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College Student Affairs Journal, Volume 34, Number 1, Spring 2016, 
pp. 56-69 (Article)

Published by Southern Association for College Student Affairs 
DOI: 10.1353/csj.2016.0003

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STUDENT AFFAIRS COLLABORATING WITH ACADEMIC AFFAIRS: PERCEPTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY AND INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

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The desire by campus leaders to continually improve the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education has led to the development of collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs. Scholars sufficiently tout the importance of these programs, providing case examples and practical advice on how to make them successful. Less research exists that empirically examines collaboration on the individual or organizational level. This study contributes to the field of knowledge in student affairs work by measuring collaboration as a competency, measuring institutional culture in relation to collaboration, comparing collaboration competency based upon subspecialty, and identifying predictors of collaborative skills in student affairs professionals.
Collaboration on a college campus is a partnership among functional areas of an institution in order to achieve the mission of the college and increase effectiveness (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Formalized student affairs and academic affairs collaborations are increasingly prominent in higher education, and scholars commend these partnerships for their positive contributions to students (Cook & Lewis, 2007). Primary examples of student and academic affairs collaborations include academic support, orientation, service, residential, and policy and planning activities (O’Halloran, 2007). As these programs gain in popularity and importance, aspects of individual and organizational competence conducive to these collaborations also increase in importance. On the individual level, the question arises as to whether current student affairs professionals have the needed competency to partner with teaching faculty to successfully implement co-curricular initiatives. On the organizational level, the question is whether institutions possess a culture conducive to building and sustaining these collaborations. Utilizing a national sample from multiple institutions, the current study seeks to measure collaboration as a competency, measure institutional culture in relation to collaboration, compare collaboration competency based upon subspecialty, and identify predictors of collaborative skills in student affairs professionals. Specifically, our research addressed the following questions:

- To what extent do demographic variables and perceptions of a collaborative culture predict and explain student affairs professionals’ collaboration competency, defined as the ability to partner with academic affairs?
- Are there significant differences in collaboration competency among professionals who work in different specialized areas of student affairs?

The first question assesses student affairs professionals on the skills needed in student and academic affairs partnerships and attempts to predict skill level based on demographic information and their own perceptions of a collaborative institutional culture. The relationship between various characteristics of professionals and their ability to collaborate can influence the successful implementation of student and academic affairs collaborations. The second question stems from the hypothesis that student affairs professionals in specific areas may implement partnerships with academic affairs more often and in better ways than those in areas that do not use or need faculty support. Such professionals, therefore, may have higher competency levels in collaboration than other student affairs professionals.

Foundations of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs Collaborations

Formalized student and academic affairs collaborations are a relatively new concept since the formation of student affairs as a profession in the early 20th century. The profession of student affairs developed from the need to unburden teaching faculty from the out-of-class responsibilities of student development. At least initially, neither student affairs professionals nor faculty showed much interest in partnering with the other (Thelin, 2011). For instance, Hamrick (2002) found little mention of collaboration in the 1937 or 1949 editions of the Student Personnel Point of View. Even in a more recent publication, A Perspective on Student Affairs (NASPA, 1987), Hamrick only found verbiage that pertained to academic affairs in the overarching desire for student affairs to enhance and support the academic mission of an institution. The emphasis of the role of student affairs was to complement, not to collaborate.

It was not until the latter years of the 20th century that student affairs professionals showed interest in collaboration with academic faculty. Professional organizations in higher education and student affairs identified collaboration with academic affairs as a means to promote student learning. In The Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1994),
Powerful Partnerships (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998), and Learning Reconsidered (Keeling, 2004), scholars argued for both academic affairs and student affairs to participate in transforming education by creating a college environment that embraced the development of the whole student, inside and outside of the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

These foundational documents in student affairs informed our conceptual framework for this study. Our framework includes three themes: interpersonal relationships, program development and modification, and organizational culture. First, student affairs professionals need to know how to build relationships with faculty. Little hope for partnership remains if professionals on one side of the divide cannot reach out to faculty on the other side (Clayton-Pederson & Dungy, 2007). Second, student affairs professionals should know of the different types of successful collaborations implemented on campuses. For instance, O’Halloran (2007) discusses examples of collaboration that include academic support, orientation, service, residential, and policy and planning activities. Collaborations can begin by implementing and tweaking programs that work at other comparable institutions, as well as by modifying existing campus programs in order to include better collaboration with teaching faculty. It is important to note that faculty have an equal amount of responsibility for the success of collaborations as do student affairs professionals, but the scope of this study focuses on what student affairs professionals need in order to develop their competency in collaboration.

