

Baylor University

From the Selected Works of Rishi Sriram, Ph.D.

2012

Reclaiming the "scholar" in scholar-practitioner

Rishi Sriram, *Baylor University*
Meghan Oster



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/rishi_sriram/16/

Sriram, R., & Oster, M. (2012).
Reclaiming the "scholar" in scholar-practitioner.
Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 49(4), 377–396.
doi:10.1515/jsarp-2012-6432
Available at <http://journals.naspa.org/jsarp/vol49/iss4/art2/>

Innovations in Research and Scholarship Feature

Reclaiming the "Scholar" in Scholar-Practitioner

Rishi Sriram, *Baylor University*
Meghan Oster, *Northern Virginia Community College*



Scholars and practitioners continuously espouse the importance of research in student affairs work. This study empirically examined student affairs professionals' engagement in research. Results indicated that professionals desire to engage research, but struggle to do so regularly. Gender and education are not factors in level of research engagement, but job level is. Graduate students reported significantly higher research engagement than did full-time professionals.

Scholars and practitioners continuously espouse the importance of research in student affairs work. Student affairs professionals, the faculty who prepare them in graduate programs, and professional associations all play a role in ensuring adequate understanding of relevant research in the field. Although the notion of *scholar-practitioner* is widely touted, there is concern about a possible divide between scholars and practitioners in the profession (Blimling, 2001; Jablonski, Mena, Manning, Carpenter, & Siko, 2006; Komives, 1997).

Recently, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), the two largest student affairs professional associations, joined efforts to publish competencies in the profession, with one of the 10 competencies

Rishi Sriram, Assistant Professor & Program Coordinator, Higher Education and Student Affairs, Baylor University. Meghan Oster, Policy Planning Specialist, Northern Virginia Community College.

pertaining to attitudes, skills, and knowledge of assessment, evaluation, and research (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). Authors attest that available literature has relevance to the day-to-day responsibilities of student affairs professionals (Jones, Harper, & Schuh, 2011). Moreover, they suggest that good practice cannot be achieved without at least reading and understanding available research.

Little is known regarding how much student affairs professionals engage research in their work or how to help them do so. Most of the published material on the topic of student affairs professionals and their research engagement consists of theoretical articles (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Young, 2001). These authors discuss the importance of assessment, evaluation, and research (AER) competency, while also suggesting plausible obstacles to and solutions for professionals regularly engaging research. Such articles are helpful for framing the issue, but they are not generally based upon empirical data. Therefore, the purpose of our study included the following key points:

1. gain insight into the research interests of student affairs professionals;
2. examine the research views, behaviors, and perceived institutional culture of student affairs professionals; and
3. determine whether providing an intervention to make research more readily accessible to professionals would result in significant changes in their research views and behaviors, and their perceptions of culture.

Key terms related to this study must be defined. First, we use the term *research engagement* to describe any attempt to read and understand published research. A professional who does not conduct research can still have a high level of research engagement. Second, Manning (Jablonski et al., 2006) proposed a four-stage continuum to describe research engagement among student affairs professionals: scholars, scholar-practitioners, practitioner-scholars, and practitioners. Scholars are predominantly faculty devoted to original research; and on the other side of the continuum, practitioners are administrators who use theory and research in practice but do not contribute to the literature. Although Manning did not label it, she allows for a fifth stage on the continuum representing administrators who may place no value on scholarship. For this study, the term *scholar-practitioner* describes administrators who desire to engage in research within and for their practice. On Manning's continuum, these administrators may be practitioner-scholars, practitioners, or those who value research but struggle to engage in the literature. Finally, the term *authors* describes faculty or administrators who have published writing relevant to the AER competency (ACPA & NASPA, 2010).

Literature Review: Student Affairs Professionals Engaging Research

The literature provided insight into the nature of the AER competency and its importance in student affairs. It also revealed extant concern about a possible lack of desired attitudes, behaviors, and culture when putting the AER competency into practice.

Beeler and Hunter (1991) published an edited monograph that placed student affairs research on trial, concluding that campus administrators, graduate preparation programs, and professional associations are all guilty of an unsatisfactory level of engagement with research and scholarship (Brown, 1991). Since that publication, authors have continued the conversation concerning the nature of professionals' relationship to research.

The AER Competency

Schroeder and Pike (2001) trace the value of research in student affairs back to Harper's (1905) *The Trend in Higher Education*, which advocated for the scientific study of the student. With varying language, many authors have restated this important goal several times: the American Council on Education in *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937, 1949) and more recently with the *Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996), *The Principles of Good Practice* (ACPA & NASPA, 1998), *ASK Standards* (ACPA, 2006), and the *CAS Professional Standards in Higher Education* (CAS, 2009).

