

**University of Alberta**

**A Comparison of Student Affairs in Private Colleges  
in the Philippines and Canada**

**by**

**Edward V. Dalusong III**



**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education**

**in**

**Administration of Postsecondary Education**

**Department of Educational Policy Studies**

**Edmonton, Alberta  
Spring 2003**

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*ISBN: 0-612-82071-8*

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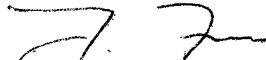
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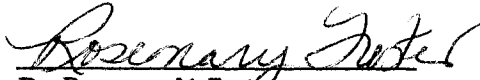
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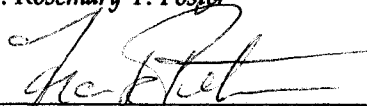
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April 8/03  
Dated



## DEDICATION

To **Awit**, who gave new meaning to the words *mother* and *wife*....

And to our children, **Colleen Sabina** and **Ethan Corbin**, who made me more mature and responsible....

## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to compare offices of student affairs in four different colleges from the Philippines and Canada. Data was gathered by conducting one-on-one interviews with the Directors, staff members and students from the participating institutions. Five interviews were conducted for each college composed of the Director, a staff member and three students.

The Directors were asked about the various types of services that they offered to their students. They were also given the opportunity to comment on the relationships they had with their fellow administrators and how their office was being viewed within their institution. The staff members and students were allowed to comment on the various student services that were being offered in their college. In addition, the staff members were also given the chance to describe their daily activities and their thoughts about their work.

The analysis of the interview data revealed ten themes – Budget problems; Transparency in funding; Difference in expectations; Lack of resources and/or space; Culture makes a difference; Money is the bottomline; The problem of awareness; Scarcity of personnel and lack of qualifications; Creativity is better than indifference; and, Policy enforcement creates more programs.

Based on the findings, the study came up with the following conclusions about student affairs from the four private colleges – The role of every OSA administrator is unique; Students and the rest of the academe still find it difficult to understand the role of the OSAs; The OSAs cannot effectively pinpoint student

needs; Diminishing quality and quantity of services; and, The importance of culture and legal context.

The study then made various recommendations to help the participating OSAs address the different problems that were brought up during the interviews.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks to my parents, **Eddie and Claudette Dalusong**, who raised and prepared me for the tough challenges that I have encountered in life. To my brother **Edgar** and sisters **Nanen** and **Elise**, for almost always believing in me.

I would like to thank **Dr. Voltaire P. Arzadon** and **Mrs. Loreta Arzadon**, it is safe to say that this would not be possible without them. Because of their attitude and continuous support, they have really changed my notion about in-laws.

Thanks to my sister in law **Feliza Sua** and her husband **Anthony Sua** for their unwavering support and wonderful outlook about life.

My debt and gratitude go out to **Dr. Mike Andrews**, my supervisor, for his guidance. His constant reassurance and positive attitude carried me through the pressure packed process of writing and defending this thesis.

To **Dr. Joe Fris**, my co-supervisor, for all the suggestions that strengthened this thesis.

Big thanks to my professor, **Dr. Ted Holdaway**, who became an immediate friend and was our guiding light when we didn't have a clue about Edmonton, the U of A and surviving winter in Edmonton. He made us feel like we had a parent in Canada. I will never forget how you tried your best to explain Curling, Cricket and Aussie Rules Rugby to me.

To **Mr. Eliseo Cardenas**, for encouraging me to pursue my Doctorate degree in North America.

Special thanks to **Dr. Aida Caluag** for her guidance during my MA days at the Ateneo de Manila. To **Fr. James O'Donnell** for always being available for advice.

Many thanks to **Uncle Loreto and Tita Lorie Meneses** for always providing comfort and relaxation whenever we were in Calgary and for always checking up on us. To **Divina Fabia** for all the laughter and stories, thanks for making us feel like we never left the Philippines.

Thank you very much to **Candice and Tony Williams**, whose friendship opened new horizons for me and widened my knowledge about Canada and its culture. Your stories always made me feel like I've already been in Newfoundland. I promise to visit "the rock" someday.

To **Aurora Labarda** for all the favors. Her presence made us feel very comfortable during all those days at the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of Education North.

Big cheers to all my classmates. Thank you for the lessons you've shared with me and for always making me feel comfortable. I appreciated the many conversations we've had about life in the Philippines and Canada.

My gratitude also go out to **Rose and Rudy Cornel** who always welcomed us to their home whenever we went down to Los Angeles. Same goes out to my good friends **Gilbert and Loving Cua** for all the wonderful adventures we've had together. It has been nice seeing each other's families grow.

To the Edmonton Oilers, for making me look forward to the brutal Edmonton winters. You've made a hockey fan out of a person from a tropical country.

And finally, to the members of my committee, **Dr. Rosemary Foster, Dr. Frank Peters, Dr. Dave Sande, and Dr. Glen Jones**. Thanks for believing in me and paving the way for my degree.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction to the Research**

#### **Background of the Research**

Do developing nations have no option but to copy the developed?

When people in North America or Europe watch the world news, most of them would normally see developing countries in terrible turmoil or distress. They feel lucky and fortunate that they do not have to go through such hardships. Many wonder where such countries went wrong and why their standards of living are lower.

When people from the Third World talk with relatives who have migrated to developed countries, they get information about life in a very prosperous environment. Thus they begin to ask themselves these questions: Why can't we be like those countries? What can we do to be the next economic tiger? What can we do to lift the status of our country?

With the indelible influence of American culture on his mind, Sycip (1996) gave a realistic description of the dilemma that developing countries, such as the Philippines, face at the present time:

Like many other developing countries that have been colonies for many years, we have pursued for many years a strategy of imitation – usually a blind imitation of institutions, customs, and practices of the former mother country. (p. 200)

He also recalled a conversation he had with a very respected individual who had a thought-provoking observation:

Mr. George Woods, former president of the World Bank, told me many years ago that developing nations often make the mistake of looking to developed nations for solutions to their economic or social problems, when they should be seeking the advice and assistance of other developing countries whose experience may be closer and more relevant to theirs. (p. 201)

Organizations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are supposed to be vehicles for such interactions between the Philippines and her neighbor countries. Although ASEAN has been a very beneficial forum for the exchange of ideas between the countries, most of them have also used methods that the more developed countries have relied on and utilized for many years. Taking the best strategies used elsewhere in the world and making a few adjustments to make them better has enabled countries such as Japan and Singapore to excel and be competitive with the rest of the world.

Hahn (1991) described the last decade as an era characterized by the management of rapid change as changing environments create new challenges, and threats lead to new tasks that require continuous changes. In this vein, Borromeo (1995) stated that, in the case of the Philippines:

Educational institutions enter the new decade beset by the seemingly intractable problems of poverty and inequity with social and economic development unable to keep pace with the wants and hopes of a young and impatient people. (p. 31)

To meet these challenges, Norris and Poulton (1991) propose that higher education institutions must seek new paradigms of operation that will allow them to meet their traditional goals with greater efficiency. They added that if these institutions are to be responsive to societal needs and expectations, they cannot continue to plan the way that they always have, which has been characterized by having more emphasis on internal efficiency and quantitative measures of educational development.

Given all the problems that these institutions are facing, opportunities abound for higher education officials to participate in leading Philippine society into an era of stability and prosperity. The Congressional Commission on Education (1991) concluded

that these opportunities include an open democratic system that is diffusing economic and political power throughout the country; a growing private sector that is becoming more sensitive to the need for faster social development; and a population that has a passion for education.

However, every institution for higher learning adopts a philosophy that is geared towards particular roles and functions in the pursuit of the nation's general objectives and thrusts for higher education. Furthermore, the educational effort is centered upon individual students in an endeavor to improve their minds, stimulate idealism and civic pride, and promote those aspects of individual growth, including personal discipline, that produce useful and responsible citizens. Colleges and universities are aiming to serve the youth and the nation in more rational and effective ways. They educate students for self-realization and fulfillment, for useful employment, and for national development.

Despite the many differences in economies and culture, colleges and universities in developed and Third World countries have a common objective of developing and preparing their students for the world that awaits them after they graduate. Offices of Student Affairs (OSAs) within these educational institutions have an important role in the achievement of this objective.

Educational systems in most developing countries face severe pressures caused by domestic and global depression. In the Philippines, small private schools and postsecondary institutions, particularly those in the rural areas, acutely feel the problem. These small organizations are threatened with extinction because of the rising cost of education.



Swinerton (1991) has observed that there will be tremendous pressure on educators from all levels to provide programs. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Borromeo (1995) declared that Philippine education should start focusing on a combination of formal, non-formal, and informal modes of education that will serve the evolving lifelong needs of students and instill in them a greater appreciation for the diversity of outlooks and cultures.

In order to maintain and provide a more effective and balanced educational experience, colleges and universities need to enrich and improve the student services that they already extend to their students. However, this endeavor cannot solely rely on the willingness of these institutions to improve student services. Financial resources often limit the scope of these programs, and therefore OSAs are forced to find creative and innovative ways to work with the budgets they are given for a particular period of time. Problems also arise with regards to the indifference that people within these institutions show towards OSAs.

The purpose of this study was to show how OSAs operated in different educational institutions in different contexts or cultures. With this study covering two countries, one Developed and the other Developing, the aim was to see the impact of OSAs on their respective academic institutions more clearly. The study examined the role of the OSAs in four private colleges in the Philippines and Canada, with a view to identifying similarities and differences from the perspectives of administrators, staff members, and students. Some of these perspectives include how OSA personnel saw their office within the institution, their personal insights about their jobs, their own views and goals on the development of their OSA and the obstacles that are keeping them from

achieving these goals. It was also hoped that the findings could be used to improve the operation of the OSAs in the four colleges.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The role of the OSA has been usefully described by Ern (1993) in this way:

[The office of] student affairs, through its professional and support staff, provides leadership in helping to develop a true community of learning by expanding the intellectual, social, and cultural horizons of the student body through a broad range of support services and programs outside the formal academic setting. (p.441)

Jacoby (1993), furthermore, cited some specific functions that the OSA could offer its students, such as financial aid, career counseling, learning assistance, health services, personal counseling, assistance to the disabled, international student advising, housing, and minority student services. Ern (1993) elaborated by stating that:

Tasks are accomplished by setting goals and priorities; policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation; budgeting; and a variety of administrative procedures enhancing staff development and communications within and outside student affairs. Through various departments, we strive to contribute to students' academic progress, personal growth, and sense of well-being by helping them clarify and reach their educational objectives and develop their talents; by promoting integration of learning; by contributing to a college or university environment that promotes student development, good human relations, a sense of community, and individual responsibility; and by acting as role models, providing them with leadership in a variety of settings. (pp. 441-442)

These kinds of services provide experiences that can help the students, through their own efforts, to develop their minds and characters to the limits of their individual capacities.

Nuss (1996) pointed out other aspects of student affairs when she wrote:

First is the profession's consistent and persistent emphasis on and commitment to the development of the whole person and....student affairs' sustained commitment to supporting the diversity of institutional and academic missions. (p. 23)

Today, OSAs have become a standard feature in every institution of learning that values the patronage of scholars. Adequate and well-managed student services attract and motivate students and, as a consequence, the objectives of providing quality education have a better chance of being achieved.

While OSAs have evolved and developed over many years in North America, they are still relatively new in the Philippines. Morales (1995) commented:

Despite the studies that have been made in developing programs, Student Services is still considered by some as an innovation. (p. 7)

Most programs being offered by OSAs in the Philippines are meager compared to their North American counterparts. Although the academic community is aware of their presence, high percentages of staff and students are still not clear about the role of OSAs within the educational institution. The confusion is well described by Dassance (1994):

In many cases, the student services division has defined its own role. All too often, such decisions have been made without consultation or concurrence from other segments of the college. Community college presidents, most of whom come from the ranks of academic deans, often have not had a clear understanding of the student services function or how it fits into the overall institutional program. As a result, many presidents have not focused much of their attention on the student services function. (p. 283)

Dassance also asked if student services should

Focus inclusively on its traditional role of being a provider of such specialized services as counseling, financial aid, job placement, and academic advising? Or should student services have the more esoteric goal of “developing the whole person”? Or should there be some completely new role for student services? (p. 283)

Given all of this input, the OSA still has a responsibility to help define its role in the overall educational program of the institution. The integration of the OSA into the overall institutional organization; the unification of all student personnel services and

related activities; and extensive communication between the student affairs staff, faculty, and administrators are needed to make the OSA operate effectively. The OSA can contribute to the realization of educational goals by helping to solve problems related to individual adjustment, administration, group harmony and effectiveness. The work can be implemented by defining and clarifying the role of the OSA in the educational institution.

The literature suggests that OSAs are now major components in the development of students in an academic institution. The OSAs have essentially proven that the classroom is no longer just the place within an educational institution where students can be molded and influenced. Over the years, they have slowly gained recognition from various sectors in Education. However, while OSAs have relatively flourished in North America, it is apparent that we do not know whether these things are true for the Philippine context.

### **Research Objective**

This research aimed to describe and compare the roles and operations of OSAs in four selected private colleges in the Philippines and Canada, as perceived by their administrators, staff members, and students. The study attempted to identify similarities and differences in student services between the four private colleges to recommend improvements or innovations that could be beneficial to the educational institutions concerned.

### **General Research Question**

The general research question was “What are the roles of student services in the four selected private colleges in Canada and the Philippines?”

### **Specific Research Questions**

The specific research questions listed below relate to the day-to-day work of OSAs within the institutions and the problems and issues that they confront:

1. What are the OSA staff members' perceptions about the effectiveness of their office with respect to advice about and assistance with the following functions?

- (a) financial aid
- (b) housing
- (c) learning assistance
- (d) personal and career counseling
- (e) health services
- (f) assistance to the disabled
- (g) international student advising

2. What are the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the same functions stated above?

3. (a) What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties?

(b) What changes would the OSA directors recommend for improving these relationships?

4. What is the extent of agreement between the perceptions of the OSA staff members and students about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the functions stated above?

## **Overview of Method**

Aside from the personal interviews with the OSA personnel and the students, I also used documentary data from the colleges such as their student handbooks and/or brochures. I also used a personal journal to record certain moments or reactions by the interviewees that could not be captured on tape. It was hoped that the supplementary information provided by these services helped enrich the data gathering of the study and gave a clearer perspective of what was happening at the OSAs and the students during that time.

## **Terminology**

Various authors have referred to the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) using different designations. In this report, the term student affairs is used synonymously with student services and student development.

## **Assumptions**

Basic to the study were the following assumptions:

1. That the OSA directors/deans' perspectives are a good source of data to describe the roles that their offices perform.
2. That students' perspectives are good sources of data to describe the effectiveness of student services.
3. That the directors/deans and the students could provide accurate expressions of their thoughts and experiences.
4. That insights into the students' perceptions and the roles of these directors/deans could be gained by asking them to describe their experiences in terms of thoughts, values, and work activities.

5. That the researcher, in interacting with the participants, could be an appropriate instrument to collect the data.

It can be observed here that I used personal interviews giving particular importance to the personal perspectives of the interviewees. The decision to acknowledge and give value to their perspectives was brought about by my notion that only the people who were directly involved or affected by the OSAs could give the clearest picture of the issues concerning the office.

Therefore, it can be said that this study used the post-positivist paradigm. This gave me the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of the OSAs using qualitative methods to describe the behavior, feelings, viewpoints, and explanations of the respondents.

### **Delimitations**

The study had the following delimitations:

1. The study was delimited to include only student affairs directors/deans, staff members and students in each of the two private colleges from the Philippines and Canada.
2. Participants were delimited to one director/dean, one staff member, and three students per college.

These assumptions and delimitations were modeled after those identified by Charyna (1996) in his study of the experiences of college presidents.

### **Outline of the Study**

This report is organized in the following way. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on post-secondary student affairs. In Chapter 3, I describe the research method that was employed in the study. In Chapters 4-7, I discuss in detail how student affairs were

administered and viewed in each of the four colleges who participated in the research. In Chapter 8, I provide a summary, comparison and analysis of the OSAs in the four different colleges. Chapters 9-10 will include the themes, conclusions and recommendations that came out of the study.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

In this chapter, I present background information about both the Republic of the Philippines and higher education in both Canada and the Philippines. I also include a review of literature and research studies related to offices of student affairs.

#### **The Republic of the Philippines**

The Republic of the Philippines is located about 1,100 kilometers from the Asian mainland. To its east is the Philippine Sea and the Pacific Ocean, and to its west the South China Sea. Its nearest neighbors to the south are Brunei, Eastern Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The total land area of the Philippine archipelago is 300,000 square kilometers, divided into three main island groups: Luzon, which is 140,000 square kilometers; the central group of islands, referred to as the Visayas, which is 64,000 square kilometers; and Mindanao, which is 96,000 square kilometers. Altogether, there are over 7,100 islands, 11 of which are of significant size.

The National Statistics Office of the Philippines estimated the population in 1995 at 68.6 million. It grew from 48 million in 1980 to 60.7 million in 1990, a growth rate of about 2%. The greatest concentration is around Metro Manila, the capital. Other main cities include, in order of population, Davao, Cebu, Zamboanga, Bacolod, and Iloilo. Citizens of the Philippines are referred to as Filipinos.

The Philippines has two main languages: Filipino and English. Spanish is spoken by a minority of people, and there are numerous local languages and dialects. English is the principal language used in government and business circles.

### **Higher Education in the Philippines**

Unlike the North American model, wherein most colleges and universities are funded by government, most Philippine educational institutions at all levels--high school and post-secondary (tertiary)--are owned by private individuals, partnerships, or organizations. Albarracin (1975) quoted the opinion of the former Philippine Deputy Minister of Education on this matter:

The number of private schools at the tertiary level is frightening indeed in a developing country like the Philippines.... To make the picture vivid, our enrolment in college is second to that of the U.S., proportionatewise [sic] and larger than that of Israel, Australia, Japan, Sweden, Taiwan, Germany, England, Italy, Spain, Mexico, India, and Thailand, in that order. (p. 8)

Most of these private colleges are owned by partnerships or families who invest all the money needed to operate the college. These investors usually comprise the board of trustees and one of them is appointed as the president. Rarely is an outsider hired by the board to act as president. Maquiso (1980) affirmed this when he said that:

The family bloodline dominates...controls the stocks...before any change in administration occurs, control of stocks must change hands...it takes a corporate takeover to change administration in the private schools. (p. 4)

Although the government may monitor the operations of these private colleges, it does not provide any form of funding for them. Alingasa (1975) said that as far as Philippine private schools are concerned:

Schools which government agencies control through regulations on taxation, tuition increase, retirement benefits, 13th month pay, without reciprocal incentives or subsidies for educational programs. (p. 49)

The government only funds the public education institutions, but most Filipinos would agree that the quality of education that the private institutions provide is far better than that in the publicly funded ones.

One of the biggest developments in Philippine education, which changed the structure of the entire educational system, was the creation of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). This commission was a result of Republic Act no. 7722 which was signed by President Fidel Ramos on May 18, 1994. Having become one of the largest and most difficult to manage entities, the education sector was becoming one of the biggest problems in the Ramos administration. Thus, the creation of the CHED was a move that was meant to extract more efficiency from one of the government's biggest bureaucracies. Following the formation of the Commission, the education department was divided into three separate entities: (a) the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS) was assigned to take charge of only basic education; (b) the CHED was assigned to manage higher education; and (c) the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), created by Republic Act no. 7796, was placed in charge of vocational and technical education.

One of the reasons people are closely watching the education system is that the Philippines once had one of the best educational systems in Asia. As former Philippine Senator and President of the University of the Philippines Edgardo Angara (1988) noted:

The Philippines up to the late sixties distinguished itself with an advanced educational system. In Southeast Asia the country enjoyed, and still enjoys, one of the highest literacy rates in the region. Our top universities attracted scholars from neighboring countries for study and research. All that however seems to have changed, with the Philippines trailing behind many of its progressive Asian neighbors today. (p. 18)

Therefore, there is tremendous pressure on today's Philippine higher education institutions to regain the supremacy that the country once held.

### **Higher Education in Canada**

When the issue of providing education for Canadians arose, a provincially controlled and publicly funded school system was developed. According to the British North America Act of 1867 (re-enacted and retitled the Constitution Act, 1982), the provinces have the responsibility for education. Levin and Young (1994) have noted that the Constitution Act:

Incorporated an already well established distribution of authority in education rather than creating a new one. (p. 25)

Although it is quite clear in the Constitution Act that the provinces have sole authority over education in their respective jurisdictions, Cameron (1997) has pointed out that:

Under the guise of political expediency, the federal government contends with both opportunities and pressures to assume a more prominent presence, even to the point of challenging provincial primacy in some aspects of higher education. (p. 9)

**Structural characteristics.** By the time of Confederation in 1867, there were 17 colleges in Canada, only four of which were independent of denominational control. The British North America Act presaged the shape and character of the Canadian university community. The University of Waterloo (1998) stated that there are now 88 institutions of higher learning that make up the Canadian university community and that they offer a wide variety of educational settings. However, this number has been the subject of much discussion. Various lists, websites and statistical reports were consulted to determine the exact number of universities in Canada. Different lists cite different numbers which are

determined by how people distinguish the educational institutions. For example, some lists do not include the affiliates and some ignore other institutions. Trinity Western is the closest to being a private university in the Philippine sense. Still, a number of private university colleges exist in Canada, including those with religious affiliations.

**Institutional governance.** Jones (1997) commented that:

Canadian higher education is unique in the sense that it has a common model of university governance. (p. 4)

He elaborated that:

Almost all Canadian universities have a bicameral governance structure involving a corporate board of governors with responsibility for administrative and financial matters and a senate with responsibility for academic matters. The composition and authority of each body are specified in the institutional charter. (p. 4)

Because of the autonomy given to the institutions, their processes of decision-making still spark considerable debate and discussion among educational theorists and practitioners.

Each provincial system reflects its specific regional concerns and its historical and cultural heritage. Jones (1997) concluded that:

Rather than a single national system of higher education, the Canadian approach has involved a combination of federal government involvement and provincial/territorial initiatives. (p. 7)

However, Jones (1996) observed that by the beginning of the 1990s, Canada's various provinces were moving in different directions with regards to higher education policy.

Jones (1997) also implied that due to their independence and autonomy, most Canadian educators and administrators were not familiar with policy developments in their neighboring provinces.

The provinces and territories of Canada have developed comprehensive, diversified systems of education, designed to be universally accessible and responsive to the bilingual and multicultural character of Canadian society. They especially give high priority to post-secondary education, which is proving to be increasingly important for knowledge-based economies. Canada has a reputation among industrialized countries for spending large amounts on post-secondary education.

One of the major sources of frustration for many Canadian post-secondary institutions is the inadequate funding that they are receiving from the government. Institutions are being forced to accomplish more with less. Thus, their administrators are forced to look elsewhere for funding. Even though administrators receive criticism from students and faculty about the commercialization of the institutions, this trend is becoming increasingly acceptable and “a way of making do” for them. One major source of funds for the colleges and universities is the differential fees paid by international students. It is commonly reported in their publications that faculty members are also having difficulty in obtaining adequate research funding which is vital for achievement of their professional responsibilities.

There has also been a great focus on the thrust of internationalization by many Canadian colleges and universities. Institutions recognize their key role in developing human potential through the preparation of highly qualified individuals who have essential skills in areas which enhance Canada’s international competitiveness.

Canadian post-secondary institutions acknowledge that in order to prepare Canadians for the next century, an international dimension to education is vital. For many of them, justifying the need for internationalization represents a challenge, since the

economic and cultural advantages, which flow from student exchanges, are not always clearly understood. However, continuing the process of internationalizing Canadian universities and colleges is recognized as a necessary part of this preparation, an integral part of excellence in higher education, and an important component of the well-being of the society. OSAs can assist substantially in this activity.

### **Private Colleges in Alberta**

An amendment to the Universities Act of Alberta in 1983 created the Private Colleges Accreditation Board. Andrews, Holdaway, and Mowat (1997) described the board as consisting of

Four academic staff members of the universities, four academic staff members of the private colleges, and four members of the public, with a chair appointed by the Minister. The board is empowered to approve a program of study leading to a baccalaureate and to recommend to the Minister that the private college be given the power to grant a degree in that approved program. (p. 69)

As of 2000, there were five private colleges in the province of Alberta.

