

TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

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APPENDIX

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Final report of the
Task Force on the Future of Student Affairs
Appointed jointly by ACPA and NASPA

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1. CHARGE OF THE TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

As current societal trends and priorities focus increasing attention on higher education, the profession of student affairs is compelled to take intentional responsibility for its future. We recognize that our work demands accountability, effective use of resources, collaboration, and a stronger knowledge base. As the two comprehensive student affairs associations, ACPA and NASPA recognize the importance of our role in crafting a vision for our profession that is responsive to the needs of our students, institutions, and colleagues for the next ten years and beyond. Together, we must be committed to considering and identifying strategies that will shape the future of student affairs and higher education.

The Task Force is charged with responding to the following questions related to challenges student affairs professionals have brought forth to our leadership. The expectation is that this group will develop strategies to address these issues in the coming years.

- What are the best mechanisms to contribute to and advance the profession's knowledge base about practice, students, ourselves, and organizations?
- How can the comprehensive associations (ACPA and NASPA) best serve the broad professional development needs and expectations of our members?
- How can the two comprehensive associations (ACPA and NASPA) assure efficiency and effectiveness in providing professional development?
- What linkages to other student affairs associations, higher education organizations, and governmental entities are essential to the work of student affairs? How should these partnerships be developed?

Specific to ACPA and NASPA, should we continue to coordinate the joint meeting each decade, recognizing the next would be in 2017?

The work of this Task Force will help assure the long-term credibility and viability of the student affairs profession and our responsibility to serve future generations of college students and colleagues in higher education.

As the leadership of the two most comprehensive student affairs associations, our responsibility is to create and implement a strategic plan for the profession of student affairs that honors our history, intentionally builds on our present strengths, and positions student affairs to help shape and be responsive to the future of higher education. We are committed to providing leadership and to partnering with colleagues to enhance our credibility, sustainability, and viability for the future.

2. RESPONSES TO THE CHARGE QUESTIONS

The following sections present responses to the charge questions, with insights from the conversations Task Force members had during our meetings. The questions are grouped according to the topics addressed and the Task Force's approach in the conversations.

KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

1. What are the best mechanisms to contribute to and advance the profession's knowledge base about practice, students, ourselves, and organizations?

The Task Force recommended in the report that the associations become models and leaders in creating a culture of evidence around student affairs work. This requires that collaboration for professional development offerings and funding of research be re-conceptualized as a partnership between researcher and practitioner. In addition, the process by which programs are accepted for national meetings must be reconsidered in the context of this need to create a culture of evidence.

EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS, AND SERVICE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE ASSOCIATIONS (ITEMS 2 AND 3)

2. How can the comprehensive associations (ACPA and NASPA) best serve the broad professional development needs and expectations of our members?
3. How can the two comprehensive associations (ACPA and NASPA) assure efficiency and effectiveness in providing professional development?

We believe the comprehensive associations can best serve members' professional needs by assessing the needs and interests of the members and the profession systematically and by assessing the ways in which the associations can and should respond to those needs and interests. As part of this effort, the associations should use multiple avenues to ensure all voices—outside as well as within student affairs—are considered; these voices will also inform the direction of professional needs and expectations of our members.

Assessing and responding to professional development needs also must include reflection by the associations on current practices in professional development. Particularly important is a clear evaluation of where redundancy of offerings exists and the extent to which redundancy is effective and/or efficient in meeting the needs of the profession. The Task Force conversations emphasized several realities that must be considered:

- Maintaining financial solvency is critical and both associations have an obligation to provide a broad array of member services. The Task Force questioned at what point the associations' desire to offer a wide variety of professional development opportunities might become inefficient and ineffective for association members and the profession. For example, what is a reasonable number of midlevel manager programs the associations should offer in a year? How many multicultural competency opportunities are enough?
- The current budgetary crises on many of our campuses make the issue of efficiency and effectiveness particularly poignant and timely. When many institutions are cutting student services staff to balance budgets, it is difficult to justify having repetitive programs and services from two associations.
- The Task Force understands that the leadership of both associations need to reconceptualize the role of associations.

