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Student affairs professionals face increasing pressure from ideologies, people, and organizations outside of higher education institutions. Historically, student affairs practice has been focused on student development theory. In this constructivist grounded theory study, we explore this tension using interviews with 21 early-career, mid-level, and senior student affairs practitioners. Our findings highlight the complex forces now shaping student affairs practice, including external demands related to (a) efficacy and efficiency of student services; (b) compliance with local, state, and federal laws; and (c) student and public relations crises. We theorize these pressures relative to Foucault's thinking about surveillance and self-regulation within total institutional spaces, using these ideas to offer new insight into student affairs practice.

Student affairs practice has changed rapidly in the past three decades (e.g., Hevel, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). The profession has retained its long-running emphasis on student learning and development, social justice, and reflexive practice (e.g., Bureau, 2018; Evans & Reason, 2001; Roberts, 2012), but current education for student affairs professionals also emphasizes a variety of responsibilities not directly student-centered that involve the linkage between student affairs professionals with authority structures on and off campus. In this paper, we explore these responsibilities as part of a broader structure of external demands on practice, including but not limited to efficacy and efficiency, compliance with rule and law, accountability, and the threat of crisis.

To date, only a few studies have explored the way that student affairs professionals integrate these disparate skill sets into a holistic framework for practice (e.g., Gansemer-Topf & Ryder, 2017; O'Brien, 2018). These studies found that student affairs professionals perceived that the importance of skills related to accountability, law, public relations, and crisis management increased with career progression (e.g., Cooper et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2016). Our prior work showed that these discrepant valuations increase in proximity to legal demands in student affairs practice (Kimball et al., 2019; Ryder et al., 2022), but to date, existing work—including our own—has not fully explored how student affairs professionals understand the intersections of the multiple external demands present in their work.

To address this gap in the literature and to inform future graduate preparation and training opportunities for student affairs professionals, we asked two linked research questions: (a) How did participants in our study describe the core focus of their work? and (b) How did external demands on their time shape the nature of their work? Findings from this study suggest that external demands on student affairs professionals significantly shape their practices. These questions guided a focused reanalysis of a dataset derived from qualitative interviews with 21 early-career, mid-level, and senior higher

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education administrators who self-identified as student affairs practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before we started the focused reanalysis of the dataset, we reviewed two bodies of literature as sensitizing constructs for our work. First, we explored empirical literature that describes the core beliefs and responsibilities of student affairs professionals and suggests that core values of the profession include support for student learning and development; promotion of social justice; and intentional, reflexive practice (e.g., Arminio & Ortiz, 2017; Reason & Broido, 2017; Wilson et al., 2016). Our goal in this process was to understand what role, if any, accountability to external demands plays in the foundational conceptualization of student affairs. Second, we examined descriptions of the key skill sets of contemporary student affairs professionals. This review indicated the growing importance of competency in areas such as assessment and evaluation, financial management, personnel management, legal issues, risk management, public relations, and crisis management (e.g., Herdelein et al., 2013; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012; Kimball et al., 2019; Ryder et al., 2022). Taken together, these two bodies of literature helped us identify new threads in a study previously centered on the legal dimensions of student affairs work. As we completed this reanalysis, we identified participant accounts related to compliance, surveillance, and discipline within institutional spaces. As such, we reviewed the theoretical work of Michel Foucault (1995) to help structure our analysis. Since this shift occurred during our analysis rather than the conceptualization of the study, we review this body of literature as an analytic framework in the Research Design section.

Core Values of Student Affairs Professionals

Student affairs is a heavily introspective field. As noted by Arminio and Ortiz (2017), this introspection has stemmed at least in part from deep uncertainty over whether student affairs is truly a profession. If so, the requisite skills and knowledge required to be a successful student affairs professional are unclear. As of yet, the major student affairs professional organizations have not adopted a clear stance on the issue. Although recent efforts have sought to clarify standards for competent practice (e.g., ACPA & NASPA, 2015; CAS, 2015), they have not resulted in a clear demarcation between someone who might be called a "student affairs professional" and someone who would not. As Perez (2020) demonstrated, this non-normative stance has produced a lack of clarity about what professionalism means in student affairs and the dispositions, skills, and knowledge that undergird it. It has also meant that one of the key features distinguishing a "student affairs professional" from others in higher education administration is self-identification with student affairs-as-profession (McGill et al., 2021).

In the absence of a clearer statement about what it means to be a student affairs professional, many who identify as such have fallen back on the field's core values, which often motivated them to enter the field in the first place. Yet, they may struggle when encountering incongruence between these values and the realities of their work (cf. Bureau, 2018; Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2016). It seems unlikely that these discrepancies emerged as a result of fundamental disagreements about the nature of student affairs work itself. Evidence from analyses of major professional statements of values and the history of the student affairs profession has displayed broad agreement about what student affairs professionals ought to do (e.g.,

Evans & Reason, 2001; Hevel, 2016; Reason & Broido, 2017; Roberts, 2012). As synthesized by Reason and Broido, these works broadly coalesce around five key values: (a) focus on students; (b) the educative role of the environment and context; (c) intentional, empirically grounded work; (d) responsibility to society; and (e) social justice advocacy. Notably, key dimensions of contemporary practice, such as legal reasoning and risk management, are not included in these foundational statements, nor do they figure prominently in the history of the profession (cf. Evans & Reason, 2001; Hevel, 2016).

