Coming together: a case study of collaboration between student affairs and facult...

Introduction

From politicians to foundations to presidents of universities, nearly everyone has been discussing the topic of student success in higher education. Though arguments exist regarding what defines student success (Seidman, 2005 ; Kuh, 2009 ; Kuh et al., 2010), there is no argument that student success is the current focus of funders and policymakers. Institutions of higher education are finding that various funding sources are increasingly being linked to the ability to showcase " student success." Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been questioned, often from a deficit approach, concerning traditional measures of success such as graduation and retention rates (Gasman et al., 2013). Often overlooked are the HBCUs that are serving students well.

HBCUs with successful models and programs of student success exist. Yet, there is little known about these institutions' programs and even less is known about what contributes to these programs' successes (Conrad and Gasman, 2015). This article examines an HBCU, Norfolk State University (NSU), whose initiatives are contributing to increased freshmen retention rates. We give focus to the role of collaboration between academic and student affairs to facilitate this success. By analyzing interviews with key constituents involved in retention initiatives, we discuss the role and relationship of the collaboration of academic and student affairs with student retention. We also explore the motivations behind and strategies for collaboration in the unique HBCU context. Through this article, we hope leaders will learn more about the way in which coordination and

collaboration—between academic and student affairs—aid in fostering student success, particularly in an under-resourced environment.

Literature Review

Higher education institutions are continually exploring what are the best ways in which they can achieve their missions. Institutions must embark upon this task while taking into consideration all the environmental factors that will shape their success. " External challenges such as difficult financial times, changing demographics, globalization and increasing complexity create an atmosphere in which organizations must rethink their work (Kezar, 2006 , p. 804)." In the last 50 years or so higher education has slowly moved toward specialization. This culture of specialization has, in turn, led to compartmentalization and the creation of silos (Schroeder, 1999). Recently, however, there has been a shift in the culture of higher education administration. There has been an increase in interest around enhancing academic and student affairs collaboration. Researchers are writing about the need for collaboration to increase student learning and improving college retention (Schroeder, 1999 ; Kezar, 2003a , 2005 ; Pace et al., 2006). Collaboration is particularly the case for institutions that find themselves under-resourced. Collaboration takes a more process-centered approach, shifting the focus from being on what the students learn to how faculty and staff play a role in how the students learn. Students become central to practice.

Process of Collaboration

The campus environment created or that is present is important to successful collaboration (Kezar, 2003a). Though collaboration is a popular

trend, challenges do exist. When attempting to bring together academic affairs and student affairs professionals, there are often cultural differences that exist between the two that inhibit partnerships (Frost et al., 2010). Academic and student affairs have their own subcultures, but often lack self-awareness of their cultural norms and values. " This lack of self-awareness is a setup for confusion in the collaboration process (Magolda, 2005 , p. 20)." Magolda finds that to create effective collaborations, individuals in both groups must be aware of the cultural boundaries they create and understand how their subcultures influence their actions and interpretation.

Collaboration should be approached with clearly defined outcomes not simply to emulate a popular culture or trend. Academic and student affairs professionals must articulate a shared vision to birth positive outcomes (Schroeder, 1999 ; Frost et al., 2010). Bringing faculty into the student services area and student services into instruction, administrators can more effectively promote the integration of purpose and work (Frost et al., 2010). This complements Kezar's (2005) argument that the ability to integrate structures is necessary for the process of collaborative work. The integration of structures and processes may prove important to the process of collaboration; however, the sometimes elusive element of the institutional mission statement and the impact of senior leadership also revealed to be strong themes present in the higher education collaboration literature.