ACPA and NASPA endorsed a joint publication entitled *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* (2010). This document defines the broad professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected of student affairs professionals, regardless of specialization or role within the field. These 10 competencies provide professionals with the ability to increase awareness of strengths and areas of needed development. The AER competency emphasizes the importance of using, conducting, and critiquing qualitative and quantitative analyses.

AER in the Literature

In 2001, the *Journal of College Student Development* published an issue entirely devoted to linking research and practice in student affairs. In 2002, NASPA followed suit with its own issue dedicated to the topic. Ideally, the increasing emphasis on student development and learning in student affairs during the previous two decades should translate to a similar increase in the use of research in practice (Carpenter, 2001; Fried, 2002). Expertise in research pertaining to higher education and student affairs is imperative if professionals wish to remain credible within the academic community (Carpenter, 2001; Young, 2001). But perhaps most importantly, administrators can make sound decisions only through understanding the current research and what that research means for practice (Blimling, 2001; Carpenter, 2001; Patton & Harper, 2009; Schroeder & Pike, 2001; White 2002). Without engagement in the literature, student affairs practice becomes "simply random activity, bound by tradition and convention, maybe helpful, maybe not, probably suiting some students, almost certainly leaving others out" (Carpenter, 2001, p. 305).

More recent scholarship continues to highlight the importance of engaging in research in student affairs work. Authors attest that literature is available that has relevance to the daily interactions and responsibilities of administrators (Bishop, 2010; Burkard, Cole, Ott & Stoflet, 2005; Jablonski et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2011; Patton & Harper, 2009). Not only can such research increase

effectiveness (Jablonski et al.), but there is also a "joy of working at the nexus of research work and professional work" (Kidder, 2010, para. 6). Moreover, research skills are playing an increasingly important role in student affairs, with more than one in four positions explicitly requiring skills related to the AER competency (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010).

Reasoning Behind the AER Competency

Although a desire to work with college students is a natural prerequisite for entering into student affairs work, being "good with students" is simply not enough to be an effective practitioner. Carpenter (2001) drew an appropriate comparison between the student affairs profession and other professions, such as medicine. A doctor would not be considered effective simply based upon personality or good intentions. Likewise, student affairs professionals are most effective when they are experts in the scientific study of students (Harper, 1905) and are able to implement their practice based upon sound evidence. Gaining the status of "scholar" is not the goal, but instead the activities of a scholar connecting research and theory to practice for the benefit of students and campuses (Young, 2001). Students have a right to expect that the educated professionals who serve them do so with a high standard of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and best practices (Carpenter, 2001). Such a standard cannot be achieved without the AER competency.

A Lack of AER Competency in Student Affairs

Unfortunately, authors have expressed concern that some student affairs professionals do not satisfactorily demonstrate the AER competency. Blimling (2001) admitted, "If scholarship and practice in student affairs sometimes seem segmented, confused, and conflicted, the reason may be that they are" (p. 381). Over the last two decades, practitioners published fewer scholarly articles (Davis & Liddell, 1997; Saunders, Register, Cooper, Bates, & Daddona, 2000). Professionals do not need to publish to demonstrate the AER competency, but when so few practitioners conduct scholarship they delegate this important work to graduate students and faculty who may not be directly involved in practice (Young, 2001).

A lack of publishing may not be a real concern in and of itself, unless it is a symptom of a deeper problem—a lack of AER competency among student affairs professionals. Although there are multiple reasons for this problem, it begins with the adequate preparation of student affairs professionals in graduate programs (Bishop, 2010; Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Hunter & Beeler, 1991; Jablonski et al., 2006). Graduates of these programs may lack understanding of the value of scholarship and their obligation to consume and apply such research in the field (Hunter & Beeler, 1991; Jablonski et al., 2006). Student affairs leaders need to do their part as well, requiring professionals to use their research skills regularly by at least staying current with the literature (Bishop, 2010; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010; Malaney, 2002; Sriram, 2011).

Research Views, Behaviors, and Culture

A synthesis of the literature pertaining to research skills in student affairs uncovers distinct areas needing improvement. These areas can be placed into three categories: views and opinions about research, behaviors in reading research, and a perception of the organizational culture and its relationship to scholarship.