### **Brief History of Student Affairs**

Looking at the history of higher education, the roots of the evolution of OSAs can be observed. Chickering and Reisser (1993) gave this helpful overview:

For more than eight hundred years, master educators have brought their knowledge to younger scholars, most of whom were literally bachelors. Through its first six centuries, the college experience occurred in small groups, in pastoral, semi-monastic settings, and in close quarters with authorities deeply concerned about their students' moral character.... In these colleges, the president, trustees, faculty, and tutors literally stood in for parents, imposing a heavily moralistic discipline and a biblical perspective on the world. They lived with the students, taught class, conducted chapel services, and punished and prayed over backsliders. In their own way, they were united in their commitment to developing their students into respectable citizens. (pp. 427-428)

However, changing student attitudes and educational methods have prevented this traditional system from being retained. In this vein, Fenske (1989a) notes:

Surely the religiously oriented college that dominated the American higher education scene for two-thirds of its history provided a setting in which student services, although not yet differentiated and professionalized, were at their zenith in the functional sense – in the sense that they involved all participants and were inseparable from the academic program. Contemplation of these early models tempts one to speculate that only in a setting in which an absolutely unifying principle (such as a specific orthodox religion) permeates the life and aims of a college can the field of student services, with its concern for the whole person, become a full partner in the academic enterprise. But that source of unity is gone from all but a small minority of present-day colleges, a minority that constitutes only a tiny fraction of total U.S. enrollment. (pp. 25-56)

Chickering and Reisser (1993) said that:

As society became more pluralistic, secular, and technological, single-minded approaches to student behavior and course content were challenged... This set the relaxation of the in loco parentis relationship colleges had with students. (p. 431)

These developments paved the way for how student services and their academic institutions are set up today. Chickering and Reisser described this evolution in this way:

The trend toward egalitarianism in admissions paralleled a shift in faculty orientation – away from students and toward their own departments and scholarly interests. Allied neither with the trustees and presidents nor with the students, they became their own constituency group. American instructors doing graduate work at prestigious German research universities returned with their hosts' laissez-faire attitude about what students did outside the classroom. Faculty priorities shifted away from surrogate parenting. The trend was toward less constraint and more freedom of choice as the classical curriculum fragmented into proliferating disciplines. The brightest students were taught how to do scholarly research, not how to become good citizens or well-integrated human beings. Yet someone had to be responsible for enrolling students, handling discipline problems.... The deans of women and men charged with warding off the dangers of coeducation joined the first deans of students as members of the nineteenth-century college student development profession. (p. 432)



## **Professional Literature**

At the First National Convention of Deans/Directors of Student Affairs in Manila, Vargas (1995) emphasized the importance of a proper attitude towards each student, a respect for individuality, and a concern for the development of the many facets of that individuality. This approach is based on the theory that the ultimate goal of formal education is the development of the individual. The experiences of the students, not only in the educational institution, but also in the society at large, must therefore affirm the worth of individual persons, develop acceptable values, strengthen their moral autonomy and individual freedom, develop self-confidence, inspire them to achieve their best in everything they do, develop social skills and other personality-enhancing traits, and become happy and fulfilled persons.

In Vargas' (1995) view, the central focus of the administration of student affairs should be student development. Student development is a process of education conceived of as "out-of-class" activities in which the holistic development of students is based on the premise of fostering the optimal growth of the "whole." Therefore, the exercise of what they can do as individuals should be reinforced by giving them freedom to participate in various activities such as talent clubs and other organized activities. This enables them to develop personal responsibility and a greater awareness of other people. Being more conscious about other people teaches them to become acceptable persons in society.

Vargas (1995) further emphasized the continuing effect of outside classroom activities as stimulants for inductive and deductive reasoning and healthy self-worth that lead to good decision-making and judgment skills for students. He added that in order to

get the most out of student services, there must be a provision for a legislative or administrative mechanism that will lead to the improvement of programs for the students. For the OSA to flourish, its activities must have the capability to win the confidence of the academic community.

Another point of view was given by Congressman Teves (1996) who delivered a speech during the Student Government Management Program organized by the National Youth Commission of the Philippines. According to Teves, OSAs are expected to take an active part in not only addressing issues concerning students, but also nation building.

In his speech entitled “Facing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Need for cooperation among student affairs workers,” Wong (1996) said that with the higher percentage of younger persons in tertiary education, more students with lower academic standards than those in the past years are admitted into universities. As the Director for Student Affairs at Hong Kong University, Wong also called for a better understanding of these students’ characteristics, aspirations, motivations, behaviors, and values to ensure that they are appropriately prepared for tertiary education. He said that cost-effective methods have to be developed for the collection of data, and sound analytical tools have to be used to analyze the data for charting changes in the profiles of the student population. With more students and fewer staff, innovative methods are required to facilitate and/or organize leadership training among a much larger population of students.

The need to do more with less can only be achieved with new approaches, operating systems, and procedures because existing ones have reached their limits in productivity and effectiveness. These changes are made possible with new information technology. Leadership and bold steps are required to put these activities into effect: (a)

re-conceptualize the objectives and functions of major areas of work under student affairs; (b) re-structure and re-engineer existing systems into new ones that may transcend administrative and management boundaries among institutions; and (c) re-train student affairs workers to have new concepts, new outlooks, new skills, and new ways of delivering services.

For many years, the sharing of ideas among professionals who work in OSAs can be described as minimal. Exchanges among student affairs workers of different countries, even among those in the most developed countries, have not been common. In the past, this lack of exchange was not by choice. Methods of operation and organizational structure had been efficient and effective even if such information was kept within their institutions. Furthermore, the nature of information technology at that time was such that the exchange of information was inefficient and costly.

Another point was made by Gonzales (1995) who presented the following proposal at the First National Management Congress for the Youth in the Philippines:

As an institution of learning, we the administrators, faculty and staff of universities have the major responsibility to these students and the youth in general. There is a need to provide them with [sic] opportunities that will enable them to attain their full potentials [sic] as human beings. We have the tremendous responsibility to teach them, guide them, lead them, counsel them, and to provide them (with) relevant activities to help them realize the purpose and meaning of their lives.... Thus, the challenge remains to assume a proactive stance towards students/youth moral recovery. There is a need to respond to the various concerns of the students/youth and bridge it with the prevailing constraints in a changing environment. A grand vision it may seem. But like the grandeur of the ocean which cannot be seen apart from its bed of tiny sand, each one of us has a significant role to play no matter how modestly [sic] it may be perceived.

A different approach was disclosed by Atencio (1996) who reported that the

De La Salle University Student Development Office has found an innovative way of training student leaders of the university on how to manage school organizations and other activities. The project is called “The Management of Organization for Visible Effectiveness (MOVE)- Plus Emerging Leaders Curriculum.” It is aimed at developing whole persons and providing resources to church and nation. The Student Personnel Services Department of the university aims to provide formative programs and services which facilitate the institution’s goal of making their students become Christian achievers.

### **Related Studies**

Robertson (1999) studied the competencies of entry-level student affairs practitioners. She concluded that “meeting student needs” and “human relations and interpersonal skills” were the most important competency categories that were determined by the respondents. She also found that for most of the respondents, their areas of strength with regards to their profession were their “professional purpose and role identity” and “historical, philosophical and social foundations.”

In another recent study, Timko (1999) assessed student needs for educational programming in student affairs. He recommended that student affairs professionals should be encouraged to review the literature and current research in the field in order to expand and strengthen their understanding of students and student needs. He added that student affairs professionals should market themselves to the academic community as rich resources of information about students and student needs.

After conducting a study in the Philippines, Reyes (1993) recommended that private institutions should examine their objectives and goals in the conduct or delivery

of curricular and extra-curricular activities for students. He also said that OSA administrators and other concerned personnel/faculty members should work hand-in-hand to regulate or reformat student activities to make them more attractive and to emphasize the holistic development of students.

Another aspect was focused on by Morales (1995) who conducted a study of student services in La Sallete College in Isabela, Philippines. He recommended that administrators should periodically review and update policies that would intensify the different components of the Student Personnel Services, and re-align the objectives of the programs to meet the institution's philosophy, mission and vision. He also saw the need for proper coordination and dissemination of information regarding the various programs and activities to the academic departments to facilitate a better academic atmosphere in the implementation of programs and to create a well-informed academic community.

Another study by Gonzales (1990) dealt mainly with the organization of student affairs in 19 colleges and universities in the greater Manila area. An outline of the author's perceived functions of the dean was provided through the questionnaire sent to the institutions. The focus was on the dean's qualities and qualifications. Gonzales found that there was a need to "professionalize" the position since most institutions do not provide a specific task for the dean and also found that the position was too clerical in nature. An example cited was the practice of asking student organizations to produce a report. There seemed to be very little input in the organization and administration of the student activities on the part of the dean of student affairs. Gonzales' conclusion was that there was a need to further specify the role of the dean and she warned them to watch out

for what she called “occupational hazards” such as a lack of job security and misconceptions by other departments about the OSA.

A different view was given by Alciso (1987) who recommended that state universities of Region 1 in the Philippines should examine their goals and objectives with a view to giving student services proper attention. Because students are the primary clients of universities, proper attention should be given to their needs. These needs are not limited to formal instruction; there are many others such as health, discipline, and financial aid that must also be addressed properly. Alciso recommended that OSA programs should be properly planned, and that each should be given the necessary budget allocation, specialized personnel and other resources.

Because of the new challenges and increasing competition in higher education, now more than ever, students are being encouraged by educational institutions to enroll online. McRae (1999) conducted a study whose focus was online student services. The U.S. Association of Colleges and Schools criteria for accreditation of student development services was used and made the top 100 “most wired” colleges and universities as the subjects of the research. McRae found that most universities and colleges offered information online in text format regarding student services. Of these services, the highest percentage offered online were career services and financial aid. The information least offered concerned student behavior and disciplining.

### **The Need for an Office for Student Affairs**

The OSA has been a fixture in many educational institutions for a number of years. Still, there remains the lingering problem of recognition and understanding by

other constituents within the college. Sandeen (2001) attempted to clarify the purpose of student affairs organizations this way:

The purposes of any student affairs organization are to support the mission of the institution and to serve the educational and personal needs of students. These goals may include creating a supportive campus environment, improving the graduation rate, reducing student attrition, developing special educational programs, improving campus relations, increasing enrolment, responding humanely to student traumas, developing effective leadership programs, enhancing the learning environment, or providing efficient services. (p. 186)

Usually the OSA is concerned with the well-being of the whole student. Although most college or university students are adolescents and are expected to look after themselves, they will inevitably still need some form of assistance. Students coming into college or university for the first time often experience or encounter some type of confusion or anxiety and fears of being an outcast or being misunderstood by other people are high. For everyone who has gone through tertiary education, these issues are not new. For example, Arbuckle (1953) gave this description of the frustrations of incoming students and what faculty members could do to help ease the burden on both student and student affairs professionals:

The student coming to college, however, will soon find that many of his professors are much more concerned with research than they are with him; he will find that some of them make quite clear their complete lack of concern over his well-being; and he will find in college the highest point of poor teaching, since the greater proportion of our college teachers, whose full-time job is teaching, have had absolutely no preparation for the task. (p. 2)

Still, there seems to be apathy and a lack of understanding among faculty regarding these issues.

Showing their sympathy towards the student affairs professionals, Chickering and Reisser (1993) compared them with struggling students:

Like students struggling with identity and making hard choices, student development professionals must constantly choose between a demanding array of priorities. Some may feel that studying theory is low on the priority list, and applying it may be feasible in residential colleges with large counseling centers but is less possible on a bare-bones budget. Many student development staff members remain invisible to faculty, unless they serve with them on campus-wide committees. (pp. 436-437)

Contemporary youth have greater problems and more issues to deal with. Jacoby (1993) cited problems with marriages, finances, drugs, depression and alcohol as some of the issues. In fairness, most of today's faculty have recognized and have become more sensitive to their students with the help of OSAs. Sandeen (1993) stated that

The faculty represents the most important campus resource available to student affairs staff. Without the support, understanding, and participation of the faculty, no student affairs division can succeed for long. Within the faculty on every campus, there are talents that can be tapped for the benefit of students and their out-of-class education. (p. 303)

However, due to the large numbers of students who attend colleges and universities today, this burden of understanding each and every student has emphasized the importance of the OSAs. Their task of giving assistance to students has taken on a new level of importance that has resulted in the recognition of the importance of their work.

Creamer, Winston Jr., and Miller (2001) emphasized this point when they said that:

The administration of student affairs programs and services has evolved from marginal or ancillary duties of faculty members to specialized functions central to effective institutions of higher education. These functions provide vital support to college and university students through such traditional programs and services as admissions, student financial aid, new student orientation, advising and counseling, career services, campus activities, recreational sports, health and wellness education, and residential life programs... These traditional roles have been expanded in recent years to include more intentional efforts to shape the student learning environment and to make the campus a more inviting place for those who have been excluded from or ignored by higher education in the past, such as racial and ethnic minorities; nontraditional-aged students; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students; commuting students; students with disabilities; and women... They are expected to provide far-reaching services and



environmental design initiatives to remove or lessen barriers to student learning and student success. (p. 5)

### **The Different Services**

**Financial aid.** Most institutions provide a financial aid service to help their students with their educational expenses. This service is usually made up of scholarships, grants and loans. Sometimes the OSAs also provide financial planning for students while they are in college. Likins (1993) said that college presidents should have strong concerns about this type of service:

In most private colleges and universities, financial aid is no longer a marginal institutional activity for a few impoverished students. Financial aid policies and strategies are now major elements of college or university management and are [sic] therefore of keen interest to the president. (p. 86)

Shindell (1993) also pointed out the increased need for financial aid when he said that:

Students continue to absorb more costs for higher education through increased tuition, student fees, user fees, and the like. This trend creates a greater demand for student employment; a rise in student consumerism focused on cost, value, and quality; a need for more scholarships and grants; and greater dependence on loans to finance educational pursuits. (p. 174)

**Housing.** A good number of institutions try to provide residential facilities for their students but not all of them have the resources to provide these. For those institutions with residential programs, Sandeen (1996) said the OSA is:

Expected to provide a healthy [sic], clean, safe, and educationally supportive living environment that complements the academic mission of the institution. (p. 441)

He added that:

The office may have responsibility for the financial management and maintenance of residence halls as well as student room assignments, student programming, and support services. Many residential life offices also assume responsibility for

residence hall food service operations, whether they are self-operated or contracted out. Planning and supervising new construction may be part of the office's responsibilities as well...Most residential life offices are part of the student affairs organization. (p. 441)

Murrell, Denzine, and Murrell (1998) conducted a study of students residing in community college dormitories. Results showed that residence hall staff are perceived to be higher contributors to the academic climate than residential peers. In the study, suggestions were made for how community colleges can reexamine the educational potential of residence halls.

**Learning assistance.** Very often, a special office is created by colleges to assist students with their learning needs. Sohns (2001) defined the office as:

An administrative entity and/or location on a college or university campus with a primary mission to assist students to learn more in less time with greater ease and confidence and a secondary mission that extends its services and programs to faculty, staff, administration, and the surrounding community. (p. 36)

Sandeen (1996) says that these offices:

Address the needs of students who may need learning assistance, such as in math or writing. (p. 439)

He emphasizes that looking for:

Adequate resources for advising, coordinating advising with the teaching program, and linking advising to recruitment and retention efforts will remain key issues. (p. 439)

Fichten (1995) makes a clear and compelling case for the importance of a continued effort to help people with disabilities have better access to post-secondary education:

[Research] indicates college education is more important for people who have a disability. For example, while the employment figure for university graduates with disabilities is somewhat lower than their nondisabled peers, it is still

substantially greater than that of students who did not complete university, who, in turn fare better than those who never went to college. (p. 16)

**Career and personal counseling.** With regards to personal counseling, institutions now exert great efforts to help students with their personal development and everyday problems by creating counseling offices. These offices are described by Sandeen (1996) as follows:

Staffed with professionals trained and in some cases licensed to provide assistance to students, this office usually includes mental health and psychological services. Many counseling services now engage in outreach activities with other campus offices, such as residence life and academic departments. The office may also provide services to persons in crisis. (p. 440)

Career counseling is also usually a responsibility of the placement office. This service used to be limited to helping students get jobs after graduation. But Sandeen (1996) says that this aspect of the OSA has evolved into many more activities and goals:

Now the purpose of the student affairs office include helping students learn about their own interests and skills and developing plans that fit students' career and personal needs. Staff work closely with students, faculty, corporations, and community and government agencies to discover opportunities. (p. 440-441)

**Health services.** The purpose of student health services is usually to provide medical assistance to students and to promote good health habits that will prevent disease and illness. Institutions with medical schools usually have links to these health centers. Sandeen (1996) said that:

Most colleges and universities provide some form of health care for their students, whether directly through a service on campus or in conjunction with a community agency or hospital. (p. 443)

Contracting out to a local health provider has also been a common practice.

Likins (1993) said that health services have a powerful role in the institution and should be given due attention by its presidents. He emphasized that offices of health

services have the power to prevent and treat afflictions. However, they also have the power to create disaster in the campus if operations go wrong or programs are not successful. Therefore, the president must be able to monitor health services closely.

**Assistance to the disabled.** Yunker (1987) indicated that one of the most neglected issues is the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the classroom. Dixon (2001) also stressed that institutions should be responsive and that perceptions about persons with disabilities are not what they used to be:

The challenge of providing accommodations for persons with either visible or not-so-obvious disabilities can be daunting for any institution. However, as these institutions begin to understand and appreciate the enormous potential of this relatively untapped talent pool, employers will have to begin looking at persons with disabilities as people – not as a disability with a person attached. (p. 67)

Sandeen (1996) also says that these offices have the duty to improve the success of students with disabilities and learning problems. He adds that the office:

Works to improve physical conditions and understanding on the campus and in the community...the office also finds itself in an advocacy role, serving as a catalyst in discussions of academic policies and procedures that affect students with disabilities. (p. 441-442)

**International student advising.** Many colleges and universities have established offices specifically to meet the needs of international students. Dalton (1999) emphasized that:

The presence of so many international students on campus and their importance to institutional enrolment and development strategies make it important for student affairs leaders to be knowledgeable about these students as well as about the international issues and circumstances that affect them. (p. 6)

Sandeen (1996) enumerated some of the services offered by these types of offices and said that:

These offices help international students with travel, orientation, financial aid, registration, housing, counseling, and successful adjustment to the campus and community. (p. 439)

He added that sometimes there are no separate offices for this kind of service, they could be part of the academic affairs department or another division but the OSA always has a major role in its success.

### **The Need for Leadership in Student Affairs**

For a student affairs program to be successful, having an effective leader to administer the office is essential. Creamer (1989) stated that leadership is:

The greatest single deficiency in student affairs today. (p. 38)

Dassance (cited in Cohen and Brawer, 1994) recommended a list, based on a similar one prepared by Creamer (1986), of the characteristics that are needed for a person to be an effective leader of student affairs in community colleges:

1. **Knowledge about student services, including the historical aspects.** Of course the leader should be knowledgeable about student services, but having a historical perspective is also important. A solid understanding of how student services has developed and changed within the community college provides a substantive basis from which to develop an effective program of student services and also adds to the leader's credibility as a well-grounded professional.
2. **Knowledgeable about human development theory and organizational development.** The explosion of human development theory in the past thirty-five years offers a wealth of information that can be used to theoretically ground student services programs. A thorough knowledge of human development theory also provides a basis from which the student affairs leader can contribute to the improvement of the teaching/learning facets. Knowledge of organizational development is important for planning and implementing change, and appropriate change is a requirement for the long-term health of any program.
3. **Competence as a researcher.** This skill is important so that the leader can formulate important questions to be addressed about students, accurately

describe the reality of the institution, and contribute to the development of effective methods of assessment.

4. **Competence as a planner and organizational effectiveness specialist.** These skills are a key for an effective student services leader and programmer. While the ability to plan for student services is important, it is equally important for the student services leader to be concerned with the overall effectiveness of the college. This broader perspective is critical if Student Services is to be a significant factor in the total educational program. A focus on effectiveness also means a focus on outcomes, and that focus should be the ultimate guidepost for the leader.
5. **Value the goals of general education.** A case has been made elsewhere (Kuh, Shedd, Whitt, and Associates, 1987) that the goals of student services and the liberal arts are similar. The student affairs leader should be an educator who understands the broad goals of general education and can articulate that student services supports those goals.
6. **Have vision.** The student services leader needs to provide a vision for what the student services program should be. The vision will flow from personal beliefs about education and from knowledge and experience. Providing the vision is so important that it might be considered the most critical skill of an effective leader of student services, especially if the president's strength is not in student services. (pp. 285-286)

The authors acknowledged that while these characteristics may produce an effective student services leader, many other skills including budgeting, communication, and conflict resolution need to be addressed. The overall goal is to produce an effective student services program.

### **The Unrealized Potential of Student Affairs**

Although the student services profession has made great strides in the past few years to have its importance recognized, Chickering and Reisser (1993) contended that student services is capable of achieving much more. Knefelkamp (1974) said that one of the reasons that student services is not able to realize its potential is that both administrators and faculty members still do not see the work of student services as a real

part of the educational institution. Parker (1970) observed that a virtual wall separates the OSA from the rest of the institution. This has resulted in the alienation of the members of the student affairs profession.

Despite this apparent separation of student services professionals from their colleagues, student development leaders came up with a statement entitled “Toward the Future Vitality of Student Development Services” during a colloquium sponsored by the National Council on Student Development and the American College Testing Program (1985) in Traverse, Michigan. Taking on the theme of collaboration, the statement included the following goals:

This challenge emphasizes collaboration with faculty and other campus educators to incorporate student development concepts into the college mission, academic program competencies, co-curricular programs, and, ultimately, course objectives...At the local level, student development professionals should:

- a. Assume leadership roles in integrating student development concepts into college missions and expected student outcomes.
  - b. Assess student needs in terms of development.
  - c. Provide for student development through co-curricular programs.
  - d. Collaborate with instructional leaders in integrating student development competencies into academic programs and courses.
  - e. Enhance their own knowledge and competencies in student development.
- (p.5)

Keys (1990) said that some participants from the Traverse meeting along with other leaders provided one addition to the above list:

Collaborate with institutional leaders in integrating student development philosophies into all components of the institution. (p. 32)

Based on the literature, there are a number of key issues that the OSAs face or must address:

1. A lack of recognition and understanding about issues that are faced within the OSAs. For example, trying to assist or help contemporary students is not the same as it was a few years or decades ago.
2. There is a need for leadership in the OSA. A person who has competent background knowledge about the office is not enough, he or she must also be able to create suitable or better than acceptable OSA programs within the budget allocations they are given.
3. Although the gap has subsided between the OSAs and the rest of the departments, the unrealized potential of the OSA remains. There is a wealth of information about students and student needs that the OSAs continue to possess that might help their respective institutions.
4. The full integration of the OSA into the educational system is still not complete.
5. The shift in faculty orientation, away from students and towards their own departments and scholarly interests, has not helped the goals of the OSAs.
6. Based on the studies cited above, most educators and researchers agree that the primary concern of the OSAs should be the overall well-being of the student. According to them, educational institutions can achieve this by providing students with the necessary support services which are mostly the domain of the OSAs.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Research Method**

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative study explored the views of some OSA staff and students in the Philippines and Canada. Two colleges were chosen from each country. Since I wanted to compare the role of the OSA in four different colleges in two countries, it was determined that one of the best ways to obtain the opinions of OSA staff and students was to talk to them and give them the opportunity to personally share their views and experiences. In relation to this, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested that qualitative research includes the following characteristics:

- a) The natural setting is the direct source and the researcher is the key instrument.
- b) Qualitative research is descriptive.
- c) Researchers are concerned with process rather than simply outcomes or products.
- d) Researchers tend to analyze their data inductively.
- e) "Meaning" is of essential concern in the qualitative approach. (pp. 29-33)

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that by collecting and asking questions and reflecting on the data, hypotheses about concepts and their relationships can be developed:

Often, one idea or insight sparks another, directing you to look more closely at the data, to give meaning to words that seemed previously not to have meaning, and to look for situations that might explain what is happening here. (p. 43)

However, Lancy (1993) cautioned that the:

Use of the vernacular, verbatim quotes, and precisely detailed observations all serve to convey that the author is merely a 'translator,' and that the story is the natives' own. (p. 22)

Lancy also echoed Van Manen's (1990) concerns that researchers might regress to simply giving facts without working more on the analysis and presentation of data.

In order to analyze and present data more effectively, one must determine what the levels of analysis should be in the research. Lancy distinguished two levels for analyzing qualitative data:

Classics in the field, like Becker et al. (1961) and Glaser and Strauss (1967), suggest that one works from the bottom up, breaking the data into the smallest pieces possible, then systematically coding and collating all the lower level (grounded) categories, and then moving upward to seek meaningful, larger aggregates. (p. 21)

In his research about the experiences of college presidents where interviews were conducted, Charyna (1996) determined that his:

Analyses would explore first level categories and then second level themes. (p. 35)

In defining what a theme is, Van Manen (1990) suggested that theme formulation is at best a simplification. He added that themes are intransitive - not objects one encounters only at a certain point in the text - and that they are a form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand. Charyna more simply described themes as "golden threads which are woven through the experiences" of subjects to gain a better understanding of their roles.

