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Understanding job dissatisfaction and burnout amongst student affairs professionals and its  
relation to student success

by

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## **Abstract**

Student affairs professionals are crucial in supporting student success in post-secondary education. There are a multitude of factors that can impact a student affairs professional's ability to provide excellent and consistent support to students. This written work seeks to assess how burnout and job dissatisfaction impacts student affairs professionals' ability to support student success and some potential mediating factors or strategies to move forward. Through reviewing literature around burnout, job dissatisfaction, and student success this piece hopes to highlight ways for individuals, workplaces, as well as institutional policies to combat issues of burnout and job dissatisfaction amongst student affairs professionals. Providing support to their support staff can allow post-secondary institutions to continue to support students and staff to thrive and succeed.

Post-secondary institutions are thriving communities filled with students, support staff, and faculty members all navigating a very dynamic environment. A student affairs professional, SAP, is a part of a broad group of institutional employees that strive to support student success and development on campus (Lynch & Glass, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016; Seifert & Burrow, 2013). As Mullen et al. (2018) states, “Student affairs professionals (SAP) perform diverse and multifaceted job responsibilities that range from individual counseling or advising with students, to coordinating large scale events (e.g, career fair), performing assessments of students, and dealing with crises” (p. 95). SAPs occupy a multitude of roles that place them in direct contact with students to support their needs outside of the explicit academic classroom. The direct connection with students, as well as the helping nature of the role, places SAP in a position to address, whether directly or through connecting to additional resources, a wide variety of student concerns. Due to the complex needs of students, such as mental health crisis or experiences of gender-based violence, SAP find themselves “...increasingly acting as first responders to student crises” (Lynch & Glass, 2019, p. 1).

SAP’s ability to support student success on campus is impacted by a multitude of factors ranging from supporting students who are in crisis to navigating institutional restructuring. With factors such as burnout and job dissatisfaction, limiting the capacity of SAPs to meet student needs, it becomes an institutional concern. Students are the core around which many post-secondary institutions operate, and by illustrating the various factors that impact an SAP’s ability to support that core value, the importance of this research will become apparent.

This paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature regarding SAPs, specifically in relation to their ability to provide service to students. Topics around job dissatisfaction and burnout have been discussed in the context of social workers or K-12

educators frequently, and this paper seeks to apply that work to a post-secondary context. Bringing in these concepts from other disciplines to further support existing literature about SAPs will hopefully add additional discourse or support the development of new literature in the field. This article will focus on defining burnout and job dissatisfaction in relation to SAPs before diving into defining student success, and how that burnout and job dissatisfaction impacts student success. After highlighting the impacts, the focus will shift to potential tools or perspectives to better support SAPs as they support student success on an individual, workplace, and institutional level.

With external forces or movements such as the Covid-19 pandemic or the Black Lives Matter Movement, there are very real and varied impacts on communities such as those at post-secondary institutions. These external factors add layers of complexity to an already liminal space where youth meets adult, storied institutions meet engines of societal change, academic meets workplace, as well as many more unique spaces. Better understanding the experiences of the support staff who guide students through these transitory spaces and providing them with the tools needed to succeed benefits students, staff, and the institution alike.

### **Student Affairs Professionals**

SAPs are unique in the ways they interact with students, within the context of the university, but outside of a strictly academic or classroom setting. They can range from career services, financial aid, conduct officers, residence professionals, academic program advisors, and many more (Seifert & Burrow, 2013). The education and support that occurs outside of the classroom happens as SAP engage in front end service such as programming, workshops,

individual or group support as well as behind the scenes work like policy review, grant writing, or interdepartmental collaboration. SAPs may not be the first people to come to mind when someone thinks of people at a post-secondary institution, but they are incredibly vital to a successful campus.

Due to the breadth of roles that an SAP can occupy, they are positioned to interact with the different student populations on campuses. Access to post-secondary institutions and increased enrollments have created an opportunity for SAPs to interact with a diverse body of students. According to the University of Alberta's (2021) overview of 2021/22 undergraduate enrollment stats, they had over 34,000 undergraduate students with over 107 countries represented and an 11.6% increase in Indigenous students in a year over year increase (p. 3). This is in line with the University of Alberta's (2016) strategic plan which aims to build a diverse community where students can excel and engage in "...diverse and rewarding learning opportunities that...enable our success" (p. 5). Due to the increasing enrollment of students year after year, the subsequent need for student services must expand to help meet the desired goals of the institutional strategic plan.