The Role of Mission

Institutional culture and mission play an important role in collaboration (Kezar, 2005 , 2006 ; Whitt et al., 2008). When attempting to create collaboration, an institution needs to evaluate the motivation and the

purpose (Whitt et al., 2008). An institution's mission statement can serve as a starting point for identifying these elements. In this era of mission statements and vision casting, several institutions include collaboration as a core part of their mission. However, institutions that are collaborative only in mission, but not in practice, create challenges toward student and institutional success (Guarasci, 2001). Whitt et al. (2008) highlights that the " goals and purposes of the program should be consistent with, and promote, those of the institution (p. 246)." Though Whitt et al.'s (2008) study looked at several institutions that engaged in collaborative programming, including various institutional types, none were HBCUs. The literature on collaboration should move forward and look at specific institutional types. The spectrum of institutions across higher education is not explicitly explored in the literature. HBCUs that are employing collaboration should be examined, particularly if this practice is leading to increased retention and student success for underrepresented students.

HBCUs are institutions whose missions are rooted in the empowerment and education of disenfranchised persons, with a focus on African-American students. Since their inception, HBCU's have been institutions lauded for their nurturing environment and family feel (Outcalt and Skewes-Cox, 2002 ; Hirt et al., 2008 ; Palmer and Gasman, 2008 ; Palmer and Maramba, 2012). Though there have been studies on student affairs work at HBCUs (Hirt et al., 2006 , 2008 ; Palmer et al., 2010) there is limited work on the collaboration or process of collaboration on HBCU campuses (Gallien and Hikes, 2005). HBCUs service a large amount of low-income, first generation, and underrepresented groups of students. Ensuring that this demographic of

students is served well and is successful is crucial to the economic and social growth of the country. It is for this reason that we must have a better understanding of how HBCUs approach and achieve success in this unique institutional setting with this group of students.

Common educational goals are important in successful collaboration. Presidential mandates and organizational reforms play major roles (Guarasci, 2001). Overall, collaboration is practiced in the following ways: Diversity education, first-year programs, service learning, community based learning, and residential colleges (Guarasci, 2001). Guarasci chose to explore collaboration through a single case study of a small private college. Guarasci poses the research questions of how the collaboration was built, sustained and nurtured and, " What obstacles were encountered, overcome, and still remain?" (2001, p. 107) The findings of this study were that the campus needed " leader-teachers" and that trust and innovation had to become " soul mates" for collaboration to occur on this campus (Guarasci, 2001 , p. 108). " Collaborations among various academic and student affairs units are necessary but insufficient in and of themselves. What is required is a wholesale rethinking of our respective responsibilities grouped now around student learning and success." (Guarasci, 2001 , p. 109) This is insightful and provides an institutional lens through which to view academic and student affairs collaboration. Research is needed that pushes and explores further collaboration at institutions with unique missions or institutions with a critical mass of underrepresented students such as HBCUs.

Senior Leaders

Leadership is also important in successful, effective collaboration (Kezar, 2003a , 2005). Kezar (2003a) asserts that at smaller institutions it may be leadership that guides change. Leadership needs to be able to challenge prevailing assumptions and encourage responsible risk taking (Schroeder, 1999). Leaders that support collaboration will compose reward systems such as appointments, tenure, and resources so that they will flow in line with goals and practices that focus on student learning (Guarasci, 2001). It would prove interesting to see the significance of the role of senior administrative support in other, more specific institutional types. To enact change, having a campus network is central within every phase (Kezar, 2005). The campus network's commitment to collaboration enables successful collaboration. " Sharing responsibility for educational quality and student success is woven into the tapestry of educationally effective institutions (Kinzie and Kuh, 2004 , p. 8)."

Kinzie and Kuh (2004) found that not only staff and faculty, but also student agency played a role in successful collaboration. Creating these environments helps faculty and student affairs professionals see the value in each other. Pace et al.'s (2006) model for collaboration highlights this as it includes organizing discussion groups. However, this model is limited to the university studied (Pace et al., 2006). More studies must be done to uncover if there is a common model found or models unique to certain institutions or institutional types.

Strategy Development

Though there have been pushes toward academic and student affairs collaborations there has not been much research that provides strategies outside of changing reward systems (Kezar, 2003a , 2005 ; Whitt et al., 2008). Kezar attempted to develop a framework for understanding collaboration between academic and student affairs looking at what strategies work best and how they vary by institution. Performing an analysis and cross comparison of Kuh's Model for Developing a Seamless Environment, Planned Change models, and Restructuring/ Reengineering models, Kezar focused less on the benefits of collaboration and more on strategy development. Therefore, knowledge is added around understanding various ways collaboration occurs, but not in the areas of motivation, benefits, and how collaboration occurs in specific institutional types.