### **Criteria for selection of participants**

There were 20 participants in the study. Half of them were from the Philippines and the other half from Canada. Along with the four OSA deans/directors, one person from each of their staff was also interviewed. The staff member was selected by the OSA dean/director.

Student participants in the study were randomly selected from an initial list of current students provided by each college OSA. To be included in the list, all of them had to have completed at least one term (or semester) with the college. Prior experience or contact with the OSAs was not used as a criterion in selecting the participants.

Staff members were selected on the basis of frequency of interaction with students. Such individuals are usually the receptionists of the OSAs who deal with students on a daily basis. They were chosen on the assumption that since they are in constant contact with the students, the information that they possess is relevant and can prove to be vital for the improvement of OSA operations in their institutions.

### **Data Collection**

All participants received a letter of introduction from me requesting their participation in the study. The letter included the purpose of the study and a general idea of the focus of the interview. (see Appendix B)

Because the participants came from two countries, the scheduling of the interviews was important. The Canadian participants were the first to be interviewed before I went to the Philippines to conduct the same interviews with their Philippine counterparts. The interviews in Canada took place during September, 2000. The interviews in the Philippines were conducted one month later in October. The Canadian interviews were done during the first few weeks of classes when students had just returned to the college. However, the Philippine interviews were made near the end of the first semester. The rainy season was almost over and most students were getting ready for their semestral break.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study in the hope that the interviewer and interviewee would be able to explore topics of mutual interest, without being impeded by preset questions. An interview guide was used to ensure that the relevant and important questions were asked. The interview was tape-recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of analysis and comparison. The interview transcripts were sent to the interviewees for verification of the accuracy of the transcription and reported statements.

I also maintained a journal to record the date, time, and duration of each interview along with the observations and thoughts gathered during the interview process.

Documents that describe the role and functioning of the OSAs were also collected.

### **Criteria for selection of colleges**

The colleges in this particular study were selected based on the fact that they are all categorized as private institutions in their respective countries. OSAs in these colleges also serve approximately the same number of students in one school year. In addition, my own college was not included in the study.

### **Pilot interview**

A pilot interview was conducted in another private college to test the interview schedule. The pilot interview proved to be very useful in helping myself get comfortable with the interview process.

A personal concern mine was the challenge of interviewing a foreigner in his native language. Being Asian, I had the task of interviewing North Americans using the English language. Although I was quite proficient in speaking English, this was the first time I had conducted such an interview. As a result of the pilot interviews, parts of the interview schedule were refined and questions started to flow more easily from me,

which was important to maintain momentum during the interview. I was also able to practice asking more open-ended questions and prevent myself from leading interviewees into answers. The pilot interview was also a good exercise in generating questions from the answers given by the respondents. This was very helpful when the actual interviews were conducted as it created more data for the study.

### **Data analysis**

The responses of the participants during personal interviews were transcribed and later analyzed for categories (phenomena) based on content and the observations made by the researcher in these themes. Deductive and inductive methods enabled me to identify general themes. A journal containing records of the interview including thoughts and observations was also used in the process of theme identification.

### **Trustworthiness**

Guba and Lincoln (1981) identified four aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The study addressed these aspects in the ways described below.

Credibility refers to the correctness of the data gathered in the study with respect to reality. In order to attain a better understanding of the data, interpretations emanating from the transcripts of the interview process were discussed, confirmed, and checked with the students as well as with the OSA deans/directors and staff.

Transferability is concerned with how the findings of a particular study can be applied to other situations. While referring to “external validity”, Rudestam and Newton (1992) said:

The qualitative study emphasizes the “thick description” of a relatively small number of subjects within the context of a specific setting. Samples can change as the study proceeds, but generalizations to other subjects and situations are always modest and mindful of the context of individual lives. (p. 39)

The descriptions obtained from this study only reflect student services in the four participating colleges; it is up to the readers to determine whether the findings are applicable to their own situations.

Dependability refers to the steadiness or reliability of the data under similar circumstances. The study used the personal interview method which enabled participants to describe their experiences and tell stories about the functions of the OSA from their points of view. An audit trail composed of interview data, notes, and observations provided substantial information that was organized to enable the researcher to look at crucial points during the study. Morse (1998) described an audit trail as a:

Careful documentation of the conceptual development of the project that should leave an adequate amount of evidence that interested parties can reconstruct the process by which the investigators reached their conclusion. (pp. 76-77)

Confirmability focused on the capability of verifying the data. The triangulation of data from interviews, documents, journal notes, and personal reflections helped in the process of verification.

In addition to these four aspects, two types of validity defined by Maxwell (1992) were assured through the procedures described above:

1. Descriptive validity. Providing a factual account, without distorting what was seen or heard.
2. Interpretive validity. Seeking to “comprehend phenomena not on the basis of the researcher’s perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situation being studied...grounded in the language of the people...rely[ing] on their own words.” (pp. 285-297)

## **Ethical Considerations**

In accordance with the policy of the University of Alberta, the research proposal was submitted for review and approval to the Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Educational Policy Studies. The ethical requirements were satisfied as follows:

### **Who are the participants and how will they be involved in your research?**

Before the formal part of the interviews were held, I met with each participant to get to know him or her personally. I wanted the interviewees to get comfortable with the process and to explain to them what the study is about. I introduced myself as a doctoral degree student at the University of Alberta doing a comparative study of student affairs in private colleges in Canada and the Philippines.

### **How will the nature and purpose of the research be explained to participants?**

During this first meeting, I presented to the interviewees the letter of introduction. This letter contained various facts about the research and an invitation to participate in the study.

**How will informed consent of participants be obtained?** The OSA deans/directors were presented with a consent form to sign which declared that they were willing to participate in the study. There were also consent forms for students and their parents. Self-addressed and stamped envelopes were also included for the prospective participants' and their parents' convenience. A consent form for the parents was included since some of the students might have been below 18 years old which is the age of consent in both Canada and the Philippines. Fortunately, all student participants were

above the age of 18 years at the time of the interview so I did not need to send out the parent consent forms.

**What provision will be made for exercising the right to opt out at any time and how will confidentiality and anonymity be maintained?** The confidentiality of all participants' identities, their answers, and their opinions was guaranteed, and they were given the opportunity to opt out at any time. If one of the participants decided to opt out, all documents or tapes that had connected them to the study were destroyed immediately. After the study was completed, all tape recordings and all notes on which personal identification was made were destroyed.

**Is deception or risk involved in the project?** No deception or risk was involved in the project. The study hoped to benefit both participants and researcher in terms of the insights, findings and new information that was gained.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Charter College**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data gathered from “Charter College.” Data were obtained through interviews with two members of the Office of Student Affairs and three full-time students.

#### **Overview of the college**

Charter College is situated in a city in the northern area of the Philippines. The city is a bustling trading center with a population of approximately 250,000 people. It is also considered the education capital of the region, since most of the students seeking a college education in the province and surrounding areas attend its five colleges and universities.

Charter College was founded in 1984. Starting out as a vocational school, Charter College became a pioneer when information technology (IT) became an important component of the country’s educational system. The next few years saw the college expand into a multi-program institution with IT as the programming core. Enrolment increased from 100 students to the 8,000 that it presently has. The college employs approximately 140 faculty members in addition to the 150 who comprise the administration and support staff. From three classrooms, the college has expanded to seven buildings.

The college is affiliated with the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities (PACU) and is accredited by the Philippine Association of Colleges and

Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA). Other academic affiliations are with the associations in the National Information Technology Movement, the Philippine Association for Teacher Education (PAFTE), and the Accountancy and Hotel Management organizations. The college is under the supervision of both the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

The major courses being offered in the college are those in Information and Computing Technology as well as the Engineering courses, specifically Computer Engineering and Electronics-Communications Engineering. More than fifty percent of students are enrolled in its IT programs, specifically the B.Sc. in Computer Science and its other courses such as Management Information Systems, Information Technology, and so on.

Charter College students are similar to other college students in the Philippines who have an average age of 16 to 20 years. Most of them undergo about 2 years of preparatory school. By the time they reach the ages of 6 or 7, they attend primary school which lasts 6 years. At age 12 or 13, students move on to 4 years of secondary school. All students attending college should have finished 4 years of secondary school before they are admitted. Students from Charter College came mostly from the lower to middle income families and from within the province - although recently there has been a growth in the number of students coming from the neighboring provinces as well.

The college is owned and operated by a single family that also acts as its Board of Trustees. For guidance on the daily operations of the college, the President receives the

advice of a management committee composed of the deans and the heads of various departments. There are also written policies on every aspect of the college's operations.

The office of the President - through the Vice-President for Human Resources Development, deans, and department heads - supervises all faculty and non-faculty personnel. One of these department heads is the Director for Student Affairs.

### **The Office of Student Affairs (OSA)**

At Charter College, the OSA consists of the director and two full-time staff members. In the Guidance office, there are three guidance counselors. These offices hire three student assistants every semester to assist them in record keeping. Charter College literature describes the existence of the OSA as a means to support the teaching, research, and public service functions of the college by providing programs, services and educational experiences that promote the academic success of their students and enhance the quality of campus life. Personnel from the OSA contended that these programs were designed to support the moral, spiritual, social, and physical growth and development needs of the students in a healthy, safe, and intellectually challenging environment.

Personnel from Charter College's OSA claimed that they directly support the educational goals of the college. In their view, OSA personnel helped students integrate classroom experiences with their extra-curricular experiences. They strongly supported the notion that all members of the college community should be involved in activities to develop discipline and important educational experiences for students. Discussion and consensus on the development of discipline and extra-curricular experiences, according to them, are essential to the formation of students who will respond to the challenges posted by Philippine society and the rest of the world.

## **The interviews**

The participants were involved in one semi-structured interview that was arranged to suit their schedule. The interviews for Charter College were conducted during the month of October 2000 and were guided by the research questions below:

1. What are the OSA staff members' perceptions about the effectiveness of their office with respect to advice about, and assistance with, the following functions?
  - (a) financial aid
  - (b) housing
  - (c) learning assistance
  - (d) career and personal counseling
  - (e) health services
  - (f) assistance to the disabled
  - (g) international student advising
2. What are the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the same functions stated above?
3. (a) What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties?
  - (b) What changes would the OSA directors recommend for improving these relationships?
4. What is the extent of agreement between the perceptions of the OSA members and students about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the functions stated above?

It should be noted that the interviewees, particularly the members of the OSA, were also asked about their professional backgrounds and their day to day activities to provide me with a deeper understanding of their views and opinions.

### **The OSA environment**

The following segment provides some background information about the circumstances that surround the OSA at Charter College. It is meant to create a picture of OSA operations and how it is viewed and understood at Charter College.

Two members from the OSA were interviewed for about an hour each. For this study, the Director for Student Affairs was given the pseudonym of Grace and the staff member was named Nanette. Grace had been working with the college for approximately 5 years while Nanette had been employed for about 4 years. The OSA Director for Charter College was chosen for meeting the standards set by the college administration and the professional standards imposed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

In describing how she acquired her position in the college, Grace recounted how she was hired to be one of the staff members of the OSA:

I used to work at a bank, I got bored and started looking for another job. Fortunately for me, I had a very good friend whose family owned a college in our city and this friend informed me of a vacancy. Not one to back out from the opportunity I applied for the job and before I knew it, I was a staff member of the OSA.

She became one of the first OSA staff members of Charter College. At that time, Grace recounted how small the OSA was. She remembered that very few people knew what the office was for and what its role was in the college. For three years after she got the staff job, Grace said that her predecessor worked hard to build the OSA. Slowly, the

OSA was able to gain a bigger voice during the weekly administrative meetings of the college and the importance of the OSA became more apparent to the administration. She added that:

When I started, the college had about 3,000 students, now it has grown to 8,000. Some attribute this to the tremendous reputation that the college has gained, some say that Charter College takes care of its students better. There can be a lot of arguments on that, we are just happy that people have recognized the work we do and how we help the college.

When asked about her daily activities, Grace observed:

The students just keep on coming, the events are always coming up, my day just never seems to stop!

Her days were filled with numerous meetings with concerned parents, student organizations, problem students and helping out with other college activities:

It sounds so hectic and tiring when I talk about my job, but somehow and somehow, I do find the energy to do it. I guess I love my work, that's why!

Grace considered student orientation, student elections, job placement seminars and the job fair as the major activities of her office. She regarded monitoring student attendance and talking with parents and students as her major daily activities. Due to the number of activities handled by the office everyday, the director was assisted by full time staff members and a few working students. It was the duty of the director to oversee the performance of his or her staff members for the smooth implementation of the OSAs goals and objectives.

The two OSA staff members of Charter College admitted that they did not have any background knowledge about the kind of work involved in the OSA when they first applied. They explained that due to the difficulties in finding a job in the Philippines, they immediately accepted the next job available, which happened to be the OSA staff

job. At the time of interview, both had already spent at least two years with the OSA and declared that they had found “fun, fulfillment, and excitement” in their work.

Grace’s eyes seemed to glow when the interview with her shifted to the students:

Well I can say this about students, no matter who you talk to, you always end up with an interesting conversation.

Having been in the student affairs profession for a few years now, Grace said that it never got tiring and that she always looked forward to the challenge of another semester or another school year. According to her, due to the hectic schedules that they have, sometimes the semester just goes by without them even barely noticing it:

I’ve been working here for about 5 years now if I’m not mistaken and it’s been a real joy. Part of it is the work and most of it is the satisfaction I get with helping and dealing with the students. Honestly, the 5 years feels more like 8-10 months.

Readily admitting that dealing with students is the “most demanding” of all their tasks, Nanette recalled with lightheartedness most of the encounters she has had with students. She claims to have heard “all the excuses in the world” when interviewing students about their absences.

Nanette said:

Although we mostly deal with student problems like absences, academic difficulties, fights, family problems, and others, a lot of them have also become our friends and they have kept us in touch with the rest of the student population.

She added:

I hope you do not get us wrong by implying that we hate our job because all we get are problems. We have to remember that we still do a variety of services and programs; it is just that these student problems are always the ones that seem to capture the limelight. We always try to stay positive whenever possible and try to give our students every opportunity available to help themselves reach their own particular goals. Personally, I even thank them for trusting us with their personal

problems and having opened our eyes to the realities of our world today. I wouldn't have realized the things that go on with students and their families today if it were not for them.

Parental communication is an important part of the job for Grace. A 10 a.m. appointment was set with Grace at the OSA office for me to conduct our interview. The designated time came and went and she still could not accommodate me; the reason was that there was a long line of parents that day. It was almost the middle of the semester and the midterm examinations were two days away. It was, according to her, "one of those forget-about-a- coffee-break days." What was normally a waiting area for students waiting for their turn to consult with the OSA and the Registrar's office was transformed into a waiting area for parents. When asked why there were so many parents waiting to either talk to her or the Registrar, Grace explained that these were normally the days when parents would have received some of the letters from the OSA informing them of the absences attributed to their sons or daughters. She said:

Some of them are just shocked, many of them are worried, and a few of them would defend their sons or daughters' absences. Anyway, the important thing is that they are being informed and all of them are appreciative of the fact that we spend money and take some time and effort to make sure that they are kept abreast of how their children are doing in the college.

She also explained that some parents were there to seek help with the administration to allow for an extension of the fees schedule:

The economy has been hit really hard lately and many parents are having trouble making the payment deadlines. To respond to these constant problems, the administration grants parents extensions on the payments on the condition that they would have to personally appear in the campus to sign the extension agreement.



While meetings with the students are “a mixture of anticipation, joy, and frustration,” Nanette says that she found that meeting with parents was a very different experience. She added:

When parents come over to our office, more often than not there is some trouble involved or at least a complaint.

Even though parents are very involved during Charter College’s recognition day, when honored students and scholars are officially recognized, a lot of the other parents come to the college to visit and check on their children, their financial status, and even their grades.

When asked what she thought about parents and their visits to the office, she had this to say:

Parents usually come in to check on their children. I guess that since they are paying for the tuition fees, they want to make sure that their hard-earned money is going where it is supposed to. Too many cases have come up when parents, to their disgust, would find out that they have been tricked by their children into paying tuition when in fact they were no longer attending college or were just pretending to attend college. Some parents, on the other hand, just want to check on their son or daughter’s grades, and some would even travel from remote areas to visit these students. So there are really various reasons why parents come and visit, and we’re just happy to be sitting here waiting for them to come.

Nanette then explained that parent-staff communication has improved greatly through cellular phone technology, particularly in the area of text messaging which she said has become very popular and useful in the country. In 1996, the Philippine government liberalized the telecommunications industry by ending the long monopoly held by the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company or PLDT. This enabled other companies to immediately make phone lines available even in the very remote parts of the rural areas. Nanette recounts with frustration:

We have heard of all the horror stories of families not getting their phone lines until 20 years later! With the new phone companies, households now get telephone lines within weeks. The liberalization of the telecommunications industry has opened the doors of communication between the OSA and the parents too. Now, some of them do not even need to travel great distances anymore just to check on their children, they can simply make a phone call. Recently, the sudden boom in the use of text messaging using digital cellular phone networks have also been advantageous for both parents and the OSA.

### **Interview findings**

In order to answer the first two research questions posed in chapter 1 and reiterated on page 47 of this chapter, this section was organized around the seven major functions of Student Services as identified in the literature. Document analysis and interviews with the OSA director (Grace), staff member (Nanette) and three full-time students formed the basis of the data collection. Ferdie, Susan, and Jojo are the three full-time students who were interviewed at Charter College for this study. They are all registered students of Charter College and have all been with the college for at least a year.

**Financial aid.** Grace readily admits that there is not much financial aid available for their students. Although there are internal scholarships and a few external scholarships available, these are still not enough to support the growing number of college students. She said:

The administration recognizes the need for this and, believe me, we have spent some hours at the board room trying to come up with an idea or an arrangement that would be feasible for the college. Unfortunately we have not been successful so far.

One thing that she cites as unique about their students, even all Filipino students in general, is their resiliency. She admires not only the students but, more importantly, the parents as well. For her, it is unbelievable how families, despite all their hardships

and financial difficulties, manage to financially support themselves and still afford to send their sons and daughters to college. She added:

We have not heard too many complaints from students about this, I think they understand why the college refuses to offer them loans. They know how it is in the country; it's either you or your family pay the tuition or you try to get a scholarship.

Grace admitted that the closest Charter College can get, with regards to financial aid, are the internal scholarships that it provides to usually “poor but deserving” students.

When students were asked what they had to say about financial aid, all of them said that they wish that there were funds that they could access but understood why the college does not offer them. Ferdie said:

As much as we would like to be able to obtain financial aid, we also understand where the college is coming from. I think they are just not sure of how they may be able to collect unpaid loans if ever a student suddenly decides to drop out of school. It can be quite difficult to trace people here. But still, I really hope that the college can find a way around the problem and offer it to students. There are still honorable people like myself who know how to face our obligations and responsibilities.

In contrast, Susan insisted that there should be more funding for students who are experiencing financial difficulties. She cited the cases of “poor but deserving” students. These people, according to her, want to finish their degrees but financial difficulties surrounding their respective families sometimes prevent them from finishing college. She added that most of them are forced to quit college and get a job. When asked about the possibility of both working and studying, she replied:

I have friends who do that [but] unfortunately the pay does not make much of a difference. You have to remember that to get a decent paying job here, you must at least be a college graduate.

Jojo agreed that there should be more financial aid available to students but is also well aware of Ferdie's observations about the college's concern for trying to recover the money they have loaned to students. In his words:

It is indeed very risky for the college. If I were in their position, my mindset would be exactly the same.

**Housing.** The OSA director confirmed that during the time of the interview for this research, the OSA was already considering accrediting some of the boarding houses around the campus. These boarding houses are run by individuals or families who live in the vicinity of the college. According to her, some things she would take into consideration in accrediting these houses will be the cleanliness of the house, the cost of rent, and the amenities they provide. Grace said:

We at the OSA still dream of someday having a dormitory run by the college. But obviously due to the lack of space around the campus, such a building is still an improbability at this point.

Grace added, based on casual conversations she had with her fellow OSA directors in the city, that most colleges also have their own problems with regards to providing good housing referrals for their students. Usually, students are left to themselves to search for good housing or whatever they consider to be a "good fit" for them.

Jojo and Ferdie lived in boarding houses adjacent to the college campus. Both said that they would be interested in living in a college-accredited boarding house or dormitory only if they offered cheaper rates. Other than that, they were both willing to remain where they were just so they could stay within the limited budget they were provided by their parents. Sanitation, health issues, and convenience are, according to them, "not too much of a big concern."

Susan has to commute daily for about 30-40 minutes each way to get to and from the college. Although she wants to stay in a boarding house near the college, her parents insist on her commuting everyday. She said:

I guess my parents [were] willing to spend some extra money as long as it meant that they got to see me everyday after classes. I really believe that the fact that I am a woman made them also think twice about letting me live in a boarding house. I think that if I were my older brother, they wouldn't have much of a problem letting me live on my own, even for at least five days a week.

Susan has an older brother and she confirmed that her parents did let him stay in a boarding house in the city. If she was given the opportunity to live in a boarding house, Susan said, she would consider the cost of the boarding house and amenities as her primary factors in choosing a place to stay.

**Learning assistance.** Grace said that learning assistance is a relatively new type of service that they have been developing with various student organizations in the college. She described the new system as follows:

Recently, the administration has shown growing concern towards students, especially the freshmen, who drop out of college after the first semester. We found out that along with financial difficulties, learning problems were the major factors in their decision to leave. Student organizations have recognized this too and so we came to develop a little program where freshmen are invited by these organizations for tutorials in math, English etceteras. The guidance office also offers study techniques and time management sessions. We have not seen huge success in this area yet; my problem is that students are not aware of these programs. We are trying to make the faculty take an active part in this program, I see them as the key, after all, they are the ones who know firsthand the students having difficulties.

It must be mentioned here that in the Philippines, students are exposed to learning assistance programs only during college. Secondary schools, whether public or private, usually do not have such programs in place. Parents, if they are willing to spend extra

money, have the option to hire private personal tutors to help their children with their class subjects.

With regards to learning, all three students were aware that some organizations offer tutorials in certain subjects. Jojo said that it was very helpful for him:

I think that these programs [such as] the math clubs and computer clubs have really helped me during my first year. I was really having problems adjusting; the level of math that I took in high school did not prepare me for this. Usually these sessions are offered before major exams. The techniques I learned from those sessions helped me through those tests.

Susan said that the time management sessions were helpful. She recalled:

Out of desperation during my first year, I attended the study techniques and time management sessions. I picked up some good advice and I would definitely recommend it to anyone who is interested.

On the other hand, Ferdie said that he had no knowledge of these learning services.

**Career and personal counseling.** Grace said once again that awareness is her greatest enemy. She laments:

We do everything we can to let them know that the OSA, together with the Guidance office, is around to give them help. We do it during the orientation, we post messages on the various bulletin boards, and one time we have even gone as far as to visit classrooms just to let them know that we are here and that this is one of the things that we do.

When asked why they stopped doing the room-to-room visits just to raise awareness on the part of the students, the OSA director replied that with the limited staff she has, including that of the guidance office, going from room to room became too time-consuming. She said:

We used to be able to do it before with only three thousand students, but now that we have close to eight thousand students plus new buildings with more rooms, the task [has] become difficult.

According to Grace, the OSA of Charter College “gambles” on just presenting most of its services during the orientation days when students are asked to attend a presentation by the different departments during the start of classes. Asked to explain what she meant by “gambles,” Grace said that not all students are able to attend because they were either absent for that particular orientation day or they enrolled late. In apparent frustration, the OSA director said:

There really are a number of reasons why we cannot reach out to every student. Sometimes its timing, maybe bad luck, or just plain apathy on the part of the student.

However, despite the difficulties she has been encountering in making students aware of this service, Grace claims that the Guidance office still reports that there are still students who regularly visit them to share their concerns and problems:

These are usually students with academic or personal problems who are trying to vent out their frustration and just need someone to talk to.

The three students said that they were all aware that the guidance office did offer these services to students. All of them said that they had not needed to take advantage of these services. However, they were interested in career counseling – which, according to Ferdie, “might help just before I graduate from the college.”