Research views. Engagement in research necessitates a belief that pertinent research is available and relevant to campuses. A separation between scholars and practitioners could lead to "something of an antipathy for things scholarly" among student affairs professionals (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007, p. 272). Scholarly practice equates to good practice and demands that professionals utilize theory and research as the basis for goals and decisions (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Dean, 2010). If professionals do not view research as vital to good practice, there is little hope of increasing their research behaviors.

Research behaviors. The daily behaviors of student affairs professionals represent the crux of the issue regarding the AER competency. As Jablonski et al. (2006) noted, "We need to argue for moral, sane, and appropriately complex assessment, research, and evaluation. We can argue the case most readily and convincingly if we are actively engaged in such and are using it to inform practice every day" (p. 190). Authors offer several ways for engaging research more readily, including initiating conversations about its importance, collaborating with others on research, seeking out research that is contemporary and relevant, presenting at conferences, and contributing to research articles (Kidder, 2010; Sriram, 2011; White, 2002). Although some of these practices may occur on an individual basis, others require an organizational culture that values and promotes research engagement.

Research culture. Culture significantly influences perceptions, feelings, and, ultimately, behaviors in organizations (Schein, 2004). The AER competency must be a cultural priority for divisions of student affairs, thereby influencing supervisors, peers, job expectations, staff meetings, decision-making processes, and reward systems. The potential of the scholar-practitioner model will never be realized until graduate programs, student affairs divisions, and professional associations work together, fostering a culture that encourages and requires the AER competency (Schroeder & Pike, 2001). There is much work to be done to embed research-based decision making into the ethos of the profession (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010). Changing the level at which student affairs professionals engage research will require changing the culture of the profession, and that must begin on individual campuses.

Purpose of This Study

In light of the literature on the importance of research knowledge, skills, and attitudes in student affairs, it is somewhat surprising that little information exists regarding attempts to eval-

uate or increase the AER competency in practitioners. The present study is an attempt to address this gap in the literature.

Methods and Results

Our research comprises four studies, which we called the Student Affairs Research Awareness Project (SARAP). In Study 1, we investigated the research interests of student affairs professionals, allowing us to gain general information about the participants. For Study 2, we compared professionals' research engagement based on gender, education, and job level. For Study 3, we examined differences based on gender, education, and job level regarding organizational culture perceptions and its influence on the use of research. In Study 4, we compared the results of individuals who took both the pretest and posttest to discover if engagement changed after the SARAP newsletter was distributed.

Our research used these exploratory questions:

1. What are the research interests of student affairs professionals?
2. Is there a difference in engagement in the research literature (as defined by a combination of research views and behaviors) among student affairs professionals based upon gender, education, or job level?
3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of a research culture among student affairs professionals based upon gender, education, or job level?
4. Is there a difference in research engagement before and after participation in an intervention designed to increase such engagement in student affairs professionals?

We conducted this research using a survey design and a pretest-intervention-posttest design. We distributed an online version of the SARAP instrument to all student affairs professionals at a single institution at the beginning of the academic year. We then sent a research newsletter intervention to the same individuals by e-mail as an attempt to increase engagement in the literature. After five newsletters were distributed, we administered the survey again to the same student affairs professionals.

Site

We implemented the SARAP at a private, research university located in the South. The institution has an undergraduate population of more than 10,000 and less than 20,000 students. We chose this institution for several reasons. First, this university has a large division of student affairs with a strong tradition of commitment to NASPA. Approximately 30 professionals and graduate students from this institution attend the NASPA national conference annually. Student affairs professionals employed at this institution receive generous professional development funds, with the expectation that the funds will be used to gain needed knowledge, skills, and perspectives for

the field. This institution also has a strong graduate program in higher education and student affairs that partners with the division of student affairs. Based upon this information, we believed this institution to be an appropriate site to measure research engagement among student affairs professionals.

Instrument

The SARAP instrument is composed of three scales pertaining to the AER competency: Research Views, Research Behaviors, and Research Culture. The philosophical model used in developing this instrument purports that responders must understand the questions and link them to relevant concepts (comprehension), retrieve specific and generic memories (retrieval), draw inferences based on accessibility (judgment), and map the judgment onto the response category (response) (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Each of these scales used Likert-type response categories.

Literature on student affairs professionals and their research engagement was the basis for creating items for the instrument. To address content validity (DeVellis, 2012), the instrument was distributed to a focus group of student affairs faculty, professionals, and graduate students. Focus group participants provided feedback on their ability to comprehend items and on the extent to which the items addressed what we were attempting to measure. Calculating Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each scale assessed reliability of the instrument. Factor analysis was not used because the sample did not meet general guidelines for size requirements (DeVellis, 2012).

