



# Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education

An Official Publication  
of the Informing Science Institute  
[InformingScience.org](http://InformingScience.org)

[JSPTE.org](http://JSPTE.org)

Volume 2, 2017

## TEACHING RECONSIDERED: EXPLORING THE TEACHING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

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Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who teach in a variety of college classroom settings.
Background	Increasingly, student affairs professionals are serving in teaching roles inside the college classroom; yet, there are few empirical studies that explore that teaching role or the impacts of that teaching experience. Because there are so few studies, we know little of the impacts of these experiences on the individual, the institution, or students.
Methodology	This qualitative study explores the experiences of student affairs professionals who also teach in a variety of campus and classroom settings. The 12 participants from 11 different institutions ranged in years of service in the profession from six to 40 years. They taught an array of undergraduate and graduate courses including first-year experience and career courses, general education courses, and courses in higher education graduate programs. Participants share insights on how their training as student affairs professionals impacts them in their roles as college teachers.
Findings	The findings are categorized into two broad themes: the impacts of practice on teaching and the impacts of teaching on practice. Additionally, participants share how their teaching experiences enhanced their awareness of the academic culture of the academy, enriched their understanding of students, and improved collaborations across their campuses.

Accepted as an Peer Blind Reviewed Research Article by Editor Sydney Freeman, Jr. | Received: July 25, 2016 | Revised: October 7, 2016 | Accepted: November 29, 2016.

Cite as: Lewis, R. M., Boss, G. J., & McConnell, A. T. (2017). Teaching reconsidered: Exploring the teaching experiences of student affairs professionals in the college classroom. *Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education*, 2, 23-41. Retrieved from <http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3616>

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**Future Research** Our research addresses the gap in the literature by providing a number of considerations on how formal teaching and student affairs practice have a recursive relationship. Future research might explore how teaching at the undergraduate level may differ from teaching at the graduate level. Future research, should explore in what, if any, ways the number of years teaching influences how professionals approach teaching. Future research on teaching might also explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who teach in discipline specific areas.

**Keywords** student affairs professionals, teaching, classroom, practitioner, scholarship of teaching, college teaching

## INTRODUCTION

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Since its inception, the work of student affairs professionals has been one in support of the academic mission. The guiding principles of our profession have always centered student learning and have been grounded in a belief in “teaching”, “instruction” and “learning principles” (Evans & Reason, 2001, p. 372). This belief is evidenced as early as the *1937 Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education Studies [ACE], 1937). Though the profession has shifted through the years, it continues to focus on the whole student, with an increasing emphasis on contributing equal parts to advancing both student development and student learning (Keeling; 2004; Magolda & Quaye, 2011). Student affairs professionals are involved in educative and teaching and practices both outside and inside the classroom. Increasingly, student affairs professionals are seeking out and being tasked to teach in the college classroom both as a function of their jobs and in addition to them (Hanson, 1980; Komives, 2012; Moore & Marsh, 2007; Roper, 2003). However, the impact of that work has not been documented in the literature. As higher education continues to face issues of accountability, it is increasingly important for student affairs professionals to clearly identify how their work impacts and benefits their institutions, their own professional development, and student learning and development (Harper, 2009; Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010). To this end, our research study sought to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who teach in the college classroom.

We utilized the qualitative approach of phenomenology, starting with one broad research question, that is, what are the experiences of student affairs professionals who teach in the classroom? A broad research question aligns with the phenomenological design which explores the essence of an experience. In this article we use professional, practitioner, and educator interchangeably and are referring to individuals whose primary function at a college or university is as student affairs work. The participants of our study were full-time student affairs professionals who have had opportunities to teach in the college classroom.

It was important to us to introduce our study by exploring the literature and historical framing of the educative role of student affairs professionals more generally. We then present literature on the teaching practices of student affairs professionals, after which, we lay out our conceptual framework focused on reflective practice and Reason and Kimball’s *Theory to Practice Model* (2012). Next we address our methodology and methods including data analysis. In our findings, we summarize the voices and expressions of our participants who share their experiences as college teachers. We close with the discussion of our findings, implications for practice, and considerations for future research. Because there is little, to no empirical research about student affairs professionals in the classroom, we hope this article serves as a beginning discussion for future work on not only the experiences of professionals, but ultimately how the work of student affairs professionals inside the classroom impacts student learning.

Our purpose was to broadly explore the experiences of teaching for student affairs professionals. To date, little has been documented in the literature about the impact of teaching on the work of stu-

dent affairs professionals or the lives of students. We anticipated there might be reported impacts of this work, but we wanted to see what would emerge from our participant data. The data from our study lends empirical support to what many student affairs educators know inherently to be true—that teaching has the potential to impact us and serve as a powerful means of professional development; and, that our professional training as student affairs educators will inform and impact the way we teach. During our exploration and analysis new questions emerged, such as, what does it mean to be a student affairs professional who also teaches in the formal classroom space? Does one's training or role as student affairs professional shape the way one approaches teaching? Does that teaching experience influence the way they think about their work or interact with students? Because there are few studies about student affairs professionals serving as college classroom teachers, we know little about how many teach, what they teach, and the impacts of these experiences on the individual or the student. Thus our exploratory study begins to illuminate this experience and its impacts. Given increasing calls for accountability by government, students, and their parents, we believe the results of our study provide more information about how colleges and universities are maximizing the training and talent of professionals in enhancing student learning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### *STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS AS EDUCATORS*

