

# **STUDENT AFFAIRS ON CAMPUS JOURNAL**

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Editor's Introduction - I am excited to present the newest issue of the TACUSPA Journal (Student Affairs on Campus). This issue of the journal is focused on changes in higher education. As you explore the fifth issue of this journal, think about how higher education professionals can prepare for the impending changes in higher education.

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# **Entry-Level Competencies Compulsory for New Student Affairs Professionals**

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## Abstract

Student affairs is an accidental profession since undergraduate students tend to discover career opportunities in student affairs late in their college career (Taub & McEwen, 2006). Student affairs professionals are not invited to high school career day, famous, or hold an important place in pop culture. Students do not major in higher education or student affairs as an undergraduate, but eventually, discover professional opportunities through their college experience and involvement. For most, graduate school is their first opportunity to explore the various functional areas this profession has to offer. However, it remains to be seen if we are adequately training these professional students, so they are graduating with the competencies necessary for the job market. The purpose of this study was to determine what competencies are required for entry-level, student affairs employment. This was a replication study that analyzed entry-level job postings from The Placement Exchange (TPE).

## Background

The first research around professional competencies were in the mid-1970s when Newton and Richardson (1976) looked at current practitioners to determine competencies in entry-level positions. Later, Ostroth (1981) measuring desired entry-level competencies, but early studies of competencies focused on personality traits and knowledge and skills specific to student affairs were not included (Saidla, 1990). In *The Future of Student Affairs*, Miller and Prince (1976) presented performance expectations regarding the role of student affairs professionals. Criteria for this framework included setting goals, assessing growth, instruction, consultation, environmental management, evaluating programs, organizational context, and integrating programs (Miller & Prince, 1976) Hyman (1988) used the work of Miller and Prince as a

framework for an assessment instrument, which was the first to explore the adequate preparation of students for professional positions. Researchers continued to focus on competencies and preparation programs, Delworth and Hanson (1989), Barr (1993), and Pope & Reynolds (1997), but each used different theoretical frameworks and did not build on one another.

In 2000, Lovell and Kosten conducted a meta-analysis on the previous 30 years of research related to skills, traits, and knowledge for student affairs professionals. The results represent three main sections: skills, knowledge, and personal traits, then listed characteristics of each category based on the percentage of articles they appeared (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). The skills section included administration and management first, and the knowledge section had student development theory listed first. Personal traits, such as teamwork and enthusiasm, were far less common, especially among graduate students and new professionals. Two decades after the Lovell and Kosten publication, Herdlein, Riefler, & Mrowka (2013) conducted a comparison study and revealed one of the most significant changes was increased knowledge of multicultural and diversity issues. It was both highly desired by campuses and obtained by masters-prepared students. There were identified deficiencies of graduates understanding of assessment and the need for further developed technology and professional writing skills (Herdlein et al., 2013). There were additional studies that tried to determine the skills obtained by graduates of masters preparation programs (Waple 2006, Herdlein 2013, Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina 2009) with similar results. Knowledge of student development theory ranked as the highest competency, and ethics and history ranked towards the bottom.

## Methodology

This study was a replication of a 2012 research project, which analyzed all job posting from the 2008 TPE conducted by Hoffman and Bresciani (2012). This exploratory design, the researcher collects qualitative data, followed by quantitative analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2010). This study will use the 21 competencies found in the original study but will only focus on entry-level job postings. The qualitative portion of this study involved a document analysis of each job posting occurred to determine if the 21 competencies are present in the posting. Then a quantitative analysis of the data set was conducted.

The data collection for this study included entry-level job postings from TPE for candidates with a 0-1 year of full-time experience. Data included 259 job postings from October 2013-May 2014. The additional data were institution type (2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private), institution size (less than 5,000; 5,000-9,999; 10,000-20,000; and more than 20,000), and position categories. In examining the documents, 21 competencies (Table 1), from the original research, were evaluated and a dummy code signified yes (1) or no (0) for each competency (Vogt, 1993). During the analysis, data from three positions were omitted from the dataset. Two job postings did not provide any details of the job duties, and one posting was for a part-time graduate assistant position. Thirteen job postings indicated multiple positions available. In these instances, duplicating the dummy codes reflected the correct number of positions available. The final dataset contained 275 job postings.

Table 1

*Competencies Used in Document Analysis*

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Advising Groups	Diversity and Social Justice
Advising Individuals	Foundations of the Professions
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research	Fundraising
Attitudes and Dispositions	Law and Policy

Budgeting and Fiscal Management  
Collaboration with Faculty  
Collaboration with Non-faculty Professionals  
Communication  
Conflict Mediation  
Crisis Management  
Critical Thinking

Leadership  
Practical Competence  
Programing  
Student Learning and Development  
Teaching and Training  
Technology

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*Note.* Adapted from “Identifying what student affairs professionals value: A mixed methods analysis of professional competencies listed in job descriptions,” by J. Hoffman, and M. J. Bresciani, 2012, *Research and Practice in Assessment*, 7, p. 26-40.

The next phase of the study uses quantitative methods to answer the four research questions.

- (1) Which of the 21 competencies appear most often from entry-level job postings?
- (2) What differences are there in required competencies for different types of institutions (2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private)?
- (3) What differences are there in required competencies for different size institutions?
- (4) What are the differences in competency requirements within job types?

### Results

Roughly, 94% of all postings were from 4-year institutions. Postings from 4-year public institutions comprised 49.8% (137) of all entries, and 4-year private institutions made up 44.4% (122) of job postings. Institution size is balanced across the different categories with the largest number of postings from the smallest institutions with less than 5,000 students (96, 34.9%). The largest campus populations of greater than 20,000 students (75, 27.3%) represented the second-largest type.



The first research questions determined which competencies appeared most often in the entry-level job postings. Descriptive data were used to discover the most common competencies for entry-level employment. As seen in Table 2., Programing appeared 188 times (representing 68% of all posts) with five additional competencies appearing in more than 50% of job postings. Collaborating with non-faculty (172, 63%), advising groups (167, 61%), law and policy (156, 57%), teaching and training (152, 55%), and advising individuals (146, 53%). In the original research from Hoffman and Bresicani (2012), programming was also the most common competency, but the only other top competency shared was teaching and training showing a difference between what is needed for entry-level positions versus all positions (including mid and senior level). There are more similarities at the bottom with foundations of the profession, and fundraising competencies deemed less important for employment in student affairs.