Third, student and academic affairs collaborations stem from an organizational culture that includes both structural limitations and symbolic ideals (Kezer, 2001; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Structurally, budgetary constraints and limited resources affect programming and initiatives across campuses, compelling institutions to form collaborative partnerships in order to comparatively reach their goals with restrictions in place. Symbolically, institutions place continued emphasis on student learning, and many scholars believe that seamless learning environments between the curricular and co-curricular settings benefit student learning overall (Kellogg, 1999; Kezar, 2001, 2009; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). A review of the literature buttresses the three themes – interpersonal relationships, program development and modification, and organizational culture – that comprise our theoretical framework.

Interpersonal Relationships. Findings from extant research highlight the importance of forming interpersonal relationships for successful collaborations. Kezar (2001) examined merits of student and academic affairs collaborations by conducting a survey of senior student affairs officers. She found that cooperation, student affairs staff attitudes, common goals, and individual personalities all impacted success in these collaborations. Likewise, the Boyer Partnership Assessment Project (Whitt et al., 2008) assessed what makes partnerships effective through a qualitative investigation of 18 institutions deemed to have successful student and academic affairs collaborations. From the study, seven principles of good practice emerged, including nurturing relationships.

Perceptions of collaborations from both the academic affairs and student affairs areas of campuses are also an important influence (Arcelus, 2008). These perceptions of the other area’s attitudes and contributions can lead to negative biases and stereotypes that hurt institutional collaboration. Meaningful, interconnected relationships help foster collaborative environments by overcoming these stereotypes in order to create a more seamless learning environment for students (Arcelus, 2008). Interestingly, Consolvo and Dannels (2009) suggest that the greatest barrier to successful collaborations with faculty is attitudes from student affairs professionals themselves. If student affairs professionals are willing and able to
invest in relationships with teaching faculty, then they can help develop successful collaborations by modeling best practices from other campuses or modifying existing programs to include faculty partnerships.

**Program Development and Modification.** A helpful way for administrators to initiate a collaborative partnership with potential for success is to implement programs that work at other comparable institutions or to modify current student affairs programs on campus by more intentionally involving teaching faculty. How and why collaboration begins influences its future chance at success. In fact, some scholars present potential disadvantages to these partnerships because they are poorly developed or modified. In one example, Magolda (2005) cautions against establishing collaborations hastily: “Faculty, students, and administrators jump on the bandwagon and begin their journey, because it is fashionable and sounds right, often without purposefully and carefully considering whether a particular partnership has merit” (p. 17). Moreover, Whitt (2011) notes that those in academia view these collaborations as a panacea to help fuel college student success without considering other options, resulting in collaboration as an end rather than a means. Scholars cite an inability to model best practices as a leading obstacle to successful partnership (Cook et al., 2007; Kezar, 2001). Therefore, administrators should not expect benefits described in the literature as automatic outcomes without considerable work to overcome barriers to successful collaborations. Implementation without proper vision and buy-in may do more harm than good for the institution. For this reason, organizational culture is also a vital component of successful collaborations.

**Organizational Culture.** Scholars study the importance of organizational culture more broadly (Schein, 2004) and in higher education specifically (Birnbaum, 1988; Manning, 2013; Tierney, 2008). A few scholars also write about the role of organizational culture in student affairs work (Hirt, 2006; Kuk, 2009). Schein (2004) dissects culture into three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts involve the visible and tangible aspects of a culture. Espoused values pertain to the articulated goals of an organization. The third level, underlying assumptions, is the most important part of culture, but also the most difficult to identify and change (Schein, 2004). These theories-in-use demonstrate what is important to a culture not by what is said, but by what is done. If administrators support student and academic affairs collaborations through artifacts and espoused values, but do not support them in daily decisions and conversations in political environments with scarce resources (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar & Lester, 2009), a culture that promotes collaboration will not form.

