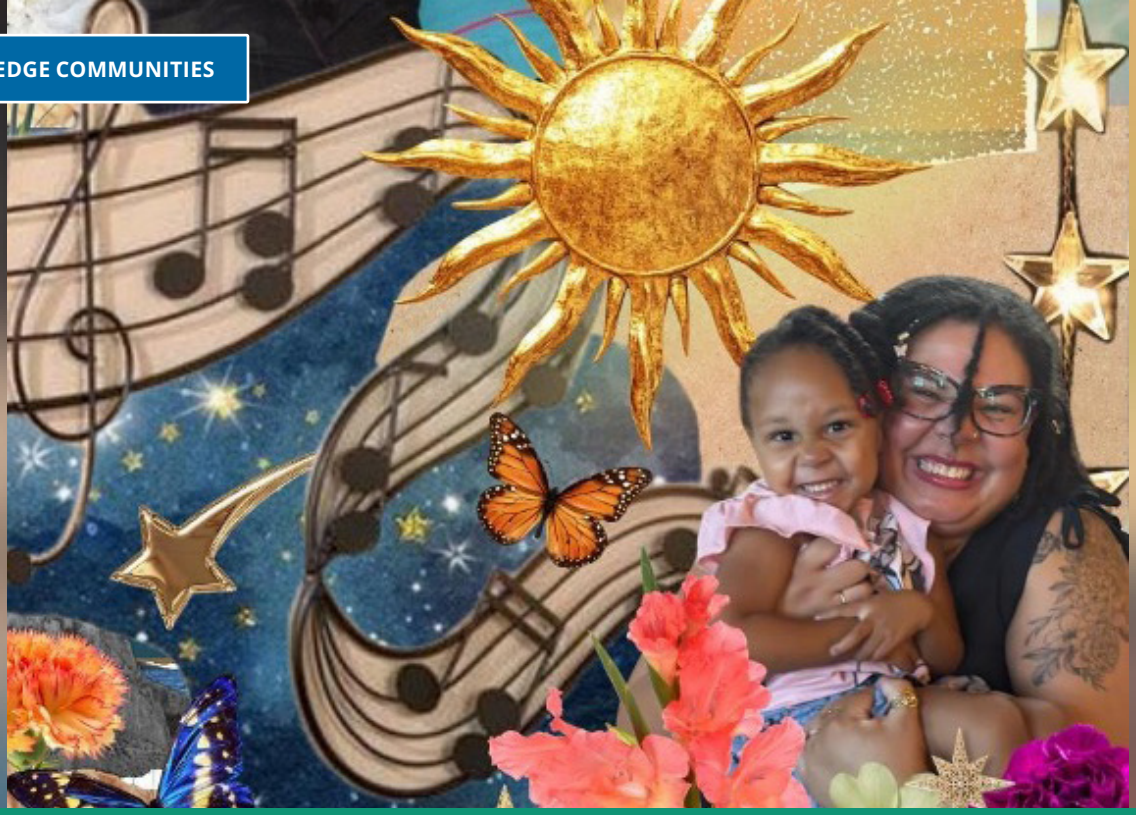

Womxn in Student Affairs Knowledge Community

Through Grief. Through Motherhood. Through Beyoncé.

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Personal and Ethical Foundations
Values, Philosophy, and History

If I had to summarize the past three years, where my career in student affairs collided with new motherhood and profound personal loss, it would be with this Beyoncé (2022c) lyric: "Been down, been up, been broke, broke down, bounced back."

In February 2022, I gave birth to my daughter, just 9 days after my own mother's unexpected death and nearly a year after a pregnancy loss. As a new mother and a griever whose professional identity was deeply intertwined with my personal one, I could not anticipate how these roles would disrupt, challenge, and transform my relationship with my career. There was a reckoning.

I began to question the culture of the profession I once loved, one that exalts overwork, self-sacrifice, and martyrdom in the name of student support (Isdell & Wolf-Wendell, 2021). Through my use of narrative, self-definition, and creating a theorized existence, grounded in Black feminist frameworks (Amoah, 1997; Collins, 2009), I share my lived experiences in hopes of illuminating how ideal worker norms (Acker, 1990; Williams, 1989) marginalize, harm, and push out Black women, mothers, and grievers in student affairs. In reexamining my relationship with this profession, I have turned to Beyoncé's recent body of work as both a soundtrack and lens for viewing my own healing, reclamation, and resistance.

