Odd Bedfellows or Perfect Partners: A Case Study Analysis of Academic Librarians and Student Affairs Professionals Mental Models toward Collaboration and Student Learning

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At first glance, a partnership between student affairs and academic libraries seems unlikely due to the contradicting perceptions of each field. Librarians have been narrowly characterized as solitary "passive gatekeepers"[1] or guardians of books[2] and conversely student affairs staff have been seen as outgoing and labeled anti-intellectual.[3] From these stereotypical images, it seems unlikely for these two groups to interact let alone collaborate to advance student learning. Yet, once the stereotypes are shed, there is ample evidence to suggest that student affairs professionals and academic librarians are perfect partners to enhance student learning on campuses nationwide. In this paper, I will review recent literature on collaboration between student affairs and academic libraries, introduce the concept of mental models and their potential impact on collaboration, and provide an overview of an ongoing study of collaborative relationships between student affairs professionals and academic librarians.

Collaboration and Student Learning

Throughout the last two decades, numerous higher education scholars and professional organizations have called for collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. Researchers have encouraged institutions to foster seamless learning environments that bridge organizational barriers and connect students' in-class learning with co-curricular experiences.[4] Despite these calls for reform, successful partnerships are often curtailed due to cultural differences, assumptions, and pre-existing mental models regarding student learning and professional duties.

In Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt's study on student success, they found that colleges with high levels of collaboration were more likely to have high levels of student engagement.[5] The authors concluded that higher education leaders must collaborate across functional lines to improve student success. Collaborations between academic and student affairs have also been shown to enhance a variety of student outcomes including learning, development, adjustment to the institution, and academic/career decision-making.[6] Terenzini & Pascarella eloquently summed up the need for a new philosophy focused on campus collaboration for student learning,

> Organizationally and operationally, we've lost sight of the forest…. A whole new mindset is

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needed to capitalize on the interrelatedness of the in-and out-of-class influences on student learning and the functional interconnectedness of academic and student affairs divisions.[7]

The responsibility for student learning must be shared across the institution, and collaboration between academic librarians and student affairs professionals furthers this mission.

Mutual Advocates for Collaboration

The fields of student affairs and academic librarianship have been staunch advocates for campus collaboration for generations. This is witnessed in the literature and professional directives of both professions. Forrest analyzed the standards and ethical edicts of both the Association of College Research Libraries (ACRL) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), professional organizations of librarian and student affairs professionals, respectively.[8] She discovered both associations are grounded in collaboration to enhance student learning. Although the professional standards of ACRL and ACPA have been updated since Forrest's publication, commitment to campus partnerships is still strong throughout the organizations' principles and guiding documents. This is evidenced by ACRL's principle that encourages libraries to "partner in the educational mission of the institution to develop and support information-literate learners who can discover, access, and use information effectively for academic success, research, and lifelong learning".[9] Similarly, ACPA's mission states that it "supports and fosters college student learning through the generation and dissemination of knowledge, which informs policies, practices and programs for student affairs professionals and the higher education community."[10] Both organizations recognize their individual roles in student learning and the need for outreach to further this mission.

In addition, librarians and student affairs practitioners share many of the same goals and attributes. Both have the primary goal of supporting student learning, advocacy for all students, and function outside the traditional classroom.[11] Each profession is evolving in the face of changing technology and student demands.[12] Love noted that both professions also "aim to equip students with tools and resources needed to succeed in their studies and with their evolving personal, social, emotional, and academic endeavors."[13] A majority of the literature from both fields has focused on collaboration with faculty to enhance student learning, but a growing literature base is available on collaborative initiatives between student affairs and academic libraries.

Academic Library-Student Affairs Collaborations

During the last decade, librarians have advocated for increased collaboration between student affairs and academic libraries. A growing number of journal articles in library publications have addressed library-student affairs collaboration and described successful partnerships in areas such as first-year programs, career services, co-curricular programming, multicultural student services, and academic integrity. In this section, I will review the literature on collaboration between student affairs and academic libraries in each of these areas.