Key Skills of Student Affairs Professionals

Descriptions of the key skills of student affairs professionals have identified two radically different bodies of knowledge. On the one hand, student affairs professionals need those skills associated with the core values of the profession, which are broadly associated with colleges and universities as spaces for learning and development (Evans & Reason, 2001). Within the joint statement on professional competencies (ACPA & NASPA, 2015), these include skill sets associated with personal and ethical foundations; values, philosophy, and history; social justice and inclusion; student learning and development; and advising and supporting. These skill sets all share a fundamentally student- or person-focused orientation (cf. Evans & Reason, 2001; Reason & Broido, 2017). In contrast, competency areas such as assessment, evaluation, and research; leadership; and technology begin to introduce external influences on student affairs work. That is, such competencies highlight the importance of demonstrating the effectiveness of student affairs practice or the ability to manage the destabilizing influences of technology. Likewise, competency areas in law, policy, and governance and organizational and human resources detail the need to understand and comply with rules developed by institutional, regulatory, and governmental decision-makers. The importance of responsibilities that are not strictly student-focused has grown rapidly in recent decades (cf. Herdelein et al., 2013; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). Broadly, this second set of skills and the emerging literature on competent student affairs practice indicate that a significant portion of the work of student affairs involves engagement with external structures of accountability that may or may not have been developed with the realities of their work in mind.

As we have described previously, these different ways of framing the work can be challenging for student affairs professionals to navigate (Kimball et al., 2019; Ryder et al., 2022). Moreover, the vast majority of the literature produced about student affairs work has focused on those aspects of the profession that researchers and practitioners find most appealing—namely, topics such as student learning and development; student success; and the pursuit of social justice on campus (e.g., Kimball & Friedensen, 2019; Smith & Brown, 2020). The net effect is that student affairs professionals display both a differential preference for and knowledge of some central areas of student affairs work relative to others (e.g., Gansemer-Topf & Ryder, 2017; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012; O'Brien, 2018; Reynolds, 2011).

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this paper, we report the results of a focused reanalysis of a dataset generated as part of a constructivist grounded theory study of how student affairs professionals think about legal issues in their daily work (Charmaz, 2014). Our primary findings on this topic have been reported elsewhere (Kimball et al., 2019; Ryder et al., 2022). However, in the course of our analysis, we noted that participants in our study often described overlap between legal issues and

a variety of other external demands on their work. Consistent with constructivist grounded theory's emphasis on following emergent meaning-making in the analytic process and the role of focused reanalysis therein, we then sought to examine this topic further (Charmaz, 2014). We did so by reexamining existing data and by incorporating new probes into the remaining interviews. Below we describe our data collection and analysis processes, noting where we began focused reanalysis.

Data Collection

We began our study utilizing semi-structured interviews to collect information about how participants understood legal issues. From the outset, we incorporated a limited number of questions focused on closely related topics like institutional accountability and risk management. Examples of questions included in our initial interview protocol included the following: How would you define "the law" as it relates to student affairs practice? and You've told me a bit about how you think about the law. How did you come to think about it this way? Consistent with constructivist grounded theory's constant comparative analysis, we began writing memos, doing preliminary data analysis, and discussing emergent findings as we undertook our data collection. By the time we completed our 12th interview, we had noted that participants were linking legal issues with other external demands on their work in a way that we had not anticipated. We then began our focused reanalysis of existing data and incorporated more interview probes intended to elicit additional information about external demands on student affairs practice. For example, in a section of the protocol that asked participants to provide more information about how they thought about their daily work and long-term aspirations, we asked them to consider how central they felt managing accountability demands and institutional liability was to their work. We utilized similar probes throughout our protocol and also followed up on issues related to financial management, personnel management, compliance, public relations, and crisis management.

Data Analysis

For data analysis purposes, we made audio recordings of all interviews and had them professionally transcribed. We then utilized constant comparative analysis to generate codes and interpretations (Charmaz, 2014). In our analysis, we used three phases of coding: (a) open coding, (b) both axial and focused coding, and (c) selective coding.