Student learning and development takes place in a variety of collegiate contexts—both inside and outside the classroom (ACPA, 1996; Keeling, 2004). Student affairs professionals, through an array of curricular and co-curricular initiatives make important contributions to learning and development (Keeling, 2004; King & Baxter Magolda, 2011). Roper (2003) explored the important role student affairs professionals play in facilitating student learning and development as teachers, educators, and trainers. Roper called them “student learning specialists” given the variety of opportunities they have to impact student learning on collegiate campuses (p. 466). Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) argued one of the most important roles student affairs professionals play is as educators. They stated several ways professionals work in educative capacities, both inside and outside the classroom, as lecturers, facilitators, collaborators, coaches, models, researchers, or advisors. Magolda and Quaye (2011) explored teaching in the co-curriculum emphasizing the profession's “learning-centered philosophy” and professionals' roles as educators (p. 389). On the whole, the focus of student affairs professionals' work is less typically situated in traditional classroom settings.

### *STUDENT AFFAIRS EDUCATORS IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM*

While student affairs professionals support learning in numerous ways outside of the classroom, it has been suggested professionals strive to enhance their practice by engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning (Komives, 2012). Such engagement becomes useful to professionals in their day-to-day work. Student affairs professionals, because of their backgrounds in student development, seem naturally oriented toward teaching and mentoring. It seems logical they would want to share their expertise in graduate preparation programs through supervision of practica, internships, and assistantships and, increasingly, classroom teaching. The *ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Professionals* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) recommend engaging in teaching, as well as evaluating and assessing teaching opportunities, as a form of professional development. The competency areas also encourage collaborating with faculty for teaching. Furthermore, as the number of student affairs professionals obtaining advanced degrees grows, their credentials, in many cases, makes them eligible to teach a broader range of courses.

Though relatively understudied, student affairs professionals do serve in a variety of part-time teaching roles in formal college classroom settings. These settings include, but are not limited to, teaching student-affairs-focused courses—first-year experience, career development, resident advisor training, or leadership courses—as well as teaching in specific disciplines or in graduate student affairs programs (Ellerston & Thoennes, 2007; Komives, 2012; Moore & Marsh, 2007). Teaching opportunities

may be built-in requirements of a specific position or add-on responsibilities that individuals seek out themselves on their own campuses, at neighboring institutions, or online.

Student affairs professionals contribute to the college classroom by bringing knowledge of student development, campus resources, and administrative policies. They professionally benefit from college classroom teaching by becoming more aware of the core of teaching and learning and issues facing faculty on their campuses (Kezar, 2009; Magolda, 2005; Roper, 2003). Degen and Sheldahl's (2007) case study of professionals who teach on small college campuses highlighted the need for student affairs professionals to engage as equals in the dialogue about teaching and learning. They asserted that student affairs professionals should see themselves as teachers—thus they should speak, act, and lead in ways congruent with view of themselves as “educators.” Taking into consideration the expanded role of some professionals to teach in the classroom, it has been suggested graduate preparation programs better acclimate students to pedagogy, curriculum development, and concepts of integrative learning (Ellerston & Thoennes, 2007).

Philosophically student affairs is rooted in the constructivist tradition—an emphasis on shared learning, a focus on the student as a co-creator of knowledge, and one who participates in meaning making (Carpenter, 2011). Dewey's progressive philosophy is widely recognized as influencing the foundation of student affairs (Reason & Broido, 2011) Dewey's (1938) emphasis on experiential learning and belief that learners must be actively involved in the direction and planning of their own learning is also evident in the foundational student affairs documents such as the 1937 *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937) and *The Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1997). This belief continues to guide the way student affairs practitioners work to involve and engage our students (American Council on Education Studies, 1937; ACPA & NASPA, 1997). In *Learning Reconsidered*, Keeling (2004) emphasized student affairs as a field that promotes “learn[ing] through action, contemplation, reflection and emotional engagement” (p.11). Problem-based learning, hands-on experiential learning, and active learning are the philosophical foundations of student affairs practice and tend to guide our design and delivery of programs and services. Thus, as we sought to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals in the classroom, we also considered the following questions. What ideas and theories do student affairs professionals bring to the teaching and learning environment? Do these same enduring values held to in the profession impact their classroom teaching? Furthermore, do student affairs professionals lead classrooms that are relationship and experientially based?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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We believe the practice of teaching as a function of the work of student affairs professionals has the potential for great gains across the academy. The literature we reviewed suggested when student affairs professionals engage in teaching, they better understand the workings of faculty life and the academic lives of students. This understanding has the potential to result in a deeper understanding of the professionals' institutional context. The literature, however, offers little empirical evidence of those claims. As such, we aimed to provide empirical data on the experiences of student affairs professionals who teach in the classroom. To make meaning of our data we worked within a constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and we explored our data using Reason and Kimball's (2012) theory-to-practice framework, as well as writings on the process and value of reflection as it relates to teaching.