Table 2

Competency	Definition	Frequency	%
Programing	Design, develop, implement, or manage programs, activities, and other forms of leaning.	188	68
Collaboration with Non-faculty Professionals	Teamwork, partnership, or collaboration with non-faculty professionals.	172	63
Advising Groups	Advising student clubs, organizations, or groups of students.	167	61
Law and Policy	Knowledge of higher education law, oversight of disciplinary procedures, development and administration of policy and understanding governance structures.	156	57
Teaching and Training	Teaching credit and non-credit courses as well as providing various forms of training.	152	55
Advising Individuals	Advising of counseling to individual students.	146	53
Communication	Written, oral, and interpersonal communication.	127	46
Practical Competence	Skills related to time management, organizational skills, managing multiple responsibilities working autonomously, and meeting deadlines.	117	43
Crisis Management	Manage crises, emergencies, or assess risk.	112	41
Budgeting and Fiscal Management	Understanding budgets, financial plans, and fiscal resources. It did not include fundraising.	105	38

Student Learning and Development	Knowledge of student development of learning theory and skill-based exceptions to apply these in practice.	102	37
Technology	Use computers and other forms of technology.	86	31
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research	Outcomes-based assessment, program review and evaluation, research, and data analysis.	72	26
Attitudes and Dispositions	Dispositional competencies; examples were creativity, enthusiasm, flexibility, and positive attitude.	70	25
Diversity and Social Justice	Work with diverse students or to create inclusive learning environments. This extends beyond working in a diverse environment or identification of the institution as an equal opportunity employer.	69	25
Collaboration with Faculty	Teamwork, partnership, or collaboration with faculty.	64	23
Conflict Mediation	Mediating conflict between individuals or groups.	58	21
Critical Thinking	Problem-solving decision-making, critical thinking, and reflective practice.	43	16
Leadership	Provide long-term direction to divisions or departments.	31	11
Foundations of the Professions	Knowledge of the history, philosophy, or ethical standards.	3	1
Fundraising	Grant writing, organize fundraising events, and solicit donations.	3	1

*Note.* Adapted from Identifying what student affairs professionals value: A mixed methods analysis of professional competencies listed in job descriptions,” by Hoffman, J., & Bresciani, M. J., 2012 *Research and Practice in Assessment*.

The second research question was to determine the difference in competencies required in different institution types (2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private). The number of job postings from two-year institutions ( $n=11$ ) was considerably lower compared to four-year institutions (public  $n = 137$ , private  $n = 122$ ). Since there were very few 2-year public institutions, the variable for the type of institutions only referred to 4-year public and 4-year private institutions where  $n = 259$ . Like the original study, crosstabs with chi-square was used to test the data with Cramers V to measure effect size. Only two competencies showed statistically significant differences were communication (127, 68%) and leadership (31, 11%). Communication ( $p = .035$ ) was more likely to be a competency desired in 4-year private schools than public. However, Cramer’s V = .131 indicated the effect size was small. Similar to communication, leadership ( $p = .000$ ) was more prone to 4-year private schools than 4-year

public. The effect size for leadership is somewhat higher (Cramer's  $V = .219$ ) but still less than .30 to indicate a minimal strength.

The third research question was to determine differences in competencies required for different size institutions. The four categories of institution size are 1) less than 5,000; 2) 5,000-9,999; 3) 10,000-20,000; and 4) more than 20,000. Measuring the differences between the four groups, chi-square was applicable to test for differences and Kendall's tau- $b$  to examine effect size. The results revealed limited differences in institution type. Collaboration with non-faculty professionals ( $p = .016$ ) is more likely needed at institutions 5,000-9,999 and 10,000-20,000 than institution less than 5,000 or more than 20,000. Kendall's tau- $b$  of .032 indicated a somewhat of a significant association and effect size, but overall the differences on institution size are minimal.

Research question four was to determine differences within different job types. There were 15 different job types or functional represented in the 275 entry-level job postings. There were only three job types with an  $n$  size above 20. The majority of job postings were housing/residence life (190, 69%). Campus student activities had 40 postings representing 15% of job postings, and leadership development programs had the third-highest number of postings (22 or 8%). Crosstabs was conducted with Fisher's exact test to measure differences and Phi to determine effect size. Nine functional areas had statistically significant results; however, most had a small effect size. Residence life ( $n = 190$ ) had two competencies, crisis management ( $p = .00$ ,  $\Phi = .346$ ), and law and policy ( $p = .00$ ,  $\Phi = .464$ ), that had a medium effect size.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine what competencies are required for entry-level, student affairs employment. These results can inform faculty how to prepare their student for full-time professional work and give graduate students a better understanding of what competencies they are expected to have as an entry-level professional. This study shows some competencies are more critical for entry-level employment, but knowledge acquisition is still vital as professionals move from entry to mid-level employment. Student affairs departments need to offer ongoing opportunities for continued growth and professional development.

Future research in the field of student affairs is needed to better understand the profession and the professionals. Masters preparation programs should evaluate how they are preparing their students for the student affairs profession, and research should be conducted to determine how entry-level professionals are retained and progress through the profession. Furthermore, the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Areas for Student Affairs Educators (2015) should universally be considered as the framework going forward. At the time of this study, the professional competencies were new, and masters programs needed time to adopt them and make the necessary curricular changes. Having a standard framework offers great research opportunities into the field of student affairs and how we educate and develop our professionals.

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## **Historically Bold: Three Texas Moments that Shaped Higher Education and Student Affairs**

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Understanding the historical foundation of higher education is crucial in administrative practice and scholarly activity in student affairs. Professionals who understand the background and outcomes of historical movements when discussing the future of our profession is important. Higher education historical moments such as the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the G.I. Bill), and student activism movements in the 1960's have influenced our efforts to improve the educational aspirations and conditions for generations of college students. Higher education institutions in the United States have evolved to provide college access for diverse populations and enriched the college experience by transforming institutional cultures (for example, the increasing number of Minority-Serving Institutions/MSIs). Higher education and student affairs administration owe a great deal to the important historical moments which occurred in Texas higher education and the players connected with them. How we understand and study college student development,



learning outcomes, academic achievement, and campus engagement in many ways are connected to how we respond to these historic moments on college campuses.

In this article, we recognize Herman M. Sweatt, Georgia Hoodye, Gloria Odoms, Mabeleen Washington, Dana Jean Smith, and Helen Jackson as state trailblazers in opening the door for college access and equity for African American students in Texas and nationwide. While their college experience on Texas campuses was filled with hardship and struggle, these Texas pioneers for campus diversity persevered to reach their educational goals. We also recognize the perseverance of one of the state's formidable Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), Texas Southern University, in its effort to gain presence in the state. From their efforts, Texas college student personnel administrators had to respond to the unrest these changes brought to campus, as well as opportunities to uphold the tenets of the Student Personnel Point of View 1949 document that advocated "education for a fuller realization of democracy" (American Council of Education, 1949, p. 17).

This historiography provides descriptions of three selected historic moments where these trailblazers at Texas institutions of higher education made their mark in higher education student affairs. These historic moments are viewed as significant events which occurred at each of the highlighted institutions. Awareness of these moments allow higher education professionals to understand how Texas specifically responded to issues impacting the nation overall. Higher education in the United States has seen numerous transformations reflecting societal issues and concerns starting from the Colonial Period around the early 1600's up to the modern historic era of the New Millenium (2001-current). Colleges and universities in the United States have been used as social institutions upon which citizens either benefitted from the opportunities granted by

receiving higher learning or were further marginalized through denial of educational advancement (Thelin, 2013). While higher education in the United States is said to be the current template upon which other institutions throughout the world emulate (Thelin, 2013), its earliest history is one riddled with worries for institutional survival (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Each historic moment is connected to a specific Texas institution of higher education – the University of Texas-Austin, Southwest Texas Teachers College (now Texas State University), and Texas Southern University. Before describing these significant higher education events, a brief description of each institution is provided to add context to the descriptions of the historic moments. In addition, authors of the historic moment descriptions each provide a positionality statement. Writing these statements disclose any experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and prior knowledge of the institution or event and make them visible to the authors and the reader (Ortlipp, 2008). The next section describes reasons for these statements use in this historiography and the authors connections to the highlighted institutions.