Jojo remembered recommending to a friend who was undergoing some personal hardships that he should seek the help of one of the counselors:

He was in trouble, he was obviously losing sleep, cutting classes, and was generally listless. I found the guts to talk to him and try to make him open up, but I realized that I was not equipped for that. So I was able to convince him to go to the guidance office. I really do not know the specifics of what happened after that, I think they called up his parents. But after a few weeks, I saw some improvement and he eventually returned to normal. I do not know exactly what they did, but at least it worked. Even though I did not have a direct hand in actually getting him

back to his usual self, I still privately take credit for that, along with the guidance office of course. It was one of my proudest accomplishments. I think he will be graduating in October, just a semester later than his classmates. It could have been worse.

Ferdie said that he has seen a lot of improvement in the guidance office since he first arrived in the college. He has noticed that the office was now bigger and that there were more staff members than before. The three of them have never really felt the need to obtain these kinds of services except, according to Ferdie, “unless I really and desperately needed to go there.”

**Health Services.** The OSA believes that they have done well enough in providing sufficient health services for the students. However, Grace reiterates that:

Health services is something that we are still trying to develop, we have put just enough facilities and equipment to meet the requirements. We have learned what health problems or inconveniences students usually encountered and have adjusted our clinic accordingly.

She further explained that if their college clinic’s health services were to be compared to other institutions, which had medical schools and hospitals in their own campuses, she would be the first to concede that they do not match the capability, nor the resources that these schools make available for their students. The clinic also takes pride in the aesthetic beauty they have added to the place:

Most other schools would not even think about putting wallpaper and an air-conditioner in their clinics just to make their students feel comfortable. That would just be too expensive for them! But not for us, we feel that it is important to make the students feel at home while they are there. Being under some form of duress or discomfort is bad enough.

She also claims that for a college that does not offer any medical or health courses, the college clinic ranks as “one of the best, if not the best, in the city.”



Two of the students, Ferdie and Susan, admitted that they did not even know where the college clinic was located. On the other hand, Jojo remembers their location quite well since he acknowledged that he had to seek its assistance for dizziness and nausea. He recounted:

The nurses were very helpful and the clinic was air-conditioned too which was great. I do not see that often in or local clinics. I even noticed that the place even has good wallpaper and that the cleanliness and comfort of the clinic made me feel better knowing that these people were serious about health, unlike some public hospitals I have been to.

Ferdie and Susan knew that the college had a clinic somewhere since they heard from their classmates that there was one. But once again, they never felt the need to know where it was, since they have not yet encountered or been in a situation where they absolutely needed the services of the clinic.

**Assistance to the disabled.** Another form of student service that has seemed to frustrate the OSA director is the lack of assistance available for the disabled:

As incredible as it may seem, you and I know that hardly any Philippine structure or building ever considered accessibility for the disabled. Maybe the newer ones that were built in the last two decades did, but I am sure a lot of our buildings are still not friendly to the disabled. Take our buildings for instance. These are relatively new, having been up for less than a decade. There are six or seven buildings but only one has an elevator. Students have to take the stairs, sometimes as high as five floors. It's partly the fault of the college and it is also partly the fault of the government for not forcing or requiring easy access for students.

With regard to helping disabled students in the classroom, Grace admitted:

There is no program in place yet for students suffering some kind of disability.

This seemed to be one of the shortcomings of the college that Grace acknowledges she has a limited capability to overcome. However, according to her, they are lucky at the moment because there are hardly any disabled students in the college.

None of the three student interviewees had a disability; nonetheless, their opinions were sought on the subject. All three of them were consistent in saying that there were few, or no special programs for disabled students that they were aware of. As Susan described it:

First of all, I only see a handful of access ramps. You also have to remember that we have five-storey buildings here and only one of them has an elevator. I do not know how a student using a wheelchair would be able to attend his class in the other buildings.

Jojo added:

Personally, I do not think that the college will be prepared if, for example, a blind person tries to enroll and asks what kind of programs will be available for him or her. I really think nobody will be able to do anything about it and will be forced to turn them away.

**International student advising.** OSA director Grace remembered a time when they had two Korean students attending the college. At that time, they just had the Registrar's office to deal with their concerns and it must be mentioned here that the OSA was still in its infancy stage.

Grace said:

Fortunately, those two Korean students were very good. They got along and adjusted well to the weather, the students and the culture. I personally got to have a chat with them a couple of times along the hallway. Their English was very good if I may add.

Grace also mentioned that these two Korean students particularly enjoyed the weather which was almost always warm.

With regard to the possibility of setting up a formal office for future international students, Grace sadly stated:

Unfortunately at this point, we have not set up a separate office handling international students. The administration has not felt the need to create one yet since international students come few and far between here in our college.

In the city where Charter College is located, this kind of service is virtually non-existent, especially since all students currently enrolled are Filipino citizens. All three students were unanimous in declaring that they would recommend that the college have some special program just in case some international students enrolled in the college. Jojo just wants a “standby program just in case they need it.” As Ferdie sees it:

If I were an international student, I would not enroll in a college that does not have any office that is there primarily for my well-being and [to] look after how I am adjusting to the country and the culture. Although I have no experience in being an international student myself, I am almost sure that any student would appreciate something like that.

### **The relationship between the OSA and other college departments**

This section of the chapter addresses the third research question which asks: What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties? This information was derived from the interview with Grace. The final part of the chapter addresses the question: What could be done to improve the relationships with other faculty and administration?

At the time of the interview, the OSA director had held the job for a little over three years. She took over from a friend who had been promoted to a higher position in the college. As it is their routine, Grace says that the college president meets with all department heads and deans every Monday morning. During this meeting, discussions are made about the operations of the college and new matters are brought up with the group. According to Grace, the OSA had modest beginnings:

During those meetings when I was still an assistant for my friend, the OSA had a very small voice. It was not that my friend was not taking care of the office or not speaking out, it was just that I felt that we were not being given enough importance. At that time, I remember, it was always about acquiring the right equipment to make sure that we match or overtake the other colleges. You also have to understand that the office was only about a few years old at that time, nothing much has been set up yet, we had a manpower of three which already included the head.

But her friend, who graduated from a university in a northern city, had this system she learned from her alma mater that she wanted to implement in the college:

At that time, we were very problematic and irritated about student absences and the parents who would come to our office complaining or worried about their sons or daughters. Cases were rampant of students who were pretending to go to college when all they were doing was just getting their allowances and hanging out in the city all day, some never even bothered to go to school and some had failing grades. With the approval of the college president, what we did was to set up a system where faculty will coordinate with the OSA in monitoring student absences. If a student were to incur three consecutive absences or have accumulated five absences, their class cards would be submitted to the OSA. The OSA would then write to the parents informing them of these absences and at the same time, the students would have to go to the OSA to explain their absences before they could reclaim their class cards and attend class again. There was a lot of confusion in the beginning but it caught on, this system also meant a lot of processing on our part. It was a source of irritation from both the faculty and students. But then we noticed that parents were beginning to appreciate what we did. Most would visit us to thank us; some would even go as far as to send us fruit or gifts and you have to remember that these are not exactly rich people. The college president also noticed it and from then on, I believe, the OSA became a bigger player in the college.

This phase in the growth of the OSA meant a lot of work according to Grace, but it also meant a stronger voice in the meetings:

It was very exciting for us because we could feel the growing importance that was being given to our office. I think everybody realized that we were there speaking for the students and the parents too.

The OSA director added this observation:

I think the deans also realized that we were a very important source of information about what and how students were thinking. Inevitably during our

conversations with students, we would come across a few complaints that students would vent out. Because of the OSA, a lot of unscrupulous misdeeds being done by some faculty members were uncovered, parents also had a lot of input for us that we put into good use. For example, a lot of them were complaining about expenses left and right for expensive equipment, or a field trip, or a costume to be used for some presentation. Sometimes the boardroom would just be in awe of what we were saying and could not believe it. But because of the information that we had, the administration was able to correct things that needed correcting.

This was when they realized that the OSA was finally being seen as a very useful department in the college. Grace said that they were able to gain their confidence as a department, they were able to gather courage to request for more expenses from the administration (e.g. a bigger office, new equipment, additional staff etc.).

In this context, we became the medium between the students and parents on one hand, and the administration on the other. With this recognition of our work also came bigger responsibilities, we were given a bigger hand in handling the food services, the library and in setting up the guidance office. You must understand that the guidance office was virtually non-existent when I first arrived. My friend got promoted about 3 years ago with the OSA already running well and recognized by the deans as an important partner in carrying out their jobs.

### **Suggested changes**

This section provides the responses to the question: What changes would the OSA directors recommend to see that these relationships are improved? Again, only the interview with Grace is incorporated to answer this question.

When asked if she was satisfied with the OSAs relationships with the different departments of the college, the OSA director replied that she was “happy and contented with it, but not yet fully satisfied.” When requested to explain what she meant, Grace said:

Whenever I go to conferences and seminars, I naturally get the chance to interact and have conversations with my fellow colleagues from OSAs in other colleges. Naturally, I always try to compare their concerns in their own offices with our own situation here in the college. Honestly, our OSA is better off than most of

them are. Unfortunately for these people, some of their colleagues and administrators still regard them strictly as an expense for the college and not much use at all. I must tell you that I was really surprised when I first heard that, but for those who have been in the OSAs for quite some time now, it is unfortunate that they have grown to accept the way they are viewed and until today, are still battling to get some attention.

As for her OSAs own situation, Grace hinted that lately, some fellow administrators have been losing interest in helping the OSA. Grace explained:

What I mean is that somehow they are not as curious about the operations of the OSA as they used to be. They might be busy, I am not sure. As the OSA operations grew, I was expecting them to be more involved but the reverse seems to have happened. I admit that the faculty is still complying well with the class card and absences system.

This is the new challenge that Grace set for herself:

The more that the OSA has grown, I think the greater need to regain the attention of my colleagues and possibly re-educate them about what we are doing.

She acknowledged that the administration still meets every week and that the OSAs voice in these meetings is stronger than ever, but:

The tremendous growth of the college has made everyone involved very busy and focused on a lot of other concerns.

When asked if she thought that the success of the college did her department more harm than good, Grace replied:

Every organization definitely wants to grow, in this era of competition among educational institutions here we cannot afford to sit back. But at the same time, we also cannot afford to forget what got us to where we are. I truly believe that the OSA had a huge contribution to our continuing success and for us to stay this way, the administration and faculty should not overlook the path we took to get here.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided the results of interviews conducted at Charter College. Two OSA members were asked about their opinions of the services described in the first

research question. They were given the opportunity to also express their views on their relationships with the college administration regarding how their work was being recognized and accepted. Based on the comments they made, the OSA was very happy that they have made great strides in their relationship with the rest of the institution. Despite the heavy workload they had, they still hinted that they needed to do and learn more. On the other hand, three students were also interviewed about their opinions on the same student services outlined in the second research question. While the students were a little satisfied with the student services (e.g. health, counseling, learning), they still suggested a variety of opinions and proposals that they believed could help improve the OSA.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Park Square College**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data gathered from “Park Square College.” Data were obtained through interviews with two members of the Office of Student Affairs and three full time students.

#### **Overview of the college**

Park Square College is located in the northern Philippines. Park Square College was founded at a time when the Philippines was going through a recovery period during the aftermath of World War II. Young men and women from the province were all eager to go back to school to prepare themselves for what seemed like an uncertain future, considering that the country was still in ruins.

A group of young men saw the opportunity to serve the post-war students of the province by establishing a college specializing in commerce and business administration. It was their contention that since their city had always been the economic center of the province, the youth should be prepared to lead in commerce and business. Hence, Park Square College was conceived. Because of the impressive performance of its graduates, the college drew students to its portals easily and its enrolment (which was just over a hundred at the start) grew phenomenally so that peak enrolments reached 14,000 full-time students.

Park Square is a private college that has a board composed of the family members of the original founders. The board elects one of its members to be president and run the daily operations of the college. It is now pursuing its dream of achieving university



status. To attain this, it applied for accreditation in 1988. It has recently pre-evaluated its resources, facilities, and performances and is confident that given its achievements it will be able to finally attain its goal. This confidence and high hopes come from its awareness that the college has already established its prestige in providing quality education to its students, and it has manifested its high academic standards with accredited programs that produced elite students and high passing rates in national licensure examinations. Park Square has a host of alumni holding key or responsible positions in government, in corporations, and in entrepreneurial ventures in various parts of the world.

### **The Office of Student Affairs (OSA)**

According to Park Square literature, the OSA aims to help students acquire the values and skills necessary to make adequate choices, plans, and meaningful decisions. It strives for a cooperative undertaking of all academic and non-academic personnel working together, organizing their knowledge and resources to create a better world for the student and others. The Office of Student Affairs sees itself as a complement to the life of the student outside the formal and often compulsory activities of the college. It views the environment outside the classroom as one of the most fertile learning fields available to a student. Such experience enables the student to appraise his views and values and to learn life skills even from negative situations.

Aside from the director, the OSA has a staff composed of two receptionists, two guidance counselors and two student assistants.

### **The interviews**

The participants were involved in one semi-structured interview that was arranged to suit their schedule. The interviews for Park Square College were conducted during the

month of October 2000. As stated in chapter 1, this study was guided by the research questions below:

1. What are the OSA staff members' perceptions about the effectiveness of their office with respect to advice about and assistance with the following functions?

- (a) financial aid
- (b) housing
- (c) learning assistance
- (d) career and personal counseling
- (e) health services
- (f) assistance to the disabled
- (g) international student advising

2. What are the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the same functions stated above?

3. (a) What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties?

(b) What changes would the OSA directors recommend for improving these relationships?

4. What is the extent of agreement between the perceptions of the OSA members and students about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the functions stated above?

It should be noted that the interviewees, particularly the members of the OSA, were also asked about their professional backgrounds and their day-to-day activities to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of their views and opinions.

## **The OSA environment**

Two members from the OSA were interviewed for about an hour each. The Director for Student Affairs was given the pseudonym of Rose and a staff member was named Rudy. Rose had been with the college for approximately seven years while Rudy had been with the organization for about four years. Three students were interviewed at Park Square for this study. Michael, Joshua and Ashley were all registered students of Park Square and had all been with the college for at least a year.

Rose worked as a Guidance Counselor before she became the OSA Director for Park Square. She graduated Cum Laude at St. Louis University in Baguio City, earning a degree in Psychology. Before going to Park Square to become a guidance counselor, she worked at a local utility company as a Human Resource Assistant. Having been well trained in dealing with different people and being a Cum Laude made it easier for her to be hired by businesses established in the city. After a few years working in Human Resources, Rose wanted the challenge of working for the big companies in the capital city of Manila. However, she decided to settle in her hometown when she was offered a good job at Park Square College. This is when she started as Guidance Counselor for Park Square. Rose remembers how she started:

I applied here to be an instructor and just by plain luck, I found out that they were looking for a new Guidance Counselor. The man was relocating to the United States. The head of Human Resources looked at my credentials and told me that the position was going to be vacated soon and asked if I would be interested. I did not hesitate and accepted the challenge right away. I really love my job, talking to students everyday made me fulfilled with my work and gave me content with my career. In fact, I was so contented with the job and organization that I decided that I'm going to serve the college as long as they like me. After that, I was promoted as OSA Director. The job requires more of my time because I do not deal strictly with students now, I have become the middleman between

students and instructors especially at times when conflicts occur. But I love it, and I've been loving it for about seven years now.

However, Rose admitted that she has encountered many struggles in her position:

There were times when it was hard but with the support of the administration and being open-minded to different situations and people helped me accomplish my tasks a little easier.

She further stressed her personality and character within the office environment:

I am a very patient person. I do not get angry or irritated with little petty things. My colleagues playfully call me Ms. Friendship and to some degree, I try to live up to that reputation. I do not get frustrated when some students refuse to listen and acknowledge your authority. So basically, I am enjoying my job, I am learning a lot from the administration, the students and my colleagues.

Rudy graduated from Park Square College earning an Associate degree in Computer Science. He has been a staff member of the OSA for three years. Rudy considers himself lucky for being able to land a job immediately after graduation:

Back when I was still a student, I already got a sense of how the organization worked and treated the personnel. So when I graduated, I just thought about submitting an application and maybe get lucky. It turned out they needed someone for the summer that year and they kept me. I have learned to love the college so much. I always liked the atmosphere even when I was still studying. When I was hired I vowed that I'd be loved by the students too. I hope I am succeeding.

Rudy was assigned at the OSA mainly because of his computer knowledge and clerical skills. According to him, having been friendly with the staff members when he was still a student made the transition from student to co-worker very comfortable and easy for him.

When asked what his thoughts were about his job, Rudy had this to say:

I really had no problems when I was assigned to the OSA. I mean, I am familiar with what they do, I always saw them when I was a student. What surprised me most was the amount of work done behind the scenes. As a student, you only saw through the window. What I found out was that there was tons of information that needed to be organized. I could only imagine the work there was before they installed the new database system that we have now. I also learned that you have

to be good at multi-tasking. You must know how to talk to students, you should be able to talk to parents if needed, talk on the phone, participate in meetings when called upon and of course, learn how to use information when needed by students and parents. And one more thing, you should really need to control your emotions especially during hectic days.

Despite this, Rudy said that for all their faults and shortcomings, he still found the students to be the most interesting:

We were all students once, so you have some idea of what they are talking about. Sometimes they just make me laugh and smile, they make me feel young again. But I must admit that sometimes, they could cause me to grow white hair.

He added that he has earned a greater appreciation for parents and the sacrifices that they make for their children:

Some of these people travel just to check up on their students. Its not enough that they can call us, I guess sometimes they need to see the campus and their children for themselves.

When asked about the major activities that her office performs, Rose mentioned that the office has to deal with the needs of different students on a daily basis. She also said that speaking with faculty and addressing the concerns of visiting parents are also common. The OSA also oversees various student activities, student orientation and advising student organizations

### **Interview Findings**

In this chapter, the findings are organized around the seven major functions of Student Services as identified in the literature. Document analysis and interviews with the OSA director (Rose), staff member (Rudy) and three full time students formed the basis of the data collection.

**Financial aid.** In the Philippines, there are only a limited number of scholarship grants available. Private institutions usually reserve their own scholarship grants for the

poor but deserving students coming out of high school. They also provide scholarship grants to the academic achievers of the college who are able to meet and maintain a certain grade average.

The Philippine government, through the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) offers the Study Now, Pay Later program, which is meant to provide loans or credit to students who are enrolled in priority courses in selected higher education institutions. To be eligible, a student must be able to meet certain grade requirements, pass the national secondary school achievement exam and must prove that his or her family earns no more than a specified amount of money annually. Students are charged 6% per annum interest on the loan which should be paid within 12 years of graduation.

Aside from the Study Now, Pay Later Program, the CHED also offers the Private Education Student Financial Assistance Program or PESFA. This is a study grant for qualified and deserving college freshmen who intend to enroll or are presently enrolled in priority courses in selected educational institutions. To qualify, students must again meet certain grade requirements in high school, pass the national secondary school achievement test and prove that his or her family has a gross annual income that meets the maximum eligibility requirements set by the government. The same program is also administered by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) which is another branch of the government. Unlike the PESFA by the CHED, the TESDA offers the program to students who wish to enroll in post-secondary non-degree vocational and technical courses in pre-determined areas.

Rose conceded that the college has not yet ventured into offering financial assistance to students. Although the college would want to see itself in the future doing

that, it is still limited to giving scholarship grants to newly graduated high school students, awarding academic scholarships to deserving students and opening slots for the Study Now, Pay Later program of the government and other government scholarships:

I guess the College is not yet ready for that. Our funds are mostly allocated in the maintenance of our buildings, the new facilities that we need and salary increases for faculty and personnel. We have many students, we want them to feel comfortable and provide them with all the amenities and services expected from a college institution.

However, Rose reiterated that financial assistance is included in the five-year plan that it is currently being developed:

We are always geared towards goals that will help students, especially those who are intelligent but with financial problems. The college is thinking on how to meet with these students and give them the opportunity to a decent education and good opportunities for employment. I have known many students who really deserve to study but just can't and students who have sufficient financial resources and yet take their education for granted. It is just discouraging. Nonetheless, the college is setting its five-year plan and in that duration, we hope to find ways to meet that specific need.

Students like Michael hope that the College would put a lot of emphasis on helping students financially:

I think what most of us need is financial help from the administration. There are a lot of deserving students who really want to study, I hope the administration would extend a hand to us poor students, [rather] than to build its image on how beautiful its buildings are. There are students, who missed taking their exams because of financial constraints. I hope the administration would give consideration to these students. I do not discount the fact that the college has to keep its finances strong and balanced but I believe that this is a big college and it has earned a good reputation after all these years. So I hope they will stop with the buildings but instead they should start checking the financial status of the students and help us with our financial problems.

Ashley had a different opinion compared to Michael. She believed that the College was just doing what they thought was right:

The administration is right, I do not think that it is possible for them to offer financial aid at this time. I am still glad that at least I am seeing where my money's going when I see these new buildings being erected to accommodate more students and the upgrading of facilities, especially the computers. I believe the government should be the one that should provide more scholarships and money for the poor but deserving students. We can't help but pity other students who do not have money for education, but there are just too many students and not a lot of government scholarship grants that they can avail of.

Joshua agreed with Ashley and said that, "I really think that the college is doing what it can to offer some financial support to students." Being a member of the student council, Joshua said that they meet regularly with the College President just to keep them informed about what the college is doing and at the same time provide an avenue for the student leadership to exchange ideas and suggestions with the administration:

We bring it up to them and the topic always comes up during the deliberations for tuition fee increases, the President shows us the numbers, and to be honest I really do not think it is possible to add more at this point.

**Housing.** Rose said that at this point, the college has no plans of establishing its own housing facility for its students. She said that the college does not have enough funds and space to erect a structure for this and added:

Unfortunately, students are left to themselves to find a place to stay during the schoolyear.

Michael and Joshua insisted that the college should have a dormitory for the students. They said that some of the boarding houses near the college are in poor condition. Michael even suggested that he would "not hesitate moving to a college dormitory at the right price." Joshua added:

I think a lot of students would appreciate it if the college decides to have its own housing facility, with all these students coming from a lot of places in the province, they will fill up the dormitory almost immediately!



Ashley also agreed with the suggestions made by Michael and Joshua. But she had a few more to add:

If ever they build their own housing facility, I hope there will be two separate buildings for men and women. I also hope that they will spare no expense with the facilities.

Asked if she thought that this would happen sometime in the near future, Ashley shrugged and said:

I don't think so, first of all, where would they build it? And second, I think they would rather build more classrooms than a dormitory.

**Learning Assistance.** The OSA has always been very happy that most of the faculty members have set aside some of their time to assist students in various subjects. Rose said they have been able to convince faculty members to establish consultation hours for their students:

Basically what happens is that the teacher informs the students of his or her consultation hours. The teacher tells them that if they need some kind of help, he's going to be in some pre-determined place like the faculty room at some time and students can walk up to them and consult them personally. It has really been useful for both instructors and students. The instructors find out what areas they should focus on during class and at the same time, the students are able to catch up with some things they're having a difficult time understanding.

Sometimes the OSA also acts as an intermediary between students and faculty members. Rudy described how they do it:

I do not know if you could call this learning assistance but I believe it is, most students tend to be shy when asking for favors from their instructors. Sometimes, students do have valid reasons for missing a quiz or an exam. So what we do is we try to inform the instructors of what happened and ask them for some consideration. Of course, the ultimate decision is still determined by the instructors but most of the time they have no problems with our requests.

Rose also said that they also work with student organizations in holding special tutorial classes, especially for core subjects like calculus. Rose also remarked:

The math tutorials are well attended, especially during the midterms and we always get good feedback from both students and student volunteers.

Of the three students interviewed, only Joshua had any knowledge of the learning assistance being provided by the OSA. He recounted:

I always went to the math tutorials during my first year. I thought it was very useful and it helped me a lot for my exams.

When asked if they were aware of the consultation hours that were set aside by faculty members for students, the interviewees responded by saying that they were usually informed of these hours by the instructor during the first week of class. Ashley added:

I don't think a lot of students take advantage of consultation. I know a lot of students like me who would rather not go to the instructor for help unless it is really needed.

On the other hand, Joshua said that he took advantage of consultation once and found it very helpful:

Consultation is good, you get to understand a subject that is confusing you and at the same time, I get to know the instructor a lot more and I get on their good side because they will notice that I am really serious about the class.

Michael wanted the OSA to consider the possibility of lending books, computers and other learning paraphernalia to students, especially those who have limited finances.