### **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE**

It has long been argued that student affairs professionals should engage in self-reflection as a means of professional development (Nottingham, 1998). Reflection has been argued to be a key element in assessing one's skills and is required as part of growth as a teacher and administrator (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Brown, Podolske, Kholes, & Sonnenberg, 1992; Roper, 2003; Schön, 1983, 1987). Schön (1983, 1987) described one facet of reflective practice as “reflection-on-action,” a process

where the individual reflects on past action and engages in retrospective sensemaking about the action. Engaging in a formal process of “reflection-on-action,” where professionals specifically consider how their work with students in the classroom impacts their day-to-day practice, is an important activity for those who teach. This reflection is vital to establishing personal and professional learning outcomes as well as committing to continuous self-improvement as student affairs educators and college teachers (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Roper, 2003). Additionally, it has been suggested that critical reflection, which involves not only reflecting on one’s actions but as the systems and structures that influences one’s beliefs about one’s work, is a necessary component of good practice (Brookfield, 1998; Reason & Kimball, 2012).

### ***REASON AND KIMBALL’S THEORY-TO-PRACTICE MODEL***

Reason and Kimball’s (2012) framework presented a way of understanding theory-to-practice as situated in institutional contexts and assessed through reflective practice. They explained how professionals use a combination of formal (Evans & Guido, 2012), informal (Love, 2012), and implicit theories (Bensimon, 2007) in their practice. To maximize use of theory in practice, Reason and Kimball (2012) suggested professionals consider the unique characteristics of their environments. In doing so, professionals were better positioned to reflect upon how their institutional context shaped their use of theory and the ways professionals thought about students. Reason and Kimball (2012) argued for professionals to engage in reflective practice in order to better understand how and why they approached their work. In particular, Reason and Kimball advocated for professionals to engage in the reflective practice of interrogating the ways in which they use formal theories or operate out of informal or implicit theories.

## **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

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We used qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who serve as teachers in the college classroom. The nature of qualitative research is to describe, understand, or interpret a particular phenomenon from the individual’s point of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Particularly, our study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research design. Hermeneutic phenomenology, based in the early philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl, is concerned with exploration of the lifeworld and study of lived experience. According to Husserl (1970), phenomenology’s aim is to uncover an individual or group’s particular lived experience. This process of phenomenological exploration, which includes description, reflection, and communication of experiences not previously reflected upon, provides a deeper understanding of that lived experience (van Manen, 1997). Hermeneutic phenomenology is both a descriptive and an interpretive methodology. As a descriptive methodology, it is used to describe phenomena as they appear (van Manen, 1997). As an interpretative methodology, hermeneutical phenomenology is used to make meaning of described phenomena (van Manen, 1997).

### ***PARTICIPANTS***

We employed purposeful sampling in order to identify individuals who met criteria defined for the study. We recruited participants through snowball sampling; referrals were made from students and colleagues. We sought to involve a diverse pool of participants who represented a cross section of personal identities, an array of professional functional areas, and a variety of institutional types. Participant criteria for this study are individuals who (a) worked primarily in university student affairs/services administration, (b) held a minimum of a master’s degree, and (c) taught a minimum of one undergraduate or graduate course at a college or university. The study was approved through the HSIRB, and participation was voluntarily but required informed consent. Each individual was provided a pseudonym. Table 1 depicts the participant demographics, years in the field as student affairs administrators, years teaching, and classification of types of courses taught. The participants of the study self-identified their characteristics of age, gender, years in the profession, and years teaching. The study included seven women and five men. Participants ranged from newer professionals with

approximately seven years to senior level student affairs professionals with over 40 years of experience. Participants represented 11 different institutions and work in administrative roles at large public universities, small private colleges, and community colleges.

For the purposes of this study, we classified participants' teaching experiences into four categories: (1) undergraduate student affairs teaching (UG SA), which includes courses such as first-year resident advisor, career planning, or study skills classes; (2) graduate student affairs teaching (Grad SA), which includes teaching in graduate programs for higher education or student affairs; and the final two categories, which include (3) any other teaching at the undergraduate level (UG varies) or (4) graduate level (Grad varies).

**Table 1. Study participants**

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Years In Field	Years Taught	UG SA	Grad SA	UG Varies	Grad Varies
Gary	Man	40s	Caucasian	14	14	X	X	X	
Sara	Woman	34	Caucasian	12	8	X		X	
Rob	Man	30s	African American	10	1	X	X		
Peg	Woman	65+	Caucasian	41	20+	X	X	X	X
Kyra	Woman	27	Indian	7	6	X			
Emily	Woman	31	Pacific Islander	8	1	X			
Katie	Woman	43	Caucasian	20+	11	X	X		
Jessie	Man	36	Caucasian	14	9	X		X	
Stan	Man	60+	Caucasian	40	30+	X	X		
Anthony	Man	29	African American	6+	3	X			
Michelle	Woman	28	African American	7	3	X			
Jen	Woman	36	Caucasian	14	14	X		X	

**DATA COLLECTION**

Data was collected primarily through semi-structured, individual interviews, conducted both face-to-face and by phone. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and were recorded for the purposes of transcription. The interview protocol included a general set of questions focused on three major categories, (1) experiences as practitioners, (2) experiences as teachers in the college classroom, and (3) ways they saw those two experiences intersecting. Given the emergent nature of this research, the interview structure remained flexible, allowing participants to share about their own experiences rather than relying solely on the researchers' questions. For example, open-ended questions included some of the following. Describe your interactions with students in the courses you teach. How do these interactions compare to the interactions with students you connect with in your daily student affairs work? What do you see as the benefits of your teaching experience? How do you see teaching impacting your practice? How has teaching informed your understanding of students? This open-ended approach allowed us to explore the experiences shared by our participants.