During the open coding process, two researchers independently reviewed each transcript and met to resolve any discrepancies in coding. We used our open coding process to explore patterns in the data while reducing the complexity of our dataset by grouping similar data into categories. Early in our analytic process, we noted the interrelationship of external demands on student affairs practice functioned as a focal code. Focal codes represent a key perspective in or on a dataset, which can anchor a focused reanalysis. When we began the reanalysis process, we repeated the open coding process from this perspective before continuing onward to create additional focused and axial codes, which created larger groupings of conceptually related open codes. Although not required in constructivist grounded theory, axial codes can be used when the complexity of the dataset requires more organization, which was the case in our dataset. At the level of selective coding, which is sometimes also called theoretical coding, we sought to develop theoretical interpretations grounded in the data that explained linkages between our open, axial, and focused codes for theory-driven reasons. Although described sequentially, the constant comparative analysis is done iteratively, meaning that each new transcript represents

an invitation to start the coding process anew. During analysis, we recognized the salience of focused codes related to compliance, surveillance, and discipline in institutional spaces; therefore, we introduced Foucault's work as an additional sensitizing construct for analytic purposes. We then reexamined our dataset from this perspective.

Foucault on Compliance, Surveillance, and Discipline. Although not a constructivist, Foucault's emphasis on social constructionism means that his work is deeply attuned to the way that language and symbols shape social reality. We selected Foucault's work since it intentionally addresses themes of compliance, surveillance, and discipline within institutional spaces. Foucault posited that disciplinary power remakes spaces, time, tasks, and people so that they are useful to the institution (Foucault, 1995). In other words, discipline enacts power through institutional methods of distribution and organization (Foucault, 1995). Discipline applies to both tasks (i.e., what one does in one's student affairs position) and time (i.e., when one works). Indeed, time spent is at the crux of disciplinary power, whose processes lead to "a theoretically ever-growing use of time: exhaustion rather than use; . . . extracting, from time, ever more available moments and, from each moment, ever more useful forces" (Foucault, 1995, p. 154).

According to Foucault, surveillance is a key mechanism in this formulation of disciplinary power. Discipline operates through three processes: (a) hierarchical observation, (b) normalizing judgment, and (c) examination (Foucault, 1995). These three processes enable institutions not only to observe and organize individuals within institutional space but also to give value to them and their activities (Foucault, 1995). These processes set the discursive expectations for behavior that can determine inclusion within the purview of the institution. Importantly, it is only through observation—whether real or perceived, externally or internally imposed—that discipline is maintained. This surveillance does not simply flow from the top down; each individual participates in their own surveillance and the surveillance of others. Using the metaphor of the panopticon, Foucault (1995) argued that "although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally . . . supervisors, perpetually supervised" (pp. 176–177). Perpetual visibility combined with the impetus to surveil is the linchpin of disciplinary power; individuals are always already vulnerable to that surveillance and, thus, surveil and discipline themselves in service to the institution. We utilized these theoretical contributions drawn from Foucault's work as part of a newly introduced sensitizing construct that helped us identify participant accounts of compliance, surveillance, and discipline in our dataset. With this insight, we then restarted our constant comparative process and reanalyzed our data.

Sample

Our study sample consisted of 21 participants who self-identified as student affairs professionals. Following a theoretic sampling strategy (Charmaz, 2014), we varied our sample over time to recruit participants from different institutions, functional areas, and career stages as it became clear that our emerging grounded theoretical perspectives needed to contemplate how these factors might influence the broader process we sought to understand.

We used email contact, social media outreach, and word-of-mouth referrals to generate a potential participant pool. Our resulting sample included participants from 14 different institutions drawn from five different geographic regions (i.e., Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest), which included six student affairs professionals working at private and 15 student affairs professionals working at

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Institution	Position Level / Functional Area	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Field
Alexis	Oceanside University	Entry-level, Student Activities	Woman	White	3
Beth	Garner University*	Senior leadership	Woman	White	22
Brad	University of the Poplars	Mid-level, Student Wellness	Man	White	20
Catherine	Oceanside University	Entry-level, Orientation	Woman	White	2
Charles	McDavid University*	Senior leadership	Man	White	35
Derek	Oceanside University	Mid-level, Title IX	Man	Black	11
Elise	Oceanside University	Mid-level, Leadership and community engagement	Woman	White	4
Elliot	Essex State University	Entry-level, Student Activities	Man	Biracial	1
Gabrielle	Fitzgerald College*	Mid-level, Residence Life	Woman	Mixed Race, Latina	5
Hassan	Bayside State University	Senior leadership	Man	Asian	12
Jacob	Arrowhead State University	Entry-level, Community Engagement	Man	White	3
James	University of the Poplars	Mid-level, Fraternities and Sororities	Man	African American	18
Jordan	University of the Poplars	Mid-level, Fraternities and Sororities	Man	White	20
Louis	Cosmopolitan College*	Senior leadership	Man	White	28
Mary	College of the Dogwoods	Senior leadership	Woman	White	35
Max	Jaguar University	Entry-level, Student Activities	Man	Latino	3
Raquel	University of the Southern Plains	Entry-level, Orientation and parent programs	Woman	African American	1
Renee	Valley College*	Mid-level, Title IX	Woman	White	7
Roy	University of the Poplars	Senior leadership	Man	White	12

Table 1, continued

Pseudonym	Institution	Position Level / Functional Area	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Field
Sadie	Beacon University*	Entry-level, Residence Life	Woman	White	12
Troy	Jaguar University	Mid-level, Student Activities	Man	Black, African American	7

Note. Institutions with an asterisk (*) next to their name are privately controlled.

public institutions. Participants, whose years of experience ranged from 1 to 35, included a roughly even number of early- (7), mid- (8), and senior-career (6) professionals. Additional information about participants is provided in Table 1.

