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Pursuing Campus Collaboration That Works: Assessing the Impact of Relational Leadership and Work Engagement on Relational Coordination between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs in Christian Higher Education

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Abstract

Collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs departments has long been a focus of organizational development but is inconsistent at best. This quantitative study of student affairs professionals (n = 256) within the Christian higher education context examined the role that experience of relational leadership and a worker's level of work engagement have on a student affairs professional's experience of relational coordination with the academic affairs departments within their organization. The study used three validated surveys and subsequent regression analysis to measure relational leadership, work engagement, and relational coordination to identify the predictive relationship between the variables as well as a qualitative question for added nuance. Relational leadership was statistically significant at predicting the relationship between relational leadership and relational coordination, but there was no statistical significance between work engagement and relational coordination. This study provides student affairs professionals with a starting point to increase relational coordination as they collaborate with academic affairs as co-curricular educators in higher education.

Introduction

If asked about the perceived value of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs departments, most educators in higher education would agree on the importance of working together well to support the student experience. However, despite dotted lines on organizational charts, committees, task forces, and work groups, coordinating efforts continues to be elusive for many institutions (Baker, 2020; Syno et al., 2019). Philosophically, student affairs and academic affairs departments approach student growth and learning through differing lenses, often leading to disagreement in appropriate educational methodology (Palmer, 1998). Muir (2013) highlighted that "the tradition of rigor and intellectualism" in the liberal arts context goes beyond mere academic instruction and "aims to educate students with life skills as wise citizens of their society" (p. 13). However, whereas the academic culture primarily disseminates knowledge to students through consistent and structured methods, the student affairs culture tends to be more fluidly responsive to the needs of the student and the unexpected situations that arise (Dahlvig & Beers, 2018; Yao & Mwangi, 2017). Strong partnerships between these campus cultures are important sources of essential support measures for students to succeed (Jensen & Visser, 2019; Márquez & Hernández, 2020). Collaboration relies on a number of factors, including modeled behavior, experience of interpersonal trust (Derblom et al., 2021), personal investment, and a healthy sense of autonomy and responsibility on the part of the employee (Ganotice et al., 2021), which is all the more vital in a future where universities are "unlikely . . . [to] resemble a historical ideal" (Wells & Ingley, 2019, p. 29). Bills and Pond (2021) suggested that the world-wide disruption of COVID-19 may prove to be a blessing in disguise by dislodging the patterns of organizational behavior so severely that higher education institutional cultures, often steeped in tradition and resistant to change, must adapt accordingly. As anyone who worked in higher education during the pandemic can attest, the rhythms of the work did indeed change quickly and unexpectedly.

Work Engagement

In the midst of such tumultuous times, however, declining work engagement is a real threat as employees scramble to adapt with expectations. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind," characterized by the three aspects

of vigor, dedication, and absorption (p. 74). Work engagement includes an employee's experience of work-life balance (made more difficult in an ever-increasingly virtual world), the extent to which an employee shares the philosophical mission of the organization, and their sense of happiness, focus, and investment in their tasks (Kataria et al., 2019; Pasquarella et al., 2021; Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2020). Burnout, the antithesis of work engagement, occurs when a previously engaged employee fails to experience vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work and withdraws as a result of ongoing job strain (Junker et al., 2021).

Relational Coordination

In the absence of engagement, relational coordination between departments may suffer. Relational coordination is perhaps most simply summed up as "the capacity for high-quality communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration," specifically, "coordination work through relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect," which serve as the three elements of the relational dimension of relational coordination (Gittell, 2016, p. 13). Gittell (2016) suggested that these three elements lead to an increase in frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication between organizational members (the communication dimension of the relational coordination construct). Relational coordination is particularly helpful where work settings require a high level of task interdependence (Gittell et al., 2008), such as in traditional higher education governance structures that include hierarchical authority and red tape. Given that collaborative student support requires frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication between campus stakeholders, the hierarchical organizational structures of traditional higher education can often serve as a barrier to effective communication, especially in hindering autonomous or spontaneous decision making (Nurlatifah et al., 2021). The emphasis on maintaining hierarchical structures can also lead to low levels of peer respect when elements such as job design, title, tenure, or other demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status) are prioritized over the underlying goals of collaboration for the sake of student support (Tesi et al., 2020).