### ***DATA ANALYSIS***

In their writing on the use of hermeneutic phenomenology, Cohen and Daniels (2001) argued analysis involves comprehending texts. The content of the interviews, in the form of transcripts, serve as the primary texts for analysis. While there is no set guideline for hermeneutic analysis, the process is one that continually revisits the research question and investigates the lived experience. Lavery (2003) suggested phenomenologist often engage these activities through a cycle that involves reading, reflective writing, and interpretation.

We engaged different parts of the cycle through the data collection and analysis processes. During the interviews, we employed reflective writing of our thoughts and impressions about the interview process and the interviews themselves. Once transcribed, interviews were read through to capture the essence of participants' experiences. We also engaged individual reflective writing on the interview texts as we made meaning of the experiences shared by our participants. In conjunction with our reflective writing we revisited the transcripts, reading through them to deepen or interpretations. The cycle was engaged at least three times for us individually. After the third cycle, individual narratives were written about participants. These served as a collective reflective writing exercise for us as we attempted to get a sense of the "bigger picture" of the experience. After the narratives were completed, we sought common themes (Glesne, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research moves from categorization of themes to interpretation; that interpretation is often filtered through the lens of the researchers (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Though earlier writings on phenomenology suggested researchers should "bracket," set aside, their prior assumptions, more contemporary writings suggest a different approach. Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) suggested researchers consider "bridling" prior assumptions. Bridling includes recognizing one's own implicit assumptions about the experience of inquiry and acknowledging them as data are being interpreted and presented. As such we recognize our interpretations are grounded in our positionalities, which include our backgrounds, roles, beliefs about teaching, and approaches to research. This study grew out of conversations with student affairs professionals who were sharing about their teaching experiences and way improve our teaching practice. From those conversations, we realized student affairs professionals were increasingly finding themselves in teaching roles or had interest in teaching. Through those conversations questions emerged. We explored questions about why individuals teach, how they teach, and what were the benefits to themselves, their institutions, and students. The researchers in this study have all served in administrative roles in student affairs and higher education and have all had the opportunity to teach while in those roles. Two of the researchers have moved in to full-time faculty roles in graduate preparation programs in higher education. Each of us sees teaching as a means of professional development that can inform our practice; these beliefs, however, have not been proven empirically. Thus this study was one way to explore this topic. One way we sought to check our own interpretations of findings were through the measures of robustness and triangulation.

### ***MEASURES OF ROBUSTNESS***

We employed several measures to ensure our data analysis was robust. Robustness was achieved through members conducting interviews to a point of saturation of themes, through the process of member checking, and by having three researchers analyze the data (Merriam, 2009.). First, we employed triangulation of analysis, in which we separately and individually read and analyzed transcript data. We compared and contrasted our separate analyses in order to come to consensus about what was emerging from the data. We also engaged in member checking by providing all of our participants an opportunity to read through our initial analysis of the data (Saldaña, 2012). Participants were encouraged to comment on the plausibility of preliminary themes. The resulting feedback of member checking revealed our interpretation of themes to be resonant with participants' experiences and provided consensual validation (Eisner, 1991). We also considered disconfirming evidence, being

sure to give attention to information provided by participants that was contrary to common themes (Eisner, 1991).

## FINDINGS

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Our analysis of the data yielded a number of overarching themes. Our broad research question focused on examining the experiences of student affairs professionals in the college classroom. We present our findings organized thematically and using direct participant quotes. Through our analysis, we found several common themes among participants; we organized those into two broad thematic categories, with supporting subthemes. Our two broad themes describe the ways practice impacted teaching and teaching impacted practice. The themes reflect participants' thoughts on the reciprocal and integrative nature of teaching. In the theme of "impacts of practice on teaching," participants discussed how their backgrounds as student affairs professionals impacted their ability to build relationships and attend to student identities, as well as how their training as professionals impacted specific teaching methods. In the theme of "impacts of teaching on practice," participants highlighted how teaching helped them develop broader understandings of students, the campus, and academic culture. Much of the aforementioned revelations for practitioners were the result of engaging in reflective practice. Our discussion of these themes with specific links to the conceptual framework follows the section on findings. These themes came from the responses of multiple participants; though some subthemes have fewer direct participant quotations.

### *IMPACT OF PRACTICE ON TEACHING*

Participants noted several ways in which their background as student affairs professionals impacted their work in the college classroom. These included their ability to relate to and build relationships with students and to make course material more relevant by incorporating examples from practice, as well as by using a variety of approaches in their teaching learned from their administrative work.

#### **Building relationships and attending to student identities**

When it comes to the reciprocal nature of student affairs work on teaching and vice versa, several participants believed their training as practitioners provided them the knowledge and skills to build strong relationships with students. Such was the case for Rob, who shared how his skills in relationship building and mentoring helped him break down the walls of formality within the classroom.

*As the student affairs administrator, I'm used to mentoring and advising students and students confiding in me. Then you come into the classroom, and there's this real formalized structure, and I'm trying to get students to open up and discuss things, and they're kind of like, "Well, I don't know if I should do that?" . . . You know, student affairs, we just build relationships.*

Similarly, Peg discussed how her focus on social justice in her work as a student affairs professional allowed her to attend to student agency in the classroom.

*You have to have space for students to feel like they have a voice. It just can't be one way. That's the core of a student affairs point of view. And to me it makes all the difference in the student's experience. That just crosses over whether it's a classroom experience or an [administrative] one. . . .*

Michelle shared how her graduate training and knowledge of student development theory helped her to connect with students as well as to make sense of what was happening in the classroom. She said, "I think it helps me and reminds me where students are in their development." For Jessie, it played out in terms of having a heightened awareness of social identities and recognizing areas of difference, as he shared.

