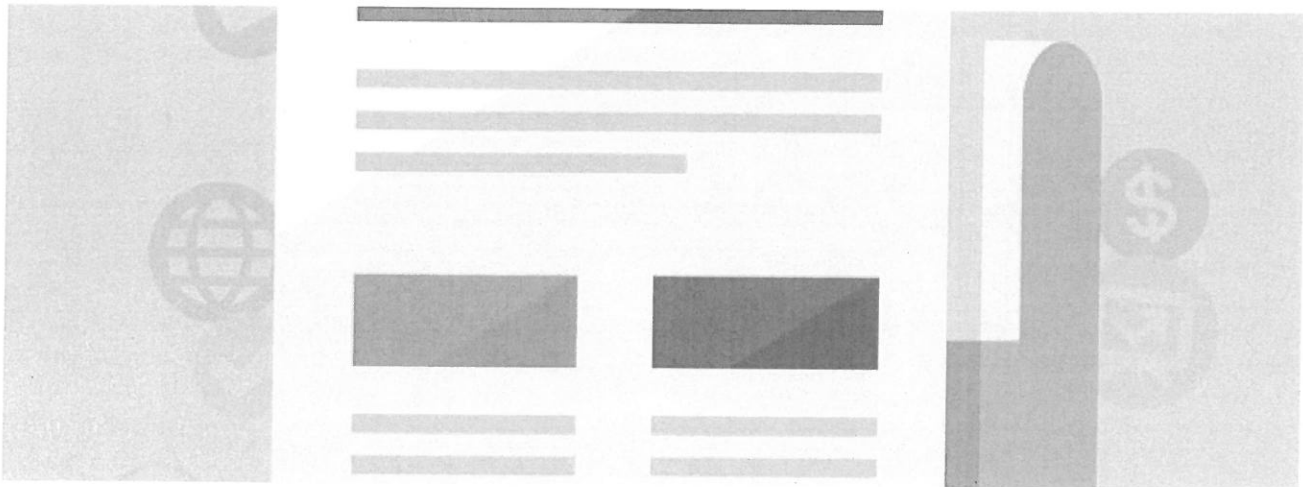


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Student Affairs: Trends to Watch in 2017-19

March 1, 2017 | Les Cook, Paul Marthers, Daniel Fusch, Director of Publications & Research, Academic Impressions, Jeremy Podany, Dr. Karen M. Whitney



What will student affairs look like, 3 years from now?

Looking ahead, what concerns you most?

What do we most need to do this year?

Recently, we held vigorous discussions of the future of student affairs with a panel of experts that included two vice presidents of student affairs (Les Cook and Paul Marthers), a career services expert (Jeremy Podany), and a sitting president (Karen Whitney, Clarion University) whose background is in student affairs.

All four are forward-thinkers and bring unique perspectives to student affairs. Paul Marthers heads up both student affairs and enrollment management at SUNY's central office, and Les Cook, as vice president for student affairs and advancement at Michigan Tech, oversees the entire student-alumni lifecycle from pre-college outreach to planned giving. Karen Whitney's approach to leading Clarion University is deeply informed by her work in student affairs, and Jeremy Podany, as executive director of Ascend and The Career Center at Colorado State University and the founder of the Career Leadership Collective, is pursuing the integration of career and co-curricular at every step of the student experience.

Our conversations with this panel of experts left us enthused, and we want to share some of the highlights from these interviews with you here.

A Panel of Experts: What will student affairs look like?

Daniel Fusch. Karen, Paul, Les, Jeremy, thanks for joining us! Three years from now, if we sit down to discuss student affairs, what will we be discussing?

Paul Marthers. Areas that I think might get renewed attention are: how to assess the effectiveness of student affairs programs, how to partner with chief diversity officers, and how to foster cross campus collaboration to raise retention and graduation rates. I think we'll also certainly be discussing much of what we are discussing today: high impact student engagement initiatives, student mental health, sexual assault, and how to create a more inclusive and equitable campus community.

Karen Whitney. Three things, I think:

1. Continued college student activism springing from the race-centered consciousness protests in 2015, moving to protest of economic inequities stemming from the 2016 presidential campaign and exploding in 2017 with a new national women's movement. There is the potential for the first time since the 1960's that there could be a convergence of critical social issues of race, class and gender that will ignite critical mass of college students to organize a multifaceted movement.
2. Paying for college. We will continue to struggle as a society, government and individual students and families as to who should pay for what in terms of college. Small scale experiments will occur in various states and communities but we will still be taking a boot-strap-piece-meal approach.
3. The effects, three years from now, that a Trump presidential administration has and has not had upon students and post-secondary education. No matter what, there will be surprises.