Relational Leadership

An organizational leader may be explicitly tasked with the mission, vision, and financial health of the organization, but they are also responsible for the culture that their organization fosters, implicitly or otherwise (Raguž & Zekan, 2017), which will influence collaboration between

departments and roles in dramatic ways (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Leaders in these settings must prioritize relationships with and among their teams, demonstrating "the willingness and ability to step away from the expert role to learn from others" (Gittell & Ali, 2021, p. 95). The specific components of relational leadership are that leadership is (1) directional (providing vision for the shared goals), (2) engaged (maintaining the culture of the team as they work together), and (3) involving (being personally engaged in the work alongside their team members; Hornstrup, 2015). In a shared leadership context, leadership is bestowed and borrowed mutually between group members, demonstrating that "lateral influence among peers" emerges when necessary and is "broadly dispersed throughout the team" (Sato & Makabe, 2021, p. 143). In this way, relational leadership emphasizes the authority of each person or role in an organization "based on the knowledge associated with it" (Gittell & Douglass, 2012, p. 719). Within this framework, student affairs members are correctly viewed as co-curricular co-educators who play a vital role in the educational formation of students.

The Student Affairs Context

Despite the reality of being co-educators who equally value student learning, tension has existed between academic and student affairs departments since the formation of student affairs departments in the late 1800s (Komives & Woodard, 2003; McGill et al., 2021). Student affairs departments originally formed to foster the development of the student as good citizens (Glanzer et al., 2020) and the cultivation of good habits imposed through structures, sanctions, and discipline (Hevel, 2016). However, as McGill et al. (2021) identified, insufficiency in professionalism stemmed from difficulties such as "the lack of a theoretical base, consistent and rigorous training standards, the definition of the role of student affairs, and the field's impotence in addressing these matters properly" (p. 124).

Making matters worse, student affairs departments often served as the "dumping ground of all unpleasant things" by faculty members and presidents (Schwartz, 2010, p. 4). Faculty are often viewed as intellectual thinkers while student affairs educators are considered development doers, furthering the divide and perception of value, capability, and missional purpose (LePeau, 2015). While the traditional higher education organizational structures bifurcate academic and student affairs departments, holistic education of students requires coherence of outcomes and alignment of mission that demand interaction between student affairs

and academic affairs departments (Barnett & McCormick, 2016; Palmer, 1998). Even the origin of the word *university* in the Latin (*universitas* meaning "community" and *universus* meaning "totality") implies an interdependence within itself as well as "notions of relationships, environment, expectations, and responsibilities" (Jongbloed et al., 2008, p. 305).

Collaborative work between student affairs departments and academics can "provide students with a richer higher education experience by offering a holistic approach to learning and breathe life into the collective project that faculty, staff, and administrators engage in as we pursue our vocations as co-educators" (Jensen & Visser, 2019, p. 160). Academic and co-curricular departments who commit to this goal can reduce the student perception that their experience in college is disjointed and disconnected (Blimling & Whitt, 1998) as they "work in concert to create the climate most conducive for teaching and learning to occur" (Trudeau & Herrmann, 2014, p. 61). Cultivating such an institutional culture fosters what Ernest Boyer referred to as *general education* that integrates coherence of purpose between "institutional mission, social context, and educational program" (Wells, 2014, p. 43). In this regard, Christian higher education uniquely prepares students to be "the most active, most serious, and most open-minded advocates of general human learning" (Noll, 2011, p. x). Longjohn (2013) suggested that "university personnel, including the faculty and student affairs professionals, are uniquely situated to help students navigate their spiritual quest, particularly in seasons of struggle" (p. 38). By emphasizing holistic student development, universities can "move beyond defining education as a simple acquisition of knowledge" and instead foster an educational environment that promotes "experiential competencies" in areas like interpersonal development, faith formation, respect and discourse, ethical action, and personal responsibility (Beers & Trudeau, 2015, p. 32). Student affairs and academic affairs departments are integral to each other's success in universities commited to this pursuit (Henck, 2011). When challenges arise, ranging from declining enrollment and reduced campus resources (Bessette & Fisher, 2021; Grawe, 2021) to global pandemics (Yang, 2020), it is a dedication to shared mission that will permit Christian education to endure.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic forced colleges to adapt rapidly as institutions faced unexpected burdens, including financial, labor, modality, and student health challenges with little warning (Raaper & Brown,