*I find in a classroom, sometimes, there's that power dynamic. And where the classroom and student affairs feed each other is . . . there's a lot of cognizance as to diversity/ inclusion. How do you work with people dif-*



*ferent from yourselves? And how do you help people who are different from each other connect on their similarities and respect their dissimilarities?*

### **How professional experiences shaped approaches to teaching**

Participants were also able to integrate their work experiences into the classroom by sharing concrete examples from their daily work. Gary taught in a graduate student affairs preparation program. He felt students needed to understand that “material is relevant” and “the utility of what they were learning”; thus, he utilized examples from his professional life to enhance his teaching. Stan, who also taught in a student affairs graduate program, explained how he made the material relevant to students by teaching in a way that parallels what students will experience in their practice. He talked about helping students navigate the dissonance they might experience in learning by drawing on his own training and socialization into the field of student affairs by asserting, “we tell folks, ‘if you’re not comfortable with ambiguity, you’re in the wrong profession.’ So we try to help with some semblance of structure and, at the same time, give them a realistic look at what [they are] going to be dealing with.” Peg was a senior level student affairs administrator, who regularly taught the introductory student affairs course; her comments illustrate how student affairs professionals used their skills and experience in the classroom. She shared, “[student affairs professionals have] a heightened awareness in [their] everyday work of case studies, examples, student experiences, and problems that students have that can embellish a conversation . . . happening in [their] class.”

This ability to bring professional knowledge and experiences into the classroom was something some participants said students noted as a positive difference about their teaching. Rob, one participant who received this type of affirmative feedback, shared the following comments from one of his students, “One of the things that we like is that you make things easy to understand.” Rob explained that his co-teacher was much more familiar with the material and very theory-heavy. He described his process of learning the material and wrestling with taking on the students’ perspectives in order to teach the material in a manner that would resonate with them.

Participants also shared ways in which their professional background specifically impacted their teaching methods and strategies in the classroom. For several individuals, their professional presentation skills and knowledge of learning styles helped them create interactive classroom environments. As an example, Michelle discussed “the transferable nature of the skills” from practice to teaching; specifically, having knowledge of how to create learning outcomes and assessing student learning. Overall, several participants shared the belief voiced by Kyra, who said, “If you don’t have them engaged or actively involved, they’re not going to be strong learners in the classroom.”

### ***IMPACTS OF TEACHING ON PRACTICE***

Engaging in teaching seemed to have a similarly poignant impact on participants’ professional practice and the way they thought about their work in student affairs. These impacts included developing a broader view of campus culture and politics; a more holistic view of students and the student experience; richer connections and relationships across their campuses with students, faculty, and other administrators; and an expanded toolbox for administrative practice.

### **Broader view of campus culture and politics**

Jen, who has had the opportunity to teach at multiple institutions and levels, divulged what she learned.

*I think [my varied experiences] allowed me at different times to have a different lens on the academic community in the institution. As a grad adjunct faculty, I was invited to be a part of the application process, student screening, and selection meetings. That was a very in-depth look at parts of academia. I got to be part of the hooding ceremony. I really felt a part of the academic community. That felt really good.*

Becoming a part of the academic community afforded Jen an emic viewpoint of the ways in the roles and responsibilities of faculty shaped the larger university culture. Similarly, Rob's understanding of the campus gave him a clearer view of how the institution worked, and an inside look at how the academic affairs side of the house operates, as he disclosed.

*I've learned a lot in terms of financially how some of the things are run structurally, who approves what. And understanding that this person approves all the positions on campus . . . You learn a lot of the political stuff. I thought I knew a lot of the politics already on the student affairs side. But it's way, way more complex on the academic side.*

Like Rob, several other participants shared examples of learning how courses were assigned, how decisions were made, and the differences between academic and student affairs. Emily's comments articulated what we heard from many participants about their enlightened understanding of their campus and campus culture.

*Personally, I just feel more connected to the university. I'm able to better understand where the university stands with our students in terms of what their expectations are for the students. . . . I feel like it's really important for anybody who works at a university to step outside of their bubble and to be part of the community. Because knowing that we contribute in different capacities, I really honestly believe that the only way that you're going to become truly engaged is if you really get out of your box.*

### **Connections across the academy**

Teaching provided many participants with additional opportunities to better connect with administrators, faculty, and students across the academy. These connections became instrumental in their daily administrative work and resulted in better collaborations and networks across their campuses. The overarching themes within connections were being seen more as a peer by full-time faculty colleagues and having more visibility across campus to both faculty and other administrators.

As a result of teaching her courses, Emily expanded her campus network. She expressed the following.

*. . . professionally I was able to be exposed to so many different kinds of people on campus that I normally wouldn't interact with on a daily basis. I felt that really helped strengthen who I was and to really get my face in people's minds . . . A lot of them had told me, "Oh I'm glad I met you, because sometimes I have questions and I don't know who to call." And I'm like, "Well now you know who to call." So I felt like that has strengthened my professional relationship with the faculty and other staff on campus.*

Emily's experience parallels many of our other participants' experiences of greater exposure to a larger community across campus. Similar to Emily, more faculty and students became aware of participants' work as a result of interactions with them in academic spaces.