**Career and personal counseling.** The OSA director stressed that her office sees to it that one of their responsibilities is to guide students and help them realize their full potential. They also believe that holding activities that showcase the students' talents would create a bigger impact in their lives:

We constantly talk to students and ask them about their problems and try to give them better options to tackle it. We encourage them to join activities that would enhance their talents and skills. We are trying to intensify programs like cultural

dancing, joining quiz bowls outside the college, joining essay writing contests even beauty contests. We encourage these competitions and I guess the students appreciate this. With these activities I know that we are developing, even bringing out students' talents that they don't actually know they have. We also advise them on the better options for their future employment and they listen. I talk to them about their talents, I ask them on what they want to be, I ask them on what they expect after graduation and we try to analyze things and we even try to look for possible employment for these deserving students.

Rose also mentioned that the OSA also conducts job placement seminars for seniors during the end of every schoolyear and said:

The seniors are really appreciative, they are taught how to make résumé's and handle job interviews.

With regards to personal counseling, Rose said:

I have always believed that personal counseling is the most effective way in molding the students to become better persons. I have always asked my staff to touch the students' hearts, to befriend them so that they will open up, then maybe we can reach them and eventually help them. It's the personal touch that matters the most. And so I do believe that in order for us to effectively and efficiently do our job, we have to lower ourselves, humble ourselves and try to reach out.

Rose added:

I always see students who visit our guidance counselors for all types of help, which I will not go into, and from what I know a lot of them find these visits very rewarding and helpful.

Certain situations get very serious and the OSA have to call in the parents concerned to intervene. She added that they also have a cooperative relationship with a lot of parents which she said is very good but is sometimes complicated:

There are parents who clearly know that their son or daughter has a problem but they just could not admit it to themselves. Sometimes they are ashamed to visit the office because they feel that it is degrading on their part. They at times feel that we are condemning them for having their son or daughter as a headache. I sympathize with them, but I do explain to them that we are doing these things for the benefit of the student. It is our job to let these parents know what these students are doing and how they are performing academically. I carefully try to explain to them that we are their partners, that we do not blame them and that we

would like to help them set things right for the student. We are also very glad that many parents come here in the office without our notice, they just stroll into the office and check. These parents really monitor their sons or daughters. And it does not necessarily have to be parents, guardians are also giving time to check on these students when the parents are working overseas.

When asked if she thought that students were aware of these kinds of services, Rose commented:

There are students who may have failed to attend the orientation and are not aware of the services we offer here in this office.

To try and alleviate this problem, the office posted announcements in its bulletin boards informing students of the availability of these services.

When the three students were interviewed, Michael said:

I am not sure if they offer career counseling. Anyway, I know what I have to do to graduate, I don't think I need any kind of counseling at this point.

Joshua made this comment:

Well, I'm a frequent visitor of that office. I always talk to Rose about my goals and she had helped me define each goal. Unfortunately, many students are not aware that they can talk to all the staff members of the office about this. Some of them just don't care. But I love to talk to them and I know that they have helped many students. The odd thing is that people that I usually see at the OSA are the student leaders, I guess the ordinary students are shy and that's a shame because they're missing a lot. The office, in my opinion, is trying all they can to reach out to students. I hope that other students would learn to avail of these services because they pay for this. I hope that some would voluntarily seek help if they really need one instead of turning to their friends who might accidentally do more harm than good. I also encourage my classmates to visit the office, I guess everybody is afraid that they might be misjudged. I don't know, but I hope they would try to open up, to be helped, to hear authorities, not just follow rules but to really know them. I am very lucky that I've been given so much attention by the OSA and by my parents too.

Ashley was aware of the personal counseling that was available for students. She said that she personally had not been to the guidance office but knows friends who have gone there for help and advice:

I think that my friends had trouble with academic pressures so they went there for relief, they really thought it was helpful.

When asked about career counseling, Ashley said that she was not aware of this service but added:

I hope there is one because I think I can use that eventually.

**Health services.** Park Square has a small room designated as the college clinic.

Rose said:

It is not really much of a clinic, we are handicapped financially on this, basically what the clinic does is first aid work.

Rose remembered a time when a student had a heart attack and had to be rushed to a hospital:

That was when we thought that having a small clinic was a mistake. But I guess as much as the administration wanted one, financial constraints just could not allow it. As a compromise, what the college does is ask physicians and dentists to do monthly visits.

Students have noticed the limited health service that the OSA offers but understand that they are doing what they can. Ashley commented:

The OSA is always ready for something and I always see them when emergencies happen. I always see one of them around when a student has health problems. I guess its one of their duties. They make sure that the student is escorted to the clinic to receive some attention. I would gladly pay some extra money if they can improve on the health services that we currently have.

Joshua and Michael were not satisfied with the health services that the OSA offered its students. But Joshua pointed out that:

I know that they help whenever they can and I think that counts for something. Its probably budget problems.

**Assistance to the disabled.** The OSA of Park Square College did not have any programs in place for assistance to disabled persons. When asked why there was none, Rose replied:

First of all, we do not have any disabled students and second, we are really not obligated to instill such a program. We would like to have one, but it will practically be useless because there's nobody to assist.

The students also agreed with the OSA in that as much as they would like a program for disabled students, there is no reason to have one yet. As Michael said:

There are no disabled students here. Usually in our country, when you are disabled they just let you stay home. I know that times are changing, but as of now, the only thing that I can suggest that the college do is make itself accessible to handicapped people like putting ramps, elevators, etceteras.

When asked if they were aware of such services as sign language interpretation or special tutorials for the disabled, the students had no idea what it was. But Ashley said:

I hope that they can find it feasible to do something, it could be a first here in the city for all I know.

**International student advising.** Park Square College has never had an international student attending its campus. Asked what their plans were if ever an international student suddenly tried to enroll, Rose replied:

The Registrar would handle all the special requirements needed from them. In terms of student services, I guess they will be offered the same services that any student here gets.

On the other hand, the students said that the OSA should have some program in place. Joshua suggested that:

The OSA should just be ready. I am not aware of any international students here, but you know, the world is getting smaller eventually there will be foreigners studying here.

Michael added:

The OSA should take care of it now while they still have time and not rush things when the program suddenly becomes needed.

### **The Relationship between the OSA and other college departments**

The next section addresses the third research question which asks: What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and other college departments/faculties? This data was derived from the interview with Rose. The final part of the chapter addresses the question: What could be done to improve the relationships with other faculty and administration?

Rose believed that the OSA had made big strides in terms of being recognized in the academic community. She also recognized the impact of changes that have occurred in education:

I think it would be safe to say that Student Services was a low priority inside school boards around this city up until a few years ago. But thankfully, with the light now shining on this relatively new arm around college campuses, OSAs, including us, have benefited greatly, especially in terms of budget allocations. And here we go again, although we have been proving our worth in the college, our relationship with other college departments still continues to revolve around fighting for money.

Still, Rose contended that some deans did show a lot of appreciation for what the OSA has done. She recounted what the Dean of their Engineering department said:

The Dean of Engineering never fails to thank us for greatly assisting in disciplining Engineering students. The dean and I have observed that Engineering students tend to absent themselves and tend to fall to peer pressures. The reason for this is because most of the students here are young men. It's like a big young men's club. The dean thanks us for monitoring them and spending time to talk to some of these students. He says that we have managed to convince some of these students to prioritize their studies and not get caught up in all the peer pressures that they normally encounter. He encourages us by saying that students really appreciate what we do and they feel that they are being taken care of personally by the college.

Rose also cheered in triumph whenever she heard stories relayed to her by the deans about students who have excelled academically through the help of the OSA:

When I hear those kinds of stories during our meetings, it makes me so happy and gives me confidence in what our office does. I believe that whenever we hear these stories, it boosts not only the OSA but the entire college as well.

However, Rose admitted that not everybody understood the importance of the OSA to the college:

Some of the administrators would have to understand that we are not just about discipline, guidance and counseling. We are more than that. We are practically the front line. Parents go to see us, students always see us and tell stories to their friends back home about us. I am pretty confident to say that what we do is a reflection of the college, and if God forbid we do something wrong, I am sure people will notice and it could cause a backlash that could affect our enrollment. I strongly believe that the OSA affects the college that deeply.

### **Suggested Changes**

Having been the director of the OSA for some time now, Rose remains optimistic about the plans that she had for the office. She was very happy that many things have changed, she was especially appreciative of the technology that had helped them become more effective in performing their jobs and making use of the information they have on file. She hoped that the college could soon finish its networking project that will make information available between offices:

I would really love the possibility of the OSA and Registrar being able to share information much faster. That would really make us more efficient, especially when parents are visiting us.

Still, Rose is aware of the clamor from the students to have more services:

Students still want to see the OSA offer more services that would really serve their best interests. Although I know that we are doing everything within our power to make the OSA be as effective as possible, I am very conscious of the fact that a lot of students are still uninformed about the work that we do. We



would like to improve on how we inform students about our services, we should find something better than putting signs on the bulletin board. If we get enough personnel and time, I really believe that the best solution is to go from classroom to classroom, just making ourselves visible to the students, letting them know what we do. I do not think the faculty members would mind allocating fifteen to twenty minutes of their classes to help us out especially during the first two weeks of class. We still have to exert more effort to reach students. We still need to offer more services to better serve the academe. We will need huge help from the administration. But right now, we are doing our best with the resources that we have at hand.

To conclude, Rose had this final message:

In my humble opinion, I think we have made the lives of some of our students better. We just hope that we could continue to do more.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided the results of interviews conducted at Park Square College. Interviews were conducted with the OSA director and one of the staff members. They were asked about their thoughts on the services they offer and how their office was viewed by the college community. Based on the comments they made, the OSA expressed their satisfaction with their work but still yearned to be given their due recognition. They appreciated that the Engineering department appreciated their work but they also admitted they still had improvements to make. It was also apparent from the student interviews that they were not very informed about the different services of the OSA. All three had a number of comments and suggestions that they felt could help improve the OSA and its services.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Riverview College**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data gathered from Riverview College. Data were obtained through interviews with two members of the Office of Student Affairs and three full-time students.

#### **Overview of the college**

Riverview is situated in a city in Alberta which is located in the western half of Canada.

Being one of the more established institutions, Riverview has provided decades of educational service for their city. It was composed of three departments and started with slightly fewer than a hundred students in its first year with the aim of being innovative and responsive to the needs of the community. Now it has over a hundred faculty members and the college has an enrolment of more than a thousand full-time students.

Today, among the programs it offers are university transfer courses, English as a second language (ESL) courses and music. It also offers programs in business and computers that will give its students employment opportunities in the community. Because of the diversity of programs it offers, the college naturally attracts students both locally and internationally.

## **The Office of Student Affairs**

Literature from Riverview College introduced the OSA as a department that assists students with “career training and post-secondary education program information.” In addition, it also mentions that the OSA:

Provides transcript applications, assists in withdrawal or class changes, marks, case management, counseling and information on financial aid.

The OSA of Riverview saw itself as essential to student success. The Director of Student Affairs, Kim, saw it this way:

I see our role as facilitating student services, however you may define it, whether technologically, library services, whether it is getting to next semester quickly or easily without causing a lot of delays and getting into a routine. Facilitating with the academic department, understanding their program, understanding the kinds of activities or strategies in the classroom, and to assist students to excel at whatever they do.

In addition, Kim emphasized that:

Student affairs won't exist without good people and there is no definition for a good person. I think good people develop and create [a] good environment with systems working together, creating an environment with supportive people. It is about constantly working with people and making them understand and let them believe that they should work with a sense of purpose.

The OSA equated the efficiency of support services with academic success. As the OSA director said:

To me, that is the only thing that works, support services for students can have a great effect on their academics performance.

The OSA at Riverview College was composed of eight counselors and two receptionists. Of the eight counselors, six were also case managers for government funding purposes. The international department had one counselor and one assistant.

## **The Interviews**

The participants were involved in one semi-structured interview that was arranged to suit their schedule. The interviews for Riverview College were conducted during the month of September 2000. As stated in chapter 1, this study was guided by the research questions below:

1. What are the OSA staff members' perceptions about the effectiveness of their office with respect to advice about and assistance with the following functions?
  - (a) financial aid
  - (b) housing
  - (c) learning assistance
  - (d) career and personal counseling
  - (e) health services
  - (f) assistance to the disabled
  - (g) international student advising
2. What are the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the same functions stated above?
3. (a) What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties?
  - (b) What changes would the OSA directors recommend for improving these relationships?
4. What is the extent of agreement between the perceptions of the OSA members and students about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the functions stated above?

It should be noted that the interviewees, particularly the members of the OSA, were also asked about their professional backgrounds and their day to day activities to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of their views and opinions.

### **The OSA environment**

Two members from the OSA were interviewed for about an hour each. The Director for Student Affairs was given the pseudonym of Kim, the staff member was named Jannie. Three students were interviewed at Riverview for this study - Jean, Tina, and Julius - are all registered students who had been with the college for at least a year. Julius is an international student who came to the city to take English classes.

Before getting the position of OSA administrator at Riverview, Kim had fifteen years of experience in the education profession. She remembered:

I was with a secondary institution for thirteen years. I loved it. Great experience but not a lot of opportunities to work in student services.

Eventually, her opportunity came:

So a position came forward, I applied and was successfully interviewed. So I took on the role of Director of Student Services even though I have not worked directly in Student Services. These services included the library, international education skills and somewhat later, the registrar's office and student records. I also liked focusing on the enrollment management which is kind of my area and that is how I ended up here and it was a good decision.

Asked what in particular attracted her to the student affairs profession, she had this response:

The students, absolutely, without a doubt. I've worked in secondary, I have seen students struggle and I've seen students not succeed because of things that are missing in the process of trying to understand the students. So oftentimes, it could be something simple as, you know, student with a child and the child is sick and day care is unwilling to take care of the child. This does not sound like a major thing except what it does is [create] an environment where attention is a very important factor...all of a sudden, what people see is a student missing

classes, being absent and not attending. In reality, this student has other issues that were not known necessarily and are complicated and difficult to understand... Sometimes students go to the OSA needing help with their subjects, and they are dealt with as best as we could, but you never look back at the academic program... So looking [at] the problem in isolation but not looking at it in its totality is a problem.... So to support the students [on the] whole, you have to look at the whole picture... With students, you do not serve them all the way through but we give the best we can when providing services.

Kim says that during peak periods, as many as two hundred students would come up to the office, especially when students would like to make changes in their registration. She describes herself as being a “hands on type of administrator,” and that she strongly believes that the impact that the OSA has on the students, college operations and the overall image of the educational institution is “next to infinite.” In her own words, Kim said:

Take the impact of the phone for example, I just would pick up phones, you know, for three weeks at the beginning of the semester. I would pick up voice mails two to three times a day from the general mailbox line to see if they are working with people, if they answer it or not. A lot of questions are basically if we are open. But that just shows you the impact of the number of people that comes to the college and show interest. We are still a small operation here but people come to us for advice and many times we explain to them their questions and tell them what to do.

But because of the number of students, Kim admitted that the OSA sometimes found itself overwhelmed with the pressures and the impatience of people who all wanted to be attended to immediately. She explained:

We are trying to meet them and do as much as possible. I used to try to get things visible, to have resources available. Other people would ask why somebody would not answer the phone and they will see that we got a handful of things to deal with but we do try to entertain them all. So if a college or university is going to deal with that, they would have to point to the OSA.

Jannie recounted that she used to work for a dance studio before getting a job as a staff member at the Riverview OSA. But when a friend recommended the job to her for

one summer, she did not expect that she would still be holding the job after 18 months.

Jannie always viewed it as a “temp job.” She went on to say:

Having been a student myself, I could not imagine the prospect of dealing with students as a way of living but I guess I am eating my words at this point.

She gave credit to Kim for being a “good boss” and never failing to encourage and consult with the staff:

Her way of talking with us makes a big difference as far as I am concerned. I like people like that, people whom you really do not see as superiors but as colleagues.

She also put a lot of emphasis on student services being a team effort and the importance of needing everything to work together:

In student services, especially as a receptionist, you need everything and everybody because you need to call all the time and if you don’t know the information for something then its gonna drop altogether. For example, you look for advisers when they need to help students to know what courses to take, you go to guidance when somebody needs personal attention, and you go to the international student advisor when it’s a foreign student. Everything needs to be in sync.

On describing her typical day, Jannie narrated:

My job requires me to keep the office organized, helping, advising students and a little bit of everything else. I do a little bit of introductory system advising too. Basically I am a half receptionist and a half adviser if you could call it that. Most of the days are pretty chaotic because from the morning until the afternoon, I am either in registration, taking inquiries about courses, advising students on what course to take and doing other things.

When given the opportunity to voice what she thought were the least important aspects of her work, Jannie vented her frustrations on the paper work that she had to do. She said that she understood that these papers were official records and that they were necessary. But she contended:

If we had a better system, we could get rid of it.

Asked if she had any suggestions to improve the system, she simply said:

You're guess is as good as mine. Believe me, we're trying.

With regards to the paper work that was giving her problems, Jannie stressed that:

We always have students dropping in, we have student files, we always have papers coming and going. My job requires me to keep up with all of this information, correct them and make them work for the office.

When asked about her relationships with the students, being visible was one of the traits that Kim prided herself on. She claimed that students personally approach her and would ask questions:

I approach them and talk to them, even in the elevator sometimes. I drive my energy especially to students who are really doing well. During graduation, you look at them on stage and it is rewarding to see them up there.

Displaying her passion for her work and a sudden excitement, Kim said:

I would also like to get really involved in the sustainability of teaching, you know, to be able to sustain the future. I always have this personal passion because I don't know, maybe because I am in a leadership position. I find that how I treat students is how I treat my kids as they're growing up. And I find child grooming is easy because I remember how it was like being a kid. It is a matter of giving a level of respect. You provide the guidelines, they know how far they can go and they give you back some respect. You learn from experience and I guess everybody deserves that. I do not care about their background, or what baggage or trash they carry, people need to be respected but it doesn't mean that you cannot expel them. Fundamentally, you have a responsibility to respect them.

As far as the students were concerned, Jannie said that they have been "a pleasant surprise and a joy to deal with." She estimated that about one hundred students go to the OSA for some type of assistance everyday. She described the students as being polite and patient and:

They do not easily get mad if things are not going their way.

However, she admitted that she gets to know some students more than others:



Students are here all the time and they're like your friends, you talk and interact to them but others just choose to be business-like in the way they interact with us. But some of them are really friendly and you become friends after a few encounters.

Still, she recalled times when certain situations got stressful between her and some students especially:

When they want their way, they want it immediately and they become very impatient.

She went on to say:

You really have to be composed and organized and it's a challenge for me personally.

When asked about the non-stressful aspect of her job, Jannie said that she managed to get a lot of compliments from other students:

They said that they did not have this kind of service and dedication on student services from their former schools and they thank us and appreciate the things that the OSA does for them. These kinds of comments generally reduces the stress that unfortunately comes with the job.

### **Interview Findings**

In this chapter, the following section revolves around the seven major functions of Student services as identified in the literature. Document analysis and interviews with the OSA director (Kim), staff member (Jannie) and three full-time students formed the basis of the data collection.

**Financial aid.** In the province of Alberta, there are two sources for student loans: the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta.

Established in 1964, the Canadian government's Canada Student Loan Program is administered by the provinces. Students do not incur interests on the loan while they are

attending a designated post-secondary institution on a full-time basis. However, a student must be a valid Canadian citizen or permanent resident to qualify for this loan.

On the other hand, the Alberta Student Loan Program was established in 1969 to provide further assistance to students in Alberta who were under the Canada Student Loan Program. These loans are based on financial need and just like the nationwide program, loans are interest free while the student is attending a designated post-secondary institution full-time. Effective August 1, 2001, Alberta Student Loans are a financial agreement between an individual and the Government of Alberta and must be repaid within a defined period of time. Alberta also contracted EDULINX Canada Corporation to administer Alberta Student Loans issued after July 31, 2001. The province provides funding, manages the program, and also continues processing the loan applications and continues determining student eligibility.

The Alberta Learning Information Service (2002) stated that, if eligible, students may receive loans from both sources. In its website, the Alberta Learning Information Service declared that:

Effective August 1, 2001, Alberta Student Loan funding will come from the Government of Alberta and will be processed through EDULINX, Alberta's student loan service provider. Canada Student Loan funding will come directly from the federal government and funds will be processed through the National Student Loans Service Centre. (2002)

Kim acknowledges the limited resources of Riverview and said:

We are looking at minimum resources and maximizing it very much. You have to remember that we are an organization with not many resources and a lot of competitors.

Kim said that Riverview works closely with other community colleges in the city. Through their joint efforts, the institutions are able to use each other's facilities. They

also help each other to expose students to various programs and opportunities like scholarships. She remarked that:

They are trying to as much as possible, expose the students to all these opportunities, especially the scholarship funds for students wishing to get a degree from a post-secondary institution. Right now we have about thirty scholarships and awards for all programs of Riverview, I look forward to adding on to that for the benefit of the students.

Of the three student interviewees, Jean had the most comments about financial aid at Riverview. As a self-supporting student, she said that she searched for some financial aid when she first started attending Riverview:

There were some scholarships available and the OSA was very helpful with my questions, but somehow I found out that it would be easier to get a job than get financial aid, so I quit pursuing the scholarship.

Asked why she quit, Jean simply said:

I got the job quicker and [it] was paying quite well, so it was pretty much an easy decision for me.

Tina mentioned that she knew that financial assistance was available after hearing this from classmates and friends who talked about it. She admitted:

I am lucky that my parents still support me financially so I do not have first hand experience with the financial aid aspect of the OSA.

She went on to add that she was very aware of students who were experiencing some form of financial trouble.

As an international student, Julius had to show proof of finances to support his studies before he was issued a student visa by the Canadian consulate in his country. He commented:

I wish I could get some financial aid just to save my parents some money, but I believe that these are mostly reserved for Canadian citizens or residents, so I did not even try.

**Housing.** Riverview regularly draws an influx of international students to its campus because of the special programs it offers for them. For students who do not have relatives living in the area, housing is one of the first questions regularly asked about by students. Kim said that Riverview helps these international students by referring them to the Homestay Alberta program. In this arrangement, the international student is given the chance to live with a Canadian family. According to Kim:

The program matches the needs of the student with the family. There are no random matches made unlike what some people may think.

It is possible for students to call Homestay Alberta directly and make arrangements themselves. Kim said that some international students were concerned about the culture and are naturally a little nervous about the possibility of living in another country. But according to her, technology has been able to help in this regard:

With the internet, our students are now able to gain a wealth of information about the city, the weather and the best hangouts. A lot of students these days have a pretty good idea of the city before they even land at the airport.

Julius, an international student, said that he lives with relatives in the city. He had friends who were participating in the Homestay program and according to him, his friends were “enjoying the experience.” He added:

I was lucky to have relatives in the city and was able to adjust right away.

Tina and Jean recommended that Riverview should construct its own housing facility for its students “if possible.” Tina had some experience living in a dormitory and happily recalled:

The experience I gained living with other people, meeting new friends, is a priceless experience. It opened my eyes to a lot of things, the college should look into it if they can.

**Learning assistance.** When questioned about learning assistance, Kim brought up the role of the Student Adviser:

The student adviser is a coordinator who deals with students while they are in campus providing help in classes, teaching and learning, working with teachers to know strategies and then we customize those math tutorials and English language coaching as the need arises. As much as possible to identify need, we will go to students and survey how it works for them then we would truly have student success. So everybody, the team at the college, always want students' successes first and every decision made is based on how it will affect the students.

There are also case managers, Student Services personnel and program coordinators who assist students with academic difficulties. She claimed that these systems have bonded the students to the staff and certainly gave the staff some renewed vigor and commitment towards the students that has been previously non-existent.

Kim also mentioned that the college had a peer support program that focused on students helping each other. She described it further in this way:

Peer support is one of many ways for students to be with each other outside the regular classroom environment. It is also a way for student volunteers to log volunteer hours that they can use to enter educational programs like social work. Its nothing but a win-win situation, students can get help in various subject areas and skills while the volunteers get to help their peers and advance their own future careers.

She also added that the OSA had various workshops dealing with study habits and techniques. There was also a list of academic tutors that could help students if they chose to seek these forms of assistance.

Julius and Jean both admitted that they have attended the workshops that the OSA offered for the students. Julius said:

I was already seeking all kinds of help during my first few weeks here. I am very grateful to those people who helped me and gave all those very useful tips. I think I might still be taking those subjects for a second or third time if it were not for them. I also found time management as very helpful for me.

Jean also participated in the peer support program and had this to say:

I only attended once but it is very helpful. I have recommended it to some of my friends who are having trouble coping with their academic loads.

On the other hand, Tina said that she never felt the need to seek assistance in learning. In her own words:

I don't want to brag or anything but I think that I am coping just fine and am satisfied with my academic performance so far. But if I ever get into trouble, I will not hesitate to look to them for help.