Data Quality and Limitations

To enhance the quality of our data collection and analysis, we used peer debriefing, triangulation, and discrepant case analysis (Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, we sought to enhance our own reflexivity as researchers through active discussions of our biases and assumptions. Doing so, we noted that our own experiences as student affairs professionals shaped the way that we thought about and considered the importance of various aspects of student affairs practice. Notably, the members of the research team most responsible for the initial design of the study think about student affairs practice in a way that is consistent with the profession's core values of student learning and development; social justice; and intentional, reflexive practice. We initially sought to understand the relationship between these ideas and the way that student affairs professionals thought about the law. Our backgrounds and selected emphasis may mean that other researchers may have designed the protocol differently from the outset—incorporating more questions about external demands on the work of student affairs professionals—and may have generated a more nuanced understanding of this paper's findings.

Likewise, we must note the inexperience of the research team in addressing some of the issues described in this paper. Specifically, although two members of the research team had experience as mid-level student affairs professionals, no one on the team had worked as a senior student affairs officer nor encountered their specific portfolio of accountability, compliance, and crisis management. Although we collectively have significant experience training aspiring and early career student affairs professionals as well as researching how student affairs professionals approach their work, it is certainly possible that we may have missed nuanced thinking about roles that we ourselves have never occupied. Finally, by virtue of our own socialization to the profession, we centered the experiences of people who self-identify as student affairs professionals rather than those whose occupational roles might broadly be thought of as fitting within the student affairs profession. Although that distinction may appear subtle, the porous boundaries of the student affairs profession mean that two people on the same campus with the same title may have very different socializations to student affairs and may think about their work in widely divergent ways. Doing this study with a broader swath of higher education administrators, including those who would not self-identify as student affairs professionals or in specific occupational roles, may have produced different results.

FINDINGS

At every career stage and across functional areas, the student affairs practitioners with whom we spoke identified exogenous influences that fundamentally altered how they approached their work. We subsequently describe these external influences in three categories: (a) efficacy and efficiency demands external to student affairs work; (b) external demands related to compliance with rule and law; and (c) external demands related to accountability and the threat of crisis. A major cross-cutting theme of these findings concerned the extent to which external demands on student affairs professionals served to make them part of a system of surveillance within higher education wherein they constantly monitored themselves and others and, in turn, were constantly monitored by others.

Efficacy and Efficiency Demands External to Student Affairs Work

Participants spoke about the pressure to document the efficacy and efficiency of student services primarily in terms of accountability to entities external to their work units. They thought of this push for accountability as a multi-faceted and sometimes totalizing phenomenon. Beth, a senior leader at Garner University, described accountability as a person's responsibility to others:

> Holding students accountable, holding staff accountable. How do you even operationalize that? We use it so often. You hold them responsible. [. . .] They have some level of making something happen or making sure something doesn't happen.

Framed in this way, accountability existed in virtually every interaction between people and in countless ways on a daily basis. Others echoed this sentiment, noting that in order to manage myriad accountability demands, they needed to pick and choose the form of accountability on which they would focus. For many participants in our study, one significant strategy for feeling comfortable in the midst of potentially overwhelming accountability demands was to focus on "the rules" and on things that are quantifiable or demonstrable, such as the effective use of time and money. Catherine, an entry-level orientation professional at Oceanside University, highlighted both the attraction and the potential downfall of quantifying work—asking whether students who "don't show up and never email us back but they sign up" should "count . . . in our assessment numbers?" In the midst of a higher education environment that values quantifiable results, Catherine and many of the other participants with whom we spoke indicated the importance of transparently showing one's work in a way that made its value clear to other institutional units.

Two key ways that participants sought to demonstrate the value of their work were through effective financial and personnel management. Overwhelmingly, our participants approached financial management with a focus on resource scarcity. For example, Derek, a mid-level Title IX professional at Oceanside University, framed the programmatic need to support students via effective student affairs practice against hypothetical objections to resource use:

> Some individuals may ask the question, is it reasonable for us to create an office to do this, or can other people just assume the role and responsibility? Should we actually have to devote X number of dollars to creating three positions, three salary lines, all the things that go along with creating an office to carry out this function? That's a resourcing issue, and I think that's always present. We're always trying to figure out can we do something different with the resource that we're allocating here. I think that's still on the table, to some degree, as we try to figure out how do we do more with less.