### **Understanding faculty life and connecting with faculty**

Beyond a deeper understanding of campus culture and politics, teaching gave participants a greater appreciation for the experiences and life of faculty members. Gary shared his own perspective shift on the role of faculty. "I have a level of empathy for how hard faculty are working," he said. Gary, like many of the participants, talked about coming to the realization that faculty had many more demands on their time than he had previously assumed. His assumptions and those he had observed of his peers had led him to criticize what he had assumed to be disengagement by faculty in the lives of students outside of the classroom. He disclosed.

*I understand why faculty are and aren't choosing to spend their time and energy in different places. I think you learn to value the good and hard work faculty are doing. Faculty are not paid to understand student affairs. They are not paid to collaborate with us; we are paid to collaborate with them. We are the connectors.*

Participants' lived experiences serving as college teachers had given participants a deeper understanding of faculty life, which in turn expand their opportunities for collaboration and cross-communication

### **Improved relationships with full-time faculty**

In addition to having a better understanding of faculty life, participants expressed they had developed closer ties with faculty and were sometimes seen as more of an equal. As Peg articulated, "I do think the faculty see you differently when you teach." Overwhelmingly, participants attributed their time in the classroom as a leverage point for deeper relationships with and greater access to full-time faculty. Rob revealed, "there was a group of us who would meet, and we would talk about what each of us were doing in our classes. A lot of times I would be bouncing stuff off of folks who were already teaching the class. Or we would always reflect on, 'was that the best way to teach this part of the course?'" Anthony also voiced how working alongside faculty through teaching revealed the importance of building strong relationships with them. He expressed, "I think I value it more based on having more firsthand knowledge, if that makes sense." Not only were the relationships with faculty strengthened for many participants, but also they realized how mutually beneficial those relationships can be. Sara shared about her experience co-teaching with a department chair, "I got a ton from that, and she still says, to this day, that she learned a lot from me about students that she didn't know before."

### **Holistic view of students' lives**

One of the most influential and direct impacts teaching had on student affairs professionals' practice was the provision of a more holistic view of students' lives. Teaching gave them a better understanding of students' academic lives, a greater sense of how students conducted themselves in a classroom setting, and hands-on experiences with responding to students' learning styles. Kyra explained how teaching helped her see a new side of students.

*I think working with [students] administratively, there are set expectations, there are set things that need to be done, and then the students kind of just abide by those expectations. ... You get to see a different side of the student [in the classroom], because it's up to them to really gain those experiences and be engaged in the classroom.*

Stan commented on the overarching benefits of teaching, with similar sentiments shared by many of the participants. He expressed, "[Teaching] certainly helped keep me current. It helped me stay in touch with students and how they learn." Finally, as Anthony stated, teaching allows student affairs professionals "an opportunity, hopefully, to interact with students in a way that most of our roles don't allow us to. And the teaching kind of gives you the full spectrum of our students. You see all of them."

### **Direct impacts on administrative practice**

Participants shared ways in which working with students in the classroom helped them learn more about the inner workings of their campus and provided new perspectives for their administrative decision making. Peg, a senior level administrator, shared how she was more attuned to what is happening in the workplace when she was teaching.

*I feel like my little antennae are sharpened on whatever I'm teaching, because I'm always sort of scanning the environment looking for some great way to make a point or actually something that un-proves a point or a new way of looking at something or some new trend in student affairs that's emerging.*

Kyra articulated how the things students shared with her and each other about their collegiate experience impacted how she went about her work.

*You hear things, and even if in that moment you don't think about it, when you're sitting in meetings that are making decisions about these students, you can reflect and say, "I heard a student say x, y, z maybe we should consider doing a focus group or maybe we should be thinking about looking into it further."*

She also shared.

*[Teaching] keeps me learning, keeps me engaged, and so I hope I'll continue to teach as I do this profession because I know that I'll continue to do better in the field in general.*

Katie, a senior level housing administrator in residence education, shared how her teaching role strengthens her administrative work.

*So sitting in workshops about how to write effective learning outcomes with my faculty colleagues forces me to understand that at a new level for when I work with my housing colleagues. In our practice, we should be writing student learning outcomes for everything that we do. But I think in student affairs sometimes that falls off. And so I get that from the faculty colleagues, and I bring it to the administrative side of my life.*

Several other participants mentioned teaching helped them refine their professional presentation skills, knowledge on issues of student learning styles, and skills in conducting research. Overwhelmingly, participants saw the interconnected nature of their teaching and their practice.

## DISCUSSION

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Particularly, when analyzing our findings through the lenses of reflective practice and Reason and Kimball's (2012) model, our findings display the powerful and recursive nature of student affairs professionals' engagement of both their everyday work and their teaching in college classrooms. Our participants' experiences with teaching as a part of their full-time work in student affairs, or in addition to it, served to highlight this nature. Reason and Kimball's (2012) framework suggested the work of professionals is greatly enhanced by reflective processes that incorporate their use of theory and their institutional contexts. While some participants spoke of using reflective practice in various domains of their work, our interviews provided space for deeper reflection. Consequently, participants enumerated and described how the two aspects of their work, administrative practice and teaching, enhanced their overall work within the academy. Much of what they shared demonstrates the professionals' processes of using formal and informal theory learned through their student affairs training and work to impact their teaching and in return finding their work in the classroom enhanced their student affairs practice. The benefits of student affairs theory use in the classroom, as shared by our participants, complements previous literature on the benefit student affairs professionals bring to the classroom (Komives, 2012; Moore & Marsh, 2007; Roper, 2003). Our findings offer an extension of previous literature by also highlighting the ways in which teaching enhances student affairs practice.