Understanding and appreciating the culture of both academia and student affairs is important before pursuing collaboration (Consolvo & Dannells, 2009; Kezar, 2009; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Philpott & Strange, 2003). In *Involving Colleges*, Kuh and his colleagues write, “To too many faculty members, student affairs is a black box, a set of functions about which little is understood and even less is noticed” (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, et al., 1991, p. 171). Kezar and Lester (2009) add, “in order to foster collaboration at postsecondary institutions, organizational culture, particularly values, must be considered” (p. 89). Student affairs professionals and faculty need to put forth effort to understand the values of their fellow colleagues (Birnbaum, 1988; Cook, Eaker, Ghering, & Sells, 2007; Manning et al., 2006; O’Halloran, 2007). Kellogg (1999) identified several cultural barriers to successful collaborations, including: unclear job duties, disparate perceptions, different terminology between the groups, and competition for funding. Other obstacles noted by scholars include lack of established goals, historically distinct roles, a habit of isolation, different cultures, poor communi-
cation, lack of mutual understanding, lack of a clear and compelling mission, lack of an impetus for change, and lack of senior administrative support (Kellogg, 1999; Kezar, 2001; Kezar & Lester, 2009). All of these obstacles reflect organizational culture and the difficulty in changing it for collaboration.

Organizational culture can also contribute to the success of collaborations. Kezar (2003) inquired about the strategies that helped in collaborating and whether the strategies vary by factors such as institution type, enrollment, size, funding, and institutional culture. Factors such as cross-institutional dialogue, generating enthusiasm, and creating a shared vision were important in creating successful partnerships with academic affairs. Likewise, the Boyer Partnership Assessment Project (Whitt et al., 2008) assessed what makes partnerships effective through a qualitative investigation of 18 institutions deemed to have successful student and academic affairs collaborations. From the study, principles of good practice included advancing the mission of the institution, fostering a learning-oriented ethos, and recognizing the influence of organizational culture.

**Gaps in the Current Literature**

Although some empirical research does exist, much of the research on student and academic affairs collaborations is descriptive rather than empirical (Whitt, 2011). These studies pertain to the establishment and sustainability of effective partnerships, extolling the merits of these partnerships. As an example, Baxter Magolda (2003) highlights the importance of student affairs professionals in these collaborations and argues that they possess the knowledge, skills, and access to students to lead higher education in forging these partnerships, but she does support this assertion with gathered evidence.

Kezar (2001), however, did gather data pertaining to collaborations by surveying senior student affairs officers. Some reported benefits of these partnerships included an improved learning environment, increased student retention, a culture of trust with enhanced communication, better relationships across campus, and increased attention to the importance of student affairs work. Her findings confirm what previous research espoused as the benefits of these partnerships (Kuh, 1996; Love & Love, 1995), but her evidence is limited to only the perceptions of senior student affairs officers, who may have little to do with day-to-day implementation of these partnerships.

Despite some evidence of the benefits of collaborations, gaps remain in the current research concerning the role of student affairs professionals in these partnerships. Previous research reveals that successful partnerships require student affairs professionals who can build relationships with faculty, develop the types of collaborations that are likely to succeed, and modify current initiatives in order to involve more collaboration. Scholars repeatedly emphasize the importance of these professionals working within institutional cultures that promote healthy collaboration. However, little research examines perceptions of institutional collaborative culture or the individual collaborative skills of student affairs professionals. Surprisingly, collaboration is not listed as a competency in the recent publication from ACPA and NASPA (2010), *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners*. In addition, no extant research examines whether student affairs professionals differ in their collaborative skills based on their area of specialization.

In summary, there remains a need for comprehensive research on student affairs professionals and their role in these collaborative partnerships. Measuring culture and competency can help current professionals assess the state of their campus climate and the state of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to these partnerships. This research study represents an attempt to describe the role of individual skills and institutional culture in student affairs and academic affairs collaborations. We use a
Methods & Results
As part of a broader research project examining competencies in student affairs professionals, this study represents an attempt to empirically understand individual skills and institutional culture in the context of student and academic affairs collaborations. Specifically, our goals were to better understand predictors of the measured skills needed to partner with academic affairs, measure perceptions of a collaborative institutional culture and its influence on skills, and examine possible differences in skills based upon specialized areas of student affairs.