At a minimum, the associations should communicate clearly and regularly about these issues and decisions about what to offer, to whom, how often, and where. Associations' decisions should be based on the systematically assessed needs of the profession, not on the financial health or competitive advantage of the individual associations. Moreover, we believe the current and future needs of association members and the profession requires the serious and dispassionate consideration of creating one comprehensive student affairs association. We believe this is an inescapable conclusion of our discussions of the challenge facing higher education, our campuses, our profession, and our members to provide greater access and success for more diverse student populations despite shrinking financial and human resources. The associations'

efforts to provide the strongest, most relevant, and most focused professional development opportunities for the profession and to represent the profession to other stakeholders in one voice requires us to rethink how we have done business in the past in the interests of doing new business in the future.

4. Specific to ACPA and NASPA, should we continue to coordinate the joint meeting each decade, recognizing the next would be in 2017?

Based on the recommendations of the preceding questions, the Task Force recommends hosting one convention in 2017 only if there is a single, unified, comprehensive association or if such unification is underway.

CREATING AND SUSTAINING LINKAGES

5. What linkages to other student affairs associations, higher education organizations, and governmental entities are essential to the work of student affairs? How should these partnerships be developed?

Context

Although our professional associations draw their membership predominantly from the United States, higher education is now a global enterprise. As we consider essential partnerships and important linkages with other governmental entities and higher education associations, we ought to be mindful of the worldwide dimensions of student affairs work. In addition, our relationships and partnerships with higher education and governmental and community-based organizations should be informed by our awareness of social, economic, and demographic trends. In fact, emerging state, regional, national, and global dynamics should be important considerations in the identification of potential partners. For example, *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution*, a report prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, presented several issues affecting higher education worldwide, all of which are relevant for the student affairs field in the U.S. The issues facing higher education according to UNESCO are the impact of globalization; the phenomenon of massification; inequalities in access; increasing student mobility; teaching, learning and curricula; and quality assurance, accountability, and qualifications frameworks.

The UNESCO report points to important issues for higher education leaders to understand and realities that higher education should recognize:

- We live in a world characterized by increasingly integrated economies, connected through an international knowledge network, and linked through communication and information technologies. Millions of students and scholars are moving about the world to learn, teach, conduct research, and disseminate knowledge and cultures. While globalization affects institutions differently, all colleges and universities feel its effects.
- A mass demand for higher education worldwide is being driven by social dynamics such as the shift to postindustrial economies and rises in service industries and the knowledge economy. This growth in demand for education has spurred the expansion of education systems, particularly in Western Europe, Japan, Latin America, India and China. There are over 150 million students enrolled in college worldwide, representing a 53-percent increase in enrollment between 2000 and 2007.
- Despite dramatic changes in worldwide participation in higher education there continue to be gross inequities in access to educational opportunities. Historical, cultural, and economic influences continue, thus affecting who is provided opportunities to participate at the collegiate level. Inequities tend to have the most profound impacts on impoverished individuals from rural and remote communities, and people from indigenous populations. Of all the barriers to participation, cost tends to be the most significant obstacle. While governments around the world have enacted programs to increase participation, inequality still exists. Even in cases where education is “free,” students still bear significant indirect expenses.
- Student mobility is one of the most conspicuous examples of globalization. There are currently more than 2.5 million students studying outside of their home counties and the number is expected to rise to over 7 million by 2020. This increase is an outgrowth of national and institutional strategies and is characterized by two major trends: a) students in the European Union studying outside their home country in response to E.U. efforts to encourage student movement and b) students from Asia seeking education

in the United States, Western Europe, and Australia. While many institutions have instituted programs to attract and respond to the needs and expectations of international students, more needs to be done to make international experiences more equitably available, as current dynamics suggest that participants in these experiences tend to be the most privileged.

- Retention and completion are the strongest indicators of educational progress. While much has been done to increase access and participation in higher education, there still remains a gap in completion rates across different student populations. Attention must be paid to student engagement, the quality of teaching, and the level of academic and social support provided to students. The content of an institution's curriculum and other educational experiences must assure that students receive discipline-specific knowledge, as well as personal skills to enhance the student's creativity, adaptability, and ethical awareness.

Many countries have enacted policies to address quality assurance in higher education. In the process, government officials and higher education leaders have struggled to define meaningful outcomes from institutions with diverse and complex missions.

The Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) (2008) offers examples of national trends affecting higher education. Student affairs leaders should explore these trends to determine how those dynamics might be instructive in determining relationships to pursue as we advance our work and the missions of our institutions. The emerging issues SCUP has identified include

- Rising concern about the mental health of students;
- The vital role of institutional financial aid in the recruitment and retention of students, especially low-income students;
- The dire nature of global economic indicators and the long-term ramifications of economic fluctuations;
- The impact economic shifts will have on the need for campuses and communities to develop stronger relationships and partnerships on sustainability issues;

- The continuing growth in prominence for business leaders of the climate change movement and required collaboration with higher education researchers;
- The continuing negative impact of the U.S. Patriot Act on the enrollment of international students in the U.S., while the European Higher Education Area offers a promising example after which other higher education systems may model their practices;
- Greater constraints on online education, long seen as a key to providing access for developing countries, due to regulation, bureaucracy, and infrastructure challenges;
- Continuing rises in public skepticism about the quality of U.S. K–12 public education; research shows no gains over the last 20 years in preparing students satisfactorily for either employment or postsecondary education;
- The continuing collision between digital natives and immigrants; a growing need for more attention to the design of learning environments to foster changes in faculty/student interactions and to enhance student learning;
- Decreasing amounts of public funds dedicated to higher education, while federal and state legislators continue pushing for greater accountability;
- The continuing press to reform higher education accreditation; although the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and the Spellings Commission failed to gain the sought-after changes in accreditation, a strong push remains for changes in accreditation in higher education; and
- The continuing spreading availability of technology at the K–12 and postsecondary, challenging college and university leaders to employ engagement practices that respond to the social networking habits and needs of students.

Although the trends cited in the aforementioned reports are neither exhaustive nor reflective of the dynamics facing all institutions, they offer examples of the factors that can influence how linkages with other associations and organizations will affect the future of higher education and have direct implications for student affairs.

Future Partnerships

As the student affairs field considers future partnerships and linkages with other entities, we need to begin scanning our environment to identify the social trends we must work with others to address. The identification of issues should happen at the individual and institutional levels as well as at the professional association level.

Individual leaders should consider which professional associations provide access to the knowledge and skill development opportunities necessary to influence professional growth in areas of emerging concern. In this context, a group of student affairs professionals from a particular campus may explore conference attendance or association affiliations outside of the traditional student affairs milieu. Our efforts to enhance our effectiveness and deepen the impact of student affairs work should compel us to enrich our work by reaching out to campus colleagues involved in professional associations in other communities of practice. There are practitioners and scholars on campuses giving serious attention to each of the trends offered in the various reports. Individual leaders should determine effective measures to connect with those practitioners and scholars in meaningful ways.

Professional associations have leadership mandates that go beyond those borne by individuals and institutions. As conveners of communities of practice and communities of scholars, student affairs associations are charged with constructing learning and developmental opportunities to enrich practice and knowledge acquisition. Student affairs associations must take seriously the immense challenges facing higher education and reframe those issues in ways that position student affairs professionals as essential leaders for institutional success. We can no longer afford to limit our contribution to the narrow domain of “student affairs issues.” Our associations must consider how they will fulfill their responsibility to create meaningful learning opportunities and professional experiences to support access to the best thinking. While large general conferences or conventions have been an important vehicle for bringing professionals together, future strategies will need to provide issue-specific learning using a range of delivery mechanisms.

Student affairs associations need to partner with associations committed to research and practice in areas identified as emerging trends. In addition, our associations must support and commission research in areas beyond those traditionally investigated by our scholars. Stimulating research can also serve to connect student affairs scholars with scholars from other disciplines. As the complexity of student affairs work grows, so too must the array of relationships we rely upon to advance our work.

Because of the significant role of governmental agencies in drafting legislation and mandating higher education practices, our associations have a particular charge to develop vehicles to represent the perspectives of student affairs to national leaders. Whether in the area of student financial aid or institutional accreditation, legislative bodies carry considerable power over issues that affect our institutional success. If professional associations are to continue to represent the voice and values of the student affairs profession, they must do so in the settings where our voice most needs to be heard. Association leaders should also look beyond governmental entities to explore ways to deepen relationships with foundations to benefit from foundations' interest and investment in important higher education issues.

Student affairs preparation programs are a critical variable in producing professionals with the appropriate anchoring to participate effectively in professional leadership roles. Professional associations must provide an environment in which preparation program faculty, student affairs practitioners and practitioners, and scholars from other relevant fields interact and deepen the thinking of program faculty regarding curricular innovation.

3. PROCESS USED BY THE TASK FORCE

To provide background and to establish a historical record for the work of the Task Force, this section is provided to explain the processes undertaken during the two years of work by the Task Force.