Derek's example highlights the linkages between financial management, human resources, and student-centered practice. While foregrounded by a larger commitment to supporting students, the actual operationalization of that commitment is contingent on Derek's ability to engage bureaucratic processes linked to other parts of the institution (e.g., finance, human resources).

For some participants, the institutional dimensions of student affairs practice diverged from the roles that they thought they had chosen. Notably, participants frequently expressed frustration at the need to document their effective stewardship when they felt they were being asked to do so by people who did not understand their work. Elise, a mid-level professional in leadership and community engagement, talked about how "people who are making local policy do not have teaching experience" and "from the federal perspective, there are people running education that have never done this work." They went on to note how frustrating it can be in such an environment when "trying to prove to you that what I do matters and trying to get funding for that and trying to continue to exist." Elise's frustration with the imposition of external authorities—in this case, local and federal policymakers who "have never done this work"—reflects a broader sense of external imposition on student affairs practice, which frustrated many participants. Even while acknowledging these frustrations, however, Elise and other participants most often regarded them as routine and habitual—not something within their capacity to resist or change. Notably, this deference to financial accountability showed up at a variety of levels, ranging from Raquel's focus as an entry-level orientation professional on the need to "turn in receipts" for everything they purchased to the pressures identified by some senior-level participants to justify the scope, scale, and even existence of some programs.

As participants described their efforts to demonstrate accountability generally and sound financial management specifically, it also became clear that their behavior was under scrutiny by external units or individuals. For example, Roy, who serves in a senior leadership role at the University of Poplars, described efforts to avoid unforced errors by systematically training his staff. One particularly important example in this regard concerned professional communication via email since these documents were subject to subpoena and could easily be misconstrued—either in a lawsuit or in the course of regular university business. Roy stated:

> I constantly am training our young professionals about how to craft an appropriate email because a lot of them have come up through what I call the ee cummings way: no punctuation, no capitalization. They just stream of consciousness. And we can communicate with our friends that way, fine. But that's not a formal way to communicate. And so, if somebody expresses a complaint, our natural mechanism is sometimes to be on the defensive. I refuse to defend stupid. If we make a mistake, we need to own it. We need to acknowledge that we made a mistake and take reasonable steps to fix it. There are too often times where I think, particularly younger, less experienced supervisors immediately come to the defense of their staff in ways that then by the time it hits my desk . . . we're looking at it and saying, this should have been fixed at the earliest stage.

While this example may seem relatively isolated, it is indicative of the broader way that participants thought about personnel management. They sought to minimize risk by supervising and training staff in ways that encouraged them to get it right the first time, and where that did not occur, they sought to minimize the institution's legal or public relations exposure. To that end, many participants—particularly those in early career or mid-level roles—reported highly

structured reporting requirements. In one such example, Alexis, an entry-level student activities professional at Oceanside University, described mandatory check-ins every two weeks and then much larger final reports at the end of every semester. In contrast, senior student affairs officers more often thought of these same issues as management problems. For example, Louis described his first actions as the new senior student affairs officer (SSAO) at Cosmopolitan University as implementing "a lot more management" based on a reorganization of the division such that he "had 10 direct reports when I started and now I have four." Fewer direct reports meant the opportunity for more intensive supervision of those reporting to him.

External Demands Related to Compliance with Rule and Law

Our participants consistently described their efforts to conform to institutional rules and local, state, and federal laws in a way that distanced those efforts from their preferred engagement with students. Moreover, as will be seen subsequently in this section, many participants also struggled to distinguish between an institution's bureaucratic rules and local, state, and federal laws. These ideas combined to form a larger, externalized understanding of compliance demands, which effectively meant that the law could be anything or nothing. In a typical example, Jacob, an entry-level professional who worked in a capacity related to student activities determining whether events followed established procedure and were conducted in compliance with local, state, and federal laws, talked about how much he liked "getting into the weeds" and "working with the students . . . volunteering with them, and going out and doing hands-on work." He contrasted that to his least favorite parts of the job, which included contract review and cocurricular assessment: "Probably all the paperwork and the nitty-gritty of everything. And then I would throw assessment in there. I think sometimes assessment is a little overwhelming, and it can be a task within itself." In Jacob's example, internal (assessment) and external (compliance) demands intruded on his desired work of directly supporting students. His experience was not uncommon among the participants with whom we spoke.

Participants also noted how local, state, and federal laws could be incorporated into and amplified by institutional policy. This interface between institutional bureaucratic logics and broader juridico-legal structures often led participants to describe their response to "the rules" in ways that made it unclear what compliance demands they were meeting at any given time. That internalization of external accountability systems is consistent with Foucault's theorizing about self-surveillance. For Max, an entry-level student activities professional at Jaguar University, the lines between law and institutional policy were constantly blurred:

> Anything . . . any type of role, policy, regulation that I think is . . . how do I . . . it was in my head. I think of, like, any . . . when I think of law, I think of any type of policy, like a policy, rule or regulation, one that was most likely informed by an event.