### **Burnout**

Burnout is a very real and impactful experience that can affect an SAP's ability to effectively but their well-being as well. In the study Marshall et al. (2016) conducted, they found that "[b]urnout and exhaustion were well documented, as only 52% felt they had enough time to complete their work, 51% felt the hours they worked were excessive, and 70% reported excessive weekend and evening work-related commitments" (p. 152) and that "...53% of

participants felt their levels of burnout were high...” (p. 153). Gutherie et al. (2005, as cited in Marshall et al., 2016, p. 152) stated that burnout is the “state of fatigue and frustration arising from unrealistic, excessive demands on personal resources leading to physical and mental exhaustion.” Being burnt out can result from chronic stressful experiences that can impact people in both physical and mental ways, such as a residence life staff member having less patience with a student who has repeated conduct violations (Wagner & Catalano, 2021). SAPs can be particularly prone to burnout as the helping nature of the role blends with increasing pressure to provide excellent service. Burnout can manifest in physical ways such as insomnia, headaches, or fatigue, or in ways that affect a person’s mental health, such as anger or withdrawal (Wagner & Catalano, 2021, p. 222). Working through feelings of being burnt out can be challenging for a variety of reasons that influence an SAP’s capacity or ability to work. A key facet of burnout is an overall reduction in a person’s capabilities and capacity for accomplishing goals as individuals are mentally, and at times physically exhausted.

A key facet of burnout is a reduction in lack in capacity as individuals are mentally, and at times physically, exhausted. This problem can be exacerbated by situations outside of one’s control that are affecting the SAP. We can look to events such as the Covid-19 pandemic as an example where an unpredictable external event had significant impact on every aspect of people’s lives. As people navigated this dynamic and serious situation, the mental and physical toll experienced served to hamper the ability of many to deal with additional stressful situations, thus it is understandable that their ability to manage stressors in their workplace would be lowered. This added layer of complexity would not only impact an SAPs ability to provide excellent service to students as they managed burnout, but also in how a reduction in students’ capacity to manage stressors in their lives. An increased demand of an SAP’s services in

complex student cases could further exacerbate feelings of burnout amongst SAP. There is a fine balance that SAP need to manage between providing excellent service to students while facing the impacts of challenging situations, increased demand on time, and heavy workload (Seifert & Burrow, 2013).

Institutional capacity plays into factors such as heavy workloads, available funding for new staff, as well as better physical spaces to operate out of that contribute to SAP's experience of burnout. Highlighting the impact of staff shortages or funding, Lynch and Glass (2019) state, "[u]nfortunately a lack of institutional capacity—coupled with the proximate nature of student affairs work—means students often rely on student affairs professionals as surrogate counselors after experiencing a trauma" (p. 3). While it is SAP's role to support students, such as those experiencing crises or impactful events, not everyone is trained in crisis management, emergency support, counseling, or even has the role expectations of fielding these concerns. Referrals to other resources happen frequently but may not always be as straightforward if the student's needs are complex or the appropriate services do not have capacity. As a caring profession, SAPs can sometimes try to put the needs of the student first amidst their close interactions, but it can potentially feed into deeper or more consistent experiences of burnout.

While the capacity of the institution can be pointed out as an influence on burnout, the structure and processes can be challenging as well. Student affairs is a helping profession where individuals are hearing of students' problems, meaning they may be subject to challenging or triggering topics. Additionally, within the institutional structure there may be oppressive structures or little room to deviate from procedure. These structures can place barriers in the ways that SAPs can meaningfully engage in their work, especially when looking at institutional structures from a critical or intersectional approach (Wilson, 2016). SAPs must work within the

policies and bounds of their roles, but due to the structural constraints they may not be able to act within their values or principles leading to internal conflicts (Wilson, 2016, p. 480). If an SAP's values are misaligned with the work they are doing, it can lead to feelings of burnout through working in a chronically stressful environment.

Feelings of helplessness or frustration can abound when structural changes or policy revisions, that must be enacted by the SAP or directly affects them, occur without input from the SAP. Burnout can occur when these experiences become consistent and as the needs to adapt to the institution go beyond the capacity of the SAP. What can oftentimes stem from the workplace burnout is job dissatisfaction within the role.