Kezar (2003a) attempt to develop a framework for understanding the change process involved in the collaboration process between academic and student affairs unveiled that both structural and cultural strategies were important for creating change on campus. Furthermore, Kezar found that a blended approach to change was often the best strategy to employ. Though Kezar explored the success that institutions had in engaging in and achieving collaboration by institutional type, those typologies were the broad categories of " University and comprehensive institutions," " Liberal arts colleges," and " Community colleges" (Kezar, 2003a , p. 17). This left much room for further nuance. Additionally, the study did not deeply examine the ways in which institutional type interacts with the ways in which collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs occurs.

Some higher education institutions are leery of a collaborative culture, for fear it may be too destabilizing and threatening to the survival and operations of the institution (Kezar, 2006). Though most higher education literature champions collaborative work, Magolda (2005) argued against it. Magolda argued that academic and student affairs partnerships are not always optimal for institutions.

Magolda also argued that though collaboration may be popular, it may not be in the best interest of students. " For true collaboration to materialize, far more than the opportunity for collaboration is required; the conditions that allow collaborators to genuinely engage differences must be created (Magolda, 2005 , p. 21)." Though Malgoda posed being cautious of collaborative work his argument in ways supported Kezar's (2005) assertions —an institution must have certain elements to create an atmosphere conducive for the successful implementation of collaborative work. Bridging academic and student affairs to support and enhance student learning can become an important partnership that proves vital to the life of an institution (Schmidt and Kaufman, 2005). Though there is much shared sentiment that being student focused is important for an institution (Guarasci, 2001), there is still much to be learned concerning how being student focused looks on campuses. It seems the collaboration studies outside of Kezar's work (Guarasci, 2001 ; Kinzie and Kuh, 2004) focus on what students learn from collaborative efforts but not on what the institution learns. Furthermore, more must be known about the role and the influence of institutional context and culture on collaborative efforts (Kezar, 2003b).

Institutions with unique missions such as HBCUs, other Minority Serving Institutions, under-resourced institutions, and how they approach change and collaboration needs further exploration. This study is shaped by the following research question: How does Norfolk State University approach and make collaboration occur across academic and student affairs where time and resources do not allow for extensive processes?

Theoretical Framework

Kezar's (2005) Stage Model for Collaboration in Higher Education serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Through a case study approach, rooted in social constructivism, Kezar explored " exemplary institutions that had developed an organizational context to support collaboration" (2005, p. 839). This methodological approach allowed for the ability to understand the phenomena of collaboration through the examination of structure, culture, institution-wide process, history, and a myriad of other elements as well as provided opportunity to unearth a collective understanding (Kezar, 2005). Kezar's findings resulted in a model for collaboration within the higher education context.

Kezar's (2005) Stage Model for Collaboration in higher education takes the eight elements necessary for collaboration established in earlier research (mission, integrating structures, campus networks, rewards, a sense of priority from people in senior positions, external pressure, values, and learning) and focused on how those elements " unfolded in a developmental way" to aid in understanding collaboration over time (p. 844). Those elements are presented in 3 stage model. Stage 1 is *Building Commitment*

and the elements therein are external pressure, values, learning, and networks. Stage 2 is *Commitment* and the elements therein are sense of priority, mission, and networks. Lastly, Stage 3 is *Sustaining* and the elements therein are integrating structures, rewards, and networks. Though other collaboration models contained aspects that may be related or mirror specific aspect of the Stage Model, Kezar's model centers that relationships were much more important in the higher education sector than in the corporate sector from which many earlier collaboration models emerged. Kezar (2005) found that the higher education collaboration process resembled a process of inter-organizational collaboration. This process hinged on parties being convinced of the importance of being committed to collaboration as opposed to simply being told that they must do so. The model also considers the importance of context. In other words, institutional type and institutional culture plays a part in collaboration being achieved. Therefore, within the higher education context, the Stage Model serves as a strong framework through which to understand the process of collaboration.