Max's most important consideration was not the why or from where a rule arose but rather the belief that he must follow that rule, which aligns both with the idea of self-surveillance and with the totalizing nature of bureaucratic-legal structures. This alignment can also clearly be seen in a statement from Jordan, a mid-level professional who works with fraternities and sororities at the University of Poplars. Jordan noted, "Legal and policy, I'll sort of maybe put them together because I mean when we talk to students, I mean they need to understand the entire landscape of expectation." Here again, the important consideration is less the "why?" and "what for?" of a rule and more the broader compliance with perceptions of external demands.

Notably, while many of our participants also talked about compliance as a function of their work with students, most also recognized that they ultimately were responsible for compliance in a way that the students were not. They effectively became both agents of and subject to a larger compliance regime. Hassan, a senior student affairs leader at Bayside University, captured this sentiment:

> You become very aware of language. You become very aware of actions. You focus on training and development, not only for yourself but for your staff and for students. For me, being in a state institution, we even teach our student leaders that they are agents of the state and things that they say and how they say it can be used, is offered as a subpoena or dealing with a lawsuit, that their words can be used as agents of the state because they're hired by us. So, there's a lot of preparation and training that goes into that area.

To a very real extent, the participants with whom we spoke recognized that all compliance responsibilities accrued to them—even if they were not the most senior student affairs officer in their institution—because their professional reputations and jobs would be on the line if their actions were ever called into question. For some, this realization led to a sense that legal demands were omnipresent in student affairs work.

External Demands Related to Accountability and the Threat of Crisis

As we attempted to understand better why our participants described compliance as accruing to them as individuals, it became clear that they felt that higher education institutions operated under a microscope, and they had legitimate concerns about how an institution would respond in moments of crisis. Mary, senior student affairs officer at the College of the Dogwoods, encapsulated these ideas nicely in her interview:

> Certainly, there is external attention on higher education in a way that I don't think we've seen in a very long time. I think the cost of higher education contribute[s] a great deal to that. People want to know that they're getting value for the great amount of money that's being paid to colleges and universities for students to come. There's just an overwhelming amount of regulations. I feel like we're the most highly regulated profession, and it's constantly changing, so it's difficult, especially when politics get involved, to stay on top of what is expected and required of colleges and universities and, oftentimes, being dictated by people who are not necessarily experts in what we do so that is a challenge.

Mary described an intense "external attention on higher education" and noted the role of politics in increasing the regulatory regime under which higher education institutions operate. Within Mary's account and elsewhere among our participants, this idea of accountability as surveillance and the sense that higher education institutions teetered on the brink of crisis appeared frequently. Mary and many other participants described a fraught organizational context that produced institutional responses focused on risk management, public relations, and crisis management.

Participants in our study depicted risk as a social construction that had become a pervasive part of higher education institutions. As Raquel, the entry-level orientation professional we interviewed from the University of Southern Plains University, noted, "Everything has a risk nowadays." Another entry-level participant, Sadie, who works in residence life at Beacon University, linked this proliferation of risk to a societal predisposition "towards placing, not necessarily blame, but responsibility, somewhere" and the belief that it "feels like closure if you can hold somebody responsible for something." For the participants with whom we spoke, particularly those at the senior student

affairs officer level, this produced an environment that totalized risk and risk management. Mary, SSAO at the College of the Dogwoods, provided a representative example:

> When I think about risk management, I'm thinking about everything from what are we doing to help students make healthy choices around the use of alcohol to how are we responding when we have a student who is threatening suicide to are we providing regular inspections to our buildings to make sure that we don't have any fire risks or flood risk, I mean, you name the catastrophe. I always tell them that risk management is basically what we do in student affairs. It's just now it's on the forefront in ways that maybe the rest of the university is looking at our work.

While not all participants felt as Mary did—that risk management was the defining work of student affairs professionals—nobody with whom we spoke felt they could avoid it outright. In fact, at many institutions, our participants described efforts to further systematize institutional responses to risk. Troy, a mid-level student activities professional at Jaguar University, described the creation of the "risk manager's office" and noted, "We have a whole, I guess, a department that focuses on that on multiple levels, whether it's the food, whether it's insurance, whether it's fire . . . all those things are under that department, so the person who oversees that area would be the final say." Other strategies in this vein included hiring more lawyers in student affairs, adding risk management responsibilities to student affairs job descriptions, and creating institutional risk management committees.

Notably, many of our participants conflated legal and reputational risks in their descriptions of risk management. In fact, for many participants in our study, the institution's concern about public relations appeared to be the superordinate preoccupation. Derek, the mid-level Title IX professional at Oceanside, described the complexity of managing the public relations component of his job and the need to "wear multiple hats":

> I guess one thing that I don't think I was thinking about or discussing very much at all until probably this last year is much dialogue about institutional risk. I think we can think about sort of our own professional risk, maybe think about it from a department lens. Yet people did discuss what this looks like if you put a bad name out there for the university. I don't know if I was always thinking about it until I got into this work, where it was clear that you saw this university messed it up, and all these other elements that fell into the article, you're like, wow that's not something that I would want to have caused for an organization. Let alone for the other people who love that organization, who now see it as a place that maybe is bad because they messed this thing up.