### **Job Dissatisfaction**

While job dissatisfaction is not exclusive to SAPs, there are unique factors, such as burnout, that influence the experience of it in addition to how it presents itself in educational settings. Being unhappy or dissatisfied in the work one does has lasting personal and professional implications. Job dissatisfaction can stem from many different aspects of one's work environment, such as "...role ambiguity, role conflict, role orientation, role stress, job burnout, work overload, and perceived opportunities for goal attainment, professional development, and career advancement" (Tull, 2006, p. 465). Structural concerns within the institution, such as policies or restructuring, can impact an SAP's experience of job dissatisfaction as the perceived or real barriers to student affairs practice, equity, or continuity of service can make it challenging to engage in the work. If there is a persistent negative experience of job dissatisfaction in an SAP's work, it can be challenging to maintain perspective as to the

motivations for supporting students in their work, potentially leading to job attrition (Marshall et al., 2016).

Workplace turnover is a challenging process, with many influences such as burnout, for the SAP as well as the institution itself (Marshall et al., 2016). As Chessman (2021) states, “[h]igh levels of attrition is an expensive and taxing occurrence for organizations, as remaining staff experience job overload during staffing shortages and a significant amount of time and resources are allocated toward the recruitment and training of new staff” (p. 159). When SAPs leave their role there is either a need for the institution to rehire for that role or redistribute the work to other staff, both of which take time and impact other staff. Innovative practices or workplace efficiencies can help ease the strain of covering for a vacant or abolished position, but “doing more with less” can only mitigate workplace strains to a limited degree. The reputation of the institution could be at risk with workplace attrition as the perception of the working environment impacts how they can attract or retain new talent. A post-secondary institution makes an investment of time and money into training new staff, therefore from a human resources perspective, it is important to retain trained talent who effectively manage their role. There are time implications throughout the hiring and training process of new staff, leading to potential stressors on the team or manager while the new SAP gains confidence and competency. While the institution itself is impacted by job dissatisfaction, it is important to recognize the lived experience of the SAP through job dissatisfaction, and how that impacts themselves moving forward.

Chessman (2021) highlighted that “[l]ow job satisfaction may contribute to low well-being, which in turn could have an impact on attrition, productivity, and performance of these professionals” (p. 159). If an SAP is unhappy in their workplace, it can be hard to be fully

engaged in their performance at work. As Anderson et al. (2000) states “[d]emanding schedules and work over-load may frequently be responsible for interpersonal and time conflicts which can reduce job satisfaction and increase stress” (p. 99). Job dissatisfaction, which can be influenced by the things Anderson et al. (2000) stated, can play into the performance of a role, especially if there is a lack of investment from the SAP due to a real or perceived lack of support, opportunities, or capacity in their roles. As SAPs are involved in the supporting of student success, the impacts of job dissatisfaction and how it can impede their ability to provide that service to students should be a concern to the institution (Martin, 2008, p.63). Performance management, while a key concept within workplaces, could be perceived to further alienate the SAP in their feelings of dissatisfaction. Productivity and efficacy can be negatively impacted if there are not structures in place to mitigate the concerns leading SAPs to experience workplace dissatisfaction (Anderson et al., 2000). While the goals of supporting student success remain, an SAP who is experiencing job dissatisfaction may have less capacity or less connection to their workplace, which impacts their ability to support their institutional goals of student success.

### **Student Success**

Within a post-secondary context there can be several terms that are frequently used that their meaning is taken for granted. Student success can be interpreted to mean different things depending on who you ask and at what stage they are at in their lives. One can look at the academic or metrics-based view of student success, or one where the meaning is determined by the students themselves. That is not to say that one interpretation is correct, or that they are mutually exclusive, but that student success means different things in different spaces.

Understanding both sides will create a robust understanding of not only student success, but how it is influenced by the services of SAPs.