#### *Positionality to Institutions*

Positionality, while used often in qualitative research, is used for this historiography to disclose any potential bias with regards to institutional association and the event itself. The authors believe that it is important to make their analysis of the historic moment as visible and transparent as possible (MacNaughton, 2001). Each positionality statement was developed prior to the research on the selected historic moment. These positionality statements explain the personal connection of each institution to the authors and why learning specific institutional history is important for their own professional knowledge of higher education administration. The positionality statements also communicate how the historic moment assists in their own

personal and academic development. These statements will describe the authors connections to the University of Texas at Austin, Texas Southern University, and Texas State University respectively.

Author 1. Although I am not an alumna of the University of Texas at Austin, I am very interested in my historic moment. When picking this moment, I wanted to learn more about this significant event that I feel has an impact on my life. Because *Sweatt v. Painter* is used as a legal reference in both low and high courts following the Supreme Court decision, I believe that this case truly paved the way for many cases that followed. As an ethnic minority, Texas resident, and alumna of a higher education administration master's program, I can try to imagine myself being denied admissions into my dream program. This is my connection with this historic moment and to the University of Texas.

Author 2. Texas Southern University (TSU) was selected to learn more about its history and development in Texas higher education. TSU's distinguished alumni also made it a noteworthy institution for historical research. Several prominent African American leaders and politicians have called TSU their alma mater. I am especially drawn to Barbara Jordan, Congresswoman and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient and graduate of TSU, Class of 1956. As a Houston resident, I knew of its achievements and challenges and wanted to investigate this institution more closely. The location of the campus also is interesting for this analysis since it is near another four-year state public university. Lastly, TSU is considered a Historically-Black College and University (HBCU). While the description of my historic moment starts when the campus became known as Texas Southern University, its history

includes moments when it was known as the Houston Colored Junior College and Texas State University for Negroes.

Author 3. Texas State University was selected because it is my undergraduate alma mater. After having a rough beginning to my first years of attending the University of Houston, I transferred to Texas State University in 2008 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. At Texas State, I met lifelong friends and made connections to the university through faculty and work-study employers that assisted in my persistence through college. In addition to my personal connection to the university, I chose Texas State University because of a historic event that was celebrated in 2014 that caught my attention and made my connection to the university stronger. The historic event that captured my attention was the fifty-year celebration of integration at Texas State University. As a woman of color, this historic moment means a great deal to me because I worked at an institution that only 54 years ago, I was not able to attend. It changed how I perceived my work environment.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Higher education in the Southern states during the post-Colonial period saw a rise in institution-building once the charters to create the first state universities in the United States were established in Georgia and North Carolina in the late 1700's (Thelin, 2013). Texas soon followed with the establishment of Baylor in 1845 followed by Texas A&M University in 1876. As Thelin (2013) states, "the building of new colleges in the South was the most substantial evidence of higher education's growing appeal throughout the new, expanding United States" (p. 52).

As the history of higher education moved onward into the twentieth century, higher education institutions in Texas reaped the benefits afforded to them in higher education's golden age between 1945-1975 (Thelin, 2013). Higher education institutions statewide and nationally saw increased enrollments, finances, and new infrastructure (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). A result of this accelerated growth and expansion was increased access, opportunity, and diversity for students. Institutions of higher learning also began to transform to fit into the idea of mass education for the nation. No longer was higher education seen as an opportunity for a select few, it became something within reach for those who aspired to obtain a college degree. However, by the latter part of this golden age period, students started to question dominant social values and responded to social injustices. Cohen and Kisker (2010) described this time period as the "Era of American Hegemony" (p. 187).

Focus is placed on historic moments occurring during what Cohen and Kisker (2010) describe as the "Era of American Hegemony", which is between the years 1945 to 1975 (p. 187). This era was signified by the rise of mass education, where access to higher learning increased post-WWII and a drive towards equity for marginalized student populations in higher education was emerging. In addition to being significant events, we argue that higher education transformed itself from the occurrence of these historic moments. These transformations of higher education had a significant impact on student affairs and how today's college student is served on campus. True to Cohen and Kisker's belief that understanding history is essential for change, the continued transformation of programs, policies, and services is strengthened by the knowledge of how specific historic moments impacted our higher education student affairs profession and institutions.

## Three Texas Higher Education Moments

The historic moments selected are described by providing a brief overview of the key issues, players, and setting of each event. Institution descriptions provide context to the historic background of these moments. The time period described by Cohen and Kisker will be used to give societal context to each event. After the description of the selected historic moments, outcomes will be shared to give thoughts on how these specific Texas moments are historically bold in their impact and legacy in higher education and student affairs, within the state and nationwide.

### *The University of Texas Law School and Sweatt v. Painter, 1950*

*Sweatt v. Painter* is an excellent example one person's fight to never settle for less than what they deserve, no matter how grueling a process may be. Herman Marion Sweatt could have reasoned that it would be a waste of time to pursue with legal action against The University of Texas since they offered him a supposedly equal alternative law degree and college experience. However, he and his amazing legal team revolutionized the legal approach of "separate but equal" educational doctrines by focusing on the undeniable fact that the appearance of equal buildings, books, and other items did not provide evidence of equality, nor equity, in higher education.

Institution description. In 1839, the Congress of Texas declared that an institution of higher education be established to accommodate the state's educational needs (UT-Austin History and Traditions, 2017). After a few decades of delay and one year of construction, the University of Texas was established in 1883 in Austin Texas (UT-Austin History and Traditions, 2017). The University of Texas began with one building, 221 students, and eight professors. The

University of Texas School of Law was established in 1883 with the foundation of the University of Texas (UT-Austin History of the Law School, 2017). In its inception, the University of Texas (UT) School of Law was equipped with two professors and 52 students and was located in the basement of the university's Old Main Building (UT-Austin History of the Law School, 2017).

*Cohen & Kisker description.* In the book, *The Shaping of Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)* by Arthur M. Cohen and Carrie B. Kisker (2010), these authors discuss hegemony during 1945-1975. This time frame was highly characterized by opposing groups attempting to gain dominance, influence, and in some cases equality. Although history widely reflects the aspects of war during this time, many changes and advances in higher education were noted in this time period. During the 1890s, various Supreme Court rulings focused on whether equal educational rights were obtained via separate facilities and commodities or that the responsibility of education fell to the states, where the federal government had no deciding factors within this jurisdiction (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). With more support from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) more traction was gained during the 1930s and 1940s challenging separate but equal philosophies and employment opportunities for African Americans (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Cohen and Kisker (2010) also mention the access created by the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, which is more commonly known as the GI Bill. In the six years following the implementation of the G.I. Bill over two million World War II veterans enrolled in institutions of higher education throughout the United States. Although many African American veterans returned, educational access was still hindered by racial discrimination.

Due to the rigid segregation of higher educational facilities, the NAACP reported that “where Negro veterans have sought to enter college under the GI Bill . . . they have found that the educational and training facilities were overcrowded, understaffed, or simply nonexistent.” Even in the absence of racial exclusion, “most white colleges” that admitted African Americans at all “had strict quotas for Negroes” and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were often both too few and too small to adequately accommodate the large number of black veterans interested in undergraduate training (Woods, 2013, pg.12). Only one-fifth of the estimated “100,000 Negro veterans eligible to attend college under the G.I. Bill” ever gained admittance (Woods, 2013, pg.12).