INTENT IN FORMING THE TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Future of Student Affairs Task Force was conceived during conversations between the then presidents of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Vasti Torres and Jan Walbert. These conversations focused on advancing the field and working more closely together. At the 2008 spring meetings of both ACPA and NASPA, the governing bodies charged the Task Force with helping to assure the long-term credibility and viability of the student affairs field and its fulfillment of its responsibility to serve future generations of college students and colleagues in higher education.

SELECTION OF TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Members from both professional associations were invited to apply for Task Force membership, and nominations were sought from the associations' leadership. One-hundred and seventy-four completed applications were received from the general call for interested members. The Task Force co-chairs reviewed every application individually and shared with the members at the opening meeting a metaphor that most closely described their selection process:

We had the common goal to identify a balanced group, one that would bring different strengths to the endeavor. Much like co-captains of a team, we worked together to assure that the strengths needed to accomplish the ultimate goals would be represented. We feel this is a balanced group of individuals that represent diversity in institutional type; geographic area; professional experience; and racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. The associational membership of members was not provided to the governing boards, and we have not designated members as representing one

association or the other—this was very intentional on our part. (V. Torres & J. Walbert, personal communication, September 19, 2008, Chicago, IL)

The Task Force members, as recommended by the co-chairs, were accepted and approved by both the ACPA and NASPA boards during the summer of 2008. They also approved that the past presidents of the two associations, Vasti Torres and Jan Walbert, would serve as co-chairs of the Task Force.

FORMATION OF A CONSULTING GROUP

A Consulting Group was formed to periodically consider issues or options and to provide preliminary feedback on documents before releasing the work to the general membership. Members were selected from the many excellent association volunteers not ultimately asked or selected to join the Task Force.

The Consulting Group broadened the ability to be more inclusive of a range of colleagues with different experiences and different memberships in associations other than ACPA and NASPA. The Consulting Group was asked to respond to various documents along the way and were specifically notified of the sessions planned for the ACPA Convention and the NASPA Conference. They were well represented in the sessions and stayed in touch with each other as the work proceeded.

APPROACH TO THE WORK OF THE TASK FORCE

The full Task Force met four times in person over a two-year period in pursuit of their charge. These meetings were conducted around the country, in Chicago, Atlanta, Denver, and St. Louis. These sessions, generally conducted over a two- or three-day period, allowed face-to-face discussion for participants to consider the important issues we face as a field and together—and to contemplate and plan for our future.

Between these meetings, the Task Force continued to work in a variety of focused subgroups. Subgroups active during the two-year period included

- “Mission and Purpose,” to review the current and future direction of our professional work;

- “Inside the Profession,” to consider our work from the perspective of the field and to solicit feedback from colleagues;
- “Outside the Profession,” to facilitate reflection on our profession from members of the higher education community not directly engaged in student affairs work; and
- “Catalyst,” to look at options and opportunities to thinking differently about our work in the future (i.e., outside the box).

REVIEW OF IMPLICATIONS OF THE VISION AND PRINCIPLES

In addition to the meetings of the Task Force and the subgroup work, the members also participated in a series of conference calls. These discussions provided opportunities for members to receive updates, to review the direction of the Task Force, and to deal with operational and logistical matters effectively and efficiently.

To draft and develop a plan for the field’s future, the Task Force looked carefully for the real missions of students affairs work—in the past and today. Task Force members were asked to review a broad range of publications focusing on trends, issues, and constituents’ forecasts (see part 4 of Appendix).

To help focus on future direction, the Task Force worked to develop a draft Vision Statement for the field. The draft was to be shared for comment and consideration by the Consulting Group and select members of the profession as well as a select sample of others in higher education (presidents, provosts, chief financial officers) for questions, comments, observations, and alternative thinking/perspectives. The Task Force decided to limit the time frame for the Vision Statement because unpredictable changes in the world make a timeline longer than 10 to 15 years unrealistic and, thus, would soon make the Task Force work obsolete.

The conversations of the Task Force led the group to a more concise vision and a series of principles articulating the work that should be done by student affairs professionals. The Task Force used these questions to help shape its thinking:

- If our profession disappeared tomorrow, would it matter? How would we describe who we are and what we do if we had only seven seconds?
- How would we describe who we are and what we do so that someone not in higher education would understand our purpose?
- Why do people in our profession show up for work? What do they care about?
- If we had all the resources we needed, what would we accomplish?