2020). The pandemic caused many employees to experience low morale, increased burnout, high compassion fatigue, and significant emotional health stress including depression and anxiety (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020). Student affairs departments routinely found themselves on the frontlines of pandemic response efforts (Basko, 2021). Faculty members found that their jobs extended beyond the class periods to connect with increasingly-disconnected students like never before (Willett, 2021). While the pandemic affected academic and students affairs departments uniquely, Bessette and Fisher (2021) encouraged these co-educators to work together in a united front to support students well. In doing so, faith-based institutions would continue to build the credibility of Christian higher education through a continued emphasis on "vibrant, quality academic community" despite the pandemic challenges (Moser & Ream, 2019, p. 5).

Methodology

This quantitative research study was conducted using a non-experimental, multivariate design to determine a causal-comparative relationship between the experience of relational leadership, work engagement, and relational coordination. A research survey, administered to a cross-sectional convenience sample of student affairs professionals in Christian colleges and universities (n = 256), included questions from three validated assessments that measure the variables. Inferential statistical analysis was utilized to determine the influence that relational leadership behaviors demonstrated by an employee's supervisor have on the participant's experience of relational coordination with colleagues as well as the influence that an employee's level of work engagement has on their experience of relational coordination.

The Relational Coordination Survey is a fully validated assessment to measure teamwork between unbounded teams—that is, teams that span organizational boundaries for task completion—and is ideal for understanding organizations that are highly complex and interdependent, such as higher education institutions (Gittell, 2009). The questionnaire utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to assess the seven questions across both the relationship and communication dimensions of relational coordination between organizational roles. The assessment was validated with a reported Cronbach's alpha of .86 (Gittell et al., 2010). Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis found that "the seven dimensions of

relational coordination were best represented as a single factor," with a corresponding eigenvalue of 3.41 (Gilmartin et al., 2015, p. 381).

As relational coordination served as the dependent variable in this study, to contextualize the experience of coordination between academic and student affairs, each of the seven validated survey questions asked participants to reply in light of the six primary types of the most common current collaborative efforts between student affairs and academic affairs identified by O'Halloran (2019): (1) academic support, (2) cocurricular activities, (3) orientation, (4) service, (5) residential groups/colleges, and (6) policy and planning (see Figure 1). To ensure participants were able to answer as accurately as possible, an additional option "Not applicable at my institution" was provided for each of these types of collaboration on each of the seven questions. For the purposes of this study, *academic affairs* was defined to include both academic administration roles and faculty members. Participants were asked to consider collaboration with faculty members in the context of their responsibilities outside of teaching in the classroom but still within their role as a faculty member (e.g., serving on committees, task forces, or assisting with campus programming and initiatives).

The Relational Leadership Scale measures the extent to which a leader builds relationships both with and among the people they lead (Douglass, 2018; Gittell & Ali, 2021). Developed by Hornstrup (2015), the validated scale uses eight questions to identify three dimensions of relational leadership: two questions that relate to directional leadership, three questions that relate to engaged leadership, and three questions that relate to involving leadership (Gittell & Ali, 2021).

To measure work engagement, the research study utilized the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) to measure the subscales of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The 9-item survey contained three subscales and nine questions that use a 7-point Likert scale of options to identify the frequency each participant experienced the respective phenomena, ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Internal consistencies as measured by Cronbach's alpha in previous uses of the UWES-9 survey ranged between .80 and .90 (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Cronbach's alpha was also run on each of the subscale responses using this research sample to ensure internal consistency for the participants. Following the construction of each of the subscale scores, the multiple linear regression analysis identified the Pearson's *r* coefficient to answer the research questions of this study.

The survey also asked participants demographic questions and a single open-ended question to invite the participant to share qualitative reflection about their work experience in the midst of the pandemic. The responses to the open-ended question were then examined to accomplish the three-fold goal of adding nuance to the data, giving the respondents a voice to share the context that shaped their responses to the survey, and indicate response quality (Neuert et al., 2021). Referred to as "web probing," a method used in evaluating respondents' comprehension of the key terms used in the prior questions of the survey "as well as their thought processes while answering," this method is particularly helpful when a "content analysis of the open-ended questions complements the quantitative findings" in how it "paints a more nuanced picture" (p. 5).