*Historic moment description.* Having experienced unfair opportunities for advancement employed by the United States Postal Service (USPS) due to his race and ethnicity, Herman Marion Sweatt, a young African-American man, yearned to become a lawyer (Hemphill, 2015). In February of 1946, Mr. Sweatt, applied for admission into University of Texas School of Law. Because of his race and ethnicity, his request for admission was refused with a rejection letter outlining the state’s educational segregation laws.

A very important detail of the case one should note is Mr. Sweatt’s academic qualifications before applying for admissions into the University of Texas. He graduated from Wiley College with honors. However, Wiley College was not an accredited institution of higher education (Entin, 1986). Although this was used later in the case to support the decision to not admit Mr. Sweatt, the rejection letter received from Mr. Theophilus Shickel Painter, the President of the University of Texas at the time, referenced that the State of Texas required racial segregation in education (Entin, 1986). As an alternate route for his law school aspirations,



Sweatt was told that “the state could create a School of Law for colored people” (Entin, 1986, pg. 7). This is a very important implication showing the educational disparities common to African Americans during this time period. The University of Texas claimed that the applicant was not eligible for admissions based on degree completion from a non-accredited institution likely created under the premise of the separate but equal educational doctrine. In turn, Sweatt was offered to be the test subject to the creation of a new unaccredited law school.

In taking his admission decision to court, Mr. Sweatt was represented by an NAACP legal team which including Thurgood Marshall. The legal team focused on the fact that racial segregation lacked rational purpose and was therefore invalid and contradicted the purpose of public education (Entin,1986). Marshall enforced this point by citing that segregation “promoted interracial isolation, mistrust, and misunderstanding and inflicted a ‘badge of inferiority’ upon the minority group” (Entin, 1986, pg. 44). With the previously mentioned effects of segregation, Marshall then pointed to the numerous disadvantages he had as an African American lawyer witnessed providing legal services to his clients and his community (Entin,1986). By arguing that there was no societal benefit of segregation and the damage done, continuation of separate but equal was pointless.

Since *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a commonly referenced case in *Sweatt v. Painter* of educational segregation, Marshall began by dismantling the case and showing why *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a case based on segregation in public transportation, could not be applied to education. Marshall continued by suggesting that “equality, within the Fourteenth Amendment, can never be realized under a system of segregation” (Entin, 1986, pg. 45).

In conclusion, Marshall gave evidence that in Texas, separate but equal standards could not truly be upheld. By showing the inequity of educational expenditures for White students compared to Black students, lack of accreditation at schools created for non-Whites, lack of an equivalent libraries, limited access to full time faculty, non-welcoming student interactions, and other differences, the disadvantages were clear that the educational experiences of African Americans were substandard.

The ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter* determined that the University of Texas Law School could not provide Mr. Sweatt with equitable education, degree, or student services if separated from his White counterparts. Because the University of Texas could not prove that the quality of Mr. Sweatt's education would be the same, UT was found guilty of violating the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution.

*Outcome.* The court case and the subsequent events spurred on by the events that took place following Mr. Sweatt's admission had a significant impact to the desegregation of higher education in the United States of America. Court cases following *Sweatt v. Painter* cited and referred to the rulings of the case. One notable outcome was that the suit filed by Mr. Sweatt helped establish Texas Southern University (TSU). The case also had a tremendous effect on the approach of legal teams. Unlike cases prior to this moment, *Sweatt v. Painter* focused not only on the physical aspects of "separate but equal", but also on the advancement, access to faculty, post-employment opportunities, and the promises of new colleges for African Americans. Most importantly the trial enforced the weight and accreditation of the prospective law degree at a segregated institution in comparison to a degree that would be obtained from others that did not allow African Americans. The conclusion of this historic moment led to Herman Marion Sweatt

being the first African American admitted into the University of Texas Law School. Thanks to his persistence, he was not the last.

*The Early Development of Texas Southern University, 1927-1957*

The history of the foundation and initial growth of Texas Southern University (TSU), bridging the eras of both 1870-1944 and 1945-1975, is a fascinating case study of several historical trends that influenced the development of higher education in the United States as a whole. This institution cannot be studied over the course of one of those eras without missing vital historical context.

*Institution description.* Texas Southern University is a public four-year historically Black college located in the historic Third Ward neighborhood of Houston, Texas. TSU was the first state university in Houston and is known as one of the largest HBCUs in the country. It has a current enrollment of over 9,500 students and faculty of 1,000 and offers bachelors, master's and doctoral degrees in eleven different colleges and schools.

*Cohen and Kisker description.* TSU's history is a perfect case study for many of the events highlighted in Cohen and Kisker (2010). From its founding at the peak of the post-World War I boom in U.S wealth and growth in higher education institutions, to its extremely rapid growth from junior college to fully accredited university with a graduate school within only 16 years, to the boom in summer enrollments common in urban colleges that caused the initial summer enrollment of 300 to drop to 88 as all of the enrolled teachers returned to work in the fall (Texas Southern University, n.d.), TSU demonstrates the trends described in Cohen and Kisker's Era of Hegemony.

In addition to these aspects, TSU's founding and the first decades of its existence serve as an excellent example of state government's overwhelming influence on the development of higher education. TSU's governance was controlled by local and state government, which was a disadvantage of the institution itself, as the question of integration and the state of Texas' response to this issue loomed.

In TSU's case, examining only the era from 1870-1944 cuts some hugely important events out of the picture. For this reason, this historic overview moves forward into the 1945-1975 era. The events of the 1950s and their immediate aftermath cannot be excluded from an examination of the college's transition from junior college to full university, which began so smoothly but soon hit huge obstacles.

*Historic moment description.* Texas Southern University's early history is closely tied to several historic moments from the development of higher education and of the United States as a whole. In fact, we would argue that it is a perfect case study of segregation and integration in higher education - not perfect because the process of integration went smoothly, but because it illustrates the ways in which this process was hindered by societies that were not voluntarily desegregating. To fully understand its impact on higher education, one has to examine its entire history - with a focus on its founding and development from a segregated junior college to the first public four-year college in Houston.

TSU was originally founded as 'Houston Colored Junior College' in 1927 by the Houston School Board, which simultaneously founded two segregated junior colleges, one for African-American students and one for whites (the junior college for white students, incidentally, developed into the University of Houston). By 1931 the Houston Colored Junior College had

gained accreditation; by 1934 it grew from a junior college into a four-year institution and in 1943 added a graduate school.

In 1945, its regulation by the Houston Independent School District ended and the Houston College for Negroes became a private institution - but not for long, as looming court cases over segregation (specifically, *Sweatt vs Painter*) prompted the state of Texas to purchase the Houston College for Negroes, which now became the Texas State University for Negroes (TSUN). The name change was an attempt to demonstrate that the state was providing “separate but equal” facilities for African-American students. The state poured money into the school so that it could be argued that students there had opportunities equivalent to the opportunities white students had at the University of Texas at Austin (UT), but once the Supreme Court had ruled that UT had to admit Sweatt, TSUN’s budget was slashed by 40% and Houston’s first public college was ignored by the state (Wermund, 2016). Immediately after the *Sweatt vs Painter* decision, the Texas State University for Negroes was re-named to become Texas Southern University, the name it retains today.

When the University of Houston became a public institution ten years after *Sweatt vs Painter*, disparities in treatment between the two neighboring campuses were grossly apparent. King (2012) highlights how public rhetoric at the time lauded the creation of UH because there was no state university in Houston, the state’s largest city. Interestingly, TSU’s existence merely one block from the UH campus was all but completely ignored. This oversight typifies the treatment TSU received from the state which governed it once its hoped-for usefulness in *Sweatt vs Painter* was over.