For this study, Kezar's (2005) model serves as the framework with which the ways in which collaboration is engaged and achieved at a select HBCU, as it is well positioned to both aid in understand the process of higher education collaboration within a specific institutional context. Specifically, the study, through the attempt to unearth knowledge regarding our research questions, we will also explore if the eight elements and stages of Kezar's (2005) model appear.

Methods

In line with a national study entitled Minority Serving Institution (MSIs) " Models of Success," we used a case study approach to collect data. Twelve MSIs—equally distributed across the four primary MSI designations 1 —were selected to participate, through a national competition, in a study identifying ways to support minority student achievement. Norfolk State University (NSU) was selected as one of three HBCUs. NSU is a small, public four-year HBCU located in southern Virginia. NSU serves slightly over 6, 000 undergraduate students, of which 88. 5% identify as Black or African-American (Education Trust, 2011). Norfolk State was selected for their Communities of Inquiry and Summer Bridge/ First- year experience programs. Both quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to these programs showed them to positively affect student retention. We interviewed eight student affairs practitioners, six faculty members, three senior executive administrators, and 20 students (eight freshmen, six sophomores, three juniors, and three seniors) for a total sample of 37. The interviews lasted for at least 60 min. Of note, students interview data were not used for this paper as their interviews were not focused on faculty and staff collaboration, but instead, individual resilience.

The First-Year Experience (FYE)/Access Summer Bridge Program was developed to support underperforming high school students in their transition to college. The purpose of the four-week, residential program is to acclimate these students to the " expectations and rigors associated with the pursuit of a college degree" 2 by improving their academic skills, encouraging peer-to-peer networking, and exposing them early on to faculty

and staff. The program has seen positive changes in their retention rates. Whereas, the university retention rate average is 70%, 80% of program participants return for their second year.

The Faculty Communities of Inquiry (COI) Program is a university-wide student-centered initiative that encourages faculty and staff to collaborate to find evidence-based solutions to challenges faced by their students. There are currently 11 communities of inquiry: Active and Collaborative Learning, Critical Thinking Assessment, Information Literacy, Service-Learning, Living and Learning Communities, Issues of Diversity and Oppression in the Classroom, UNI 101, Written Communication, Academic Advising, Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Reasoning. Across several outcomes, defined by the National Survey of Student Engagement used to measure this program's influence on students, students partaking in courses and programs developed by the COI scored significantly greater on " Student-Faculty Interaction" and " Active and Collaborative Learning" than the national average.

Using an open-ended, case study approach to learn more about these models of success, students, faculty, staff, and administrators were interviewed. These constituency groups were selected as they were identified as key stakeholders in the university and the aforementioned programs. All those who were interviewed filled out consent forms that were prepared in accordance with institutional review board requirements. To approach the interviews as conversations, investigators asked open ended questions that allowed the participants' stories of success to unfold (Conrad

et al., 1993 ; Creswell, 2007). A set of questions were developed that guided interviews. These questions allowed for participant perspectives on ways in which their programs led to student success, and more specifically, positively affected student retention. As research related to the topic of organizational collaboration and student success within the HBCU context is limited, we conducted open ended coding to analyze the data to capture any ideas that are new and unique from the literature (Creswell, 2012). After three rounds of review by four team members, where transcripts and codes were shared and deliberated upon, major themes—which demonstrate how, and under what conditions, collaboration is practiced—were derived.

Findings

The division between student and academic affairs at NSU tends to be tenuous. Our findings suggest that this condition is both structural and cultural and speaks to the university's student-centered environment and mission. Although our findings are limited to the case at hand, they should serve as inspiration for other institutions to question and reconsider how faculty and staff resources are used to serve their students.