All but one article was published in librarianship journals.[14] Although there is a plethora of research regarding student affairs and academic affairs partnerships, there is often only a cursory mention of the library in student affairs publications. I estimate that university libraries may be playing a larger role in these partnerships, yet they have been overlooked in the literature because of a focus on collaboration with faculty. A majority of the collaborations presented are based on anecdotal evidence. Although many of the case studies presented started in one student affairs functional area, once an initial collaboration exists, more are likely to follow.[15]

First-Year Programs and Orientation

The most frequently cited library-student affairs collaborative initiatives in literature are with first-year experience programs. A national study on academic

and student affairs collaborations supported this observation; "institutions are experiencing the most success with counseling, first-year experience programs, orientation and recruitment".[16] First-year programs already exhibit a high degree of faculty-student affairs crossover, so seeing similar trends in libraries is expected.

One example of an academic library and first-year program collaboration was at Western Washington University.[17] After staff turnover, the library created an outreach team that focused on developing relationships with student affairs entities (also referred to as non-academic departments). They began working with first-year programs and orientation and created joint workshops with technology services for incoming students focusing on information literacy. The initiative began with incoming first-year students and after seeing successes, was quickly expanded to include transfers. Through their work with first-year programs, additional student learning needs were identified and student affairs staff began to understand the role of the library in educating students about information literacy and providing valuable resources. During a conversation between librarians and residence life staff, both realized they had shared goals in wanting to improve academic services in the residence halls. Through this conversation, additional services were developed within the residence halls to academically support students and increase their information literacy skills.[18]

In 2007, ACRL and the National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition mapped a path for libraries in first-year experience programs. Aptly named, *The Role of the Library in the First Year of College,* this publication served as a call to action to involve libraries within the first-year experience and the creation of first-year experience librarian positions that focus on new student orientation, campus reading initiatives, first-year seminars, and representation on campus wide first-year experience (FYE) committees.[19] The editors discussed 13 examples about library involvement in the first-year experience, yet their focus was on the librarian's role with faculty in the classroom. There are only perfunctory mentions of collaboration with student affairs professionals.

Career Development

One of the first student affairs-academic library collaborations found in literature was at the University of Buffalo between reference librarians and career services. Prior to 2003, the Undergraduate Library and Career Services Office at University of Buffalo worked together "informally and infrequently." [20] In 2003, a librarian initiated contact with the career counselors to integrate library instruction sessions into career preparatory workshops and cross-catalog career preparatory materials. Immediate responses from students were positive and one student was quoted as stating, "I didn't know I could use the library to find out about specific companies."[21]

This initial success led to a deeper partnership, both librarians and career services staff began meeting regularly and each began to understand the other's structure and culture. Initially, steps were employed to develop a common language and vision, which included facility tours, and cross-committee representation. The partnership is on-going and has provided career services staff with a better archived satellite library, increased information literacy skills for students, and the library with increased access to students in a venue that connects library research to personal goals. Similar partnerships between academic libraries and career centers have occurred at Indiana Tech,[22] and University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign.[23]

Co-curricular Programming

In the last decade, librarians have turned to co-curricular programming to outreach to students in new ways and reduce library anxiety. *Library anxiety* is defined by four main attributes including the library size, uncertainty regarding where to find items, insecurity over where to begin, and what processes to follow.[24] Many first-year students have library anxiety and 75-85% of students regularly report feeling scared, lost, or confused in the library which can impede student success.

Stern Cahoy and Snavely reported that creative library orientations such as mystery tours, scavenger hunts, and festivals enhanced student comfort with the library facility.[25] As library space has been converted from quiet study space to a collaborative learning hub, libraries have begun to incorporate gaming programs.[26] Vander Elzen and Roush identified collaboration with student affairs professionals and student organizations as a key component for a successful gaming program.[27] They also found that gaming programs increased library visibility. Students reported feeling more comfortable with library staff and 76.9% of attendees felt that the activities enhanced their sense of belonging on campus.