Jeremy Podany. We will be listening deeply to understand "Gen Z," the new norm; we will have made big strides in cultural eco-system integration with academic affairs, fundraising, and the career services; and having just went through one of the biggest culture-war periods in American History (2017-2019 predicted), we will be a leading voice in training multiple departments on campus, and our broader communities, from our deep strength and ability, about inclusivity of all identities, harmony, and social justice.

Les Cook. In student affairs, constant and rapid change has become the new norm. We are living in times when agility is critical, and we have to be good at sorting out what's important. We are all

concerned about the impact of the new presidential administration, but we have to keep centered on student success and student learning. In the midst of all the noise, it is our task to stay absolutely centered on this.

I am reminded of what management consultant Meg Wheatley terms the *chaordic*. In a chaordic world, it's essential that we find a balance or coexistence between chaos and order. A student affairs leader's role is to bring calm in the middle of the storm, to be the voice of reason, to recenter turbulent conversations on campus on *students*: how to keep them successful, positive, hopeful, and moving forward.

During these turbulent times, we're seeing students step up with increased activism and involvement. It's likely that we will witness a new era of student leadership and civic engagement, as students seek to be part of the solution to both local and global challenges. We have a renewed opportunity to help students find and develop their voice and their role in leadership. It is also time to extend our reach and help others realize what building an open, inclusive, and welcoming campus looks like.

And we will continue to pay attention to the changing demographics of our students, declining college age populations in most states (as predicted in the recent *Knocking at the College Door* report), access/affordability/degree attainment, disruption/technology, and the need to serve Gen Z students.

Looking ahead, what worries you?

Daniel Fusch. Related to student affairs and student success, what concerns you most about this next year?

Karen Whitney. Fear. When the faculty, staff, and students you work with are fearful, this adversely affects a student's ability to succeed academically.

Les Cook. I am concerned about the rapid pace of change and the ability to respond in meaningful, non-partisan ways that support student learning and success. Student affairs professionals are generally flexible and able to adjust quickly, but the pace of change is particularly hurried now. We have to be able to respond and keep moving forward with as little disruption as possible.

Looking at the year ahead, I'd offer three pieces of advice to my peers:

1. Breathe. Take time to just breathe.
2. If you are not already doing it, invite your students into conversations, planning, and brainstorming. Include them in your conversations about the future.
3. Network with your colleagues. We're a close-knit group in student affairs, both within and across institutions. It is important that we take care of each other and find space to come together. We

need to be comfortable reaching out to colleagues for fresh ideas, advice, and perhaps even a dose or two of therapy.

Jeremy Podany. I think we need to be very aware of how a sense of crisis and how the rise in student anxiety, depression, judicial incidents, and activism effect us, as student affairs professionals -- how it effects our focus. I love that student affairs is hands-down the best unit in higher education at handling students in crisis. We are trained to provide a stable presence for students in tough situations, in conflict, or in pain. I just hope we don't get so focused on that part of our role that we become *only* counselors, mediators, and judicial officers, forgetting that we also need to play a huge role in the future career paths of our students, in the life of the mind, in providing amazing event experiences, and in inspiring our students.

What is worthy of our attention?

Daniel Fusch. What is the opportunity we *must* go after, in student affairs?

Karen Whitney. I want to fully leverage the helpful role our alumni could have in the lives of our current students as mentors, supporters, and inspirers. For recent graduates and in the post-baby-boomer generation, their philanthropic interest is in more active, less passive involvement. It's not just about giving treasure back (writing a check). Active donors do want to write a check, but they also want to be involved personally in driving the outcomes they desire. At the same time, institutions are realizing the opportunity they have to engage alumni more meaningfully, tapping their expertise and connections to help recruit, mentor, and support students on the road from matriculation to graduation. I have challenged our alumni organization to do this kind of thinking, to transition from the bake sale, tailgate parties, and alumni events to close collaboration between professional staff across our institution and alumni.

When you involve alumni throughout the student lifecycle, you can provide a very rich experience to both students and alumni. This creates a "virtuous cycle": today's students, mentored by today's alumni, become tomorrow's alumni, and then we ask them to engage and stay involved with the next generation of students. We need to play the long game.

Les Cook. This is so important. Our model at Michigan Tech affords us opportunities that other campuses may not have. We embrace the "lifecycle of engagement" model, housing within one division all of the traditional student affairs areas, as well as enrollment, advancement and alumni engagement, and university marketing and communications. We can be as intentional about our relationship with the twelve year-old who attends a summer youth program as we can about a ninety year-old alum, from pre-college to planned giving. The lifecycle model helps us be intentional about every interaction, build relationships, and sustain/build momentum.