Population, Sample, and Participants
The population of interest for this study consisted of student affairs professionals throughout the United States who work in research institutions. We chose research institutions for several reasons. First, research demonstrates that the culture of student affairs differs based upon the type of institution (Hirt, 2006). Therefore, we believed it best to focus on one institutional type, and we chose research institutions because of their likelihood to have larger divisions of student affairs with professionals who have graduate degrees in student affairs or a related field. Other scholars examined research institutions for similar reasons (Herdlein, 2004). Also, Kezar and Lester (2009) suggest that the size and complexity of research institutions may lead to both a greater need to collaborate and greater barriers to collaboration.

In late 2011 and early 2012, we contacted 15 research institutions located in regions across the U.S. We requested permission to send an online survey instrument to the entire division of student affairs at these institutions. Nine institutions elected to participate, and the survey went to 2,049 student affairs professionals. We received 564 partial or complete responses, resulting in a response rate of 27.5%. Our analytic sample consists of 221 participants (mean age = 40 years, 67% female) who provided usable data for the specific analysis. In terms of race, 76.9% identified as White, 12.7% as Black, 4.1% as Latino/a, 2.3% as Asian, 1.9% as multiracial, and 1.8% as other; less than one percent (0.3%) did not provide this data. The mean years in higher education was 14.36, mean years in current institution was 9.86, and mean years in current position was 5.77. In terms of education, 21.7% had terminal degrees and 78.3% had master’s degrees, with 63.3% having a graduate degree in the areas of higher education or student affairs. In terms of job position level, 25.4% were entry-level professionals, 48.4% were midlevel managers, and 26.2% were senior level administrators.

Data Collection Instrument
To collect our data, we used the National Survey of Student Affairs Professionals (NSSAP), a 95-item instrument measuring 13 student affairs competency areas and two areas of institutional culture. In previous research, the NSSAP demonstrated content validity, construct validity, and reliability (Sriram, 2014). We used data from two of the scales for the current study. The first scale, institutional collaborative culture, had four Likert-type response items measuring perceptions of the organizational culture’s conduciveness to collaboration. Items reflected the desire of faculty to partner with student affairs, the desire of student affairs to partner with academia, senior administrative support for collaboration, and perceptions of the current success of student and academic affairs collaborations. The scale demonstrated construct validity and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .71.

The second scale, collaborative competency, contained five Likert-type response items that measured the ability to collaborate with academic affairs in order to promote student success. Items reflected the
two other components of our conceptual framework (in addition to organizational culture): interpersonal relationships and program development and modification. This scale demonstrated construct validity from a principal components analysis and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .86.

Variables
We collected a variety of demographic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, educational background, area of specialization, and experience level. Some of these demographic characteristics served as predictor variables for the first question in this study: To what extent do demographic variables and perceptions of a collaborative culture predict and explain student affairs professionals’ collaboration competency, defined as the ability to partner with academic affairs? The institutional collaborative culture scale was totaled to form an additional predictor variable for the first question. Our second question was: Are there significant differences in collaboration competency among professionals who work in different specialized areas of student affairs? For our second research question, area of specialization was the independent variable. The total of the individual collaborative competency scale served as the dependent variable for both research questions.

Limitations
Before presenting and discussing our findings, it is important to note a few limitations to this study. Although research institutions generally have larger divisions of student affairs and tend to hire student affairs professionals with graduate education in the field, the profession spans to institutions of all types. Therefore, we encourage caution when generalizing findings to other types of institutions. Also, our survey methodology relied on the perceptions of student affairs professionals in terms of assessing their own competence and the culture of the institution. Self-reporting is an accepted practice in the social sciences, and the anonymity of the survey did not provide any benefits for high scale scores or consequences for low scale scores. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that our dependent variables reflect the perceptions of the professionals who participated.