Faculty as Student Affairs

So often we hear that faculty, specifically at MSIs, take on additional roles above and beyond their academic obligations (Sydnor et al., 2011). These roles may include the responsibilities of a mentor or friend—an additional source of support for students to address challenges that stem from their current circumstances. Several faculty members described this push to prioritize students as a reflection of NSU's faculty journey to the professoriate: " The majority of our faculty mentors are first generation

students and alum from Norfolk State." Faculty backgrounds—many similar to their students—are constant reminders and motivations to employ practices that cultivate an environment that is student centered. There appears to be an understanding of the students' unique needs as well as intrinsic buy-in to students' successes. Though this was a common finding, it was not always the case. Instances occurred that enlightened faculty to non-academic related purposes for which they served. One of the male faculty members of the program shares:

I had one of my first lectures here on campus and I thought, man, it went really well, one of those very rare occasions and suddenly students are following me, a couple of students following me, male students following me to my office. I said, " Okay, guys, what do you want to talk about?" And the guy says, " I want you to show me how do you do your tie." I said, " What? Didn't your daddy teach you? That's a double knot Windsor." They said, " No, I don't have a daddy." Oh, my expectations were completely different. So I said, " No, problem; I'll show you." And I'm showing them and I'm thinking, boy, the impact that I have here is tremendous compared to other places.

The roles that traditionally bind faculty and staff responsibilities to students are at times stretched to include fidelity to cultural associations. As an HBCU, NSU hosts several Black Greek organizations (BGLOs). The culture of intergenerational mentoring and support found in BGLOs translated to the campus culture. This overlapping of organizational cultures created opportunity for faculty to engage in mentoring relationships not limited to the classroom. Professor Jameson 3 shared his experience:

For me I generally mentor gentleman and I think several of them shared with you that I was a part of a fraternity and mentoring them. Miss Hinton is part of a sorority. We mentor them and then they become a part of the fraternity and Mr. Barker is a part of my fraternity. So they kind of see it. You mentor them and it's not just during 8: 00 to 5: 00. A lot of these students I see them outside of class. I see them outside of the 8: 00 to 5: 00. They can call me on the weekend.

The intergenerational, lifetime, kinship culture found in BGLOs created an opportunity for students to connect with faculty in a more personal manner. This culture also equipped and created a pathway for faculty members to connect with students outside of the classroom and serve as personal mentors. These relationships, though extending outside of the classroom, undoubtedly contributed to students' successes in the classroom and their ability to be retained and persist at the university.

Contributing to student success in college can be something as simple as exposing students to new and unfamiliar practices, such as tying a double knotted Windsor. Since this student entered NSU from a home life that did not expose him to dispositions of professional dress and appearance, he looked to the faculty member as not just a classroom instructor but also a mentor. The faculty member realized that his role at the university extended beyond the classroom. Faculty participants were clear of their roles in the academic lives of their students, however they were also open to approaching the area of teaching and learning with a measure of innovation

and flexibility. A faculty member working the institution's Bridge program described the faculty role as such:

So we are that side and basically enhances teaching, learning and also academic advice from the prospective of faculty. We try to reward risk taking, going to take a risk we will provide the resources as much as we can. We also facilitate the dissemination of innovative teaching and learning practices, what works, what doesn't work and that's what we try to do.

Taking a risk, or betting on new and different approaches to teaching and learning, is encouraged and is sometimes the only way to procure limited resources. More importantly, the reward structure for NSU faculty differ from universities that expect their faculties to maintain a strict focus on research. In this case, NSU faculty are rewarded for their innovation in teaching and their success is linked to the achievement of their students.

Of course, not all faculty are amendable to a student-centered environment. In the case of the Bridge program, staff " handpicked the faculty who were going to participate with this program" in order to make sure that students were only exposed to the most caring of teachers. This highlights the important role of leadership who are intentional on bringing faculty into collaborative work that share not only the values of student affairs, but also share an overarching value of the bridge program. These shared values aided in the identification of faculty who were open to being more than faculty and occasionally donning a traditionally student affairs role. This appeared to be a trait that aided in a successful collaborative process.