In the year ahead, we have to continue to create and find space to have meaningful dialogue with our students and others about what it means to be an active and engaged member of our society. Ask of your students: "How are you involved in creating the world you want to see?" Assist them as they strive to find answers to that question. It may be time to review Ernest Boyer's six Principles of Community (that campus community needs to be *educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative*) as a guide in helping students and others create those spaces for open dialogue. Now is the time to ask our students to really think about who they are, to invite them to challenge their assumptions, listen with an open mind and heart, and really think about the impact they want to have on the world.

This is not an easy thing to do. We recently had a conversation on our campus with our student government about how we educate our community about the value of our international students and their contributions to campus and the community. Nearly half of our graduate students are international, but our local, somewhat rural community doesn't fully appreciate this. While some do and regularly attend campus events like Diwali Night, Chinese New Year, international week, and other cultural events, others do not.

So how do we help bridge the gap between these different subcultures? Between town and gown? Can we help international students and others reach out to our local schools and community? How do we create space for respectful, open conversation and positive interaction to occur? These are just some of the questions we have to address.

Paul Marthers. How about two things? First, move in a positive direction on student mental health. Virtually every campus in the U.S. could use more resources for their over-utilized counseling center. A task force at SUNY identified the needs. Now we are searching for the funding.

Second, get a SUNY-wide policy on health care coverage that meets the needs of transgender students, especially those whose families are not accepting of their identity. We are working on it, but it is complicated when more than 60 campuses are involved!

Jeremy Podany. I am focused on developing the soft skills that will most benefit students in their future. The workforce readiness movement is pervasive, and I believe institutions of higher education have moved past the tension of "we are not a trade school" and have embraced that they can do more without forsaking their mission. We certainly do a fantastic job at providing a deep dive in academic knowledge, but the T-shaped student is more rare; companies know it, and universities are beginning to. Student affairs divisions, and career centers in particular, are strapped for time, but are positioned quite well to be a bridge, rounding out the co-curricular skill-set on a large scale, instead of only through programs or 1:1 meetings, which are hard to scale. Online training and badging has this potential.

Daniel Fusch. How does student affairs need to be thinking differently about the integration of the curricular, co-curricular, and post-graduation experience?

Jeremy Podany. We need to broaden our official definition of student success and fold more functional areas into that discussion. For years, student success has meant: How do we retain students, especially those who are underserved? That is crucial to the mission, but it is only part of the mission. We need to include integrate career and co-curricular, and if we do this, the impact for students will be vast. For example, we know that:

- A sense of meaningful work retains more students.
- Faculty increasingly embrace the integration of High-Impact Practices, as defined by the AAC&U (such as experiential learning, study abroad, and internships) into the classroom experience.
- Multiple colleges and universities are investigating the concept of a co-curricular transcript.
- We're seeing growing interest in online skills badging, and early evidence of its impact on student success.

Closing Remarks: From a President

Daniel Fusch. Thank you, everyone! This conversation is very needed right now. Karen, I have a closing question for you. You have a unique perspective as a president who has a background in student affairs. Looking ahead at this year, what advice would you want other presidents to hear? What advice would you want vice presidents of student affairs to hear?

Karen Whitney. Student affairs is core to any university operation - especially now.

To presidents, I would say: If you have a lackadaisical view of student affairs, you need to realize that student affairs, working in conjunction with academic affairs, is at the core of the institution; it is not peripheral. Here are practical steps a president can take:

1. Expect that the services and programs administered by student affairs are critical to the institution, and express that expectation.
2. Have the chief student affairs officer review, regularly, the extent to which each of those services do in fact contribute to core priorities. For example, to what extent is programming in housing and residence life contributing to retention? To what extent is career services programming, provided across the four years, contributing to retention from one semester to the next? And ask those questions for other key priorities, not just retention. Each unit needs to collect these data. These things are knowable. The intent is not to put student affairs on the defensive but to encourage proactive momentum: How can particular units in student affairs contribute to these outcomes even more?

To vice presidents of student affairs: Know that you are at the core of the academy, and act like it. Be clear, be convincing; don't be defensive, don't act like a second-class citizen. Show your academic colleagues, with evidence, how you are contributing to the mission and to the institution's strategic priorities. If you *are* treated like a second-class citizen, ask: How can you change that? How can you

make an evidence-based case that describes how your services and programs are making a difference? Know it and talk about it, talk about it, talk about it. Present the case to the president and the cabinet, hold workshops. Own the work that you do.

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