Previous literature articulated how student affairs professionals' knowledge of student learning and development classified them as specialists (Roper, 2003), and Reason and Kimball's (2012) framework suggests this specialized knowledge should be used to enhance the professional's work. Our findings further demonstrate the utility of having specialized knowledge about how students learn and develop when teaching in the college classroom. As fleshed out in our theme "Impacts of Practice on Teaching," our participants continuously pointed to their knowledge and training around understanding students as a great asset in the classroom. Two of our participants, Peg and Jessie, pointed to their student affairs background when discussing their use of social justice theories in the classroom to affirm students as knowers. Michelle spoke most directly about the use of student development theory in understanding how to adjust her instruction to where students are in their own development. Another of our participants, Rob, not only shared how he used his knowledge and training in his work in the classroom but also how the students made note of his approach to teaching, differentiating it from other classroom experiences they had previously.

Knowledge of how students operate allowed professionals to better connect with students and, in some instances, attend to social identity issues that had the potential to impede learning. However,

while the professionals in our study entered the classroom space with advanced knowledge of students, they also encountered a deeper understanding of how students existed in those spaces. Reason and Kimball (2012) explained the importance of professionals interrogating unexamined theories about students as a means to better understand the work in which they engage. The ability to see students in spaces these professionals previously had limited access to granted participants an opportunity to challenge and reshape both formal and implicit theories they may have held about how students learn and develop. Thus, professionals were able to expand their capacity to support students more holistically.

Engaging in teaching also served as a catalyst for increased connections across the academy. Many of our participants communicated ways in which their access to and engagement with faculty or other academic administrators was increased by their work in the college classroom. For some this opened the door for collaborative projects and knowledge sharing. Given previous writings on the power of academic and student affairs partnerships, these findings offer teaching as another effective avenue for these two areas to come together (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Haefner & Ford, 2010; Keeling, 2006; Kezar, 2009). Additionally, teaching and establishing relationships with faculty and academic administrators provided professionals with a more comprehensive view of institutional life, culture, and context.

An informed perspective on institutional context is an important aspect of engaging theory in practice (Reason & Kimball, 2012). When student affairs professionals have a strong working knowledge of the culture of their institution, they are better able to incorporate theories they have learned through education and experience to support institutional goals. Additionally, it gives professionals a better understanding of how the context of their institution has shaped their implicit theories about student learning and development. Reflective practice, then, becomes the vehicle through which professionals make their implicit theories known and also how they can measure the effectiveness of their work (Reason & Kimball, 2012). Our participants' accounts illuminate the ways teaching in the classroom led them to engage in reflective practice. They were able to reflect on how they brought their own knowledge and used it in relating to students and structuring classroom process, but they also recognized gaps in their knowledge. For some, much of the reflection on how theory informed their practice as student affairs professionals and/or as teachers came as a result of participation in our study. This points to a number of implications about how we can use experiences teaching in the college classroom as a way to advance student learning and development environments.

### ***IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE***

The participants shared a variety of examples of how their teaching experiences inside the classroom positively impact the individual, the institution, and students. Student affairs professionals contribute to the learning and development of students when serving as teachers in the college classroom by bringing both theoretical and experiential knowledge of students that enhances the learning environment. As evidenced in the examples above, they develop meaningful relationships with students and attend to personal identities, helping students feel more connected and engaged. Furthermore, their integration into the life of campus and awareness of campus procedures and services is helpful in connecting students to important people, offices, and resources vital to student success.

However, student affairs professionals cannot rely solely on informal theory to guide their practice or teaching; they must also be willing to engage in intentional reflection about how teaching experiences impact practice and how practice impacts teaching. Based on our findings, we highlight a couple implications. First, we discuss the implications of our findings on the ongoing conversation of student and academic affairs collaboration. Next, we discuss the implications of our findings on the engagement of putting theory into practice, in which we argue for the critical role of reflective practice. In our discussion on the implications on theory-to-practice, we also offer considerations for graduate program faculty for preparing students to engage reflective practice.

### **Strengthening student and academic affairs collaboration**

Developing stronger relationships with faculty and others in academic affairs through their teaching roles was a positive outcome reported by many of our participants. Given there is a significant body of literature on the positive impacts of student and academic affairs partnerships (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Haefner & Ford, 2010; Keeling, 2006), this finding suggests teaching in the college classroom may provide a successful avenue for bridging the student and academic affairs divide. As was true for our participants, when student affairs administrators teach in the classroom—particularly when partnered with faculty—opportunities increase for both professionals and faculty members to experience the impact of each other's work with students. Student affairs professionals are able to experience the ways in which faculty work with students and the sources of support they offer. Likewise, faculty members are able to encounter, through direct observation or in conversation with the professional, the ways they leverage their knowledge of student development and learning in support of students in the classroom. This level of appreciation for each others' work and experience of students serves to increase willingness among both to partner more within and outside of the classroom. In an age of accountability, where meaningfully engaged strategic planning can aid an institution in creating and demonstrating their capacity for enhancing student learning and development outcomes (Keeling, 2006; Reason & Kimball, 2012), partnerships across the academy are key. Our findings suggest when student affairs professionals engage in formal teaching experiences, they forge strong connections across the academy. For our participants, these connections often developed through both collective and individual reflections on teaching experiences with their faculty counterparts.