The idea that both individual and institutional reputations were at risk on a regular basis in student affairs work—the possibility that one inadvertent misstep could result in a "bad name"—recurred throughout our interviews. Roy, a senior student affairs leader at the University of the Poplars, described the same concern by noting that "90% of it is not necessarily as depicted in the press, but of course, we're always hamstrung because we can't come out with the alternative narrative under FERPA, the rest of it." In this framing, the easiest way to mitigate bad publicity was to include public relations as a feature of risk management and avoid it from the outset. To do so, participants talked about subjecting both seemingly insignificant risks—such as the need to scrutinize the performances of visiting comedians and bands for blue materials before booking them or ensuring that all participating students had signed a waiver before going camping—and seemingly major risks—such as regulating the

appearance of polarizing, deliberately offensive speakers or responding to student threats of self-harm—to the highest degree of scrutiny.

As described by our participants, the goal was to avoid having to respond to real crises by behaving as though one was always imminent. Louis, SSAO at Cosmopolitan University, noted that he would not hire someone as an assistant or associate dean unless they had prior crisis and risk management experience. He noted: "They've got all the other credentials you might want, but you know, they flop or fail or struggle because they'll turn this into their career, they suddenly have to think about those issues, and they've never really had to, or only in a really limited sense." Another senior student affairs officer in our study functionally equated their role to crisis management, noting that:

> I provide, probably, our leadership for, within student affairs, for our crisis management, crisis response programs, so our critical incident response team that's on call 24/7. Our large-scale events—for us that includes like Halloween events, basketball celebrations, those types of things. So essentially, we're sort of the student affairs equivalent of the first responders. That's sort of the piece I oversee.

Both the designation of a specific senior-level student affairs professional as responsible for crisis management and the idea that this person would lead a team of people who were always on-call were particularly noteworthy. They also represent a key expansion of the traditional role of student affairs in scale, if not in the scope of responsibilities. Mary, SSAO at College of the Dogwoods, described this nicely: "We've always looked at student health and responding to students in crisis. That's the nature of our work, it has just taken on a new dimension, and there are a lot more people who want to have a say in how we do that work." Risk management, public relations, and crisis management have long been a part of the student affairs profession. They simply never before have been such an all-encompassing, totalizing component thereof.

Surveillance and Conflicting Values

As participants discussed how the external demands described above shaped their work, they repeatedly invoked the idea of surveillance. They described themselves as being constantly observed by students, supervisors, and the general public. In turn, participants became observers themselves—both of their own actions and those of the student affairs professionals whom they supervised. At their most pessimistic, participants suggested that either they felt or others might feel that this surveillance stemmed from malign intent. For example, Roy at the University of Poplars suggested that: "There's no question that there is a tension that is existing between folks like myself who [are] more compliance-oriented . . . and those who really want to do the classic student affairs work of student development, student leadership." More often, however, participants simply recognized surveillance as part and parcel of student affairs practice. Hassan at Bayside University captured this phenomenon most succinctly: "I see [student affairs professionals] as referees on a field. The work that we do, if we do it really well, no one knows that we are there. And that's a level of accountability that we need to have for ourselves." Referees are simultaneously responsible for vigilant observation and are subject to constant external scrutiny. They are responsible for enforcing a bounded set of rules that uphold a system they did not create and which controls them as well.

As our participants shared, the referee metaphor also works because it describes the tension between people and rules. Charles, the SSAO at McDavid University, described the increasing complexity of student affairs work:

> I think the people who were in my position 35 years ago weren't dealing with the same kinds of issues that I'm dealing with right now. It was a less complex time. It was a simpler time. It was a less legalistic time, not that there weren't complex things happening, but I do often think that it's ironic that I made the decision not to be a social worker and I made the decision not to be a lawyer, and yet so much of my work here 35 years later is legalistic and social work oriented.

The swing between the humanistic and mechanistic represented in Charles' account nicely reflects the tension that many participants felt between their values and their role. Derek at Oceanside University made the case that, although sentiment might lead people to believe otherwise, external demands on student affairs professionals actually created the possibility to realize the profession's core values, noting "we have to be conscious of these components—risk, accountability, and law—because we don't even get to exist if those things aren't fundamental functions of how we carry out the work that we do."