The Research Views scale contains three items that attempt to capture attitudes concerning research engagement. The Research Views scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .598. Although this Alpha was lower than desired, the Research Views scale was combined with the Research Behaviors scale in data analysis to create a new variable called *research engagement*. The Research Behaviors scale contains five items that measure the amount that student affairs professionals interact with research literature. Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was .831. The Research Culture scale contains five items measuring perceptions regarding the presence of a culture that encourages engagement with research. It had a Cronbach's Alpha of .931.

Participants

Seventy-four student affairs professionals and graduate students participated in the survey at least once, and their data were used for Studies 1–3 (see Table 1). Of the 74 participants, 30 took both the pretest and posttest, and their data were used in Study 4.

Limitations

Findings from this research should be applied within the context of several limitations. First, the studies were completed on a single campus. In many areas of student affairs scholarship,

multi-institutional studies build upon prior research that examines single institutions. Because there is no prior empirical research on student affairs professionals' engagement with research, we felt that beginning this research on a purposefully chosen single campus was appropriate, even though it restricts our ability to generalize the results. Relatedly, a large sample size of participants did not exist, and the sample did not fully represent the racial diversity of the field (see Table 1). Finally, this research relied on self-reports, which are subject to potential respondent bias.

Study 1

In Study 1, we investigated participants' research interests. Because professional associations help to define the AER competency and disseminate research to professionals, we asked participants what national associations they participated in, with 74.6% indicating NASPA and ACPA (see Table 2). Regarding research topics, participants were most interested in leadership, first-year students, and residence life (see Table 3). When participants read journal articles they were most concerned with practical application and general data (see Table 4). The journals most often read were the *Journal of College Student Development*, *About Campus*, and the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* (see Table 5); 20% of participants noted that they did not read such publications. Participants were asked what prevented them from engaging in research, and most reported that they did not have the time or access to engage in research (see Table 6). Finally, 64% of the participants reported that their current engagement with research is less than what they desired (see Table 7).

Study 2

For Study 2, we compared specific groups according to their *research engagement*, a variable created from the combination of the Research Views and Research Behaviors subscales. Theoretically, we defined research engagement as a phenomenon that results from professionals' attitudes toward research and their actions in reviewing research. We conducted a factorial multivariate analysis of variance to compare groups based on gender, education, and job level. Data were first screened to make sure that all assumptions for the statistical analysis were met. Each independent variable had two categories: male ($n = 21$) or female ($n = 38$), bachelor's degree ($n = 20$) or master's degree and higher ($n = 39$), graduate student ($n = 22$) or professional ($n = 37$). The dependent variables of research views and research behaviors were linearly combined to create the new variable of research engagement, which was appropriate on a theoretical basis because both subscales were related to engagement in the literature and correlated with each other statistically (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005).

We found a significant difference in research engagement based on job level. Graduate students reported engaging research significantly more than full-time professionals with a moderately large effect size ($F(2, 51) = 4.67, p = .014$, partial $\eta^2 = .155$). The effect size indicates that 15.5% of the variation in research engagement was determined by whether the participants were graduate students or professionals. Follow-up univariate tests revealed that this difference was largely

driven by the Research Behaviors variable ($p = .011$, partial $\eta^2 = .119$) rather than the Research Views variable ($p = .979$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$). No significant differences were found for research engagement based upon education ($p = .289$, partial $\eta^2 = .048$) or gender ($p = .297$, partial $\eta^2 = .047$) (see Table 8).

Study 3

We then compared the perception of a culture amenable to research between the same groups. To address this question, we conducted a factorial analysis of variance to compare means. After ensuring that the assumptions for the statistical analysis were met, findings revealed no significant differences on perception of a research culture based upon education ($p = .573$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$), job level ($p = .575$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$), or gender ($p = .574$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$).

Study 4

In our final study, we investigated whether scores on the Research Views, Research Behaviors, and Research Culture scales significantly changed before and after the SARAP newsletter intervention was distributed. After participants took the pretest we distributed five monthly newsletters that featured summaries of relevant research and links to the full articles of those studies with important portions highlighted for easier scanning. The newsletter went to all student affairs professionals on the campus. After five months, we administered the survey again as a posttest.

Because participants cited time and access as primary obstacles to reading research, our hypothesis was that student affairs professionals would score significantly higher on the posttest after receiving five issues of a monthly research newsletter that increased accessibility and reduced reading time with summaries, direct links to full text, and highlighted sections. Thirty participants took the pretest and posttest, and we conducted a paired-samples t -test to compare the means on Research Views, Research Behaviors, and Research Culture. Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest means. The results indicated that research engagement, even in terms of just reading research, did not increase for these participants from the newsletter intervention (see Table 9).