Role of Resources in Collaboration

Participants expressed the authentic desire to aid students in succeeding, however, they also expressed the important role that resources, such as funding, staffing and physical space played. Resources were important for providing students the support that they needed to be successful at the institution generally and the Sumer Bridge program specifically. On a more administrative level, resources, or the lack thereof, played a role in everything from program existence to inspiring collaborative efforts between faculty and administrators. One faculty member, who also holds an administrative role, shares the importance of being able to acquire funding. He shares that the ACCESS unit, which is focused on student success, only functions because of Title III grant funding. But he also expresses his interdependency on the ACCESS unit to acquire the grant. He shares:

But the funding is based on the support that I get from ACCESS. I can write all day but I can't implement and that's what this team does. So when you look at all of those great retention rates that you see me talking about and student success rates I can talk about it but they feed me the information and I go. They're the worker bees of the units.

Securing funding is a necessity, but even securing funding cannot be done without collaborative effort and understanding. Faculty, staff, and administrators all appeared aware of the university's financial strain and limited resources. NSU is a public HBCU, and its relationship with state funding was one that appeared in participants' discussions. An administrator shared:

Summer Bridge program used to be funded by the state. It started out as a very small program with about 40 students in it and the state gave some resources to it. When the state pulled out of it we revamped that entire program, the coursework, the experience and we had to put institutional dollars behind it.

Another administrator speaks to the financial relationship with the state noting,

We're a state institution. The state is looking for metrics and there's a lot of pressure with the shrinking resources retention and graduation rates are the bottom line but we have to not only be concerned with the bottom line but the process to get us to the bottom line.

Faculty and administrators acknowledge that there are limited institutional monies and resources available to facilitate these student success programs. Yet, in acknowledging their limitations, faculty, staff, and administrators also acknowledge how resource limitations created an environment prime for collaboration and innovation. The need to find ways to complete tasks necessary for student success, within certain constraints, forces faculty, in particular, to seek out already available but maybe not easily identifiable financial and intellectual resources. These sources often manifest within other departments on campus and student affairs offices. In fact, resources were used to reward innovative approaches or " risk taking" by faculty. Limited resources not only played a role in collaboration but were seen as an investment in collaborative effort. Though a lack of resources may have spurred collaboration, because collaborative efforts proved beneficial for

student success, campuses should be proactive in providing resources to increase as well as reward collaboration.

Role of Assessment

Assessment proved important to the success of the programs and the ability to communicate that success to various constituencies. Assessment also provided a way to understand and gain insight into the details of how collaborative efforts worked, where challenges with collaborative work existed, and the role that collaborative work played in the programs' successes. Assessment is necessary to know where limited resources should be allocated as well as convince constituencies to use limited resources for certain programs and endeavors.

The NSU programs conducted assessment through both formative and summative approaches. This not only aided in a thorough understanding of what practices worked and did not work but also aided in identifying different successful practices across campus departments that could possibly be applied to others. These approaches aided in securing university buy-in. This buy-in was additionally facilitated through collaborative efforts such as the Communities of Inquiry (COI) initiative. Ms. Park, a senior administrator, shared:

So this university-wide buy in that starts to happen from all of these different avenues that come and meet during the COI I think that's hugely important and a big part of our formative assessment.

The need for assessment forced ways of thinking, understanding, and assessing that included input from various departments and persons across

the campus. This in turn spurred an increase in across department communication. Mr. Drew, another administrator, shares:

So people will call and say I now know your area of expertise is this and this. Can you come in and do a holistic scoring workshop, which I ended up doing for the English department. We know how to read essays but do we know how to use a holistic scoring model that's part of assessment. That was from being on a COI with folks in the English department which I am outside of because I'm in the assessment department. So it certainly makes us think about not only different ways to practice things but we were talking a few minutes ago about different ways for you to understand things or do things.

Ultimately, assessment provides evidence that the environment and manner of service created via the collaborative and student service focused cultures present at the university proves beneficial for student success. One of the upper level administrators explained it this way:

One of the outcomes from that assessment is that students when they graduate talk about their experience at Norfolk State and how the fact that they feel like it's like a family, that the school is large enough to serve you yet small enough to know who you are. Faculty members are very nurturing. I think that because of that experience that they have that they feel they kind of adopt that and they feel the need to do the same thing.