The Task Force also identified a number of issues making it difficult to establish this definition, including these:

- What is the difference between purpose and mission? We hypothesized that mission is what you do; purpose is why you do what you do.
- So, why do we do what we do? To develop the whole student and to create environments conducive to learning.
- Is student development enhanced by intention? In other parts of the world, students develop without student affairs professionals.
- Can we develop a statement of purpose inclusive of the many constituent groups under the student affairs umbrella—preparation program faculty, enrollment management, academic services, athletics, and police departments, in addition to traditional student affairs areas?
- To know where we are going, we have to know from whence we came. How has the profession evolved? Why?

FORMULATION OF A VISION AND PRINCIPLES FOR THE STUDENT AFFAIRS FIELD

The Task Force acknowledged the breadth and complexity of the profession and recognized that our work demands accountability, effective use of resources, collaboration, and a stronger knowledge base. In order to frame our discussion the Task Force set out to identify a common vision and principles for the profession (see Task Force Mid-Point Report). As student affairs professionals, the current state of higher education calls us to enhance student learning and development by creating healthy and engaging campus

environments that promote student success. This vision is enacted with the following principles:

- Align our work with the mission and goals of our institutions;
- Build and strengthen strategic alliances to foster institutional effectiveness;
- Nurture student learning and development;
- Lead in cultivating campus conditions that enhance student achievement;
- Model and teach stewardship, service, and ethics;
- Promote socially just communities and global awareness; and
- Create and measure outcomes to inform practice and promote quality programs.

The Catalyst Subgroup was given the task of thinking outside the box and reporting back to the Task Force on a variety of approaches to the future of the profession. The goals for the Catalyst Subgroup were to

- Develop a list of issues and opportunities (related to the future of the field) that might deserve some consideration by the Task Force and that might not otherwise come up in our work together and
- Identify those worthy of further Task Force review.

Catalyst Subgroup members developed their list of outside-the-box issues and opportunities and designed a process to organize and prioritize the suggestions for full Task Force consideration. Ideas were generated through Task Force discussion, literature review, and communication with a variety of outside sources and are divided as follows:

- **Organizational:** How is the profession of student affairs organized, and how is the business as a profession conducted?
- **Directional:** Where is the profession heading?
- **Knowledge:** Examine and update existing knowledge and identify new knowledge/learning opportunities.
- **Perceptions of student affairs:** How is student affairs perceived by both internal and external audiences?

In addition, the Catalyst Subgroup developed a list of resource materials that would assist the Task Force in considering issues and opportunities impacting the future of the profession. These resources were included on the eLearning website for on-going Task Force consideration (see part 4 of Appendix).

The outside-the-box ideas were used by the Task Force to consider options and opportunities, to debate alternative approaches, and to focus efforts on the most effective future for the profession. The ideas that emerged from this group were then prioritized by Task Force members to determine the level of agreement the group had about the ideas presented. The top three issues were these:

- Merge ACPA and NASPA for one voice, one organization (or dissolve both and create a new one altogether).
- Create an overarching council on student affairs, in which representatives from professions and professional groups meet periodically.
- Make the every-ten-years joint ACPA-NASPA meeting truly joint; do work and business together, not just two groups meeting at the same time and same place.

As their work progressed, the Task Force was able to gain feedback about the Vision and Principles statement from the leadership of the associations and the Consulting Group as well as other higher education leaders (e.g., American Association for Community Colleges). During this time an unexpected and historic crisis in the economic situation was impacting higher education and influencing our thinking. In addition to thinking about the trends, the Task Force recognized the financial strains on individuals, institutions, and associations, and the efficient use of resources became a more prominent issue during the discussion of the future of the profession.

The Task Force members then began thinking how our work would be disseminated to the student affairs profession and the association membership. At the midpoint of the two years, a report was created updating the governing bodies on the work of the Task Force. In that report, the governing bodies were informed that the Task Force had considered ways to represent and coordinate the profession, often perceived to be the possibility of unification, to address the

infrastructure issues hindering a common voice for the profession. This midpoint report was presented to the governing bodies, and both the ACPA and NASPA governing bodies acknowledged receipt of the report and considered favorably the initial recommendations. The boards also elected to release the report to the general membership for comments and feedback. At this point the members began drafting the final report. The Task Force was divided into working groups to draft the introduction, implementation, answering of the charge questions, documenting the process, and responding to anticipated questions. The work of these groups was edited by the co-chairs and a subcommittee of the Task Force to produce this final report.

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