Oftentimes student success is seen from a lens of measurable metrics such as GPA, graduation, or employment rates after graduation (O’Shea & Delahunty, 2018; Seifert & Burrow, 2013). Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2006, as cited in Seifert & Burrow, 2013, p. 133) define student success as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; educational attainment; and postcollege performance”. This definition has a clear tie to empirical measurements that one expects a student to gain from attending post-secondary schooling. Students themselves may also have “expectations about course content, teaching styles and other administrative aspects of service that they equate with the concept of ‘value’ that they receive in exchange for their fees” (Martin, 2008, p. 155). There is a distinct transactional nature to the exchange of student time, effort, and money for measurable outcomes, such as graduation, from the institution.

Measurable metrics of student success can be an effective way for the institution to be accountable or credible to stakeholders such as governments or to the academy itself. The quantitative nature of an academic view of student success can illustrate the educational value of the service they provide. There is, however, an added richness in more qualitative or experience focused understanding of student success. Students may be engaging in the university experience for a wide variety of reasons and outcomes. While it is true that attending post-secondary can amount to degrees or wider career opportunities, some students define their meaning of success differently. O’Shea and Delahunty (2018) conducted a study where student respondents highlighted three themes regarding the qualitative measurement of student success as a form of

validation, success as defying the odds, and as embodied and emotional success (p. 1098). Students in O’Shea and Delahunty’s (2018) study spoke to the importance of continuing their degree regardless of various barriers that impeded them in their studies, or how “[t]erms like ‘happiness’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘being passionate’...abounded when participants were asked to describe what success meant to them” (p. 1070). This humanistic view of learning places students at the centre while they derive their own meaning from their experiences. A student’s experience of success as managing the complex and competitive environment of the institution is just as valid as a student looking to graduate with a 4.0 GPA (Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016).

Whatever growth, experiences, or outcomes a student hopes to achieve the post-secondary institution seeks to support their journey there. There are academic supports such as citation or study habit workshops, in addition to non-academic supports such as conflict management or budgeting sessions. At the heart of these supports and efforts, which are aimed at promoting student success, are hardworking individuals, like SAPs.

### **Student Affairs Professional’s Role in Student Success**

Regardless of which definition of success you subscribe to, whether a more academic or student defined meaning or some combination of the two, it is bolstered and fostered with the work SAPs do (O’Shea & Delahunty, 2018). SAPs are in a unique position to support students as they define meaning or what is of importance to them throughout their post-secondary journey (O’Shea and Delahunty, 2018; Pérez et al., 2017). An SAP’s ability to work closely with students not only connects students to immediate supports but to foster a deeper sense of belonging within the institution. Leveraging their ability to be a bridge between the institution

and the student, the SAP can advocate for student needs while striving to attain the goals set out by the institution.

As Wagner and Catalano (2021) state, “[t]he humanizing shift in a compassionate relationship allows students and SAPs to have authentic relationships and creates space for genuine engagement across power, opening possibilities to communicate from positions of privilege and marginalization” (p. 219). Through engaging with SAPs, students can feel a direct sense of support as well as feel heard within the sometimes intimidating well-oiled machine of the institution. Student experiences can sometimes highlight equity gaps or inefficiencies in policy or process, which is where an SAP might be able to step in. Whether the student wishes to be heard, see what processes are in place for action, or to provide feedback for policy changes, an SAP will either be able to directly help the student, or guide them to an appropriate service.

Not only can SAPs help validate the experiences of students as they access institutional resources, but they can aid students in a wide variety of ways. A SAP’s ability to support a wide variety of student concerns from a diverse body of students beneficially affect “...academic motivation, leading to a student persisting in college and completing a degree program” (Martin et al., 2020, p. 150). The Martin et al. (2020) study looked at how the cognitive outcomes of students, such as academic measurements of GPA or graduation, was impacted by their interaction with SAPs. Additionally, Martin et al. (2020) found that a SAPs interactions with students lead to, over a four-year period, increases in 3 cognitive outcomes: academic motivation, need for cognition, and positive attitude towards literacy (p. 159). While SAPs may not be directly working within a classroom, there are very tangible benefits seen within student academic success from SAP’s interaction and aid.

Not only do SAPs impact academic outcomes, but they "...are ideally situated to impact students' cognitive growth and academic achievements by crafting and promoting environments outside the classroom that motivate, encourage, and inspire students to actively engage in the learning process through their coursework and other collegiate experiences" (Martin et al., 2020, p. 159). Learning outside the classroom is a key facet to developing students' critical thinking and engagement within the institution (Martin et al., 2020, p.149). This is in line with many post-secondary institutions' strategic plans around developing well rounded students with diverse experiences and commitments to academic excellence (Dalhousie University, 2021; University of Alberta, 2016; University of Toronto, 2018).