The advent of *Sweatt vs Painter* may have seemed good for TSU as the state of Texas purchased the school and poured money into it, expanding its programs to demonstrate ‘separate but equal. However, this increase in federal government oversight had a paradoxically negative effect on TSU. When *Sweatt vs Painter* did not produce the result segregationists had hoped for, concern in maintaining TSU’s gains evaporated as well as various tactics for defying, or at least delaying, integration. In 1999, the editors of the *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* wrote an essay titled “Texas Southern University: The Stepchild of the Texas Higher Education System.” In this essay, the editors described the many ways in which TSU has been shortchanged, often literally and probably most effectively, by unequal funding since 1951. Of note in this essay is a quote from attorneys responsible for distributing funds from a tobacco settlement to Texas universities. When the attorneys were asked why they had not given TSU one cent of the money, they stated “We take care of family, and frankly, Texas Southern is not in any of our families. (“Texas Southern University”, pg. 43)”

*Outcomes.* Before investigating more closely, we assumed that the presence of TSU as a successful institution focused on higher education for African Americans must have been a positive step for civil rights in the region. However, Pegoda (2010) maintains that the co-existence of UH and TSU, a mere block apart from each other, in fact allowed for segregation in Texas to continue to flourish. Pegoda stated that any African-American students seeking admission at UH could be pointed across the street to TSU. In fact, he wrote that in 1957, TSU administration cooperated with UH to re-open academic programs that had been previously closed on the UH campus for lack of enrollment. This request was to avoid embarrassment for UH when African-American students sought entrance to those same programs at UH, thus

actively maintaining a “separate but equal” response in Texas three years after *Brown vs Board of Education*. If taken to court, this request could have expected successful legal action. TSU went on to hold the course in question for only two students, who ironically sought admission at UH (Pegoda 2010). King (2012) mentions that Thurgood Marshall was critical of TSU and other schools like it born of the “separate but equal” doctrine. He saw them as relics of the segregationist era, although he did consent to the TSU’s law school being named after him, in the end.

Comparison today with UH provides a stark contrast: TSU’s endowment is \$48.7 million, while UH’s is \$716.4 million. Considering that they were founded side by side and both received donations from oilman and philanthropist HR Cullen in the 1940s, it is hard not to compare these ‘twins’ and their histories and draw conclusions about where the roots of this disparity lie. Texas Southern University holds a unique place in the history of higher education not only within the state of Texas, but also in the United States. Its successes in simply continuing to exist, not to mention in graduating a large number of alumni who went on to become well-known politicians, lawyers and judges, deserve to be celebrated. The challenges the institution faces today are a direct result of the segregationist legacy that disadvantaged the school and the students it was created to serve from its beginning; to allow the school to fail now would be a huge loss to the city of Houston. TSU certainly deserves more than it has been given and this author would argue that this situation needs to be reversed.

### *The Integration of Southwest Texas Teachers College, 1963*

Over the years, Southwest Texas State Normal School changed its name six more times as follows: 1918-1923 as Southwest Texas State Normal College, 1923-1959 as Southwest Texas

State Teachers College, 1959-1969 as Southwest Texas State College, 1969-2003 as Southwest Texas State University, 2003-2013 Texas State University- San Marcos, and 2013-present as Texas State University (About Texas State, n.d.). Texas State has grown to attract diverse student populations that total 38,303 undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students. The current diversity of TSU started when Southwest Texas State College integrated the first five African-Americans into a predominately-White institution (PWI). Five African American women spurred a historic moment in Texas State University history fifty-four years - Dana Jean Smith, Georgia Hoodye, Gloria Odoms, Mabeleen Washington, and Helen Jackson.

*Institution description.* Texas State University was founded in 1903 with a total of 303 students. From 1903-1918 Texas State University was known as Southwest Texas State Normal School, an institution that prepared students for teaching positions. As the institution experienced continued growth over the years, so did the mission, vision, and name of Southwest Texas State Normal School (About Texas State, n.d.). In 2012, Texas State University was classified as an emerging research institution, which is defined as “institutions that offer a wide range of baccalaureate and master’s degree programs, serve a student population within and outside the region, are committed to graduate education through the doctorate in targeted areas of excellence, award at least 20 doctoral degrees per year, offer at least 10 doctoral programs and/or enroll at least 150 doctoral students and have research expenditures of at least \$14 million per year (University News Service, 2012). In addition to the reclassification, in 2012 Texas State also gained recognition in 2011 as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). In order to have an HSI status, an institution must have “a full-time undergraduate enrollment of at least 25 percent of the Hispanic undergraduate student population (University News Service, 2011)



*Cohen & Kisker description.* Cohen and Kisker (2010) describe in more detail overlapping issues the issues of equal opportunity in their book, *The Shaping of American Education*. Specifically, the authors discuss the Supreme Court decisions of the late 1800s that impacted the legal right to racially segregate schools based on the belief that “equal rights were obtained if facilities were separate, but equal (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, pg. 195). The authors also discuss the impact the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had on legislation that assisted in the passing of federal court rulings that despite resistance, rapidly changed the course of history for equal opportunities for African Americans. Examples such as *Sweatt vs. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education*, which both rejected in 1950 the idea that African Americans needed separate law schools, as well as the famously known Supreme Court ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 that desegregated schools, provided evidence that institutions were being challenged on providing equitable services (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Other important laws that impacted marginalized groups are the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX, and the Voting Rights Act (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

*Historic moment description.* During the 1960s, the United States experienced much turmoil from the Vietnam War and the cost to keep fighting in the war, political unrest from the assassinations of key political players, John F. Kennedy in 1963, Malcom X in 1965, and Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, as well as social unrest that resulted in violent protests across the nation from the protests of the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement, which sparked the creation of radical groups, such as the Black Panthers and the Feminine Mystique. During the 1960s, the nation was also grappling with the 1954 Supreme Court Case

of *Brown vs. Board of Education* that overturned the Supreme Court decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896 that legally upheld segregation in public schools with the notion of separate but equal. Additionally, the nation was also adjusting to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 enacted by President Lyndon B. Johnson in addition to the passing of the Voting Rights Act, that used tactics to keep Blacks from voting.

Although the socio-political unrest was taking place across the country, the same sentiments were also felt towards African Americans within university settings. Despite the various laws that had passed, many colleges and universities were very reluctant to grant African Americans admission into their institution of choice. An example of this is Texas State University. In fact, it had taken a formal letter of application, a formal rejection, a lawsuit, and a court order for the university to open its doors to five African-American students: Georgia Hoodye, Gloria Odoms, Mabeleen Washington, Dana Jean Smith, and Helen Jackson (King, 2011). The integration of the five African American women to Southwest Texas State Teachers College was not an easy task and involved the cooperation of others to facilitate a peaceful integration despite national calamity. The integration involved the cooperation of U.S. District Court Judge Ben H. Rice Jr, whose “court order meant the university had to admit Smith and other qualified African-American applicants forthwith” (King, 2011), John G. Flowers, President of Southwest Texas State College, and the United States 36<sup>th</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson who signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The 1963 integration of Georgia Hoodye, Gloria Odoms, Mabeleen Washington, Dana Jean Smith, and Helen Jackson into what is now known as Texas State University sparked an increase in ethnic and racial diversity in college campus settings that were reflective of the

national changes that were taking place across the United States. The impact these women made in Texas changed the trajectory of the future of African Americans in the United States and in higher education. Their presence on campus and their perseverance to challenge segregation empowered other marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, women, and Mexican Americans to place a demand on the federal government for equal treatment and opportunities. Events described by Cohen and Kisker as it relates to the Era of Hegemony accurately describes the of events that affected the integration of African Americans into Southwest Texas State College.