Table 1
Gender, Race, and Job-Level Demographics of Sample and Population

Demographic	Sample		Population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender				
Female	48	64.9	113	67.7
Male	26	35.1	54	32.3
Race				
White	61	82.4	130	77.8
Minority	10	13.5	37	22.2
Job level				
Graduate student	26	35.1	27	16.2
Professional	48	64.9	100	59.9
Administrative	N/A	N/A	40	23.9
Education				
Nonmaster's	26	35.1	N/A	N/A
Master's or higher	48	64.9	N/A	N/A

Table 2
Association Memberships of Student Affairs Professionals

Association	<i>n</i>	%
ACPA	18	25.3
ACSD	8	10.7
ASHE	0	0.0
NACADA	0	0.0
NASPA	37	49.3
NODA	3	4.0
Not a member of any association	22	29.3
Other	13	17.3

Table 3
Research Topics of Interest to Student Affairs Professionals

Research Topic	<i>n</i>	%
First-year students	37	49.3
Leadership	43	57.3
Multicultural affairs	22	29.3
Nontraditional students	16	21.3
Residence Life	29	38.7
Retention	22	29.3
Service learning	21	28.0
Student organizations	24	32.0
None	1	1.3
Other	14	18.7

Table 4
Student Affairs Professionals' Reasons for Engaging Scholarship for Practice

Reason	<i>n</i>	%
Background information	34	45.3
Benchmarking	33	44.0
Practical application	59	78.7
Statistics	35	46.7
Theories	33	44.0
Other	4	5.3

Table 5
Most Read Journals by Student Affairs Professionals

Journal	<i>n</i>	%
<i>About Campus</i>	25	33.3
<i>Journal of College Student Development</i>	27	36.0
<i>Journal of Higher Education</i>	15	20.0
<i>Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice</i>	21	28.0
<i>Research in Higher Education</i>	4	5.3
<i>Review of Higher Education</i>	1	1.3
I do not read such publications	15	20.0
Other	8	10.7

Table 6

Student Affairs Professionals' Reasons for Not Staying Current With Research

Reason	<i>n</i>	%
I have limited access to such research	13	17.3
My supervisor(s) do not consider this a priority	5	6.7
I cannot find the time to do this	49	65.3
I do not feel like I have the skills to do this well	7	9.3
I do not have the desire to do this	10	13.3
Other	7	9.3

Table 7

Student Affairs Professionals' Self-Evaluation of Current Engagement With Research

Engagement	<i>n</i>	%
More than I want it to be	1	1.3
About where I want it to be	18	24.0
Slightly less than I want it to be	26	34.7
Much less than I want it to be	21	28.0
Significantly less than I want it to be	9	1.3

Table 8

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Measure of Multilevel Dependent Variable of Research Views and Research Behaviors by Group

Group	Research Views		Research Behaviors	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender				
Female	4.95	.240	2.76	.219
Male	5.04	.298	2.94	.271
Education				
Bachelor's	4.80	.304	2.65	.276
Master's and above	5.24	.167	3.01	.152
Job level				
Graduate student	5.09	.187	3.45	.170
Professional	4.91	.297	2.39	.270

Table 9
Pretest and Posttest Mean Difference Scores for Research Views, Behaviors, and Culture

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Research views	.207	.910	28	1.22	.231	.322
Research behaviors	.000	.634	26	.000	1.00	0
Research culture	.029	.660	26	.227	.822	.062

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to gain insight into the research interests of student affairs professionals, examine their engagement with research, and determine whether engagement increased after a newsletter intervention. As noted earlier, the term *research engagement* in this study refers to reading and understanding available research in the literature, not necessarily conducting such research. Taken together, these four studies provide insight on student affairs professionals as scholar-practitioners and offer implications for future research and current practice.

In Study 1, we used general questions to garner information regarding research interests. Overall, student affairs professionals espoused interest in research pertaining to the field, demonstrated through their reporting of interesting research topics, types of information they desire, journals they read, and a desire to increase research engagement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, topics of greatest interest were leadership, first-year students, and residential life. These professionals were most interested in engaging research for the purpose of practical application. There was, however, a disconnection between research interest and research engagement for these professionals, with 64% reporting that their engagement was less than they desired.

We then sought to determine whether gender, education, or job level significantly influenced research engagement, as defined by research views and behaviors. There was no difference in research engagement between males and females, which was not surprising. We did, however, expect that education and job level would make a difference in engagement. Those who have pursued graduate degrees, no matter the discipline, are presumably taught to value scholarship and are equipped with the skills to engage and apply research in practice. Likewise, we thought it a fair hypothesis that the higher one advances in the organization of a division of student affairs, the higher the engagement would be with the research literature.