Early in my career, I was deeply committed to my students, often at a great personal yet hidden cost. I worked long hours, gave out my cell phone number, and spent my own money to help students struggling with food insecurity. Because many of the students shared my own identities (Black, woman, first generation, from a low-income household), I proudly took on the role of the othermother (Collins, 2009), determined to be the family that my students needed.

Although I was praised and received employee awards and certificates of appreciation, the recognition rarely came with resources or even rest. In pursuit of advancement, I accepted a leadership role to build a new department from the ground up. Although my creativity and determination earned me national recognition, I was under-resourced and burning out.

A professional transition brought me to a new role where I finally felt supported, and for a brief time, I experienced what humane leadership in the profession could look like. But that support soon vanished, and as a new mother and griever, my need for flexibility was now scrutinized. My integrity was questioned. I became simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible (Constantine et al., 2008; Hollis, 2018), which meant my perceived absences were magnified, and I was told that "there was no way you're getting work done [remotely] with a 14-month-old at home." My efforts to prove my productivity by being physically in my office for 12-hour days were ignored. Motherhood was seen as a liability rather than a strength. And any space for my grief was squelched by the expectations that I swallow my pain and show up with perfection. I was surveilled, undermined, and eventually demoted, despite continuing to serve my students with excellence.

The collective weight from navigating racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2011), misogynoir (Bailey, 2018), and workplace hostility took an immense toll on my physical and mental health, and I ended up in the emergency room due to a severe panic attack while at work. Like many Black women in student affairs (Quaye et al., 2025), I was experiencing severe health consequences as I was failing to uphold the impossible professional expectations now thrust on me: to be present in my office at all times, to prove that I was "working," and to allow others to define my work and minimize my role and expertise. My role as othermother was perverted, and I was expected to serve as a mammy instead by providing self-sacrificial support to my job while denied the space to care for my own child (Collins, 2009; Williams & Castro, 2025).

I was exhausted and knew that if I did not prioritize my well-being, I would have nothing else to give to my students, my career, and most importantly, my daughter. I turned to therapy and music. Beyoncé's Renaissance became my spiritual balm. Through affirmations in songs like I'm "That Girl" and "Alien Superstar," I reclaimed parts of myself.

On my 35th birthday, my first without my mother, I hosted a Renaissance-themed party. Under disco lights, dancing with my 10-month-old daughter, I was reminded of my mother's legacy and the emergence of my own: "I'm finally on the other side.... Swimmin' through the oceans of tears we cried" (Beyoncé, 2022b).

Later, while attending the Renaissance World Tour and watching the Renaissance film (Beyoncé, 2023) with other Black women, these experiences became (en)counterspaces, crucial sites for healing and community (Boss & Bravo, 2021). In the film, Beyoncé provided reflections on being a working mother that reminded me that, right now, my most important commitment is to my daughter and ultimately myself.

Something needed to change. Then came her new album, Cowboy Carter. In "16 Carriages", Beyoncé (2024a) sings "overworked and overwhelmed, ... but still won't fold". I have been overworked in this profession, but I could not let this break me.

When I heard Beyoncé's song, "Protector", I knew that I needed to shield my daughter from seeing me crushed under the weight of these professional demands. It called me to center my daughter in a world that continually asks me to set her aside for the

sake of professionalism. It taught me that in choosing my daughter, I am choosing myself. That allowed me to show up more fully in my work, unapologetically as myself. In doing so, I model to my students (and my daughter) that in a capitalistic society insistent on extracting every ounce of our labor and humanity, choosing yourself and your family is an act of resistance.

"Break My Soul" (Beyoncé, 2022a) became my anthem. It reminded me that I am no one's martyr and that abiding to the relentless expectations of perfection and self-sacrificial loyalty would not prove my worthiness. It showed me the immense power of saying no. And it reminded me that leaving environments that harm you is self-care and an act of self-preservation (Lorde, 1984).

The lyric "You won't break my soul. I'm telling everybody" (Beyoncé, 2022a) reminded me of the power of declaring my story, and that silence only fuels harm. In declaring my story, sharing it boldly and broadly, I found a place in student affairs, among a team that values who I am, what I do, and how I show up as a mother and a griever.

Beyoncé's recent body of work has shown that by embracing motherhood, I can define myself in this profession and be empowered to push against the ideal worker norms and misogynoir I have encountered (Collins, 2009). Her work has moved me through grief, through motherhood, and to my renaissance.

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