*Outcomes.* Over the years, Texas State University has grown rapidly from 303 students in 1899 to 38,303 as of Fall 2016 (About Texas State, n.d.). However, within the enrollment growth that Texas State has experienced, there have been significant changes to the college demographics that are also reflective of demographic changes across the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), statistics show increasing numbers and percentages of Black and Hispanic students are attending college. Between 2000 and 2014, the percentage of college students who were Black rose from 11.7 to 14.5 percent, and the percentage of students who were Hispanic rose from 9.9 to 16.5 percent. Also, the percentage of Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college increased from 21.7 percent in 2000 to 34.7 percent in 2014; the percentage of Black 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled did not change measurably during this period. Additionally, due to the location of Texas State University, the institution has also experienced an increase in Hispanic student enrollment, which led to the HSI recognition.

As a result of the shift in enrollment demographics, Texas State transitioned from being a predominately-White institution into one whose minority student population is above 51 percent.

Because of the large population of students from underrepresented groups, Texas State has had to make changes to policies, student programs, and student services to accommodate the needs of its growing diverse student body. For instance, as a result of African American students enrolling into Texas State, Texas State now has resources, such as TRiO Student Support Services, Black History Month celebration, Men of Color Initiative, HSI STEM Grant, and the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion to help support students in their transition and integrate into to a new environment both academically and socially.

### *Shaping Higher Education and Student Affairs*

The historic moments selected for this article all fall into this interesting time period in U.S. higher education history. These moments reflect how Texas institutions responded to this era of American hegemony and the goals of mass education. Hegemony was described to be in place in U.S. higher education, where despite the gains in access and diversity, universities were perceived “to be lagging in their civic responsibilities” to be “champions of social justice” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 197). The Student Personnel Point of View 1949 document led the effort to develop student affairs administration into critical components of overall university organizational structures. The history of student affairs is rooted in the “realization of democracy” that was growing within institutions of higher learning at the time. In many ways, this important document in the history of student affairs in the U.S. brought student personnel administrators in the late 1940s and early 1950s awareness of impending changes being brought to higher education.

The historic moments at the University of Texas-Austin and Southwest Texas State Teachers College (now Texas State University) led to student demographic changes and

institutional organizational changes which transformed student personnel units. These units on campus increased student services for African Americans and eventually other diverse student populations now enrolling on campus. While “separate but equal” ruled educational institutions prior to and during the early part of this time period, this era led to the dismantling of such segregation on campuses. Similarly, this dismantling also occurred in campus life and student activities. The rise of ethnic and cultural student organizations provided activism and community advocacy that was widely apparent at the latter part of the 1960s and early 1970s that continued onward to the 1980s and beyond (Montelongo, 2018).

The history of higher education in the United States typically starts with the establishment of Colonial Colleges along the eastern coast, with eventual movement westward and onto the Southern parts of the nation around the late 1700’s (Thelin, 2013). The establishment of Baylor University in 1845 signaled the growth of higher education in the new republic of Texas. The oldest public institution in the state, Texas A&M University, founded in 1876, reflected the rise of providing access to higher learning through the Morrill Act of 1862 which led to the establishment of land-grant institutions. The growth of higher education in the United States reflects the societal dynamics occurring in each era of history of the United States. Despite its numerous transformations, higher education in the United States “has successfully resisted, co-opted, or absorbed – eventually changing” to become the innovative institution it currently is today (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 1).

Knowing where social institutions come from and where they are going helps create change for complex organizations. The institutional histories of colleges and universities in the United States provide thought-provoking evidence on how higher education organizations

respond to societal changes during the growth of the nation. Cohen and Kisker (2010) verify this simple fact: “Understanding history is thus essential for those who would reform higher education (p. 1).”

While this era provided opportunities for diverse students, we also recognize the importance of knowing how much effort it took for an HBCU in the state to find equitable status among not only other higher education institutions in Texas, but with one literally just blocks away. Texas Southern University has had numerous challenges within its own institutional history, but it has regained prestige among other colleges and universities in the Houston metro area. TSU’s historic moment reminds us that one of our own Minority-Serving Institutions in Texas was once seen as a “stepchild” among our higher education institutions. TSU’s efforts to transform itself can be seen in its notable alumni. The campus created a campus climate where college aspirations were achieved, and a sense of belonging was established for students who were denied educational opportunity elsewhere.

What can we learn from student personnel administrators on campus who, despite the discrimination and racism being heaved at them during this tumultuous time, still provided student services and created supportive campus environments? Questions like this one should be asked more as we continue to address current social injustices and use student affairs professionals to lead these efforts. In addition, Texas Southern University has a history of producing advocates for the community as seen through noted alumni and politicians Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland. Activism and fighting for social justice appear to be a legacy of the early fight TSU had in finding its place among other higher education institutions. Texas Southern University provides a rich opportunity for student affairs to learn more about how to

transform societal perceptions of education for African Americans and campus culture. Other institutions in the state can learn a great deal from the numerous HBCU's located within Texas.

### Conclusion

In this article, three historic moments in Texas higher education history are described to provide examples of how the state responded to shifts in college access, student demographics, and societal injustices. Cohen and Kisker (2010) described the time in which these three historic moments occurred (1945-1975) as the Era of Hegemony. Ideas of mass education in our institutions of higher learning were being tested to challenge dominant ideas on culture, society, and economic opportunity. Higher education was no longer seen as an opportunity for just a few, it was expanded to include the presence of those who have historically been denied educational advancement based on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Texas provided three historically bold examples to give credence to the changing times ahead for higher education. We encourage student affairs administrators in Texas to know the history of their institutions and become aware of the impact the historic moments on their campus provide to their constituents, and possibly state and nation.

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# **Experiences of First-Generation College Students Attending Universities**

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## **Abstract**

Each year, institutions all around are working together to enhance the college student experience. Administrators work with campus departments to try to figure out the best ways to serve their students. As time has passed, college campuses have become more diverse and the needs of the students are decreasing. Colleges are now dealing with special populations and must find the best way to serve and support these students. One of the most increasing student categories colleges are seeing today are first generation college students. These are students who are the first in their family to go to college (Atherton, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of first-generation college students that attend four-year institutions with little to no resources available for their community. This paper will also share information as to how higher education professionals can better help first generation students adapt to the college lifestyle and succeed during their time there.

## Introduction

First generation college students are unique in many ways. These students are not your traditional college student. These students are the first in their family to attend college. Some of these students have parents who did not even get to complete high school. Many of these students come from low-income households (Wildhagen, 2015). Many of them have also attended high schools that have low educational rankings (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). One thing many of these students take pride in is paving the way for future generations within their family. These students believe that they will be able to be the positive change that their family has been needing for many years (Stieha, 2010). These students unlike others are taking large leaps into unfamiliar territory to make a difference in their lives.