Contrary to our expectations, results from Study 2 indicate that graduate students engage research significantly more than full-time professionals. We offer two possible interpretations for this finding. First, graduate students are often required to read research for coursework, so the find-

ing that students engage more than professionals may not be surprising. However, graduate courses presumably require students to read research because it prepares them for what they should be doing in their professional roles. Therefore, one might expect professionals to read research as much or more than students in preparatory programs. In the context of this second interpretation, these results provide discouraging evidence regarding the research engagement of professionals. These alternative interpretations lead to pertinent questions. What is the purpose of research courses in graduate programs? Is engagement in research, even in terms of only reading articles, really needed in the field? If these results can be affirmed as representative of national norms through future research, then it may be that research engagement is not truly required in practice or that graduate preparatory programs are not instilling its value in new professionals.

Study 3 compared perceptions of a research culture based upon job level, education, and gender. We found the lack of significant difference between groups, especially based upon job level or education, disappointing. We thought that perhaps student affairs professionals with graduate degrees and/or with more responsibility would be more involved in conversations relating to research and its relevance to practice. We did not find empirical evidence to support that thinking, however.

When asked what prevented them from engaging in research more readily, professionals responded that limited time and access were the two largest obstacles. Study 4 was designed to address these issues by making relevant research more accessible through direct e-mail and enabling reading such research to be less time consuming through summaries and highlighting of key points within articles. No significant differences were found in research views, behaviors, or culture before and after the SARAP newsletters were distributed. The newsletter did not address, however, other obstacles listed by participants, such as desire to engage research or whether research is a priority of supervisors. Although professionals worry about time and access, the results of Study 4 could indicate that engagement with research is more of a cultural problem than a practical one. Stated differently, do senior administrators in divisions of student affairs promote staying current with available research as a necessary competency? If it is not discussed in job expectations, the hiring processes, and performance evaluations, then the culture could dictate that research is a nice activity to do but not a requirement for good practice.

Implications for Current Practice

In an era of tightened budgets, student affairs professionals will be increasingly called upon to prove their value to a variety of stakeholders, including governing boards, administration, faculty, parents, and students. The recent elimination of three top student affairs positions at Texas Tech University demonstrates that student affairs is not immune to drastic resource reductions and reorganization (Grasgreen, 2011). How do we reclaim the "scholar" in scholar-practitioner and ensure that professionals are experts in their field?

Engaging the literature of student affairs should not be viewed as something of interest only to graduate students and faculty with optional importance to practitioners. As Bishop (2010) sug-

gested, "There ought to be some connection between what student affairs professionals do and the body of knowledge that the profession is built upon" (para. 14). The current research suggests that there is a need for increased engagement in research among professionals. If so, then those in professional associations, graduate preparatory programs, and divisions of student affairs should take intentional steps to help professionals understand the importance of reading current research for the sake of better practice.

There needs to be a culture that encourages and demands research competencies from professionals. In addition to continuing to espouse the importance of the AER competency, professional associations could take steps to ensure that more conference presentations are grounded in research and scholarship. Graduate preparatory programs could assess whether their required research courses meet the needs of future professionals, including refining curricula or offering more research courses at the master's level. Faculty in these programs could also offer continuing professional development opportunities, especially to the student affairs professionals on their campuses (Saunders et al., 2000). These opportunities could include research workshops that hone qualitative and quantitative skills or monthly reading groups of pertinent research articles (Sriram, 2011).

Leaders in student affairs, especially senior student affairs officers, should not assume that the professionals whom they supervise readily engage in and with research. Instead, they should advocate for the importance of applying research in practice, encouraging supervisees to make research a priority, and to take the time to engage scholarship regularly. Demands upon student affairs professionals seem to accumulate from decade to decade, and finding the time to read research is perhaps easier said than done. But people will enact the behaviors that the surrounding culture values (Schein, 2004), and engaging research may be more of an issue of value rather than time. As Rhatigan (2009) noted, "Campus practitioners will need to find a way to retreat from their labors to be active learners" (p. 16); to this end, senior administrators could help to make sure that decisions regarding policy and practice are not made, at any level, without a review of the literature related to the decision. Also, performance evaluations are a critical and systemic opportunity to discuss how professionals are increasing their expertise in areas related to student affairs. New professionals need to see the AER competency modeled in their supervisors, and midlevel managers need to see it valued and exemplified by senior administrators (Carpenter, 2001). Conducting original research may not be necessary or timely, but senior administrators should at least ensure that their professionals engage in reading the literature and discussing its relevance to current practice.