Research Question 1: Predictors of Individual Collaboration Competency
To address our first question, we measured student affairs professionals on perceptions of how well the institutional culture fostered collaboration between student and academic affairs. We also measured professionals on their perceived skills related to collaborating with academic affairs. We then examined predictors of their competency levels by conducting a multiple regression, with the institutional collaborative culture scale and demographic characteristics serving as the predictor variables. The scale score for collaborative competency was our outcome variable. Specifically, our demographic predictor variables consisted of gender, the age of the professional, years in higher education administration, years at current institution, years in current position, highest degree earned (no graduate degree, master’s degree, or terminal degree), whether or not the professional had a degree in higher education or student affairs, and level of current position (entry-level, midlevel, or senior administrator). We screened data for missing values and outliers and ensured that our data followed a normal distribution before proceeding. Categorical variables were dummy coded, and we used the standard method of entering predictor variables because of the presence of dummy variables (Field, 2013). Table 1 presents a summary of correlations among all variables used in our analyses.

As shown in Table 2, regression results indicated that the overall model significantly predicted collaborative competency, \( R^2 = .313, R^2_{\text{adj}} = .281, F(10, 210) = 9.59, p < .001 \). This model accounts for 31.3% of the variance in collaborative competency and indicates that 3 of the 10 predictor vari-
ables significantly contributed to the model: terminal degree vs. master’s degree, senior administrator vs. entry-level administrator, and institutional collaborative culture.

Research Question 2: Differences in Skills Based on Specialized Area

Our next question examined differences in the collaborative competency skills among professionals who work in different specialized areas. This question stemmed from our observation that some areas of student affairs may emphasize collaboration more than others. For instance, living-learning programs – that often comprise partnerships between student and academic affairs – are so prominent in residence life that the Association of College & University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I) has an annual conference devoted to the topic. Does such emphasis lead to generally higher collaborative competency for one group compared to others?

To answer this second question, we asked our participants to identify any and all areas of student affairs that best pertain to their jobs. Participants could select multiple options. We then allocated all participants into one of four categories: Student Activities (Greek life, leadership, student organizations, service, student union, and target subpopulations such as LGBT or multicultural; 21.7%), Student Services (success center, career development, counseling center, disability services, and judicial affairs; 14.5%), Residential Life (general housing or specifically working with a living-learning program; 23.5%), and Other (40.3%). We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the mean variance of our dependent variable, collaborative competency, between and within groups for comparison purposes. In order to determine which specific groups differed from each other, we selected Hochberg’s GT2 for our posthoc test, which was appropriate due to unequal group sizes.

Main effect results revealed that competency in the ability to collaborate with academic affairs significantly differed among areas of specialization, $F(3, 305) = 2.66$, $p = .048$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$. However, post hoc tests did not reveal any significant dif-

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Collaborative Competency</td>
<td>20.77</td>
<td>5.47</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
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<td>Predictor Variable</td>
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<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.47</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.09</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>2. Age</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>12.38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.87***</td>
<td>.80***</td>
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<td>.31***</td>
<td>-.16'</td>
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<td>.39***</td>
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<td>3. Yrs in Higher Ed.</td>
<td>14.36</td>
<td>10.45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.86***</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>.18**</td>
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<td>4. Yrs in Inst.</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>9.36</td>
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<td>.70***</td>
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<td>5. Yrs in Position</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<td>6. Terminal Degree</td>
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<td>0.41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.12'</td>
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<td>7. Degree in HESA</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<td>8. Midlevel Position</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.58***</td>
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<td>9. Senior Level Position</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.19**</td>
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<td>10. Institutional Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>17.07</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*** p &lt; .001</td>
<td>** p &lt; .01</td>
<td>* p &lt; .05</td>
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ferences between individual pairings, and estimates of effect size reveal no meaningful significance. Therefore, we interpreted these findings as non-significant.

**Discussion**

Foundational documents of the student affairs profession espouse the importance of formal collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs for the purpose of better accomplishing the goals of learning and development in higher education (ACPA, 1994; AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; Keeling, 2004). Although extant literature discusses the need and purpose of these collaborations, there are surprisingly large gaps in empirical research examining student affairs professionals’ ability to implement these collaborations and institutions’ ability to support them. This study attempted to address these gaps by measuring perceptions of both individual competency and institutional culture in student and academic affairs collaborations. In summary, level of education, position level, and perceptions of institutional collaborative culture significantly and meaningfully predicted the competency of collaboration. In addition, we found no meaningful differences in collaborative competency in professionals based upon their area of specialization. These findings have implications for theory, current practice, and future research.