DISCUSSION

Our study participants described how external demands shaped their work in significant ways. Consistent with prior research (Herdlein et al., 2013; O'Brien, 2018), they noted assessment, budgeting, and human resources management comprised an important part of their administrative portfolios. Our work extends these prior findings by highlighting how varied responsibilities related to accountability function as part of a broader obligation to demonstrate that their work mattered, which also led to feelings of self-surveillance. Likewise, our findings echo prior work related to the importance of legal influences on student affairs work (Kimball et al., 2019; Ryder et al., 2022). As our participants navigated local, state, and federal laws, they conflated them in practice with institutional policy in a way that suggested a pervasive focus on discerning and following the rules. The capacity to follow perceived rules also extended to the management of student and public relations crises, where the overriding emphasis in participant accounts was showing the integrity of the process. This finding is consistent with prior work that has documented the bureaucratization of care within contemporary student affairs organizations (Miller et al., 2018).

Our findings align well with Foucault's (1995) discussion of surveillance within modern institutions and societies. Consistent with Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon, the student affairs professionals in this study described feelings of near-constant observation and the need to regulate their behavior whether they knew they were subject to surveillance or not. This strategy of self-regulation aligns with Foucault's argument that a culture of abstracted surveillance results in the internalization of surveillance wherein individuals become responsible for policing their own behavior when society cannot. Our findings extend prior arguments that higher education institutions collectively function as Foucauldian total institutions (cf. Gibbon et al., 1999; Hatteberg, 2018; Trowler, 2014), which substitute a bounded logic for that of a broader society. Within this framing, our work shows how strategies of power with which higher education institutions are governed become part of a broader regime of compliance, surveillance, and discipline wherein individual actors moderate their behavior to align with "the rules" without ever knowing precisely what those rules are. Although many groups of people engaged in higher education might find themselves ensnared in this total institutional framing (e.g., residential students, student athletes, early career faculty members), we contend that student affairs professionals

may be particularly vulnerable to this framing. Many begin their work immediately following their undergraduate years, work in early- and mid-career positions that require them to live on campus or in student residence halls, and through their socialization to student affairs, are primed to engage in acts of self-abnegation as true believers in an important cause. Consequently, by the time student affairs professionals reach senior leadership positions, they have already internalized the total institutional logic and regard its manifestations as routine and ordinary. Future research should explore how student affairs professionals understand compliance, surveillance, and discipline in the context of their professional socialization.

Likewise, future research should more systematically examine responses to external accountability demands. Although good conceptual treatments of financial and personnel management exist (e.g., Smith, 2019), we could find no studies that explored actual practice in these areas. Our study begins to provide an evidentiary basis in this area by showing that the way student affairs professionals think about budget and personnel management is connected with their broader thinking about accountability. Further research that explores the financial and human resources dimensions of student affairs practice would further extend our work. Likewise, although some empirical information about crisis management has been produced (Miller et al., 2018), more work in this area is needed. Studies that explore external demands on practice from the standpoint of specific occupational roles (e.g., hall directors, conduct administrators) or based on a more expansive inclusion criterion than self-identification as student affairs professionals (e.g., higher education administrators, NASPA/ACPA members) could also offer a different lens on this phenomenon.

Our work also has clear implications for practice. First, graduate training programs need to integrate holistic discussions of the myriad external demands on practice. Most participants felt frustrated or ill-prepared by the realities of their work. Better training in how to respond professionally to accountability, compliance, public relations, and communications demands would lead to more effective student affairs practice. Seemingly removed from the profession's core values of student learning and development and social justice and equity, our findings reveal the core increasingly relies on these skills. By offering a fuller perspective of the realities of their work and a more robust skill set in these critical areas, it might be possible to address attrition challenges that have long plagued the student affairs profession (Marshall et al., 2016). Second, as we noted above, student affairs professionals may be vulnerable to the total institution logic of colleges and universities. Making the processes of compliance, surveillance, and discipline intertwined with the profession more transparent may make it possible to resist or reframe some of them. Third, our findings also suggest the need for greater recognition of these demands and support for addressing them within student affairs professional organizations. Many existing professional development structures reinforce the field's long-running values of learning, development, and social justice, but fewer opportunities connect these values to the skill areas we describe in this paper, all of which appear to be growing in importance. Creating this space would also serve to highlight the explicitly political dimensions of student affairs work at a time when managing these dimensions has emerged as more important than ever before. Finally, our findings suggest the need for intentional onboarding processes that reframe abstract "rules" based on institutional policy, practice, and culture. Key aspects of this onboarding should include institution-specific practices for managing budgets; institutional responses to local, state, and federal laws as well

as institutional policies or practices that extend them; communication strategies and expectations; and crisis management plans.

CONCLUSION

Our prior work showed the myriad ways that student affairs professionals thought about legal influences on their practice (Kimball et al., 2019; Ryder et al., 2022). In this study, we showed that legal issues represent only one small part of a larger complex of external demands on student affairs practice. Therein, we identified three major categories of external demands: (a) accountability demands linked to the efficacy and efficiency of student services; (b) compliance demands related to local, state, and federal laws; and (c) accountability demands related to the threat of crisis. We also showed that these demands collectively create the feeling and reality of surveillance within the student affairs profession. Although navigating these demands may seem an extraneous part of student affairs practice, they are in many ways inextricable from the core values of the profession.

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