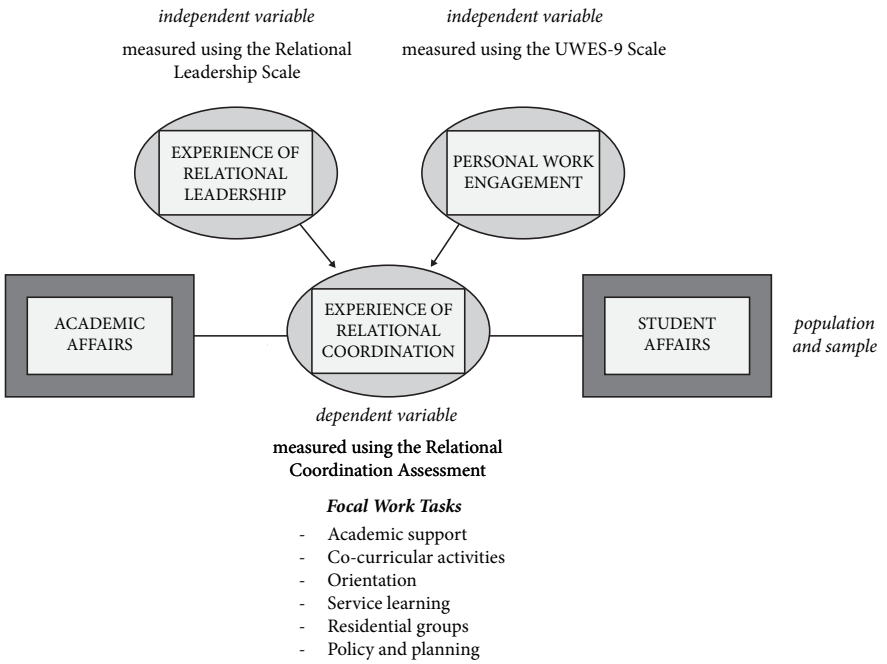
Including the responses from the open-ended question to shape the conclusions of the data also assists in addressing researcher reflexivity and positionality as a member of the population being examined and to avoid over-reliance on the researcher's own perspective (Fenge et al., 2019). Each participant quote included in the discussion was selected from 214 responses to an open-ended question that invited the participant to answer (if they wished) "In your own words, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your job in student affairs in the past two years?" Using a simple but systematic coding method, the researcher was able to "evaluate [the quotes] and choose which to use in the text: the most common, most accurately formulated, or those that provide the most important knowledge" (Ose, 2016, p. 149) to innovatively expand the research conclusions by stepping outside of a purely quantitative approach.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of experienced relational leadership and work engagement on relational coordination among organizational members. Two primary research questions guided this study:

1. Does a significant predictive relationship exist between a team member's experience of relational leadership behaviors and their relational coordination behaviors?
2. Does a significant predictive relationship exist between a team member's level of personal work engagement and their relational coordination behaviors?

Figure 1

Diagram of the Research Study Variables Used in This Study



Descriptive Statistics

Student affairs professionals (n = 256) provided survey responses for this study. Of these participants, the majority were employed full-time (86.7%) and all were employed on a Christian college campus. The participants ranged in job title, including director-level student affairs professionals (35.2%), resident directors (19.5%), dean-level positions (12.1%), and vice presidents (7.4%), and the participants had an average years of experience of 10.73 years (SD = 8.9). The sample was evenly distributed between gender (50.4% men, 49.6% women) and participants with an average participant age of 38 (SD = 11.76). Participants reported their ethnicity as White or Caucasian (85.2%), Black or African American (4.3%), and Hispanic or Latino participants (4.3% each). The participant sample was overwhelmingly homogenous in its ethnic makeup, indicating that the organizations represented in this study may also be largely ethnically homogenous. Participants also reported their highest level of education: 51.2% had obtained master's degrees, 17.2% had obtained doctorates, and 14.8% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree. Institutions involved in the research study represented all nine of the geographic regions of the United States officially recognized by the

United States Census Bureau, with the largest regional response (36.3%) representing the East North Central region, covering Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin (unsurprising given the strong concentration of Christian colleges and universities in this region). Institutional student enrollment ranged broadly: 24.2% of the participants reported fewer than 1,000 students, 26.2% reported 1,000-1,500 students, 41.4% reported 1,500–5,000 students, and only 8.2% of participants claimed a school with more than 5,000 students. Most student affairs departments (66.0%) consisted of fewer than 30 staff members. Because survey anonymity was offered to participants, identifying the unique institutions represented in this study was not possible.