**Implications for Theory**

In conjunction with previous research that found construct validity and reliability with the collaborative competency scale (Sriram, 2014), the findings of this study affirm that collaboration in the student affairs profession can be measured in a valid and reliable manner. Learning Reconsidered 2 calls for student affairs professionals “engaging one faculty member at a time” in order to build successful collaborations (Keeling, 2006, p. 66). However, Kezar and Lester (2009) acknowledge that the differences between academic and student affairs make collaboration on campus difficult. Collaboration is a competency that requires particular knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Cook & Lewis, 2007). The absence of collaboration from the list of 10 competencies published by ACPA and NASPA (2010) reduces its visible importance. The authors of *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* present the list as an evolving document open to future revisions based upon research. Leaders of these two associations should consider officially adding collaboration with academic affairs as a student affairs competency.

Culture has great influence in organizations (Schein, 2004), including higher education in general (Birnbaum, 1988;

| Table 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | $B$ | $SE_B$ | $\beta$ | $t$ |
| Gender | 0.07 | 0.69 | 0.01 | 0.11 |
| Age | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.17 | 1.23 |
| Yrs in Higher Ed. | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.02 | -0.13 |
| Yrs in Inst. | -0.06 | 0.08 | -0.10 | -0.80 |
| Yrs in Position | 0.02 | 0.08 | 0.02 | 0.22 |
| Terminal Degree | 3.21 | 0.88 | 0.24 | 3.65*** |
| Degree in HESA | -0.38 | 0.71 | -0.03 | -0.54 |
| Midlevel Position | 1.10 | 0.89 | 0.10 | 1.25 |
| Senior Level Position | 2.88 | 1.14 | 0.23 | 2.54* |
| Institutional Collaborative Culture | 0.52 | 0.10 | 0.33 | 5.32*** |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

$R^2 = .31$
Manning, 2013; Tierney, 2008) and student affairs specifically (Hirt, 2006; Kuk, 2009). The finding that institutional collaborative culture was the greatest predictor of individual collaborative competency of student affairs professionals affirms the important role that organizational culture plays in student affairs work. When scholars and administrators discuss the role of competency in student affairs practice, they should emphasize organizational culture in addition to only individual competence.

**Implications for Current Practice**

Administrators in higher education can utilize the findings from this study to improve student affairs practice. Regarding the first research question, three variables predicted and explained student affairs professionals’ collaborative competency: level of education, level of position, and institutional collaborative culture. Possessing a terminal degree or having a senior administrative position could both lead to the same implication: maturity does make a difference in the ability to collaborate with academic affairs. Professionals with a terminal degree or who are in a senior position have more comparable roles to faculty. Their degree and position level may help them in viewing faculty as peers and colleagues, leading to greater ability to collaborate. We must also note, however, that age and years of experience in higher education were not significant predictors of collaborative competency. Therefore, it is not just the length of time that contributes to competency in collaboration, but rather the types of experience (position level) and the knowledge gained (level of education) in that time span.

If those professionals who have a terminal degree or a senior position are likely to be better collaborators, the question arises as to whether these are the professionals who actually do the work of collaboration. Said differently, senior administrators who help to organize and facilitate student and academic affairs collaborations in the development phase, but then delegate implementation responsibilities to entry-level professionals, may not understand why these collaborations start successfully but soon struggle. The cause of such struggle may be the lack of professional development around the concept of collaboration. When, where, and how does the student affairs profession teach new professionals collaboration skills? Faculty should assess if it is adequately addressed in graduate preparatory programs. In addition, senior administrators may take for granted collaboration skills they learned through experience and fail to educate new professionals because they assume new professionals already know how to collaborate. Starting collaborative initiatives with senior administrators who possess collaborative skills and then handing off the daily, frontline work of collaboration to new professionals who may not have adequate competency in this area is not a successful strategy. Instead, we recommend senior administrators invest the time and energy to teach new professionals how to collaborate successfully. Such development may include emphasizing the importance of student affairs professionals developing relationships with faculty (Keeling, 2006), helping professionals understand the culture of academic affairs (Birnbaum, 1988; Kuk, 2009), and directly addressing any negative attitudes from professionals toward faculty that could impede collaboration (Consolvo & Dannells, 2009). We also recommend that senior administrators themselves continue to give time and attention to these collaborations even after the initial development phase.