Student affairs staff members have also reported advantages to joint co-curricular programming including increased engagement of commuter and non-traditional students in programming initiatives.[28] In addition to programming within the library facility, librarians have brought programs into student affairs managed spaces such as diversity centers, career centers, student unions, Greek houses, and residence halls. Cummings worked with residence life staff to incorporate a passive programming initiative, Library in your Room, aimed at educating residents of online library resources via door hangers, posters, and bulletin boards.[29] Similarly, Kraemer et al. designed a book club for residence hall students.[30]

Librarian outreach programming has enhanced traditional student activities such as Welcome Week,[31] late night programming,[32] citizenship programming,[33] cultural celebrations,[34] and student leadership trainings.[35] Not only are librarians assisting in coordinating campus activities some have begun participating. At Mansfield University in Pennsylvania, librarians sought to reduce library anxiety by participating in a theater production and campus orchestra performance.[36] Assessment results indicated that students felt more comfortable with the library and librarians. The authors concluded, "Librarians involved with student activities outside the library improves student comfort in the library, and should therefore be considered a service to the library and university."[37]

Multicultural Student Services

Walter contended that libraries have intermittently engaged in diversity issues on campus and stated, "A commitment to supporting diversity initiatives across campus is not a deeply-rooted feature of the service profile of academic libraries."[38] Although some libraries have created diversity committees within their organizational structure, little outreach has occurred to student services. Kuhartets, Cahalan, and Gitner maintain that one of the most important goals of any library is "its dedication to serving ethnic populations."[39] Student affairs has the knowledge and ability to assist libraries in achieving this vision.

Research has shown an organizational need to integrate library services into cultural centers. Theories for multicultural organization development cite collaboration regarding diversity, inclusion, and social justice as central to developing a more inclusive organizational structure.[40] Norlin and Morris conducted a survey of cultural directors regarding their interactions with library staff; 85% responded they did not network with library staff. This indicated a dearth of communication and knowledge between the organizations regarding each other's services.[41] As cultural directors and librarians interact with students on a daily basis, increased communication could enhance organizational knowledge capacity and improve student service.

At the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), significant measures were taken to entwine library resources with multicultural student services.[42] Previous empirical studies have linked use of academic libraries by historically underrepresented students to higher likelihood of retention.[43] Due to this and an increased push for multiculturalism in academic libraries, numerous partnership opportunities were identified at UIUC. In 2006, librarians at the undergraduate library created an outreach program aimed at building connections with student services. This movement created two positions, an Outreach Librarian for Multicultural Services and an Orientation Services Librarian. Each was tasked with creating partnerships within the library and bringing library services to other areas of campus.

The Outreach Librarian for Multicultural Student Services began working with staff in the Minority Student Center to assess the needs of students and how they could partner to provide essential skills. Initially, an instruction session was added to all three TRIO program curriculums. Students reacted positively and more than half set up additional appointments to learn more about topics such as RefWorks, a citation management tool.[44] The librarian began holding weekly sessions in cultural centers that provided students with research support and tutorials.

Student leaders began partnering with the Outreach Librarian to promote these services on a peer level. This step dramatically increased students' use of the service and earned students' trust. The collaboration soon broadened further to include international and study abroad students. This ongoing partnership has fulfilled a variety of outcomes including increased visibility for the library, connecting minority students with a specific librarian, improved student access to library resources, and increased student learning on information literacy.[45]

Academic Integrity

Two recent case studies have validated the potential for a successful collaboration between student affairs and academic libraries regarding academic integrity issues. The College Library and Office of the Dean of Students at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) recognized they had a common goal of educating students on the ethical use of information. They joined forces to create various learning modules. The authors noted that both offices were "invigorated by a new sense of camaraderie" and numerous collaborative projects followed the initial partnership.[46]

A similar partnership was formed at Indiana University Southeast between the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, the Writing Center Director, and an instructional librarian.[47] The team developed academic integrity workshops designed to be a sanction component for violators of the policy. The authors indicated the development of learning outcomes were critical to the program's success.