While SAPs oftentimes have a positive influence on student success, their ability to provide service is impacted by a variety of factors, such as burnout and job dissatisfaction. Attrition not only impacts the SAPs and the institution, as previously described, but they impact the students as well. As institutions dedicate time and money towards training new staff there are gaps in service to students. This could translate to longer wait times, overwhelmed staff, delays in services, and potential competency issues as new staff become accustomed to the role. As Marshall et al. (2016) states, "[t]he expenditures associated with employee turnover, such as recruiting, hiring, and training during a transition, are but a few of the costs associated with attrition" (p. 146). If the result of attrition is role restructuring where the workload of the absent position is placed on other SAPs, there are still major impacts to students. Added workloads on remaining SAPs can further exacerbate wait times for students to receive service or increase experiences of burnout or job dissatisfactions leading to capacity issues of staff. There is the potential for a feedback loop of declining staff morale and job dissatisfaction leading to further instability.

Burnout can be closely tied to poor boundaries, where SAPs may become too close to their work or too removed, and the resulting inappropriate relationships or improper engagement in the role impacts SAP's capacity or effectiveness (Wagner & Catalano, 2021, p. 98). An SAP who is experiencing burnout is not able to be fully present in their support or interactions with students as they are lacking the emotional or mental capacity (Lynch & Glass, 2019; Wagner & Catalano, 2021). Russell et al. (2020) frames a similar argument by stating “[a]s employees distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their work, they are less involved with, or responsive to, the needs of other people or the demands of their job” (p. 4). Much of the work in student affairs requires a level of compassion, empathy, and care from the SAP to the student as they navigate difficult situations. An SAP, who is burnout, may not have the capacity to be present and supportive to a student in crisis or needing a compassionate advisor through challenging policies.

As Wagner and Catalano (2021) further explore burnout, they highlight how burnout ties into depersonalization as well as how prolonged burnout creates an environment where people may feel like they are less invested in work leading to feelings of failure (p. 221). It can be challenging to reconcile feelings of burnout amongst the increased need of students, especially after global traumas like the Covid-19 pandemic, or the expanded requests towards post-secondary institutions to do more for the increased volume of students with less staff or monetary resources. This detachment from the role places barriers between the SAP and the crucial work that they do, especially in terms of building respectful rapport with struggling students and meeting those student needs within the limits of their role. That is to say that if an SAP is burnout in their role, they may not be able to empathize with student needs leading to students getting incomplete or inconsistent support at the institution.

The student may not always be able to directly identify that burnout and job dissatisfaction of SAPs are impacting their access and quality of support, but they are able to feel the impact of long wait times for mental health services, certain workshops being cancelled due to low staff, or the lack of an empathetic response to the struggles they face. To best combat the impacts of burnout and job dissatisfaction of SAPs on student success it is critical to reflect on a multitude of potential solutions. No one tool or framework will be the key to solving this complex problem. Focusing on what individual SAPs can do, what workplaces or managers can do, as well as what institutions can do in terms of culture or policy shifts can all better support SAP so that they may support students

### **Looking Forward**

Job dissatisfaction and burnout negatively impact and SAP's ability to provide support services to students in post-secondary institutions. To better support institutional goals of providing excellent care and service to students, it is important to look forward to ways to support SAPs, managers, departments, and institutions in this journey.

SAPs themselves have a role to play in combatting burnout and dissatisfaction within their role. This is not to diminish trends that impact the SAP, but there are tools or frameworks that can be applied on an individual level to the benefit of the SAP. Even before an SAP enters the field, there are reflections and research to be done in terms of goal setting for their career. Considering factors such as work environment, salaries, after-hours work, types of student interactions, as well as work-life balance are important aspects for when SAPs plan their

potential career paths (Marshall et al., 2016). If an SAP understands their limits or triggers in relation to their work, they may best align their expectations with potential roles.