**Career and Personal counseling.** Riverview has a high number of students with very little counseling. Kim remembered that when she started, the OSA had a counselor who worked only 18 hours a week. Because of the obvious lack of resources that their OSA had, she was forced to find creative ways to be able to cater to the needs of the students. Kim described what they did:

We did implement student success chambers, these were grassroots teams that we pull together. We develop charters that lead to one of the things we want to accomplish with students in terms of their academic success or personal success. And from that, we started to develop mechanisms. One example of this that directly benefited counseling was the Helping Council. And what it did was identify for the students the services offered for the community. Through this system, the OSA became a facilitator for students; it helped them point to the direction where they could ask for a certain type of help.

Kim added:

Because we do not have resources to do it, we made a commitment to students that they will be helped when they cannot get access to a counselor when they really need one.

Asked how the OSA is able to monitor such a system, Kim replied:

We always look back in terms of following up students and we always talk to teachers, that is how we handle counseling.

The three students interviewed were all aware of the services offered by the college. All of them said that because of their regular visits to the OSA for assistance, they were able to develop a friendly relationship with the staff. As Julius described:

They are very friendly and always seem to be ready to help. A heavy volume of students in the office would sometimes force me to wait for my turn before I talk to them, but I am ok with that.

However, Jean said that she has never been in contact with the helping council although she knew other students who have been able to talk with them.

Julius said that he was aware of these services that were available to them but Tina said she had never heard of the helping council. The three students confirmed that they had not needed to seek counseling, hence they had little knowledge of the service.

**Health Services.** Riverview did not have its own clinic. Kim says that she did not encounter many problems with this. As far as the international students were concerned, they were strongly encouraged to apply for the Alberta health coverage immediately to prevent any unforeseen hospital costs. However, the OSA said that in terms of first aid, they were equipped and had trained staff members who could attend to persons who needed immediate help.

When asked what they thought about health services in the college, all three students responded by saying that they were not aware of any health services being offered by the college.

In Tina's own words:

I really do not think about that. To tell you the truth, this is the first time I actually thought about it. As long as I have my Alberta health card and number, I think I am ok. But in terms of first aid, the college must have some kind of that, don't they? I am not sure, I better ask the OSA about that when we're done here. I do not think we have a huge hospital like the U of A does.

On the other hand, Jean demanded the following:

I suggest that the college should get some space, preferably here on the ground floor where everyone can see it. There should be a nurse or a doctor readily available during class hours so that any student who wishes to get some help can easily go there. I truly insist that the clinic be on the ground floor because of a prior experience I had with a previous college. I remember the day when I was really nauseated and I could not find the clinic because it was on another floor and none of my friends knew where it was. If Riverview somehow allocate some space on the ground floor for a clinic, that would be very, very helpful and convenient.

Like Jean, Julius also wanted the college to assign a nurse or doctor whom students could approach when they needed any kind of health assistance. Julius showed particular amazement of the fact that he could go to a clinic without paying anything:

I know a lot of my Canadian friends are not too satisfied with the health system here when we talk about it, but for me its great, in my country you better have some cash or else they will not let you out of the doctor's clinic.

**Assistance to the disabled.** In its student handbook, Riverview advised students who required learning support that they should inform the college immediately about their requirements. It was stated in the handbook that these support services were limited to tutorial and sign language interpretation and that their availability depended upon enrollment and financial resources.

When asked about this, Kim replied:

As much as we want to give every student the opportunity and the support that he or she needs, sometimes it is just not feasible for the college.

Despite that, Riverview was wheelchair accessible. There were ramps located in the main entrance of its building.

None of the three students interviewed had any disability. When the question of assistance to disabled persons was asked, all three students were generally aware of the



wheelchair access ramp in front of the college and the elevators that were very useful for them. They also noticed that most of the floors had restrooms accessible to persons on wheelchairs. Tina was particularly irked with students and the elevators:

I am not sure how they can do it, but I think that the college should prohibit students from taking the elevator if they're only going one floor up. Only the people and students who really need elevators should be able to use it. Able-bodied students should take the stairs.

Julius added this comment:

I expect Canada, being a developed country, to have all these things for disabled people. From my experience, it is very much different in my country.

**International student advising.** Riverview had its own International student director and advisor who mainly dealt with the international students attending the college or prospective students inquiring about its various programs.

Kim said that the arrival of faster communication tools for both students and educational institutions have brought exciting and infinite prospects for organizations such as Riverview. She said:

John is our international student director. He regularly communicates with the international students and from what I've been hearing and seeing, the students seem to like him a lot. He has a very good rapport with the students who often visit him in his office. It is obvious that it is very important that students can regularly talk with people whom they feel comfortable with. In this case, we have a lot of Chinese students. John is Chinese, so from the point of view of the students, there is an immediate connection there.

She added that John gets calls from around the world everyday inquiring about the programs. She also commented:

We could have recruited a lot more students if not for the strict regulations in obtaining a visa made by the Canadian consulates.

She also said:

There are a lot of young people waiting to come here, our institution is always open, but sometimes there are things that are beyond our control.

Being the lone international student from the three students interviewed, Julius had the most comments about the topic. He only had high praises for John, Riverview's Director for international students:

John was the man I have been communicating with via e-mail before I even arrived in Canada. He always responded to my questions right away and when I got here, I found out that he was a very nice guy in person too. A lot of my fellow international student friends always go to him for all kinds of problems and he always finds time to talk to us. He acts like a parent for us here in the college and I think we are very lucky to have someone like him here with us.

Jean and Tina are both Canadian citizens and have resided in the country since birth. This means that they do not interact with the international student office. Still, they said that they have quite a few international student classmates and commented they were:

Pretty sure those guys are satisfied and feel like they are getting their money's worth having had to come over to Canada to study.

### **The relationship between the OSA and other college departments**

The next section addresses the third research question which asked: What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and other college departments/faculties? This data was derived from the interview with Kim. The final part of the chapter addresses the question: What could be done to improve the relationships with other faculty and administration?

Kim strongly believed that the OSA is an integral part of the college. However, she admitted that most people within the organization still do not understand what the OSA actually did:

They think that we are not doing much, I mean, they know that we meet students and that we counsel them, but they do not really understand why we do it.

She went on to say:

Everytime a student has a problem, they go see us. It is the little things like that which adds value for the students, otherwise they could leave and go somewhere else.

In order to bring a little more understanding of the OSA operations from the perspective of the other college departments, Kim had this strategy:

One thing I did last year was to take a very strong academic teacher and put her in student services. We brought them to student services. I am not trying to do it all in one shot, I need more time, you don't fundamentally change how people think. You can't change it overnight, but its starting to get better. I do not think there is much interpersonal relationships between the departments, like one does not know what's going on with the operations of the other. So what I did was that I can only tell them that this (OSA) is my area, so we showed them this area and let them see how we are connected to their own area. I think that is how it should be, and it would be easier to do it if we would work closely together. From there, you can start breaking down barriers.

### **Suggested changes**

Kim admitted that she is fairly satisfied with the OSA's relationships with the other departments but added there was still room for improvement:

I think that we should just continue to be adequate and accurate in what we do. It is very much important to make student services see themselves as professional, morale boosting and that they can serve better because that is how it works, you should feel good to give service to everyone. They hold the key to almost every external reaction of people to the college. And it should be constantly figuring out how to extend services. I would love to have more resources so that we can do more.

She also wanted to obtain more help from the administration:

I would like to have more academic support like library resources and additional technology that students may avail of.

She said:

Being creative with minimum resources is a must!...If you can't provide good services, you won't be able to attract people to register in the college.

Kim also said that she would like more people to get more involved and understand her work:

I would like to bring into their consciousness the importance of social work and community support services.

As for her own office, Kim admitted that she saw a lot more ways that the office can improve its effectiveness:

Our office is small and I see that people have very diverse role descriptions. However, they need to be able to fill in each other when someone else is not there. So they need to keep themselves informed, spend lots of time with other people's company and develop information that can be useful for students. Student services are essential, they have the most interactions with the public and they can do their jobs much better if they're honed. Instead of going around and asking people about something, use your resources. It's about sharing information and people picking up something that they might need. I do not want to file something for twenty years and make it practically useless. When you talk with people with all the information that you gather, then they would eventually see that we are really providing services. From there, I hope that there would be some true appreciation of what the OSA does.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided the results of interviews conducted at Riverview College. Interviews were conducted with the OSA director and one of the staff members. They were asked about their thoughts on the services they offer and how their office relates with the rest of the college community. Both members of the OSA had pointed out observations and given suggestions on how they might be able to improve themselves and their office. Their main obstacles towards achieving their goals were adequate funding, better understanding from other departments and improved performance and

efficiency. Three students were also interviewed about their opinions on the student services outlined in the second research question. All three had a number of comments and suggestions that they felt could help improve the OSA and its services. Based on the interviews, they (especially Julius, the international student) were fairly satisfied and generally aware of the services being offered by their OSA.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Commonwealth College**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data gathered from Commonwealth College. Data were obtained through interviews with two members of the Office of Student Affairs and three full-time students.

#### **Overview of the College**

Commonwealth College began as a preparatory school for young men interested in church ministry careers. Its campus is beautifully located near the center of the city. Its main mission was offering Christian education while sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Having retained the original intentions of its founders, Commonwealth decided to extend its mission to include a larger number of college students in arts, science, and other pre-professional programs. The curriculum, instructional policies, and qualifications of faculty at Commonwealth also became consistent with Canadian post-secondary standards.

When the growth of the college challenged the physical campus site, it had become apparent that additional facilities were required to meet the needs of the growing student population. The first new building planned for construction was a Student Center. The addition of the Center also allowed Commonwealth to double the size of its cafeteria and to expand in other areas.

While the Student Center construction was underway, Commonwealth began to engage in strategic long-range planning to meet future needs such as additions to the library. There was also construction of a complex to include a new gymnasium facility.

During the last decade, several new three-year concentrations were added to the courses offered by Commonwealth. Approval was also received for a four-year degree program in Psychology, a certificate program for environmental health inspectors, and Commonwealth was also authorized to offer a degree in Bachelor of Education. Commonwealth's high school has also continued to flourish and has developed a solid reputation as an academic high school.

Commonwealth's history has been marked by steady growth and change as its mission has expanded to maintain its current status as one of the largest private, Christian, accredited, degree-granting institutions in Canada.

#### **The Office of Student Affairs (OSA)**

Gilbert, the Director of the OSA, viewed the role of the OSA as:

Primarily support students in any way, to help them succeed in their academic goals and pursuits. In other words, we provide the support system that students require in order that they achieve their academic objectives.

According to the student handbook of Commonwealth College, the OSA aims to provide its students with:

An open and supportive atmosphere that is governed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and characterized by mutual respect and freedom from discrimination, threat or interference.

In addition, the OSA worked to ensure that their students were:

Treated with dignity and respect; provided a secure and hospitable environment in which to pursue their academic goals; given good access to all programs, services and facilities; evaluated equally on the basis of academic activities and

performance; given access to grievance and appeal procedures in the case of a possible infringement of individual rights or a possible unfair administrative or academic action.

The OSA at Commonwealth included a Coordinator of Student events, one counseling psychologist, a part-time counselor, a career development practitioner, two residence counselors and a part-time person in international student services. Gilbert described how Student Services was organized in Commonwealth:

Well, there are three main departments. One whole area is recruitment, admissions and financial aid which fall under a dean. Second is the registrar's office and the third is my office, the Student Affairs, which covers a very wide range of other services. It operates and provides the residence program, counseling services including personal, career and spiritual counseling. We also acquire and develop co-curricular programming. In other words, larger areas in athletics, drama and music. We also work with student associations, newspapers and so on, all the various clubs and organizations in campus. We also develop policies to maintain our environment which is conducive to academic pursuits. In other words, we maintain an atmosphere that is comfortable and safe to the students. We have discipline policies, we make sure that our expectations from our students, in terms of the way they interact with one another, are maintained as well. And when they are unable to discipline themselves, we have to take over. This is meant to make sure that students are disciplined in their personal life and help them develop self-discipline. It will help them among other things, how to properly interact with other people. That's one of the reasons why Student Services is here.

### **The interviews**

The participants were involved in one semi-structured interview that was arranged to suit their schedule. The interviews for Commonwealth College were conducted during the month of September 2000. As stated in chapter 1, this study was guided by the research questions below:

1. What are the OSA staff members' perceptions about the effectiveness of their office with respect to advice about and assistance with the following functions?

(a) financial aid



- (b) housing
- (c) learning assistance
- (d) career and personal counseling
- (e) health services
- (f) assistance to the disabled
- (g) international student advising

2. What are the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the same functions stated above?

3. (a) What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties?

(b) What changes would the OSA directors recommend for improving these relationships?

4. What is the extent of agreement between the perceptions of the OSA members and students about the effectiveness of the OSA with respect to the functions stated above?

It should be noted that the interviewees, particularly the members of the OSA, were also asked about their professional backgrounds and their day to day activities to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of their views and opinions.

### **The OSA environment**

The members of the OSA were interviewed for about one hour each. In this study, the Director for Student Affairs was given the pseudonym of Gilbert and the staff member was named Loving. Both have been working with Commonwealth for more than ten years. Three students were interviewed at Commonwealth for this study – Gavin,

Gian, and Julius – are all registered students who had been with the college for at least one year.

Before getting the position of OSA Director at Commonwealth, Gilbert trained as a Lutheran clergyman; he worked in a parish and found out that he was successful in working with the youth. He recalled:

At that time, Commonwealth was in need of a director for the OSA and apparently my name came up, they offered me the position and that is how I landed here.

When asked if he had any second thoughts about the profession that he chose, Gilbert said:

Absolutely not, my great interest is working with young people and having even just a little positive influence in their lives is already very fulfilling for me.

When requested to describe what it is like to be the head of the OSA today, Gilbert said:

Obviously it is a very challenging position dealing with students. Students can be very demanding and there's no end [to] the number of situations you have to deal with. But what I'm saying is that the reason why I am in this position for as long as I've been here is that it's tremendously rewarding to be working with young people, helping them overcome obstacles they encounter in their young lives. Working with personal concerns that simply need to be dealt with and seeing these young people succeed, move on and hear from them later on about where they are, their successes and have them come back to Commonwealth and share them with us. It is a very fulfilling area, it is not just student services you know, knowing that we in Student Services have often made a difference in a student's life is very satisfying.

When he talked about his thoughts on the effectiveness of the OSA in providing student services, Gilbert said he thought that they were generally doing a good job. He believed that the students were satisfied with student services:

We try to be professional and personal in dealing with students. I think the students appreciate that a great deal.

However, he admitted that the results were not always satisfactory, but remarked that:

For the most part I think student services does achieve its objectives.

In addition to this, Gilbert was also questioned about whether he thought that students at Commonwealth were aware of all the services that the OSA offers. This was his answer:

No, unfortunately students are never aware of the services you offer. We inform them of all these services in their orientation. We advertise all our programs and yet its amazing how many students do not know. Communicating with students is a very challenging aspect of our work. For some reason or another, the students do not seem to be aware of the services available to them even though they are published, advertised, you know, in various forms and so on.

Asked to describe what a typical day was for the Director of OSA at Commonwealth, Gilbert said:

A typical day for us is something that is not typical, we always get some new case or activity to work on.

On the other hand, Loving remembered working for a law firm and became “overwhelmed with papers and the secular world.” She added:

The opportunity of working with students in coordination with spiritual life was something I did not want to pass up, so I applied. I found out that people here are wonderful to work with and students change when they attend the institution.

Asked what attracted her most to the student services profession, Loving replied:

No doubt working with students. I work with the student council and I work with students with problems. I also work closely with the counseling psychologists. So I see the students when they are in trouble and I also see the top students. The student council and I see the young people thriving, working hard under the influence of the OSA director and myself.

She also explained some of her responsibilities which included being the coordinator of student events and services. Loving said that she works with organizing

any events that involve student participation like orientation. She admitted that it could sometimes get very stressful:

You have to work along with the student council, organize an orientation for about five to six hundred new students and it is a one day event.

Loving explained that they always try their best:

We are careful not to overwhelm them with too much information about the services that they can get here at Commonwealth.

When Loving was requested to describe how a typical day at the office was for her, she excitedly said:

Well today, the hockey and soccer coaches came in to make sure students are eligible to be in these teams and have met certain qualifications. I also work with student insurance and dealt with a couple of students who came in with injuries. I also went to chapel today, made sure that events coming up are there and all announcements are correctly posted. We also do a lot of posters, for example, we are currently advertising a seminar where we will be holding lectures on time management, study skills and we arrange speakers for these. I also had a student come in inquiring about a doctor because she is very ill. So we went around trying to get her a doctor. These sorts of things, you know?

The preceding segment provided some background information about the circumstances that surround the OSA at Commonwealth College. It was meant to create a picture of OSA operations and how it was viewed and understood at Commonwealth College.

### **Interview Findings**

In this chapter, this section was organized around the seven major functions of Student Services as identified in the literature. Document analysis and interviews with the OSA director (Gilbert), staff member (Loving) and three full-time students formed the basis of the data collection.

**Financial aid.** Commonwealth College provides assistance, guidance, and information regarding financial matters for its students. When asked about financial aid for students, Gilbert said that this type of service is handled by the Admissions and Financial Aid Office. Commonwealth students can avail themselves of government student loans, awards and scholarships. Students can also go to that office for some budget counseling. The Admissions and Financial Aid Office handles Government Student Loans for Canadian citizens, permanent residents and those with refugee status. The office handles application forms and information regarding these student loans.

Commonwealth also had an Emergency Loan Program which was intended for students who had the necessary funding for their studies, food, and accommodation, but had been confronted by an unanticipated event which created an urgent need for supplemental funds. However, there was a maximum limit with regards to the amount of these loans and students were not considered for more than one emergency loan per semester. The admissions and financial aid office also handles this program.

In addition to information on Commonwealth awards, the Financial Aid Office kept a listing of known external funding sources and assisted students in all programs. Other sources of awards included companies for which students or their parents worked, churches, and organizations of which they were members.

With regards to the three students, none of them had any comments about financial aid. They were all aware that there was an office for admission and financial aid but none of them had to go to the office to get some form of financial assistance or counseling.

**Housing.** Commonwealth's residence program had a goal of providing a holistic form of education. It was expected that students would learn to live in a close community, and would demonstrate respect, cooperation, and concern for others.

Commonwealth has its own residence facilities. The men's and women's residences are in-campus and provide the luxury of living close to Commonwealth's classrooms. Residence rooms are usually shared with another student, and are furnished with desks, beds and dressers.

There are counselors and advisors in the residence to provide a wide range of services and programs for residents. The program includes planned activities like movie nights, ski trips and cultural events. Students apply for admission to campus residences separately from academic admission. On-campus accommodation is limited and is granted on a contract basis for full semesters only.

In addition to the student residence program, Gilbert said that the OSA also maintained a housing registry of off-campus accommodations. Loving added:

We try to find housing for students when they ask for help, if they are unhappy where they are, we will try to help them and make things available to them.

None of the three students lived on the campus residences and therefore had no comments to share regarding the service. However, Tony said that he had a classmate who lived in one of the residences and said he has not heard anything negative:

I think he is enjoying it, especially the luxury of being able to wake up from bed literally minutes before class time.

**Learning assistance.** Gilbert made reference to the lectures that were available to students such as study skills and time management. However, Loving lamented:

Not as many students come into these seminars, we would like to see them attend, they ask for these seminars like time management etceteras and yet they do not respond to it. I would just like to know how we can effectively reach them.

When asked what methods they used to communicate these programs to the students,

Gilbert said:

We have e-mails, posters, bulletin boards, we even have students make announcements in class and yet it still does not work.

Gian said that he had been to the lectures on time management. He commented:

Oh, it was very helpful for sure, the speaker was good but there were not many of us students there.

Gavin also attended some of these seminars and had the same observations as Gian but added that the OSA should have used a better information campaign for the program.

When asked how they found out about the seminars, both said that they found out through one of their friends from the student council.

Tony disclosed that he had some special needs and was very thankful that Gilbert was very accommodating and helped him:

When I first started here, I could not write so I had to have note takers. I could not write well, pens were flying from my hand so I had note takers for certain classes and I had to pay them and the government gives me money to pay my note takers through the special opportunity grants. Gilbert also arranges with my professors. He is like my lobbyist for my special needs, you know. For example, he got the adapted technology from the library that was not here when I started. It used to be that I had to take exams on these computer laboratories which was disgusting because of people coming and going every time and it was distracting. So he did something about it and that's what happened, it was a relief on my part.

**Career and Personal counseling.** The Career development department invites professional career development practitioners to speak and provides students with workshops and personal counseling to assist them in identifying their career goals and the educational and other resources available to enable them to achieve these goals.

Commonwealth had a Career Center in the library which carried information on education and career options, as well as job postings.

The college also had spiritual counseling available for its students. This was offered for students who sought counseling and wanted to speak to a pastor about spiritual or other problems.

Commonwealth also had a Counseling Psychologist who gave short-term personal, family, and crisis counseling to all students. There were also special workshops on matters concerning the emotional and psychological well-being of the campus community.

Tony was able to listen-in on one of the career workshops and said:

I just wanted to hear what they had to say. My friends may find it hard to believe but I am concerned about my future career and I just wanted to check out what's out there.

When asked if he found the workshop helpful, Tony responded:

Absolutely, anything that can give me an edge over the other graduates when I graduate is very useful as far as I'm concerned.

Gavin and Gian have both heard of the career development center. Gian echoed the same sentiments as Gavin when he said:

Yes, I know there is a career center, but I would rather concentrate on my subjects now, priority number one for me is get through my course and pass these subjects.

With regards to personal counseling, all three students declared that they were aware that there was a counselor whom they could visit if they wanted to but none of them have been able to avail themselves of this service. All of them unanimously declared that they have had no reason to see a counselor so far.

**Health services.** Gilbert said that Commonwealth's health services were



simple:

Obviously we do not have the kind of facilities that the big universities have. We have a recovery room for students if they become ill and if there is anything serious, the office would not hesitate to refer them for medical appointments if they wish.

All three students were aware that they could go to the OSA if they were feeling some kind of illness. Gian admitted:

When I get one of my usual headaches, and I've been having a lot lately, I know where to go.

However, Tony made a few suggestions:

I know that its kind of a long shot wish, but I've seen the health centers at the university and they're very nice, I hope we could have one like that.

Gavin added:

I hope the college would hire full-time staff just for a health center, the college might not have funds, but you know, maybe they could work something out. I hope it happens.

**Assistance to the disabled.** Commonwealth College advised students with disabilities or special needs to approach the OSA for information regarding services and assistance. Regularly offered services included liaison with professors and administration concerning special needs, parking permits for disabled students, note-taking arrangements, escort assistance and special examination procedures. Also, most areas of the campus were wheelchair accessible.

The Director for the OSA was proud of the fact that his office provided services for students with special needs. He mentioned:

One of the things I'm planning right now is that Commonwealth does not have an office that deals specifically with students with disabilities. And that is very time consuming and we're trying to get specific funding for that. Not to mention the

fact that working with counselors, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and so on to assist these students can be labor intensive.

When asked if he was satisfied with the way he was being treated at the college, especially because of his disabilities, Tony said:

Oh, I'm very satisfied with the way I get treated here. I started the Students with Disabilities Association here at the end of my first year, because there are many students with many disabilities, but the thing is I am very vocal about mine. You see, I introduce myself in class to the professor to let them know. For one thing, I am deaf in my left ear and I have tinnitus. I don't always hear somebody in the class behind me speaking. If sometimes I might interrupt, I did not intend to do that but I could interrupt somebody because I could not hear them. I make sure that they understand and I am not deliberately trying to stomp somebody. But anyway, my being open about that has drawn other students who have disabilities to me, and that I share with Gilbert. And he has been a really good support for everybody and all of the students with disabilities.

Gavin and Gian have no disabilities and did not have much to say about this type of service. But Gavin had this comment:

I have a classmate who has some kind of hearing problem, I guess she's deaf, and I noticed that they are being taken care of and they are being treated well by the OSA and that's great.

Gian also mentioned his own observations:

I've seen my classmate who gets to have somebody take notes for her. I haven't seen that before, at least in my experience. I do not think my former school had an office for these students who have disabilities. I hope they put up one no matter the cost, I think it's worth it.

**International student advising.** The Director of the OSA said that all international students usually go through the admission and financial aid office first:

International students are usually handled by the Admissions office to take care of their special requirements. But in terms of student services, obviously they would get all the benefits and services offered to our regular students.