Implications for Future Research

Overall, authors have demonstrated a commitment to discussing the importance of research for student affairs professionals. There is not, however, sufficient research to assess how well professionals meet the AER competency. To what extent professionals engage research and what interventions can increase such engagement are vital questions for future research. Manning's (Jablonski et

al., 2006) continuum provides a helpful start, but empirical data are needed to differentiate these stages. Data from the present study also reveal a possible sixth stage of the continuum, between practitioners who use theory and research in practice and those who do not value scholarship. This sixth stage captures those professionals who value scholarship but who do not take the time to consistently read it and engage it.

This study substantiates the need to do similar research with larger samples on more campuses. Larger samples will allow for the employment of factor analytic procedures to confirm or refine the latent variables of research views, behaviors, and culture. Items could be added to the three-item Research Views scale in order to increase Cronbach's Alpha (DeVellis, 2012). Future research can address whether the present findings are also representative of national norms, and more importantly, evaluate the effectiveness of other interventions designed to increase the research engagement of student affairs professionals. Qualitative investigations could provide a wealth of information regarding the mindsets and habits of those professionals who do readily engage research and who are exemplary scholar-practitioners.

References

- American College Personnel Association. (1996). *The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs*. Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/sli/sli.htm>
- American College Personnel Association. (2006). *ASK standards*. Washington, DC: Author.
- American College Personnel Association & NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. (1998). *Principles of good practice for student affairs*. Retrieved from <http://acpa.nche.edu/pgp/principle.htm>
- American College Personnel Association & NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. (2010). *Professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- American Council on Education. (1937). *The student personnel point of view*. Retrieved from <http://www.naspa.org/pubs/files/StudAff 1937.pdf>
- American Council on Education. (1949). *The student personnel point of view*. Retrieved from <http://www.naspa.org/pubs/files/StudAff 1949.pdf>
- Beeler, K. J., & Hunter, D. E. (1991). *Puzzles and pieces in wonderland: The promise and practice of student affairs research*. Washington, DC: NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- Bishop, J. D. (2010). Becoming a scholar-practitioner: The road less traveled. *ACPA Developments*, 8(3). Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/pub/developments/archives/2010/Fall/article.php?content=scholar>
- Blimling, G. S. (2001). Uniting scholarship and communities of practice in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(4), 381–396.

- Brown, R. (1991). Student affairs research on trial. In K. J. Beeler & D. E. Hunter (Eds.), *Puzzles and pieces in wonderland: The promise and practice of student affairs research* (pp.124–142). Washington, DC: NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- Burkard, A., Cole, D. C., Ott, M., & Stoflet, T. (2005). Entry-level competencies of new student affairs professionals: A Delphi study. *NASPA Journal*, 42(3), 283–309.
- Carpenter, S. (2001). Student affairs scholarship (re?)considered: Toward a scholarship of practice. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(4), 301–318.
- Carpenter, S., & Stimpson, M. T. (2007). Professionalism, scholarly practice, and professional development in student affairs. *NASPA Journal*, 44(2), 265–284.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2009). *CAS professional standards for higher education* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Cuyjet, M. J., Longwell-Grice, R., & Molina, E. (2009). Perceptions of new student affairs professionals and their supervisors regarding the application of competencies learned in preparation programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(1), 104–119.
- Davis, T. L., & Liddell, D. L. (1997). Publication trends in the Journal of College Student Development: 1987–1995. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38(4), 325–330.
- Dean, K. L. (2010, summer). Part II: The scholar practitioner: What defines a scholar practitioner? A way of thinking and doing. *ACPA Developments*. Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/pub/developments/archives/2010/Summer/article.php?content=scholar>
- DeVellis, R. F. (2012). *Scale development: Theory and applications*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Fried, J. (2002). The scholarship of student affairs: Integration and application. *NASPA Journal*, 39(2), 120–131.
- Grasgreen, A. (2011, March 31). Challenging the role of student affairs. *Inside higher ed*. Retrieved from http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/03/31/texas_tech_university_dismantles_student_affairs_and_eliminate_administrative_positions
- Harper, W. R. (1905). *The trend in higher education*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hoffman, J. L., & Bresciani, M. J. (2010). Assessment work: examining the prevalence and nature of learning assessment competencies and skills in student affairs job postings. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 47(4), 495–512.
- Hunter, D. E., & Beeler, K. J. (1991). Peering through the “looking glass” at preparation needed for student affairs research. In K. J. Beeler & D. E. Hunter (Eds.), *Puzzles and pieces in wonderland: The promise and practice of student affairs research* (pp. 106–123). Washington, DC: NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- Jablonski, M. A., Mena, S. B., Manning, K., Carpenter, S., & Siko, K. L. (2006). Scholarship in student affairs revisited: The summit on scholarship, March 2006. *NASPA Journal*, 43(4), 182–200.