Although terminal degree and senior position level were both meaningful predictors of collaborative competency, perception of institutional collaborative culture was the largest predictor. This finding affirms the powerful effect culture has upon practice. Professionals who viewed their institution as having a culture conducive to collaboration reported a higher level of collaborative skills. Likewise, professionals who did not believe their institution had a collaborative culture tended to report lower competency
in this area. We conceptualized culture using Schein’s (2004) three levels of analysis: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. At the artifacts level (visible and tangible aspects of culture), it is important for professionals to know of successful collaborations on campus and to see them promoted on websites and brochures. With the espoused values level (articulated goals), administrators should consider whether they consistently message collaboration as a priority in vision, mission, and strategic planning documents. The third level, underlying assumptions, demonstrate what is important to a culture not by what is said, but by what is done. Our findings demonstrate that administrators must support student and academic affairs collaborations not only through artifacts and espoused values, but also through daily decisions and conversations that drive organizational culture (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Our second research question asked whether student affairs professionals differed on their collaborative competency based upon their area of specialization. The question stemmed from certain areas within student affairs, such as residential life, seemingly placing great importance upon collaboration, as demonstrated in the development of particular conferences on the topic. Although our analysis initially detected a significant difference among our four categories (student activities, student services, residential life, and other), the combination of non-significant differences between individual comparisons and a low effect size led us to conclude that there are no differences in competency based upon area of specialization. In some sense, this is good news, as collaboration should not be isolated to a particular area within student affairs. Contrary to our hypothesis, campuses are not succumbing to such isolation and are most likely seeking collaborations across subspecialties.

Implications for Future Research
This study aimed to answer key questions related to collaboration as a competency in student affairs practice, but many questions remain. Future research can expand on both the definition and measurement of collaboration as a competency in student affairs. The items that comprised the collaborative competency scale targeted two areas of our conceptual framework: interpersonal relationships and program development and modification. The items that comprised the institutional collaborative culture scale targeted the third area of our conceptual framework: organizational culture. Although this framework arose from a review of the relevant literature, it is purposefully parsimonious and therefore may exclude other important aspects of competency skills in collaboration. Future quantitative research can improve upon our psychometric scale and continue to examine what variables influence the collaboration competency. Qualitative research can delve deeper into what promotes collaboration on both the individual and organizational level. Qualitative studies of individuals with a high level of collaborative competency could contribute to the field of knowledge by identifying how those skills developed. Case studies of highly collaborative divisions of student affairs would provide needed insight into how collaborative cultures form. In addition, scholars can continue to expand upon the work of Kezar (2001, 2003) by investigating the methods of professional development in the area of collaboration and what makes one institution more collaborative than another. Future research on student affairs and academic affairs should continue to examine the influence of organizational culture upon student affairs practice.

Conclusion
Resource-sensitive environments and a desire to continually improve higher education both lead to the need for collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs. However, little research exists that empirically examines collaboration on the individual or organizational level. This study
contributes to the field of knowledge in student affairs by measuring collaboration as a competency, measuring institutional culture in relation to collaboration, and identifying predictors of collaborative skills in student affairs professionals. The importance of collaboration on college campuses necessitates that more work is done to understand how to help professionals and institutions develop, sustain, and improve these programs. Findings from this study convey the need for an organizational culture that supports collaboration and for more seasoned professionals to take a leading role in collaborative partnerships. Experienced professionals can also ensure that new professionals learn the needed skills for successful collaboration. The future of student learning and development in higher education will depend, at least in part, upon the ability of traditionally isolated areas of campus to partner together to achieve shared goals (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Collaboration is an essential competency that needs more emphasis in the student affairs profession.

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