When asked if they were planning to create a special office specifically to cater to international students, Gilbert responded:

Yes, we would like to have that one just like the office for students with disabilities. But again, funding is a problem.

None of the three interviewees were international students. They did not have much to say about the topic but Gavin had this comment:

I have a foreign friend who studies at the university. He says that they have this office that serves international students only, they help them get acquainted with the culture and customs of the city, what to look for, what to expect, that kind of thing. He said they even had a manual which he found very, very useful especially during his first few weeks and during winter.

### **The relationship between the OSA and other college departments**

This section of the chapter addresses the third research question which asked:

What are the opinions of the OSA directors concerning the effectiveness of relationships between the OSA and the other college departments/faculties? This data was derived from the interview with Gilbert. The final part of the chapter addresses the question: What could be done to improve the relationships with other faculty and administration?

When asked to describe how the relationship of the OSA was with the rest of the departments and faculties at Commonwealth, Gilbert said:

The relationship is very close, for instance, one faculty and the whole academic enterprise. And so, if they have a problem that is not simply an academic one, say, a problem of a student concerns another student or other needs that they feel is required, they will contact us very quickly. If they have concerns about students' attendance, health or anything at all, they will notify the counseling or they notify my assistant. So there is regular communication back and forth.

When questioned whether he had heard any negative comments directed towards their office by other departments, Gilbert replied:

No, I haven't. I think they are very appreciative. I think sometimes they wish there were more people here to provide more services. I know sometimes instructors have to make arrangements for a student to write an exam that they did not take during the designated exam period, and they would like student services to monitor that. The fact is we don't. In other words, we will provide special

conditions and so on but we assume that the instructor or someone that he designated will monitor the exam. So I think that they may wish that we would, or some of the things that they would not rather do themselves, but in general I think there is a very deep appreciation for and trust shown towards the student services area.

### **Suggested changes**

This section provides responses to the question: What changes would the OSA directors recommend to see so that these relationships are improved? Only the interview with Gilbert is incorporated to answer this question.

Gilbert is firm in saying that the OSA's relationship with other departments is good. But he mentioned that there is still room for improvement and that he is not completely satisfied. He also insisted that the situation could be improved if there was additional staff in some areas and additional programs could be established. Still, Gilbert said that his staff works well and use their time efficiently.

When questioned on what he would do differently in the future compared to what the OSA is doing now, Gilbert had this to say:

The one area that really needs serious attention in student services is a career placement office. In other words, what I would like to see is a much greater focus in placement. If possible, one hundred percent of our graduates will be in positions that they would feel are satisfying to them in employment situations. And I believe that what we have to do is establish an office like this that will explore and develop relations in [the] business industry, [and the] industrial community to attempt to ensure greater opportunities for our students to be employed in the area of their choice upon graduation.

The OSA director once again reiterated that he believed that everything would be improved if only they could get more funding:

With regards to funding, we have constant problems, as a private institution, we have [a] reduced level of funding from the government for operations. We have no funding whatsoever for capital, buildings and so the sources of funding are much reduced from the public institutions. As you can see this is a constant

problem, and of course, it translates into not obtaining adequate staff, adequate space and so on. I believe that funding is a major challenge for any private institution.

Gilbert also reported that the profession of student services was constantly changing. He attributed this to the generally accepted fact that the students themselves were changing:

The types of students you're serving [are] changing, including programs and provincial and federal legislation.

These changes, according to the OSA director required:

A constant need to respond effectively to the needs of the students and the educational scene around you. I suppose change is the only constant in student services.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided the results of interviews conducted at Commonwealth College. Two OSA members were asked about their opinions of the services described in the first research question. They were given the opportunity to also express their views on their relationships with the college administration regarding how their work was being recognized and accepted. Based on the comments they made, the OSA was not satisfied with the service they were providing and they wanted to offer more. However, the main obstacle was adequate funding for these programs. On the other hand, three students were also interviewed about their opinions on the same student services outlined in the second research question. The three suggested a number of suggestions that they believed could help improve the OSA.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Findings**

This section presents the findings from the four colleges regarding their student services. Data was gathered from two sets of participants: (a) OSA members and (b) students. They were asked to share their views on the following forms of student services: (a) financial aid, (b) housing, (c) learning assistance, (d) career and personal counseling, (e) health services, (f) assistance to the disabled, and (g) international student advising.

This part also addresses the fourth research question which asks: What extent of agreement exists between the perceptions of OSA members and students about the effectiveness of the OSA in delivering the services stated above?

#### **Charter College (Philippines)**

**Financial aid.** Although there are a few internal and government scholarships available for students at Charter, both the OSA and students agree that there is a lack of financial aid available. Student loans granted from within the institution are seen as a remote possibility because of potential hazards, especially in the area of debt collection. In the meantime, the college is trying to find ways that would be safe and feasible for them. The students also understand the reluctance of the college in offering financial loans to students for fear of being unable to collect debts from students.

**Housing.** Charter College does not have its own housing facility. Grace, the OSA administrator, supports the idea of being able to accredit the boarding houses that operate within the vicinity of the campus. On the other hand, students generally do not seek the

assistance of the OSA for their own housing needs. Both students and the OSA recognize the fact that there is no in-campus housing facility, but the OSA has taken steps to make up for the absence of this service. The OSA is also very aware that for the students, cost of rent is the biggest determining factor for them when looking for their respective boarding houses.

**Learning assistance.** The OSA have been taking steps to create a decent learning assistance program. In cooperation with some student organizations, the OSA organizes tutorial sessions on various topics that students can participate in. Two of the students mentioned that they had participated in at least one of these programs and found it helpful.

**Career and Personal counseling.** Together with the learning assistance program, Grace's primary concern here is student awareness. The OSA has attempted various methods to make the students more aware, but the inability of the office to cope with the continued growth of the college continued their problems. Lack of staff is also a major problem for the OSA with regards to their information campaigns. Despite the problems alluded to by the OSA, the three students were all aware of the counseling services that were available to them. However, they also said that none of them had taken time to seek counseling or to visit the counseling office.

**Health services.** Both students and the OSA were satisfied with the service that they were receiving and providing respectively. In fact, the students had no complaints and/or suggestions for much more improvement especially when they compared it to other colleges in the city. Grace takes special pride in the appearance of their clinic and the extra efforts that the OSA made in making it more inviting and relaxing for students.

**Assistance to the disabled.** Students were generally not pleased with the lack of programs that the college had for the disabled. They particularly point out that the buildings are not accessible for people with physical handicaps, especially those who need to be in a wheelchair. Even if none of these students had a disability, their sentiments were generally the same as that of the OSA.

**International student advising.** The OSA wants to have a program set in place for this service, but they have not done it yet. The students want the OSA, if possible, to have some of these programs set. However, the OSA claims that they do not look upon these programs as urgent since there are hardly any international students who enroll in the college.

### **Park Square College (Philippines)**

**Financial aid.** The OSA director, Rose, declared that Park Square is not yet ready to provide financial assistance to its students. As of the moment, only a limited number of scholarships and awards are available for students. However, she reveals that a financial assistance program is included in the college's five-year plan. All the students agree that the college should be providing more financial aid for them. They gave special mention to quality students who cannot continue their studies because of financial difficulties. They also recognize the concern of the college about collecting debts from students.

**Housing.** Rose confirms that the college does not have any plans to construct its own housing facility in the near future. She cites lack of funds and available real estate as the primary factors. On the other hand, the students are requesting that the college provide one if they can. In their opinion, their fellow students will immediately fill up dormitory space if the college constructs its own facility.



**Learning assistance.** The OSA describes its faculty consultation program as its primary form of learning assistance. Only one of the three students was aware that the consultation program was a part of the OSA's learning assistance services. The remaining two students did not know anything about the program, nor have they ever participated in them.

**Career and Personal counseling.** Rose mentions some of the programs they offer related to this type of service, such as job placement seminars, quiz shows and a variety of extra-curricular activities that will help promote self-esteem and confidence. Students have also indicated that they were knowledgeable about most of these services. One of them was very enthusiastic in recounting his experiences and was satisfied with the service he was receiving from the office.

**Health services.** The OSA admits that the kind of health service that they provide is very limited and basic. Rose points to the limited budget they have as the main cause. Because of this, the college can only offer first aid for students. When asked about college health services, the students were unanimous in declaring their dissatisfaction with the service. Still, one of them guessed that financial problems were a part of the problem and gave credit to the OSA for doing what they can with what they have.

**Assistance to the disabled.** Park Square College does not have any special programs in place for the disabled. Rose cites the fact that they do not have disabled students and says that they have not found the need yet to have such programs. When questioned about this, the students also showed little knowledge about sign language interpretation or special tutorials for the disabled.

**International student advising.** The OSA says that the Registrar will handle issues with international students when they attend Park Square College. As of the moment, Rose says that the OSA does not have a separate office dedicated specifically for this type of service simply because the college has never had international students. Still, the interviewees recommended that the OSA have some program in place just to be prepared for the eventuality of having foreigners attending the institution. It should be noted that international students still attend universities in the Philippines. However, they usually go to the big universities that offer medicine and dentistry.

### **Riverview College (Canada)**

**Financial aid.** Kim, the OSA director, admits that they do not have much financial aid available for students. What they do is share resources with other colleges in the area to help expose students to whatever scholarships might be available. Kim cites lack of financial resources as their main problem in this area. Two of the students also expressed their discontent with the limited number of scholarships available.

**Housing.** Riverview College does not have its own housing facility for its students. The only kind of housing program they have is Homestay Alberta which is mostly utilized by international students. The three interviewed students believe that a housing facility would be beneficial for students mainly because of the valuable experience they will gain.

**Learning assistance.** Kim mentioned that the OSA has resources such as the student adviser, peer support, case managers, tutors and other workshops that are available for students. Two of the students were very appreciative of this service and admitted that it helped them in their academic performance.

**Career and Personal counseling.** Because of the lack of resources that the OSA of Riverview had, Kim said that they were forced to find ways to be effective. One example was the Helping Council which facilitated certain services, not found within Riverview, to be made available to students through the community. However, all three students interviewed revealed that they had never personally utilized the services of the helping council and other counselors. However, one of the students relayed that she had friends who had been in contact with the Helping Council. According to them, they were treated and assisted very well.

**Health services.** Kim said that the OSA is only equipped for first aid cases. They do not have their own clinic or health center. Because of this, the students were not sure whether the college offered any health services at all. The students also mentioned that they would appreciate it if a standby physician or nurse were assigned to the campus so students could approach them easily. Making space for a clinic was also one of the suggestions that were mentioned.

**Assistance to the disabled.** The OSA limits its support for the disabled to sign language interpretation and tutors. In addition, the availability of these services is dependent on financial resources and enrolments. However, the college building has access ramps and elevators for students who need them. On the other hand, the students did not have much to say about the topic other than to notice that the college campus indeed had the ramps and elevators.

**International student advising.** Riverview has its own international director who communicates with current and prospective international students. It is his job to deal with the unique concerns of these students. Among the three interviewees, the

international student naturally had the most comments on the topic. He stressed how helpful the international director had been to him and his fellow international students. He praised the director for making the transition from his country easier and more tolerable.

### **Commonwealth College (Canada)**

**Financial aid.** Gilbert, the OSA director, said that the Admission and Financial Aid Office handles matters regarding this type of service. Information about loans and scholarships from within and outside Commonwealth College are available through them. During the interview, the students were aware of the Admission and Financial Aid Office and the loans that were available. However, none of them had personally sought financial assistance.

**Housing.** Commonwealth has its own residence facilities within the campus. Aside from being furnished with desks and beds, residents are also exposed to various programs and services to ensure that their stay in the residence halls are holistic in nature. The OSA also maintain a housing registry for off-campus residences. None of the interviewees were residents of the dormitories and therefore did not have much to say about the service. However, one of them said that they had friends who lived in the housing facilities. According to this student, his friend had no complaints about the facilities and programs being provided to them.

**Learning assistance.** The OSA said that they make lectures on study skills and time management available to their students. According to them, the problem is that not many students attend these events. All three students have attended at least one of these lectures and all had the same comment about the lack of attendance. Still, students found

the lectures helpful. One of the interviewees also revealed that he had a disability and that the OSA had worked closely with him to accommodate his needs to assist in his academic activities.

**Career and Personal counseling.** Commonwealth College has a career center to help students in their career and personal goals. Aside from this, the college also has spiritual counseling and counseling psychologists available for students if they wish. With regards to the three students, all of them showed particular interest in the career counseling area. All were aware of the services that this career center provided and said that they hoped to be assisted before they graduate. In terms of personal counseling, none of them were sure if a counselor was available to listen to any problems they might have. Nonetheless, the three students insisted that none of them needed any kind of personal counseling.

**Health services.** Gilbert said that they have minimal facilities for their health service. All they have is a recovery room and should a student need further medical attention, the OSA could refer them to the proper specialists. From among the student interviewees, one of them mentioned that he had been helped numerous times because of his headaches. Another suggested that the college should construct a bigger health center with full-time staff attending to the needs of the students.

**Assistance to the disabled.** Gilbert said that he was planning on establishing an office that deals specifically with students with disabilities. At the moment, the OSA communicates with disabled students and assists them with their needs. One of the interviewees was disabled, he declared that he was very satisfied with how he was being assisted and treated by the college. The rest of the students interviewed had no disabilities

but relayed that they have friends and classmates with disabilities and have not heard anything negative from them. They also suggested that the OSA should create an office for disabled students.

**International student advising.** With regards to this service, the Admission and Financial Aid Office usually handles the international students and their requirements. There is no special office that deals strictly with them. All three interviewees were Canadian citizens and therefore did not have any comments on the topic, but they added that the college should have a center that concentrates on the welfare of the foreign students.

Canada receives a lot of international scholars and immigrants. Because of this, colleges are more aware and prepared for the needs of these foreigners. However, only one of the colleges in the study had a center for international students.

### **Summary**

The following is a presentation of the major areas of agreement or disagreement between the OSA personnel and students:

- 1. Lack of funding in financial aid.** Except for Commonwealth College, all participants from the other schools unanimously agreed that there was a definite lack of financial aid that was available for students. The OSA directors blame this problem on inadequate funding coming from their respective colleges.
- 2. Absence of housing facilities.** Once again, all colleges except for Commonwealth did not have their own housing facility. Both OSA personnel

and the students wanted their own housing facility but conceded that funding or lack of space was the main problem.

3. **Satisfactory learning assistance programs.** All participants were in agreement with the kind of programs being offered by their own colleges. Everyone recognized and agreed on the various factors affecting these programs: a lack of awareness and their general effectiveness.
4. **Lack of health services.** Most of the interviewees recognized the need for more health services for their colleges. Only Charter College participants were satisfied with their current program. All of them attributed the problem to a lack of funding or office space.

## Chapter 9

### Themes and Conclusions

In this chapter I will present the themes and conclusions that emerged during the study.

#### Themes

**Budget problems.** During the study, all the OSAs referred to budget constraints or lack of support from the administration as their primary concerns. Brazzell (1996) concluded that:

The most serious challenge for any institution in carrying out its mission is securing sufficient financial support. (p. 58)

For example, in the Philippines, granting of loans to students is generally not practiced. Although it seems to be an unacceptable practice from a North American standpoint, not too many complaints are being heard from either Philippine parents or students in this regard. Despite the budget constraints that are forced upon them, the Philippine OSA directors were still confident and proud about how they were fulfilling their duties to the students.

In Canada, financial aid depends on the available resources by the institutions. Despite the presence of the federal and provincial loans, colleges still maintain good relations and contacts with other institutions to expose students to as many awards and scholarships as possible. Although the student interviewees seemed to be disinterested or not too satisfied with their government's assistance programs, it is obvious that the Canadian government is more sincere in providing financial assistance to its students than their Philippine counterparts.



During the interviews, the administrators seemed resigned to the budgets that were being allocated to them by the administration. And it will not get better, Schuh (1993) warned:

Student affairs units will be fortunate to maintain the status quo...regardless of the funding source, student affairs units will be forced to struggle to maintain an adequate funding base for the foreseeable future. (p. 59).

Still, it is apparent that budgeting will always be a concern for student services professionals. Schuh (1996) implored administrators of student services to learn how to approach budgets:

Student affairs officers must possess strong planning and budgeting skills. Financial pressure on student affairs units will continue to rise in the future...Student fees will likely increase at a faster rate than tuition, and the use of downsizing and outsourcing will increase. Given this unpleasant scenario, student affairs managers and leaders have no choice but to acquire excellent planning and budgeting skills or face dire consequences.

**Transparency in funding.** During the study, one major difference between the two countries in terms of operations was the transparency of the process whereby budgets are allocated to the OSAs. Canadian OSA administrators usually have an idea of how much money they will be able to work with for a particular year. In contrast, it is totally different in the Philippines. Even though yearly budgets are submitted to government agencies for compliance, these budgets are rarely followed. According to Philippine OSA administrators, they are never assured of a specific amount of money that they can spend. The usual practice is that they would have to ask specific permission from their senior administrators or the board before they could act on a particular program. Therein lies the difference, the Canadian administrators are aware of how much they can spend,

Philippine administrators will have to convince their senior administrators for every major funding requirement.

**Difference in expectations.** Canadian students expect more services out of their OSAs than the Philippine students do. Canadian students want and expect to get the ultimate kind of service that is available if possible, Philippine students seem to just appreciate whatever assistance they may receive.

Dixon (2001) said that the changing expectations also have a significant effect on OSAs:

Currently, parents, students, and employers, as well as governmental and private contributors, are becoming vocal about receiving an acceptable return on their investments in education. (p. 67).

There has also been proof that influential people who possessed some knowledge about the operations and “products and services” of higher education, have started to raise questions about quality and effectiveness (Immerwahr, 1999).

Students generally accept the realities within their own colleges including the conditions and facilities that are available. From among the interviewees, only one of them showed some aggressiveness in relaying her needs to the OSA director. For example, during the interviews, a lot of them wanted the colleges to have a better financial aid program because only a few scholarships and grants were available for students. Still, almost everyone accepted and understood why there was a lack or absence of financial aid. Also with regards to health and housing, students had mixed reactions. A few of them want improvements and some think that the lack of health services and housing is just due to budget problems.

**Lack of resources and/or space.** Sometimes, money is not the only concern. There are instances when a lack of space prevents colleges from providing additional services. A good example of this would be the problems faced in health and housing services. Although the difficulty in securing land for constructing a housing facility is understandable, some colleges even have trouble providing space for small clinics that will serve the health issues of students. In all the participating colleges in the study, only basic health services like first aid were being offered. All students, if possible, want a housing facility that will be run by their respective colleges. They want it, but even they do not see how their college can accomplish the project.

**Culture makes a difference.** During the course of the study, it became obvious that the differences in culture can alter the way student services are prioritized in each country. A prime example of this is the issue of providing housing and residence for students. Because of culture, housing in Canada looks more essential than in the Philippines. The reason is that in the Philippines, it is common for a lot of students to continue to live with their parents up until their late teen years to their early twenties. A more practical reason is that it also allows the parents who normally pay for the tuition fees to save on money that would otherwise be spent on rent. And because most parents still spend their finances on tuition for their children, they are very involved especially in OSA operations and constantly demand all kinds of information regarding their siblings. On the other hand, Canadian students have a more independent mentality. They would tend to live on their own and seek to detach themselves from their parents.

Another issue that amplifies the differences in culture is health. Because of the costs of going to a hospital to seek medical assistance, families in the Philippines would

usually rely on traditional medicine before going to an expensive modern hospital with the latest facilities and technology. This is probably the reason why students in the Philippines seemed more satisfied with the basic services they were getting as compared to the Canadian students. Whereas the former are used to simple health facilities, the latter expect the latest technology to be available to them.

**Money is the bottomline.** No matter what the country, all students usually pay close attention to their finances. When asked whether they would pay more tuition if it meant that they would get improvements in student services, all of them did not hesitate to answering in the negative.

In the Philippines, the primary source of housing for the students was families living around the campus with extra rooms in their houses. Students admitted that these houses were not spacious and the students had meager accommodations. Still, the students explained that they did not have too many problems with the less than satisfactory facilities, rent was the most important factor.

**The problem of awareness.** Gilbert expressed it best when he said with frustration that students are never aware of the services that they offer. Of all the services included in this study, learning assistance together with career and personal counseling were least known by the students. In the Philippines, the OSAs admitted that learning assistance is a relatively new form of service.

Nevertheless, all the OSAs acknowledged that they need more information programs to make students more aware. Their problem is that they seem to be running out of ways to make sure that students are kept aware of these services. They have tried all kinds of advertising materials and they have all been ineffective.

**Scarcity of personnel and lack of qualifications.** All the OSAs in the study acknowledged that their offices are lacking personnel. Eventhough the Canadian colleges appeared to have an advantage with regards to personnel, they implied that if their services were to improve and expand, they would definitely need more people to help.

Based on this study, the Philippine OSAs have bigger problems. Aside from the fact that they have fewer personnel at the OSAs than Canada, the motivation of some of the staff members working for them can come into question. During the interviews, most of them admitted that they took the job out of necessity. Even if they say that they have grown to love their work, they implied that they were admitted to their jobs without the proper qualifications.

Sandeen (2001) emphasized the importance of the professional background of the student affairs staff:

Another very important factor affecting the student affairs organization is the ability of the staff itself. The senior student affairs officer must determine this. If there are staff members who do not have the background or professional training to lead departments effectively, and the senior student affairs officer does not have the option of replacing them soon, the organization most likely will require fairly tight controls and very little authority will be decentralized. (p. 188-189)

**Creativity is better than indifference.** Like the Philippines, Canadian colleges also suffer from lack of funding and resources. However, the biggest difference that came out of the study was that the Canadian colleges showed more creativity in finding ways to be effective despite the lack of funding. They have shown more commitment and dedication in their work by going as far as cooperating with their fellow colleges to share information and resources. Ideas like the Helping Council or the peer support programs are also proof of just how hard the Canadian OSAs are trying to improve their programs.

To their credit, the Philippine colleges have also been trying to launch new programs, but these are not as extensive as the faculty participation and peer support programs of their Canadian counterparts.

In the Philippines, when asked whether they would consider sharing information with the other colleges in their city, the OSA directors answered with an emphatic “no.” Their reason was that unlike Canada, Philippine colleges are more adversarial. Competition for students is always high and the owners of the colleges would normally forbid any idea of seeking help from their rival colleges. In the long run, students will lose under this mentality.

It is quite easy for OSA administrators to keep placing the blame on the lack of support or funding that is being given to their office. Still, the fact remains that the administrators should continue to work, or else lose their jobs. Sandeen (2000) suggests ways in which the OSA can serve notice to their presidents about their work:

Senior student affairs officers are evaluated by presidents on the basis of their performance and this is mainly associated with their ability to resolve problems, manage budgets, deliver efficient services, improve programs, and find resources. They are, and should be, held accountable to do these things by their presidents. Achieving success in these areas is a great challenge and constitutes the heart of the senior student leadership position. Failure in any one of these key areas can result in negative consequences for the institution; it can also result in senior student affairs officers being viewed as ineffective, and eventually being removed from their positions. Moreover, senior student affairs officers are expected to support their presidents, enabling their presidents to carry out their priorities for the institution. (pp. 5-6)

**Policy enforcement creates more programs.** Significant differences were also identified in the study with regards to enforcement of certain laws or educational policies that directly impact certain student services. A good example of this was the services for the disabled. In fact, Canada is the only western country to have encapsulated the rights

of people with disabilities in its Constitution (Stainton, 1994). The 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 15(1)) protects people with disabilities from discrimination, based upon their disability. This right is echoed in provincial Human Rights legislation across the country.

The provincial protection is particularly relevant to post-secondary institutions, most of which come under provincial jurisdiction. Post-secondary institutions clearly have an obligation in law to refrain from discrimination against students with disabilities. This obligation has been put to the test on at least two occasions. Both cases involved the University of British Columbia, and had to do with discrimination towards students with disabilities. These cases are well documented elsewhere (Howard v. UBC, 1993). They make clear the legal obligation of post-secondary institutions to accommodate students with disabilities, and to refrain from discrimination based upon disability.

If we compare this to the Philippines, the differences are very significant. First of all, the OSAs have said that services for disabilities are really not needed because there are hardly any disabled students. Significantly handicapped students usually stay at home or attend special vocational courses in the Philippines. Second, handicap laws and programs are not strictly enforced by the government. Third, hardly any handicapped students are in college. If there are, these handicaps are hardly recognized, acknowledged or admitted by the students themselves. Stainton (1994) also said that students with disabilities only tend to self-identify if they need to do so in order to receive a disability-related service. Otherwise, they do not have any reason to disclose their disability to the institution. For example, an individual who uses a wheelchair for mobility, attending an institution that is relatively accessible would not necessarily self-identify. The effort on

the part of service providers to reduce systemic barriers, such as architectural barriers, plays an important role in making education accessible to students with disabilities, and thus reduces the need for self-identification. Similarly, many people with disabilities who enter a post-secondary institution will have already developed ways of adapting to their environment, and the ability to advocate on their own behalf.