- Jones, S. R., Harper, S. R., & Schuh, J. H. (2011). Shaping the future. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 534–536). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kidder, R. (2010, spring). The scholar practitioner: Administrators engaging in the research process. *ACPA Developments*, 8(1). Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/pub/developments/archives/2010/Spring/article.php?content=kidder>
- Komives, S. R. (1997). Linking student affairs preparation with practice. In N. J. Evans & C. E. Phelps Tobin (Eds.), *The state of the art of preparation and practice in student affairs: Another look* (pp. 177–200). Lanham, MD: American College Personnel Association.
- Malaney, G. D. (2002). Scholarship in student affairs through teaching and research. *NASPA Journal*, 39(2), 132–146.
- Mertler, C. A., & Vannatta, R. A. (2005). *Advanced and multivariate statistical methods* (3rd ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak.
- Patton, L. D., & Harper, S. R. (2009). Using reflection to reframe theory-to-practice in student affairs. In G. S. McClellan & J. Stringer (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration* (pp. 147–165). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rhatigan, J. (2009). From the people up: A brief history of student affairs administration. In G. S. McClellan & J. Stringer (Eds.), *The handbook of student affairs administration* (pp. 3–18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Saunders, S. A., Register, M. D., Cooper, D. L., Bates, J. M., & Daddona, M. F. (2000). Who is writing research articles in student affairs journals? Practitioner involvement and collaboration. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(6), 475–482.
- Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schroeder, C. C., & Pike, G. R. (2001). The scholarship of application in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(4), 342–355.
- Sriram, R. (2011). Engaging research as a student affairs professional. *NetResults: Critical issues for student affairs practitioners*. Retrieved from <http://www.naspa.org/membership/mem/pubs/nr/default.cfm?id=1810>
- Tourangeau, R., Rips, L. J., & Rasinski, K. A. (2000). *The psychology of survey response*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- White, J. (2002). Student affairs scholarship: Reconsidering questions toward possibilities for liberation, collaboration, and innovation. *NASPA Journal*, 39(2), 158–165.
- Young, R. B. (2001). A perspective on the values of student affairs and scholarship. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(4), 319–337.

Appendix

Student Affairs Research Awareness Project (SARAP) Instrument

Research Views Scale (Participants were asked to use this scale when answering the following questions: strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree)

Remaining current with research pertaining to higher education or student affairs is important to me.

I do not think research pertaining to higher education and student affairs is relevant to my work.
(reverse scored)

Research pertaining to higher education or student affairs does not exist for the specific things I am interested in. (reverse scored)

Research Behaviors Scale

How much time do you spend each week reading research pertaining to higher education or students affairs?

1. I rarely have time to read or analyze such research
2. 15–30 minutes
3. 31 minutes
4. 1–2 hours
5. 3–5 hours
6. 5 hours or more

How many articles do you read about higher education or student affairs in a typical month?

1. None
2. 1–5 articles
3. 6–10 articles
4. 11–15 articles
5. 16–20 articles
6. 20+ articles

How much time do you spend reading research pertaining to higher education or student affairs in a typical month?

1. None
2. 1–5 hours
3. 6–10 hours
4. 11–15 hours
5. 16–20 hours
6. 20+ hours

Research pertaining to higher education and student affairs is important, and I engage in it regularly.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Moderately disagree
3. Slightly disagree
4. Slightly agree
5. Moderately agree
6. Strongly agree

How active are you in engaging literature pertaining to higher education and student affairs?

1. Highly inactive
2. Moderately inactive
3. Slightly inactive
4. Slightly active
5. Moderately active
6. Highly active

Research Culture Scale (*Participants were asked to use this scale when answer the following questions: strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree*)

Remaining current with research pertaining to higher education or student affairs is a priority for my supervisor.

Remaining current with research pertaining to higher education or student affairs is an expectation of my job.

Discussion about research pertaining to higher education or student affairs occurs in the staff meetings in which I participate.

Discussion about research pertaining to higher education or student affairs occurs in meetings with my supervisor.

My supervisor encourages me to spend time with research pertaining to higher education and student affairs.