Results

Independence of observation was checked by verifying that the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.88) was between 1 and 3, and collinearity was checked by verifying that the tolerance (.874) was greater than .10 and the VIF (1.14) was less than 10. No outliers were identified by verifying that the residual statistics fell between -3.29 and +3.29 for a minimum (-2.775) and maximum (2.294) score. A normal distribution was observed on a histogram and normality was observed on a P-P plot with all values falling on or close to the line. Data were elliptical when observed on a scatter plot.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if a significant predictive correlation existed between the independent variables of work engagement and experience of relational leadership and the dependent variable of relational coordination. The correlation between experience of relational leadership and relational coordination was statistically significant, R (254) = .225, p = .004. However, the correlation between work engagement and relational coordination was not statistically significant, R (254) = .161, p = .158. The effect size for the model (r^2 = .058) indicated that the level of relational leadership that the student affairs professional experienced and their work engagement accounted for a small portion (5.8%) of the variability in relational coordination with academic affairs. The regression equation for predicting relational coordination from work engagement was $\hat{Y}$ = 1.234 + .010x, and the regression equation for predicting relational coordination from relational leadership was $\hat{Y}$ = 1.234 + .184x.

Because the correlation between experience of relational leadership and relational coordination was weak and no correlation was found

between work engagement and relational coordination, an additional statistical test was conducted to determine if the correlation between either years of service or age and relational coordination was statistically significant. Using a bivariate correlational analysis test to compare the relationship between the years of service in student affairs and relational coordination score (and subsequently between the age of participant and relational coordination score), statistical significance was not present in any of the tests. Expanding the test to examine correlation between the variables and work engagement revealed that only age of participant and work engagement were statistically significantly correlated, R (254) = .144, p = .02, with a small positive effect on the work engagement score as the age of the participant increased.

The most common theme that emerged from the analysis of the open-ended question was the experience of *increased or changed job responsibilities* (80 references). A similar theme of student affairs professionals *adjusting or adapting* their methods, programs, or policies also indicated a high level of change agility and change motivation that was essential in this time (58 references). The third most common theme was direct references to feelings of *burnout* and *exhaustion* (38 references). As one participant said succinctly, "there are higher levels of fatigue that a good night's rest can't cure" because of the pandemic. A table of the most common themes are below in Table 1.

Table 1

Open-ended Comment Themes

Theme	*f*
Increased/Changed Responsibilities	80
Adjusting	58
Burnout	39
Relationships	35
Student Involvement	26
Community	25
Mental Health	25
Organizational Culture	22
Under-Resourced	14
Programming	13
Communication	12

Student Preparedness	10
Goals	9
Technology	9
Policy	8
Collaboration	7
Creativity	5
Resignation	5

Additionally, each of the comments was categorized with an overall theme to assess the overall sentiment of the participant's response (see Table 2).

Table 2

Overall Themes of Responses

Theme	*f*	Rel *f*	c*f*	Percentile
Negative	160	0.75	214	61.22
Neutral	33	0.15	54	25.23
Both Positive and Negative	13	0.06	21	9.81
Positive	8	0.04	8	3.74

Discussion

The basic themes revealed in this overall coding process paint a starkly negative picture of the experience of working in student affairs during COVID-19. The overwhelming theme (75% of all comments) was that the student affairs experience during the pandemic was solely negative, compared to the 25% of comments that acknowledge any positive aspects of how their institution handled this industry disruption well. If higher education trusts what Wells and Ingley (2019) and Bills and Pond (2021) are warning the industry regarding the changing future of higher education, the low level of confidence that participants had in how their institutions handled the pandemic does not bode well for the likelihood that future disruptions will be handled any better. As institutions brace for the demographic changes, the decrease in perceived value of education, and the shifting modalities from face-to-face interaction to increasingly online formats, disruption will become the norm, not the exception.