Self-reflection plays a critical role in an SAP's ability to manage negative experiences or impacts they face from their work. Being self-aware of one's needs will set an SAP up to advocate for themselves and therefore better serve their students (Wagner & Catalano, 2021). There are several ways in which this self-awareness can be applied, such as through self-care practices. Individual self-care can be a key tool for SAPs to combat concerns associated with burnout and job dissatisfaction (Wagner & Catalano, 2021). Self-care is a set of tools or strategies that individuals can engage in to help manage stress, anxiety, burnout, as well as for maintaining general wellness (Jackson Preston et al., 2021). Each person has a unique way that they engage in self-care that works best for them, but it may take time and experimentation to find what works best. As Burke, Dye, and Hughey (2016) highlight in their study, practices of self-care and mindfulness "...can help prevent burnout, be essential for enhancing work-life balance, and decrease attrition" (p. 95). There is a need for SAPs to be aware of their needs, through self-reflection, and to articulate those needs within their workplace so they may access supports available and applicable to them.

Another way that SAPs can engage in self-reflection is through reframing practices. "By restructuring our cognitions, reframing allows us to be able to create a different way of looking at a situation, offer new meaning or perspective, and generate a new frame of reference" (Wagner & Catalano, 2021, p. 164). Additionally, as Roper et al. (2016) states, "[r]eframing is one way to develop deeper and more profound understandings of our experiences and of the systems and the circumstances in which we operate" (p. 97). An SAP's ability to reshape how they find meaning in their work could aid in finding alternative solutions to their experiences of

burnout and job dissatisfaction. Instead of focusing on the perceived struggles in one's work, shifting one's mindset to focus on growth or solutions could help SAPs articulate their concerns as well as their needs. Reframing one's perspective when referring students to additional services who may be better equipped is not a failure of the SAP, but rather an "...enlargement of the circle of support for the student's well-being and stabilization" (Wagner & Catalano, 2021, p. 97). Combatting feelings of burnout stemming from perceived failings in an SAP's work could be supported by individual reflections geared towards reframing one's own beliefs, values, experiences, and perceptions.

Within a workplace there are numerous opportunities for supervisors, managers, or directors to best support the SAPs working with them. As Wagner and Catalano (2021) state, "[a]t an organizational level, it is important for institutions to consider workloads of their employees, professional development trainings that educate individuals on burnout, and maintain a culture of awareness around the phenomenon of burnout and provide preventative, timely strategies" (p. 161). Between organizational changes and more individualized supports, managers can better support SAPs, which in turn supports the students at the institution.

The very capacity or organization of an office can be impactful to SAPs. The work of SAPs is incredibly dynamic, needing a lot of support themselves as they see students through their struggles at the institution. Rigidity in the work, high workloads, and poor work-life balance can all be factors detrimentally impacting SAPs. Flexibility in the work environment can better support SAPs to have more control or autonomy over their work as they provide service to students amidst a dynamic work environment (Anderson et al., 2000; Martin, 2008). Managers promoting flexible structures, in context within the capacities of their roles, within student affairs work puts the needs of the SAP in the centre of a supportive work environment.

As the main facilitators of professional management in the workplace supervisors or managers have a direct chance to support SAPs, such as through clear role expectations. Before SAPs become entrenched in their roles with set habits or practices, it could be crucial for managers to conduct goal setting and role expectations. Open conversations between managers and SAP regarding professional development opportunities or the career goals of the SAP will foster an environment where SAP feel like their contributions matter or that there is a future for them within workspace, potentially leading to an improved work setting (Chessman, 2021). Work environments that promote work-life balance, growth of the individual, and individual support can more effectively combat issues such job dissatisfaction or burnout (Martin, 2008).

Student affairs managers can also seek to build relationships meaningful relationships with SAPs that show the value of their contributions while encouraging growth (Marshall et al., 2016). Synergistic supervision, as discussed by Tull (2006) could pave the way for SAPs to have open conversations regarding job satisfaction, feeling connected to the role, as well as meaningful opportunities to engage in their roles moving forward. Winston and Creamer (1997, as cited in Tull, 2006, p. 466) states that synergistic supervision relates to “(a) discussion of exemplary performance, (b) discussion of long-term career goals, (c) discussion of inadequate performance, (d) frequency of informal performance appraisals, and (e) discussion of personal attitudes”. If the relationship between the supervisor and staff is one of open communication aimed towards understanding and collaborating with SAP, then there are many more opportunities to readily address any issues that may come up.