## Challenges

There are so many challenges that first generation students face. One challenge that has been highlighted lately is their transition into college. Many of these students do not receive the proper guidance and support when applying for college. Students are often misguided and possibly even told that they will not make it in college (Stieha, 2010). These students struggle with finding someone who will believe in them enough to help them. Unfortunately, their parents cannot help them because they are unaware with what the applying process let alone the college experience looks like (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Some students even have parents who do not want them to go to college because they do not believe in their child.

Another major challenge these students face is their finances. Many first-generation college students cannot afford to attend college. These students depend on grants and student

loans to pay for their education. While this may help many students, others have to take on two to three jobs to pay for college as well as provide for their family all while trying to focus on their academics (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). Some students have given up on their dream of going to college because their families could not afford to pay for it (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Others have given up attending their dream institution and end up settling for the most affordable one they can find. Unfortunately, these schools may not even have their desired major.

More than anything these students have to learn how to navigate their college experience with little to no support from their families due to their lack of knowledge. This definitely takes a toll on these students and can cause some of these students to want to drop out early and go home (Terenzini et al., 1996). These students have to deal with these challenges and work their hardest to make good grades. Without the proper guidance and support from their family, peers, and higher education professionals, first-generation college students will continue to feel lost and out of place on college campuses (Stieha, 2010).

### Experiences

After struggling to finally get into college, first-generation college students often lack the motivation to stay in college (Gibbons, Rinehart, & Hardin, 2016). These students have dealt with what some may consider impossible odds and may find it hard to see themselves making it through all four years. They have to learn about a whole new environment, take on new roles, and make sure they are performing well academically. Many of these students struggle connecting to campus because they are not really sure what the institution has to offer them.

Others struggle making connections due to the amount of time they now spend at working trying to pay tuition and fees. Having to deal with so much inside and outside of the classroom takes a negative toll on these students, and without the proper support, these students are bound to eventually drop out (Winkle-Wagner, 2011).

## Resources

As educators and administrators work towards better serving this community, they have taken great strides to improve their transition process, academic resources, and on campus living experiences. Colleges have begun creating parent orientation programs that help them gain a better understanding of the college experience and what their children may be going through (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). During parent orientation, parents learn about all of the campus resources offered to students, degree plans their students may have, how their parents can support their students emotionally and financially, and depending on the institution some parents will have the opportunity to meet their child's academic advisor. While this may not matter to some, students have shared that having their parents and peers support has made a huge difference when it comes to their academics (Wang, 2012).

In conjunction with college campuses, high schools have created summer bridge programs, after school tutoring programs, and trio programs to better help prepare students for college. During the summer bridge programs, students visit college campuses early and learn about all the college has to offer these students. The goal with this program is to help students build a sense of community early on. Studies have shown that this helps decrease some of the fear students have about their transition to campus (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). Often times,

during these programs students make friends that they end up taking classes with later on during their college career.

Another great resource for students that has been expanding is the Advancement Via Individual (AVID) program. This is a program many middle schools and high schools now have that's goal is to get students into college. Through this program, students are taken on field trips to visit colleges all over. These students are also required to take notes that will help them study and pass their other classes while in school. Towards graduation, students are guided when applying for colleges and writing their personal statements. This program has helped many students prepare and get into college. AVID allows students to learn more about their dream schools, the requirements to get into the school, and whether or not the students are on track to getting into that college.

While much preparation has been done for the transition process, one of the greatest and latest inventions that have benefited first-generation students during college is living-learning communities. Living-learning communities are communities where students are grouped together based off of similarities of some sort (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). For example, some institutions have STEM major living-learning communities where everyone who lives in that area is a science major. Now many campuses are creating first-generation living learning communities. Within these communities there are faculty and staff dedicated to helping these students adjust to living on campus. These communities plan and execute programs tailored to these students' specific needs and interest. The staff living in this area is required to be there for these students at all times, answer their questions, and help them with whatever they need. Students have shared that by living in these communities and being able to interact with

individuals who are just like them has helped them feel more welcome and more at home (Engle et al., 2006). These living learning communities help with the transition and retention of first-generation college students. By building that sense of community, students are more likely to get involved and be extremely active in student life on campus. Some of these students eventually continue on to be student leaders within other departments on campus (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017).

### Conclusion

First generation college students face unique challenges and often need support in ways that other students do not. While educators work towards making these students feel more at home on their campus, there is still much work that needs to be done. While there has been much research on what educators and administrators believe these students need in order to succeed and perform better in the classroom, there is one thing that is often missing in the research and that is the student's voice. Allowing students to share their personal experiences and what they desire to see on their campus will bring forth a more fruitful change. When making decisions for first-generation college students, their voices should be heard and their opinions should be prioritized. Doing this can possibly bring forth an increase in first generation student retention, higher test scores, better grades, more college applications, more degrees earned, and more students prepared to transition into their careers after college.



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# **Social Media Activism is Not Just for Students**

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## **Abstract**

Facebook and Instagram now have live platforms where users can communicate in real time with their favorite people. Youtube encourages channel owners to do quirky and interactive activities on their channel to further engage users and let them into their personal lives. Snapchat allows people to see into the everyday lives of their followers. Social media has become such a powerful tool in society, Within recent years, we have seen the power of social media organize people around a variety of causes and conflicts, especially within the realm of education.

There are national and global conversations that have sparked changed on many different levels and many different topics with the influence on online engagement. Students have taken on #blacklivesmatter vs #alllivesmatter in a public forum that has engaged many people across the country. Student leaders brought national attention to the Fisher vs. Texas affirmative action case with the hashtag #staymadabby. Black students challenged the narrative that they are seen as a threat or harmful to police and society by sharing photos with the hashtag #dangerousblackkids after the death of Jordan Davis. Undocumented students shared their stories of the necessity of DACA with hashtags #WithDACA and #DefendDACA. Student

activism is a historical thread within the university experience, as it is students who often shaped “local educational reform, transformed national political structures, and in more than a few instances spurred coups d’état,” (Boren, 2001, p. 3).

Social media activism is not merely posts on a website, but this form of engagement allows for the mobilization of a variety of voices to be heard to influence change; this is shown time and time again. However, social media activism is not just for students or individuals with no association to professional institutions. What about the professionals who support students in their efforts of reshaping the world? Realistically, the values of educators do not magically disappear when they step foot onto their campus. With the growth of social media activism, institutions are more attentive to the social media accounts and posts of staff and faculty members. There has been a more critical look at what educators post and say on their social media. More now than ever, professionals must weigh the risk of being socially engaged with the possibility of losing their jobs even when social media is used as a “personal” realm of engagement. Global citizenship and social change requires risk. Joel Zylstra states that “student affairs educators must consider their work with students as a means of advocacy rather than simply building awareness about issues” (Magolda & Magolda, p. 382). Student affairs professionals have a tremendous power in dismantling systems of oppression and they should be supported in their efforts of doing so, not silenced.

Educational leaders must catch up with growing media trends and honor the broad learning opportunities that technology and social media bring to the learning environment. Ana Martinez Aleman speaks to the influence of social media as a tool of learning, stating “Perhaps the real value of social networking media for learning is the extent to which it can complement,

extend, and transform cognitive skill sets trained and drawn out by traditional instruction” (as cite in Magolda & Magolda, p.139). As a profession with core competencies related to diversity and inclusion and technology, higher education institutions must continue to challenge the pervasiveness of institutional racism, harmful professional norms, and silencing behaviors in order to actively listen and influence change within educational spaces.