Overall, there are a growing number of successful collaborations between student affairs and academic libraries represented in literature, although collaboration remains challenging on many campuses. The literature base is comprised largely of individual testimonials, and additional systematic scientific inquiry is needed to advance the knowledge base. Currently, I am conducting an on-going study using a qualitative case study methodology to explore the how student affairs professionals and academic librarians collaborate to advance student learning. This paper will focus on exploring a sub question of this study: How do the mental models of each profession influence collaborative relationships regarding student learning?

Mental Models

Mental models are "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action."[48] They can be shared within organizations or groups of individuals and unearthing these operating assumptions is crucial to forming mutual understanding and respect. Mental models can unconsciously guide behavior and "determine what people attend to, what they hold dear, and what they emphasize in their own work with students and others…they dictate the relative value one gives to facets of the undergraduate experience."[49] In fact, different mental models about the nature of student learning and value of out-of-class activities among academic affairs and student affairs are among the most significant barriers to collaboration.[50]

Evidence suggests that student affairs practitioners and academic librarians are unaware of each other's roles and responsibilities, which may result in inaccurate mental models about each field.[51] Tag, Buck and Mautino acknowledged that with increased access to information technology and services (e.g., Internet, Google, etc.) there is a significant lack of knowledge among both faculty and students about the library, its resources, and librarians themselves.[52] It is likely this ignorance extends to student affairs professionals, but further research is needed. Additionally, Walter and

Eodice noted that student affairs graduate program curricula did not address academic libraries.[53]

This lack of awareness may result in inaccurate mental models and assumptions about each profession, their role in student learning, and collaboration. Further research is needed to better understand the mental models of librarians and student affairs professionals in order to develop strategies to enhance collaborative activities.

Methodology

To investigate how mental models of each profession influence collaborative relationships between student affairs professionals and academic librarians I am employing a qualitative case study approach which lends itself to the study of a "real-life, contemporary context or setting"[54] and "interpreting observations of educational phenomenon."[55] The case study methodology is the defined by the selection of an identifiable bounded case and grounded in a constructivist theoretical framework.[56] For this study, I sought out an institution that had a shared student affairs-library facility and a high commitment to student learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum to serve as the bounded case. I hypothesized that institutions with a shared facility will be information rich because the library and student affairs staff members at these institutions have a higher likelihood of interaction, and may have already begun to self-analyze their collaborative relationships. I chose a private, liberal-arts institution in the Midwest that recently opened a joint library-student union facility to conduct this research.

Data Collection

Case study demands the collection of a vast array of data from multiple methods.[57] In this study, I am collecting data from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews are the primary form of data collection and participants include 3-6 academic librarians, the director of the library, 3-6 mid-level student affairs professionals, two senior student affairs officers, and representatives from senior university leadership. Semi-structured interviews are being conducted during three separate visits over the course of an academic semester. Interviews are exploring the following topics:

- Common misconceptions about each profession
- The values, priorities, and culture of student affairs and academic libraries
- Definition of student learning and the role it plays in ones work
- The role collaboration plays in ones work
- Benefits and challenges of collaboration between student affairs and academic libraries
- Specific collaborative initiatives and the creation of the joint facility

Study Overview

At the time of publication, one site visit had been completed and six participants had been interviewed (4-librarians, 2-student affairs professionals). Data is being coded using open and axial coding processes. Initial data has revealed that each profession has a general lack of understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities on campus. Both librarians and student affairs professionals in the study have demonstrated a commitment to collaboration, but are unsure what initiatives may be mutually beneficial.

Participants have provided varied definitions of student learning, but all have indicated that student learning expands beyond the traditional classroom. Overall, participants' mental models regarding collaboration and student learning are symbiotic, but perceptions about organizational structure, daily operations, and goals are varied. These preliminary findings suggest that there is a willingness to enhance collaboration between the entities, but the lack of familiarity with each other's day-to-day work and desired outcomes hinders collaborative attempts. By further exploring these misunderstandings, I hope to develop tools that will aid both librarians and student affairs professionals in developing collaborative student learning focused relationships. The study is scheduled to conclude in the summer of 2015 and the final results are slated to be distributed in early 2016.

Notes

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