Distributed Leadership

Leadership within the programs did not find itself heavily directed by one department. Team leads and key decision makers included upper level administrators, faculty, and student affairs personnel. Participants expressed

that this structure provided an opportunity to learn from persons with whom they may not normally interact. This was not only beneficial for community building but also for the professional development of participants. One junior faculty member shares his experience:

As a tenure track person it gave me an opportunity to actually meet with individuals who have published because I didn't have a clue at that particular point. But it gave me an opportunity to actually work with senior faculty members and they acted as my mentors and actually showed me how to get publications through, actually how to take a… we've actually been working with…. I've gotten several publications just by interacting with Charlie and Lynn and some others. So that group is very valuable and very powerful…. Suddenly you get people working toward the same goal and its peer mentoring across academic silos at the faculty level.

This distributed leadership approach appeared to be fueled by the institution's student centered ethos. The focus of faculty, staff, and administrators was less on who would take the credit for the successes, or failures, of the programs but rather how could the programs best address the needs of the students and how could this be done using the human resources available.

Connection to Institutional Mission

We mentioned earlier in our findings that the distributed leadership model employed by NSU's models of student success was seemingly tied to the student focused ethos of the institution. NSU's mission states:

Through exemplary teaching, scholarship, and outreach, Norfolk State University transforms lives and communities by empowering individuals to maximize their potential, creating life-long learners equipped to be engaged leaders and productive global citizens.

The institutional mission held a strong connection to the collaborative approach employed by faculty and student affairs practitioners. This is apparent in an administrator's explanation of how faculty are chosen for the COI program,

Participants are selected to the COI's based upon their commitments to student centered teaching. No more sage on stage, level of interest in the program, openness to new ideas, potential for implementation of innovative ideas, commitment to participate fully in all the activities of the COI. That means you participate on webinars that we have, you participate on any type of activity that is related to enhancing student teaching and learning.

Student learning was not solely a goal of the Division of Student Affairs—it was institutionalized. NSU created a three-tier general education curriculum in which curriculum courses are certified and re-certified as they go in and out of the curriculum. This practice communicated to faculty that student learning would be the focus of all that was being done. An upper level administrator shared,

We designed courses and we are certifying them and recertifying them as they go in and out. If they don't do their job in terms of providing these critical thinking skills on students they're out. Doing that was extremely

difficult. The only way we could have done that is by creating the three-tier gen Ed structure because suddenly it stopped being a zero-sum game. Faculty members saw that and oh you're going to take my course out? You cannot take my course out. My course is part of gen Ed and has been part of gen Ed. That mentality went out. It became very competitive. Show me the impact on student learning and then the course stays or doesn't stay.

One of the questions that is asked of faculty members who are members of the COI program is, " How many students do you have contact with on a per year basis?" Even with all of the other professional benefits for faculty to participate in this program, the students, their learning, and the impact made on them remains central. This understanding and centrality of institutional mission to the work of faculty and student affairs practitioners made it easy for said mission to manifest itself in the form of collaborative work.

Accessibility

One of the benefits of practicing collaboration is the ability to break down walls and silos created within institutions, through formal and informal processes. One of the walls created is between administrators, faculty, and students. There is an expectation that student affairs professionals will interact with students. This same expectation is not always present for administrators and faculty. This is not the culture at NSU. Faculty and administrators practice accessibility to and involvement with students in the same manner traditionally found in student affairs. This increased accessibility ultimately adds to a campus environment that fosters student success. According to a staff member speaking to the accessibility of

academic administration: " So these are the kind of people when the students see them, wow, the Dean is here, the President is here, the Provost is here. If I have problems I can actually talk directly to these individuals." In order to maintain a culture of collaboration, staff may believe that they have easy access to individuals that normally are shielded by bureaucracy. Faculty also desired to be highly accessible to students, using technology to increase their ability to help students experiencing challenges with their work. The faculty encourage students to use their cell phones in courses to answer and ask questions via Twitter and text messages. This is possible due to the campus being connected via Energy Wireless.

The practice of accessibility extended to administrators and staff as well.