As the student population gets younger and more diverse, they will want to see their educators advocating on their behalf through social media activism. This cannot happen if higher education professionals are reprimanded for using their voice on social media to advocate for social justice and against systems of oppression that not only impact their students, but also influence their daily lives. In reference to free speech on college campuses, Tobias Uecker argues that, “Administrators of colleges and universities must recognize that acting as free speech regulators or civil discourse referees relinquishes the education power of conversation” (Magolda & Magold, p.360). It is ok for diversity education and advocacy to reach beyond the work of the classroom and the multicultural center and into online communities and social media spaces. Embracing “theory to practice” efforts means allowing professionals the ability to use their voice despite the risk.

There are grave implications for advocating for social justice; who gets to decide what is socially just and what topics are worth advocating for? In allowing professionals the space to share their beliefs and engage in social media activism, it also opens the door for professionals to share language or beliefs that are oppressive. This can be assessed holistically with consideration of institutional needs and values as well as student needs.

There is not a definitive definition for the work that higher ed professionals do; the responsibilities and interactions are vast and ever changing. In a complex web of higher education and institutional environments, we are tasked with being one of the many factors in helping students develop. Topics of race, equity, and social justice are unavoidable in the efforts of educators to support students in

their growth towards becoming global citizens. In their support of students, educators must also be able to advocate for their own rights and freedoms without fear of being shunned out of the profession or losing their jobs.

# **Supervisors, Mind Your Mindsets**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses Dweck's (2006) concepts of growth mindset and fixed mindset as they relate to supervision. Following a brief anecdote, Dweck's model is described, then readers are encouraged to legitimize the mindsets, become attune to them, and adopt a growth mindset. Supervisors are offered suggestions for practice: praise the process, reward risk-taking, support slip-ups, and let feedback flow. It is argued that a growth mindset leads to gains in supervisors' and subordinates' development.

## Supervisors, Mind Your Mindsets

A few years ago, I considered asking one of my resident assistants (RA) to step down from her student leadership role. She had made several poor, unprofessional choices. “This RA doesn’t ‘get it,’” I thought. “She doesn’t have the “smarts” for the job. She’s a bad RA.” However, after some reflection, I realized this RA’s poor performance was partially my fault. I had not provided her sufficient training and support. Worse, I had fallen prey to a common tendency: viewing my subordinate’s abilities with a *fixed mindset*.

### The Problem

People with a fixed mindset believe that basic human abilities or intelligence are static traits (Dweck, 2006); talent is considered endowed, not developed. As supervisors, this have-and-have-nots belief system can have detrimental effects on our professional performance (Dweck & Elliot, 1983)—and those we supervise.

In her book on mindset, Carol Dweck (2006) synthesized nearly 30 years of research on motivation, personality, and talent development. Initially, Dweck investigated how people responded to setbacks. She found that operating within a fixed mindset often produced negative affect and performance (Dweck, 1975). Other effects of a fixed mindset were misguided motivations and misplaced goals (Grant & Dweck, 2003), diminished risk-taking and an aversion to experimentation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), defensive self-protection, and decreased productivity (Dweck, 2009). Perhaps more harmful, some of Dweck’s participants internalized their setback (e.g. thinking “I am a failure” versus “I failed”), which crippled their confidence



and performance. In my earlier example, I had transmuted an RA's imperfect performance into a label ("bad RA"). My fixed mindset approach not only discouraged my RA, it was antithetical to the educational mission, the student affairs profession, and my responsibilities as her supervisor.

### Addressing the Problem

In contrast to a fixed mindset, Dweck found those who cultivated a *growth mindset* were more resilient, successful, and satisfied—even in the face of adversity and failure (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006). A growth mindset is the belief system that one's qualities and talents can be developed. Said differently, growth mindset assumes a person's self-perceptions, motivations, and abilities can be improved through purposeful effort (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995).

The stark contrast of fixed versus growth mindset might sound over-simplified as individuals do, of course, differ greatly in their interests, abilities, and temperaments. However, in practice, mindsets powerfully influence our attributions and decisions, manifesting differently in various areas of our lives (Dweck, 2006). For example, I might have a growth mindset regarding program development or RA training but a fixed mindset about learning statistical software or budgeting. Left unchecked, a fixed mindset hinders our own development and the quality of our supervisory skills. Thankfully, like other beliefs, mindsets can change.

Here are three recommendations to help you generally cultivate a growth mindset.

*Look:* Mindsets are beliefs systems and beliefs are not always conscious. Adopt mindset lenses in your everyday life and work (Dweck, 2017). After you do, you will see their ubiquitous influence.

*Listen:* Listen to the voices in your head; your beliefs whisper to you. Doubtful and sardonic, the fixed-mindset voice is defensive and image-centric to a fault. In contrast, the growth mindset is curious and gracious. Once you identify the voices, tune out the fixed mindset voice and turn up the growth mindset voice (Dweck, 2017).

*Learn:* Experience is a great teacher, and the best students are active learners. The growth mindset fosters a love for learning and development. It enables you to esteem all experience—successes and failures—as valuable growth opportunities (Dweck, 2006). Remember, however, that knowing about a growth mindset does not mean you *have* a growth mindset (and “having” a growth mindset is a fixed-mindset myth!). You may be ready to engage, exercise, and embody a growth mindset, but doing so is an ongoing learning process.

### Implications for Practice

Once you have adopted “lenses” to look for the mindsets, become attune to their voices, and engaged the learning process as a “growth mindsetter,” you can begin to integrate four growth-mindset practices into your supervisory role.

*Praise the Process:* Praising your subordinates’ effort, not their intelligence or “talent,” diminishes the fixed mindset and elevates the importance of your subordinates’ growth and development. That said, effort alone is insufficient (Licht & Dweck, 1984). Any learning also takes strategy, time, and other resources (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). Still, praise effort to reinforce the idea that talent is developed through persistent, hard work.

*Reward Risk-Taking:* Calculated risks are the seeds of innovation and growth (Dweck, 2016). Growth mindsetters “do not avoid ‘failure-producing problems’ ...because challenges and

mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and grow (Dweck, 2017, p. 140). Allow subordinates to stretch themselves, seek solutions to challenging problems, and make mistakes. Neither you nor your subordinates know all they can achieve until you let them defy their perceived limits.

*Support Slip-Ups:* A growth-mindset supervisor must match their openness to subordinate's risk-taking with support. Allowing mistakes should not usurp learning as the goal, and it is amidst a subordinate's setback that they will most need you to reframe their setback as a valuable learning opportunity.

*Let Feedback Flow:* Whether through casual conversation, facilitating a 360-degree professional review, or coaching, provide frank feedback to your subordinates—and accept it from them. Bi-directional communication builds vital trust and credibility needed as a supervisor and exemplifies the belief that we are all learners (Dweck, 2006).

## Conclusion

In sum, supervisors, mind your mindset. Do not replicate the mistake I made with my RA. Look for and listen to a growth mindset. Engage continuous learning. Rather than praising “smarts,” praise the process. Rather than “bad RA,” reward risk-taking and support slip-ups. Rather than, “you don't get it,” let healthy feedback flow back and forth between you and your subordinates. Cultivating a growth mindset in ourselves and our subordinates is messy, at times, but it is worth the effort. Daily application of growth-mindset habits will enhance us as supervisors and those we supervise.

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