While statistical significance was not found between the variables of work engagement and relational coordination, the analysis of these comments suggest that student affairs professionals' level of work

engagement likely requires careful attention. One of the participants of the survey commented regarding the pandemic that "I felt well-supported in my job by my leadership even though it was a very draining time." The open-ended question responses further indicated the keen sense of burnout among the employees in the midst of COVID-19. One participant commented that they felt "overwhelmed and demoralized" while another admitted that the pandemic "hardened me in a way that is not positive." If the job expects too much of the employee, vigor, absorption, and dedication (i.e., work engagement) are unlikely to emerge. As one senior leader acknowledged, "I have thought all too often about going somewhere to work where I can just make a widget" because the influx of burdensome tasks "negatively impacted the positive goals that I had for my institution to help us move forward." While a sense of vocational calling or missional alignment may be a moderating effect on the burden of the pandemic, is it enough to overcome it entirely? Junker et al., (2021) suggested that exhaustion, not poor work engagement, as a possible explanation for the dissonance between the failure to find statistical significance on the research question examining work engagement and the student affairs participant's comments indicating a dissatisfaction with their work during this time. In other words, highly engaged workers who have a strong shared vision for the value of their work often engage more in their work when facing a task or problem rather than disengaging, leading to exhaustion (Junker et al., 2021). Indeed, both exhaustion and burnout were both among the most commonly mentioned themes from the open ended question responses and often used interchangeably. In this regard, strong work engagement may yield negative personal outcomes while simultaneously yielding positive organizational outcomes.

Collaboration is another key theme that was identified in the participant comments. One student affairs professional lamented that "as demand has risen in areas such as health services, mental health, residential life, etc., it sometimes feels like we have fought the battle alone and certain responsibilities are just relegated and considered 'not my job' by certain academic administrators." This potential professional disconnect may further entrench preexisting silos and forge new lines of division and discord. A comment by a frustrated student affairs professional highlighted a unique frustration of residential student affairs professionals during the pandemic: "I feel a divide between the other departments on campus that were able to work from home while I was

living with students day in and day out. We had very different experiences than the professors who were only on Zoom and not on campus." If left unaddressed, this divide is unlikely to resolve itself naturally. As O'Halloran (2018) highlighted, the six primary areas of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs include (1) academic support, (2) cocurricular activities, (3) orientation, (4) service, (5) residential groups/colleges, and (6) policy and planning. In each of these areas, there will likely be continued collaboration as institutions continue to emerge from the effects of the pandemic. However, as indicated by the participants in their responses, each of these areas may now hold newly formed opportunities for professional discontent and unresolved tension to emerge, which may threaten to undermine the attempts at successful collaborative student support measures. Student affairs participants who perceived that they carried an unequal share of the burden of the pandemic may struggle to see their academic counterparts as being equally yoked in their shared mission to accomplish the task of educating students as holistic beings as Muir (2013) and Jensen and Visser (2019) prophetically called them to.

Implications for Practice

Given the correlation between experience of relational leadership and relational coordination, higher education leaders should design roles with an expectation of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs professionals and provide relational leadership to increase the likelihood of success for their efforts. When considering the six focal work tasks that O'Halloran (2018) outlined, each of those areas is often relegated entirely to the various stakeholder whose job description includes that task or responsibility, and collaboration only occurs when acute moments in the institution's life require it (e.g., at the start of new student enrollment periods for orientation purposes).

Take, for example, the experience of a student conduct incident that violates one of the institutional policies (one of the areas of common collaboration). Institutional policies are often determined by the university administration, with the foundation and occasional edits voted on by faculty in committees and enforced by the front-lines (faculty and staff alike in their separate contexts). From there, the splintering of the campus begins as the residence life staff is often entrusted to address student conduct in the residence halls, the faculty members focus on the classroom, and the athletic coaches consider the student's actions on the field. However, a holistic development perspective would not see these