Workplace training or educational opportunities can be crucial in promoting coping skills, addressing workplace issues in a practical way, and promoting meaningful engagement in the work (Russel et al., 2020). Growth in the role is a key way to keep SAPs engaged in their

position as they can advocate for training that meets their specific needs. Reynolds (2013) highlights an example wherein “[g]iven the increasing demands for support and mental health services as well as the limited helper training that many student affairs professionals may receive, addressing these issues seems vitally important to the welfare of college students today” (p. 103). The additional resources added to an SAPs practicing toolbelt can help offset the experiences of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Russel et al., 2020). Workplace tools, such as the one created by Lynch and Glass (2019) to assess secondary trauma in SAPs, can be utilized as a opportunity to open communication or to assess impact, in addition to potential needs, within an office.

While professional development can be fundamental in supporting SAPs, it “...must be paired with institutional efforts to increase autonomy and address stressors around the way in which work is organized or delivered” (Jackson Preston et al., 2021, p. 175). Intentionality behind the structure, operations, and ongoing engagement of student services departments could be critical in supporting support staff. Accessibility of services, such as the physical location’s proximity to students, encouraging the collaboration of services, in addition to encouraging student’s self-efficacy were valuable in Denogean and Schwalbach’s (2010) review of structure changes to Pima Community College’s changes to their Student Service Centers. Not only can a physical shift of office locale support student affairs, but a cultural shift of centering student needs can highlight the importance of student affairs. Culture shifts that empower SAPs within their roles, and valuing the contributions they make within the institution, will translate to healthier working environments, more effective SAPs, and better outcomes for the students they work with (Chessman, 2021).

Another way that institutions can positively impact student success is by addressing capacity or resource needs in student affairs such as funding or staffing. Prioritizing student success means prioritizing the supports that help students achieve that success. It is important for the institution to reflect on competitive rewards or pay, staffing needs, student needs on campuses, and future institutional goals and their relations to student affairs work so that adjustments or plans can be made accordingly (Anderson et al., 2000). Within a time of austerity measures or other resource constraints, it will be important for institutions to devise different ways to support or recognize SAPs (Anderson et al., 2000). While funding increases or staffing capacity can support the work of SAPs, it is not always feasible amidst economic or political shifts and is not always the quick fix answer needed (Palucki Blake & Wynn, 2019). There is a lot of opportunity for departments and the institution to work collaboratively to assess needs or reallocate resources to best support SAPs and students alike.

### **Conclusion and Areas of Further Inquiry**

As Chessman (2021) states, “[w]hile the mission of student affairs has shifted over the last several decades, the goal has remained consistent to provide services and programs that enhance students’ cognitive and ethical development and foster their well-being” (p. 159). The goals have not changed, but the environment and tools with which to achieve them have grown and adapted to the dynamic environment that SAPs work in. It could be beneficial to further explore how systemic structures such as institutional restructuring, or the history of SAPs connects with our current student affairs models. A comparative look with other models could lend some insights into additional supports for SAPs in their work. Additionally, the different governance structures could lend to various impacts on SAP and would be interesting to explore

further. It would be helpful to frame SAP's experiences of burnout and job dissatisfaction within greater socioeconomic trends, such as globalization or neoliberalism. The broad trends could help inform the smaller ecosystems within higher education with which SAPs operate.

Experiences of burnout and job dissatisfaction of SAPs creates a barrier between SAPs and the students they serve. Burnout and job dissatisfaction cause several concerning outcomes for SAPs themselves in addition to the institution. The well-being and experiences of SAP directly influences students' ability to succeed at the institution holistically, not just in isolated academic pockets (Palucki & Wynn, 2019). It may be impossible to completely prevent job dissatisfaction and burnout, but their impacts on SAP's ability to provide services that support student success should nevertheless be addressed. "Student engagement literature suggests that the more involved students are in their post-secondary education, the greater the learning opportunity and likelihood of their persistence, educational gains, and graduation" (Seifert and Burrow, 2013, p. 143); highlighting the importance of SAPs and the work they do in bridging gaps between students and institutions in promoting student success. For students to succeed on campuses they not only need excellent academic experiences from qualified professors or challenging courses, but a holistic approach facilitated through SAPs while in pursuit of higher education.

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