In Canada, a lot of emphasis is put on this program because of the laws that require it. Also, more students with disabilities attend school in Canada than in the Philippines. Students tend to be more open about their needs to make their studies more successful, which enables OSAs to respond to this and make appropriate adjustments or changes.

It is also quite clear that because of the stricter law enforcement, Canadian colleges are more motivated to improve and develop programs that would follow these laws.

## **Conclusions**

The study's findings supported the following conclusions:

### **1. The role of every OSA administrator is unique**

In this study, OSAs from two countries were involved. During the course of the research, it was clear that the differences in how the two countries run their institutions, the cultural gap, the unique budget problems and lack of policy enforcement, puts heavy pressure on OSA administrators. Most of them report directly to their presidents and they have to do their part in realizing institutional goals. Still, OSA administrators are forced to perform independently. Being able to adjust to different situations and having limited options forces the OSA administrators to create the best office they can under the



circumstances they have been provided with. This also supports the idea that there is no universal organizational model that will work for every institution. As conditions within the organization constantly evolve, the model that has been effective for years eventually needs to be changed.

An example of this is how students with disabilities in Canada take advantage of learning programs, unlike those in the Philippines. The OSA cannot be blamed if a student does not approach them for help, or a particular program gets a bad reception. The OSA can do everything correctly, but if students choose to ignore it, it will not work.

## **2. Students and the rest of academe still have difficulty understanding the role of the OSA and what it does.**

Based on the statements made by the OSA administrators, and despite their efforts, many people from within their colleges still do not fully comprehend the role of the OSA. Problems with awareness, and to a certain extent, culture and lack of policy enforcement, continue to limit what the OSA is capable of doing. This observation could persuade OSA administrators to be more vocal and establish their situation within the institution. Some extra effort towards initiating change, by persuading others of the need for the change, may be needed. Because of the competition for resources among administrators, OSA leaders will need to gather help from their colleagues to achieve success.

It was also observed that the OSAs still seem to be isolated from the rest of the college. OSAs in colleges and universities appear to be separated from other units, such as academic and business affairs, within the same institution. The most effective

institutions allow all facets of its organization to feel that they are major contributors to the achievement of its missions.

There was a hint of frustration on the part of the OSA administrators about this during the interviews. I could feel their sense of helplessness about the situation. It was as if they had no idea what to try next.

### **3. The OSAs cannot effectively pinpoint student needs**

Due to the different expectations of their students and the limited budget that they work with, OSAs can be described as “handcuffed.” One might also add that student attitudes about money being the bottom line puts the OSAs in a predicament, especially with regards to housing services. Thus, working with a budget becomes very important. Prioritizing certain programs over others means that some student needs will have to be sacrificed for programs that the OSA perceives to serve the majority. However, therein lies the problem because it is apparent that the OSA does not have an accurate method to gauge the things that are most useful for their particular students.

It was also observed that students, especially if they feel that they are doing well in the college, choose to ignore the OSA. The prevalence of the “go to class and go home” attitude was also evident from the student interviewees. For example, students will only seek counseling if they want to. In addition, awareness cannot be totally blamed for an apparent lack of enthusiasm. Sometimes it is simply a lack of interest, like when students showed more interest toward career counseling than personal counseling. The reason could be that students were more worried about job prospects after they graduate.

#### **4. Diminishing quantity and quality of services**

Budget cuts will always make offices maximize all the resources they have, especially their personnel. The lack of personnel and resources bring out problems with the quantity of services. Without enough people, it is not possible for the OSAs to provide more services. Most affected areas in this case are career counseling, job placement, learning assistance and sometimes guidance counseling.

The problem of personnel qualifications brings out a more serious problem, the quality of service that students are receiving. Are the OSA staff members prepared enough to handle the job? It is quite clear that the ability of the staff is crucial to the success of the OSA.

This situation brings out an interesting question, could the growth of a college actually be bad for the OSA? As more students need to be served, more pressure is put on the office and its staff to perform more efficiently. However, despite these big differences in number of personnel and their qualifications, student responses to the services remained fairly similar.

#### **5. The importance of culture and legal context.**

Taking into account the culture of each country can have a significant impact on how student services are provided. Furthermore, the legal constraints that exist under the different jurisdictions highlighted the differences between the two countries and greatly influenced how the OSAs operated.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Discussion, Recommendations, Implications and Personal Reflections**

#### **Discussion**

The following section presents how the information contained in the literature compares with my study's findings and conclusions.

1. The literature stated that there was a lack of recognition and understanding about the issues concerning the OSA. This affirms the conclusions in the study wherein students and the rest of academe still found difficulty understanding the role of the OSA. It also showed consistency with one of the themes presented in the study, which was the lack of awareness of certain programs being offered by the OSAs.
2. The need for an OSA leader with sufficient background knowledge and managerial skills was emphasized in the literature. This concurs with my study's conclusion that the role of every OSA administrator is unique and that OSA administrators need sufficient skills and knowledge to address the many issues that confront the OSAs. In addition, a theme of my study that highlighted the importance of an OSA administrator's managerial skill is that "money is the bottomline." Another prevailing theme of the study that supported the need for leadership in the OSA is the scarcity and lack of qualifications of personnel.
3. The overall well-being of a student is a major concern that everyone in the OSA profession has emphasized in their research and speeches. Most of them

implied that this can be achieved if the OSA provides students with the necessary support services. However, my conclusions in this study indicated that the OSA is having difficulty pinpointing what their students need. Furthermore, because of the prevailing issue of lack of funding, the diminishing quality and quantity of student services have gone against those prescribed by the literature.

### **Recommendations for the OSAs**

Based on the findings, the literature, and personal experience, I recommend the following:

- 1. OSA directors must clearly inform senior administration about the importance of the office.**

The OSA is very visible because of the very nature of its work. Still, lack of understanding from others in the institution, including senior administration, continues to bother the office. Its potential continues to be promoted by various research studies and yet there seems to be little or no progress in some institutions.

It is due to the nature of their work that OSAs can have much influence and power within their own institutions. An example of how they exercise their influence is the way in which they collaborate with faculty and other administrators in making students' educational experiences more stimulating and meaningful.

It is also important that the President of the institution must be able to share and experience some of the events that the OSA encounters. This will convince him or her of what the OSA does and the situations that the OSA normally faces. Thus, a kinship should be developed with the President. Presidents should not be isolated from the darker

side of campus or student life, instead they must be enlightened by it so that they will be able to personally understand, explain and hopefully address these problems. Another example could be in terms of financial aid. If a president is very involved in solving even just one student's problems with finances, this will help him or her to understand more clearly the complexities of financial aid and maybe, help create some needed reforms. The President could learn lessons that would help create stronger support for financial aid problems.

For most colleges, changes should and usually come from the top. While some people could argue that it will take timing, good judgment and good inter-office political skills for OSA administrators to have success in this particular undertaking, I believe that all of the above plus the OSAs proven track record will make the difference.

**2. The OSAs, in coordination with the administration, should look into the option of outsourcing some of its services**

Since the most common problem that OSAs in the study encounter is the lack of funding, the best way to counteract this problem would be contracting outside entities to provide the services that are a financial burden for the institutions.

Educational institutions are now exploring many opportunities to outsource their activities to cut costs and improve quality and service. Aside from the more familiar outsourcing of food services, institutions now consider outsourcing other services such as bookstores, alumni operations, remedial services, facilities, counseling, health services and many others. Given all the budget difficulties that most of the institutions in this study are under, there are not too many options left for them if they would like to continue providing the kind of services that they expect to provide.

### **3. Staff members should be evaluated and utilized effectively.**

As services are threatened to diminish in both quality and quantity, it is necessary for the OSA administrator to look upon his or her staff and see how they can manage to keep operations running smoothly. The OSA should look at empowering the staff, especially in terms of decision-making ability. It is very important for the OSA administrator to understand the ability of his or her staff and the way it is perceived by students, faculty, and others. The OSA administrator must find ways to ensure that staff members' talents are used most effectively. Staff members should be granted some authority in decision making to help improve their morale. When there is a high level of confidence in the staff to contribute to the education of students and the various units are granted considerable autonomy, there are many benefits for the overall effectiveness of the OSA.

All the colleges in this study will always have the potential to grow significantly, especially in terms of their student population. With this in mind, the OSA will be looking to serve more students every year and there will be increasing pressure for the OSA administrator to maintain or improve the office. In order to achieve this, the OSA administrator's trust and increasing reliance on the staff will be a crucial factor.

### **4. The OSA should conduct and use data gathered from research, assessments and/or surveys**

With the high profile work of student affairs, many people have a chance to form opinions about their operations. In Canada, this includes legislative action, governing boards, parents, employers, and so on. This is the reason why conducting evaluations would be a good opportunity for OSAs to gain a different perspective and to form different insights into how they operate. For example, a student may have a good

experience with financial aid and the food service, but if that same student was treated poorly in the health clinic, questions may be raised about the quality and performance of the entire student affairs division. Some faculty may view the student affairs organization in a very limited fashion, believing it must be doing well if students are not being disruptive. Parents may have yet another set of views about student affairs, with an emphasis on campus security. Some campus administrative units may scrutinize student affairs departments primarily on the basis of the expenses that they incur for the college.

The OSA could get some assistance from its research offices to conduct surveys or studies that will help them yield the information they need. Short questionnaire surveys or checklists designed to assess satisfaction with programs or with other aspects of the college experience can generate useful data that will help the OSA to improve itself.

If possible, the OSA should do this every year. New students enter colleges every year and therefore the needs change as well. In all likelihood, performing a survey will yield results that could give OSAs some idea of what they can do and prioritize programs accordingly. To design new programs and services, it is important for the OSA to find out who benefits from the different programs offered by the office. They need to understand why such programs and services worked.

In a few years, maybe a pattern will emerge that will help the OSAs be more effective in the long run. The OSA could learn from every successive generation of students and apply that to benefit future generations.



## **5. OSAs should look into how their colleagues from other countries operate**

This recommendation encourages OSAs to join international student affairs organizations to create avenues wherein the local OSA will have the opportunity to analyze how OSAs from other countries perform their work.

These organizations give every OSA practitioner a chance to see one's own problems and issues from the perspective of other social, cultural, educational and political settings. It can be very revealing to observe how international colleagues address difficult or even intractable problems found in your own country.

If OSA administrators are able to get the opportunity to visit student affairs operations in other countries and to interact with their international colleagues, it will probably broaden their perspective on approaching different problems and give them new ideas on leadership strategies.

### **Implications**

With regards to trying to make the administration see what the OSA sees, there is always the possibility of rejection. It should be understood that institutional presidents always have to look at the overall welfare of the college; the OSA administrators' priorities are to look out for their own. While the OSA may possess indisputable evidence of its success within the institution, I believe it will eventually come down to what the president sees as a priority for the administration. Every year, critical decisions are made by presidents. These choices often cause disappointment for departments or other factions of the college. Therefore, it is conceivable that the OSA will have to make the sacrifice for the good of others. OSA administrators should be aware of this and should not be discouraged in any way.

In terms of outsourcing, a problem exists that needs to be addressed which some authors have alluded to. Usually, these outside enterprises have different operating policies or procedures which would affect current worker compensation and benefits. Thus, while privatization may help reduce institutional expenses, the effect on the welfare of current employees must also be considered. Issues could also be raised concerning the institutions compromising their mission, traditions and what these colleges stand for. Usually with these outsourcing contracts, the methods in which the services are delivered are to the prerogative of the outside agencies. This raises potential problems with the execution and quality of the services that will be provided by these outside entities. These are some of the dilemmas that the OSA administrator would have to face and they continue to be debated today.

There is no certainty as to whether outsourcing will increase the benefits for students and the rest of academe. It will be the OSA administrator's responsibility to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of entering into such outsourcing contracts.

In terms of the staff members, there are indeed great benefits to the OSA if the qualifications of the staff are high. But for the colleges, especially in the Philippines, this is easier said than done. First of all, looking for qualified personnel who are willing to work for them will be difficult. Second, qualified personnel will definitely be looking for higher salaries. Still, it is possible to continue to do good and effective OSA work with the current personnel. This is where the leadership capabilities of the administrator will be tested.

With research and assessments, it is inevitable that there will be a lot of comments or criticisms from many people. It is important for the OSA administrator and the staff to

understand the impact of these comments on them personally. A potential problem for the OSA is being defensive about the whole process. Thus, a process that is designed to help the office could worsen it if the results are handled the wrong way.

Also with regards to research, if the OSA decides not to, or cannot get help from the Office of Research, there will always be the concern of lack of resources. In addition, current staff members often lack the time, expertise, and experience to perform research work.

Fear of negative data might also be a concern for staff members as this may eliminate some programs. However, this is a good test for the administrator to show the office staff his or her sincerity in acquiring valid information that can help improve the quality of education and the experience for the students.

In terms of looking at OSAs from other countries, it is quite obvious that there are many programs and services that cannot be easily copied by the local OSAs. Because of certain unique social, cultural and political conditions, OSAs are prevented from making such changes. A Canadian college might not be able to do something that their Philippine counterparts do because of privacy laws, ethical issues, and so forth. Philippine colleges might also learn something useful from Canadian OSAs but cannot replicate it because of financial constraints. Still, if an OSA exerts some effort in trying to learn from their international colleagues, maybe they can learn from their past experiences, their inventiveness in overcoming various circumstances despite their limited resources.

### **Personal reflections**

When my wife and I first decided to temporarily leave our jobs in the Philippines to go to North America and work for our doctoral degrees, one of our goals was to learn

as much as possible from how Canadian higher educational institutions conduct their operations. Having come from the student affairs department myself, I decided to focus my thesis on that office so that I could learn more specific things about Canadian OSAs and how I can adapt it to my own situation in the Philippines.

Now that I have finished this study, I have personally seen how different developing countries are from developed countries. Aside from the obvious fact that there is much more money to work with to help OSAs provide better and more services, the way in which governments allocate money was very impressive. Problems with corruption and red tape were almost non-existent. This enables Canadian institutions to provide very good facilities for their students.

In hindsight, I regret that I only asked the OSA Directors, and not all the respondents, the question on what they would like to see changed in student services in their respective institutions.

There is also the difference with culture. Although the OSAs have both showed dedication to their jobs, it is my view that Canadians give a little more, especially in terms of professionalism. It was apparent in the way they talked, the way they told their stories and their plans for the future. However, there is one aspect of culture that I personally believe favors the Philippine OSAs and this has to do with issues of privacy. While Canadian OSAs are never allowed to divulge information about their students to anyone including their parents, Philippine OSAs do not have to worry about such policies. Philippine parents are allowed to visit their OSAs and ask information about students, OSAs can also share information with parents about their siblings, which they believe would be helpful for everybody concerned. This arena of openness allows better

communication between parents and the OSAs. For example, the Philippine OSA can tell a parent that their child is involved in too many activities, is continuously missing his or her classes and anything else that could be hampering their studies. In my view, this is very useful for the OSA, the parents and for the most part, the students.

One irony that I found was how many Canadian administrators and students still complained about the facilities and services that they had. I always kept on telling my classmates and friends in Canada that they should not be complaining and that they should be thankful that such things are available for them. My fellow international students from other developing countries shared this notion as well; we were all used to substandard equipment, major lack of funding and unreliable governments. This forced me to think about standards and how they differ from one country to the next. When I was in the Philippines, I thought our college OSA was already doing a decent job and I was very satisfied and proud of it. That was until I saw the services in Canada. I found out how far behind we were and how much more we needed to catch up. Now, I will never be the same. I will be going back to my country and returning to my job, the office would not have changed much but my thinking and my standards have. I will be going back to work with people who have never seen how Canada operates, it will be understandable that they feel satisfied with their work and it will be my job to convince them otherwise. I have seen how much improvement needs to be done, I will always compare my OSA to the ones in Canada. That is my challenge, the obstacles are great but I think that someday it will be possible for colleges in the developing countries to be on par with the best in the world.

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**Appendix A**  
**Interview Schedule**

## **Interview Guide for Deans/Directors of OSAs**

1. Please tell me about yourself, your background and how you became dean/director of student services.
2. What attracted you to the student affairs profession?
3. In your opinion, what is the role of student affairs in the college?
4. What do you consider to be your biggest challenge as dean/director of student affairs?
5. What are the different forms of student services being offered in your college?
6. How do you perceive the effectiveness of the office in providing advice and assistance with respect to these services?
7. (a) What do you consider to be the most indispensable part of student affairs in your college?  
(b) What is the least important?
8. (a) Do you think students in your college are aware of the services that you offer?  
(b) Are they taking advantage of these services?
9. How do you measure the effectiveness of your office?
10. What conditions in your office do you strive to achieve?
11. What conditions in your office do you strive to avoid?
12. (a) How would you describe the relationship of your office with other departments or faculties?  
(b) Do you have any opinions or recommendations on how this relationship can be improved?
13. Has your perception of the role of student affairs and its dean/director changed since you first started working in the profession?
14. What if anything will you do differently in the future?
15. Is there anything you would like to add in describing what it is like to be a dean/director of student affairs and the realities of student affairs today?

16. Are there any other aspects of student affairs that you find relevant or would like to bring up?

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In the interviews, the official term for the office in each college (Student Affairs, Student Services) will be used.

### **Interview Guide for Other Personnel in OSAs**

1. Please tell me something about yourself, your background and how you became involved in the OSA.
2. How long have you been with the college?
3. What attracted you to become part of student affairs?
4. What is your official title in the office of student affairs and what does the job require you to do?
5. Can you please describe to me how a typical day at the job is for you?
6. (a) What do you consider to be the most indispensable part of student services in your college?  
(b) What is the least important?
7. (a) Do you think students in your college are aware of the services that you offer?  
(b) Do you think they are taking advantage of these services?
8. (a) On any regular school day, how many students come through the office of student affairs?  
(b) How often do you interact with students?
9. What is the most interesting or constructive comment that a student has given to you or the office?
10. What are the challenges do you see in your job?
11. (a) Do you think there is still room for improvement with regards to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the office?  
(b) If you were the dean/director, what would you do differently?

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In the interviews, the official term for the office in each college (Student Affairs, Student Services) will be used.



### **Interview Guide for Students**

1. Please tell me something about yourself, your background, early schooling and interests.
  2. (a) How long have you been a student in this college?  
(b) Have you attended any other post-secondary institution? If yes, which?
  3. (a) Are you aware of the office of student affairs in your college?  
(b) Are you familiar with what they can offer to help you?
  4. What do you think is the role of student affairs in colleges?
  5. (a) Does the OSA regularly communicate with students?  
(b) Do you think they are getting their message across to students?  
(c) Why or why not?
  6. Can you compare student affairs in your present college from your previous college(s)? *(To be asked if student has previously attended other colleges)*
  7. (a) Have you ever required the help of student affairs in the past?  
(b) If yes, in what manner? If no, why?
  8. What do you like most about student affairs here in your college?
  9. What do you like least about student affairs in your college?
  10. (a) If I were the head of student affairs here in your college, what comments or suggestions would you tell me about the office?  
(b) What aspects of student affairs do you feel needs improvement immediately?
- 

In the interviews, the official term for the office in each college (Student Affairs, Student Services) will be used.

**Appendix B**  
**Letters of Introduction and Consent**

## **Consent to participate in the study – students**

University of Alberta  
Department of Educational Policy Students  
7-104 Education North  
Edmonton, AB  
T6G 2G5

June 4, 2000

Dear Student,

My name is Edward Dalusong III and I am a graduate student in Educational Administration at the University of Alberta. As part of doctoral degree requirements, I am conducting research on student services in Canada and the Philippines; the title of the study is: A comparison of student services in four private colleges in the Philippines and Canada. No deception is used in this study. I want to learn what students think about student services in their respective colleges.

I would like your permission to include you in my study. If you agree to participate and are under 18 years of age, I will also ask permission from your parents for your participation.

You will spend a total of about 45 minutes with me in this one on one interview. You will be asked about your views and experiences with student services in your college. The interview will be taped and later transcribed for analysis. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts for its accuracy and discuss its contents with me.

I will not identify you by name – no one will know how you answered my questions. If you decide later that you don't want to participate, you can say no at any time. If you have any questions about this project now or later, please feel free to contact me at 438-5403 or via electronic mail: evd3@yahoo.com or my thesis adviser, Dr. Mike Andrews, at the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Education North Building at the University of Alberta.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please indicate this by signing in the space provided below and give this sheet to your teacher. Thank you.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ GIVE PERMISSION FOR Edward Dalusong TO  
INCLUDE ME IN THE STUDY AS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Consent to participate in the study – Parents**

University of Alberta  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
7-104 Education North  
Edmonton, AB  
T6G 2G5

June 4, 2000

Dear parent,

My name is Edward Dalusong III and I am a graduate student in Educational Administration at the University of Alberta. As part of doctoral degree requirements, I am conducting research on student services in Canada and the Philippines; the title of the study is: A comparison of student services in four private colleges in the Philippines and Canada. No deception is used in this study. I want to learn what students think about student services in their respective colleges.

I would like your permission to include your son/daughter in my study – your son/daughter will also be asked if he or she wants to participate.

Your son/daughter will spend about 45 minutes with me on a one on one interview. Questions about his or her views regarding student services in their college or their experiences with student services will be asked. The interview will be taped and later transcribed for analysis.

I will not identify your son/daughter by name or description. No one will know how he or she answered my questions. If you decide that you don't want your child to participate after the study has started, you can say no at anytime. If you have any questions about this project now or later, please feel free to contact me at 438-5403 or via electronic mail: evd3@yahoo.com or my thesis adviser, Dr. Mike Andrews, at the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Education North Building at the University of Alberta.

If you are willing to let your son/daughter participate In this study, please indicate this by signing in the space provided below titled "I GIVE PERMISSION." If you refuse to let your son/daughter participate, please indicate this by signing in the space provided below titled, "I DO NOT GIVE PERMISSION." After you have signed in the space of your choice, kindly return the permission form with the stamped envelope included in this letter.

Thank you.

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**I GIVE PERMISSION**

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE RECEIVED A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM AND I,  
\_\_\_\_\_, GIVE PERMISSION FOR Edward Dalusong TO INCLUDE MY SON/DAUGHTER,  
\_\_\_\_\_, IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT AS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**I DO NOT GIVE PERMISSION**

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE RECEIVED A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM AND I,  
\_\_\_\_\_, DO NOT GIVE PERMISSION FOR Edward Dalusong TO INCLUDE MY  
SON/DAUGHTER, \_\_\_\_\_ IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT AS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***After signing this form in the space of your choice, kindly return the form with the enclosed self-addressed, self-stamped envelope.***

## **Letter of Introduction from Researcher – for Student services personnel**

June 4, 2000

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta majoring in Educational Administration. My thesis is about the comparison of student services in four private colleges in the Philippines and Canada. I am inviting you to take part in the study, thus adding your insights about student services in your private college.

I believe that comparing college student services in both countries will provide an important perspective in the development of these services in the future. I also believe that all participating colleges will benefit from the study because of the information that will be gathered during the interviews and the subsequent analyses. Being an integral part of the student services profession, your views and experience will be invaluable for this study.

If you agree, I would like to meet with you at a convenient time for an interview lasting about one hour. The interview will be taped and later transcribed for analysis. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts for its accuracy and discuss its contents with me. Direct quotations from the transcript will not be used without your consent. No deception will be employed and all data will be destroyed at the end of the study.

As a participant, you would be able to opt out of the research at any time without obligation. I will not identify you by name – no one will know how you answered my questions. If you decide that you don't want to participate, you can say no at any time.

Should you require more information, please feel free to contact me at 438-5403 or via electronic mail: [evd3@yahoo.com](mailto:evd3@yahoo.com) or my thesis adviser, Dr. Mike Andrews, at the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Education North Building at the University of Alberta.

If you agree to the above conditions, kindly sign the consent form attached to this letter.

Thank you and I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Edward V. Dalusong III  
Ed.D. Student  
University of Alberta

**Consent to participate in the study (attached to letter of introduction for student services personnel)**

If you are willing to participate in this study under the conditions outlined in the letter of introduction, please indicate this by signing in the space provided below. Thank you.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ GIVE PERMISSION FOR Edward Dalusong TO  
INCLUDE ME IN THE STUDY AS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

University of Alberta  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
7-104 Education North  
Edmonton, AB  
T6G 2G5