### **Deeper engagement of theory-to-practice**

Student affairs professionals work on the front line with students daily and, through their education, they have advanced knowledge of college student development theory and the developmental and holistic needs of students. Student affairs professionals make excellent college teachers because they can apply what they know about student development directly in their work with students in the classroom (Hunter & Murray, 2007; Komives, 2012). Professionals tend to use a combination of formal and informal or implicit theory in their work with students (Reason & Kimball, 2012). These ways of knowing students is also embedded in their teaching practice—they take what they know and understand about students from their daily practice and often apply it to their classroom work. However, professionals must engage reflective practice to better articulate how they use formal and informal theory in their work. In Reason and Kimball's (2012) model, they suggest reflection can happen in a number of ways, but they argue formal assessment is an important reflective activity. We suggest practitioners use Reason and Kimball's (2012) model for bridging theory as a tool for navigating reflection and enhancing both their teaching and work as administrators.

### **Making room for reflection**

A commonality in Reason and Kimball's (2012) model, the literature on teaching, and the results of our research is the need for critical reflection. Several participants shared ways in which they utilized reflection as a tool for improving their teaching from semester to semester. Taking time to engage in intentional reflection resulted in more informed practice. However, reflection was not a skill that came easy for many of our participants. Many had not learned various way of engaging reflection prior to teaching. This part of our findings highlights important implications for graduate preparation programs.

Reflection needs to be learned as an actual skill set either through education, reading, or mentoring relationships (Brown et al., 1992). Graduate preparation programs are primed for supporting professionals in the development of critical reflection skills. Reason and Kimball (2012) offer a set of questions professionals can use to reflect further on their use of theory in practice within their institutional contexts (pp. 368-371). Graduate preparation programs can easily tailor these questions for use

with students in theory-to-practice activities, such as case studies, practica and internship reflections, and comprehensive and culminating documents produced by students. Offering students multiple opportunities for reflection guided by faculty and mentors will serve to sharpen professionals' reflective skills.

In practice, professionals need to seek out professional development opportunities aimed at increasing their critical reflection skills. This can range from national and international opportunities to individual engagement in development activities. For individual reflection, we offer a few suggested questions for professionals to consider as they reflect on teaching as a way to enhance their practice.

- What theories from practice do I use to inform my teaching?
- How is my understanding of students impacted by my teaching experience(s)?
- How is my understanding of my institution impacted by my teaching experience(s)?
- What did I learn from my teaching experience(s) that I can implement in my practice?
- What academic partnerships can I further develop as a result of my teaching role?

Student affairs professionals need to be willing to share both their successes and failures in the classroom with others who share similar experiences. This can be done locally, regionally, and nationally and engaged in by those who are currently teaching or interested in teaching in the future. Locally, professionals can attend faculty development sessions focused on teaching, or set up meetings with others on the campus who also teach as part of their practice. Co-teaching with faculty or other administrators offers another form of collaboration. Several participants shared that they learned more about themselves, students, and teaching by partnering with co-instructors. On regional and national levels, professionals can attend conference sessions focused on enhancing teaching and learning in the classroom in which they connect with and share information and experiences with session presenters and attendees. Our participants also shared many practical tips for engaging in personal reflection activities such as writing one-minute personal reflections at the end of each class or written reflections at the end of a semester, sharing in formal or informal teaching circles, and engaging in dialogue with one's co-instructor or supervisor.

### **Opportunities for future research**

Very little research has been conducted on the impact of formal teaching experiences engaged in by student affairs professionals. Our research addresses that gap in the literature by providing a number of considerations on how formal teaching and student affairs practice have a recursive relationship. However, much more can be discovered about the utility, benefits, challenges, and nature of these experiences. Given the broad focus of our research, we were not able to address the issue of degree-level differences. Future research might explore how teaching at the undergraduate level may differ from teaching at the graduate level. Similarly, we were not able to explore differences in our findings based on the number of years professionals had been teaching. Future research, should explore in what, if any, ways number of years teaching influences how professionals approach teaching. We were not able to address discipline specific impacts. Future research on teaching might explore the experiences of student affairs professionals who teach in discipline specific areas. As more and more research points to the role of social identities in mediating teaching and learning, further research might explore how various identities and intersections impact both professionals and students. This work focused primarily on the perspectives of student affairs professionals who teach. To add to this, future research should explore the perspectives of students and non-student affairs affiliated faculty on working with student affairs professionals in the classroom. Research on the expanding roles and experiences of student affairs professionals is nascent and ripe with possibility. We believe the better we understand the nature and impacts of various aspects of the work, they better positioned we will be for demonstrating student affairs professionals impact on learning and development.

## CONCLUSION

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In *Learning Reconsidered*, Keeling (2004) emphasized student affairs as a field that promotes “learn[ing] through action, contemplation, reflection and emotional engagement” (p. 11). Our study highlights the ways in which professionals bring their foundational beliefs into classroom settings. Participants shared ways in which their professional background impacted their teaching style particularly in developing relationships and utilizing learner-centered activities to engage various learning styles. Several participants shared that teaching in the college classroom offered them ways to stay connected to current trends and literature in the field. This research suggests that stepping into the formal classroom space offers opportunities for practitioners to connect with a broader array of individuals on campus with whom they might not regularly interact such as faculty and academic administrators. These relationships, coupled with a deeper understanding of students, enhance the overall student experience.

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