areas as bifurcated and distinct from each other but would instead seek to foster an integrated approach to helping the student navigate their development where the aspects of their university life are coherent. An examination of the assumptions that each campus holds about "how things ought to be done" will yield opportunities to discuss how the institution is sharing information about each student in a way that honors a student's ability to navigate their campus with necessary anonymity yet provides them with sufficient support so that struggle in one area does not compound in other areas. Student care committees to discuss student struggles, student information systems with confidential but appropriately broad information sharing channels, consistent meetings between faculty, coaches, and staff to foster collaborative spirits, and an insistence on a student development (not student deficit) mindset (Dampier et al., 2019) are all methods that can assist with this goal. It is essential that the student affairs senior leadership personally embodies the characteristics of relational leadership by providing clear direction for the expectations of how to accomplish student support work differently, remaining engaged in the transitional period where new behaviors are adopted (and new issues emerge as a result), and being personally involved in consistently demonstrating and modeling a student-focused mindset in every way.

As colleges and universities emerge from the acute experience of the pandemic, a renewed focus on relational leadership by senior leaders can help department members who feel, as one participant described: "buried in operational survival," supported and valued after a season of "intense, time-consuming" priorities not related to their pre-pandemic department goals. Restarting the positive forward momentum will require attention to what one participant termed the "newly-constructed silos" caused by COVID-19 to correct the sense of "a divergence in shared understanding, university goals, and strategic plans." This may look like hosting listening sessions for leaders to dissect the underlying issues that linger, creating opportunities for student affairs and academic affairs to interact and foster a healthy sense of community and collegiality, and revisiting often the fundamental aspects of the university's mission that each individual is committed to. If senior leaders do not give particular attention to asking reflective and probing questions of their organization about the employee experience through the COVID-19 pandemic, they will miss a pivotal and necessary growth moment in the lifespan of their organization. There may need to be difficult moments of acknowledging

where the leader, the institution, or the collective community of higher education at large "got it wrong" about how to handle the pandemic in a way that was equitable and considerate. Simultaneously, there ought to be a spirit of humility and grace extended where appropriate for the challenge of leading in what many referred to as "unprecedented times" and the impossibility of getting each decision right, except with the benefit of hindsight.

In doing this, as institutional leaders carefully consider the gulf between student affairs and academic affairs departments that may have widened during the pandemic and respond courageously to the difficult of task of entering into that dynamic between campus departments, the distance between the two may narrow. As these departments begin to remember anew the reality that they are simply two sides of the same coin in the "collective project" (Jensen & Visser, 2019, p. 160) of higher education, the imperative they share to work in coordination together for the sake of the student is reinforced, no matter the obstacle that may stand in the way. The end goal of holistically developing students is worth the challenge of returning to the table to continue collaboratively defining a fresh vision for the future.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by a number of factors, including self-selection and nonresponse bias through the voluntary nature of the study. It is also possible that social desirability bias may be present, as participants from a faith-based organization may answer questions more positively than is accurate due to their desire to uphold Colossians 3:23; "whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (NIV, 2011). Additionally, this study measured an employee's experience of relational leadership behaviors from their leaders, which introduces an inherit level of limited perspective and does not directly measure relational leadership. Furthermore, almost 20% of the participants were resident directors, a valuable role on college campuses that is, by job design, fairly removed from opportunities for academic collaboration, which potentially skews the results further.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a number of opportunities to explore this research problem further in the future. This study could be replicated in non-faith-based institutions to understand if the conclusions are generalizable beyond the Christian higher education context. This expansion would challenge the assumption of homogeneity of values and the influence of a strong

missional approach to work shared between like-minded individuals at faith-based institutions. Another suggestion would be to conduct a single-site, mixed-methods case study of a college or university to do a full campus relational coordination evaluation by collaboratively mapping the mutual efforts of the various departments surrounding the six focal work tasks developed by O'Halloran (2019).

Final Thoughts

Poor collaboration rhythms between the student affairs and academic affairs departments will not be easily resolved, but the pandemic has demonstrated that, for the sake of holistic student development, strong collaboration is essential. Institutional leaders, with an eye to the mirror to monitor their own relational leadership behaviors and an eye to their people to monitor their ongoing experience of vigor, absorption, and dedication to the work, can begin to cultivate an organizational culture that promotes relational coordination. The result is a healthy form of campus collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs that truly works: one that goes beyond merely working well with one another to demonstrating faithful commitment to the monumental but achievable task of holistically developing students together as co-educators.

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