It was important to the success and development of students that they were able to connect and access faculty, staff, and administrators. One participant pointed out how this access played an important role for some of the young men on NSU's campus. He states regarding the power of modeling for students:

…. so I'm showing them that they're not just getting the academic component because some of them don't have male figures. Now I'm being very serious. Some of them don't have male figures to show them how to do that. So I'm saying that to say that these relationships kind of go beyond the four walls of ACCESS.

Another man shared,

They come in often and I think it's so, like I said, rewarding and fulfilling that they would trust you with some of these issues and things that go on in their personal life.

Discussion

From examining the programs and collaborative initiatives at NSU there were some common themes that arose.

Resources

Resources played an important role in the process of collaboration. HBCUs often are under-resourced and must be creative and innovative in successfully reaching institutional goals. Hirt et al. (2006) found that the lack of resources often served as a catalyst for HBCU student affairs professionals to wear many hats and take on tasks not directly related to their positions. This study finds that lack of resources similarly plays a role in the motivation for faculty and student affairs practitioners to collaborate. Collaboration was often motivated by the institutional need to increase student success and outcomes while working with limited resources. This external pressure and the use of networks to stretch resources and facilitate collaboration are found in Stage 1, *Building Commitment* and Stage 2, *Commitment* of Kezar's (2005) Stage model of collaboration respectively. The institution found new ways to approach meeting student needs while working within financial constraints. However, NSU also tried to identify access to resources not initially identifiable to aid in their collaborative efforts. Faculty and administrators found that at times, a show of collaborative effort aided in financial support and access to resources from various entities. Faculty, staff,

and administrators were able to find new ways in which to allocate and distribute resources to aid in reaching their desired results.

HBCU administrators and leadership of similar institutions with strained resources should look to initiating collaborative efforts on their campuses. The leveraging of networks not only exhibited the *Commitment* stage of Kezar's (2005) model but in doing so, NSU was able to leverage the collaboration to engage in securing more resources or rewards which leads into Stage 3, *Sustaining* . This approach not only aids in the ability to reach goals while using resources responsibly but also serves as a selling point for funding opportunities. Leadership that wishes to be proactive should initiate this from the top. Faculty and staff can approach their collaborative efforts knowing that they already have the support of administration. This also aids, as is seen with the NSU case, in getting the Board of Trustees' support, which can lead to development opportunities.

Innovation

In order to reallocate and redistribute resources, faculty, staff, and administrators had to be innovative. Innovative thinking was applied to the organizational structure and approaches to student learning. The mindset of school leaders had to shift from operating in a way that works best for the status quo to operating in a way that works best for the school. Kezar (2006) pointed out that often organizations must redesign because of external challenges and pressures, which is also one of the elements of the *Building Commitment* stage of the Stage Model of Collaboration in Higher Education. Many higher education institutions, and HBCUs, in particular, have come under scrutiny for measures of student success. These measures are often

focused on graduation rates, but can also include retention rates and learning outcomes. This increased external interest in student success, often linked to funding sources, plays a role in institutions like NSU rethinking strategies and practices concerning student learning. At NSU some existing programs went through restructuring to shape the structure to be student focused. The way in which student learning was approached was also altered to better meet the needs of the students. Instead of each department or faculty member simply approaching their courses in the way they saw fit, faculty crossed disciplinary lines to come together and find teaching methods that supported each other and aided students' academic success. Staff and administrators were included to see in what ways they too could approach their work to support the faculty. Becoming creative and innovative in collaborative approaches and organizational structure fostered creativity, which in turn fostered student success.

NSU not only created an environment where innovation could thrive, and implemented innovative practices, but they aided in creating a collaborative culture at NSU. This supports Kezar's finding that the element of integrating structures is not only necessary to create an environment prime for collaboration but also importing in the *Sustaining* stage of collaboration. Kezar (2006) highlights that there is a difference between an organization that redesigns for collaborative work and one that has an identity as a collaborative organization. Whereas the former simply rewards and facilitates the work of those that want to do collaborative work, the latter is a campus with the expectation that people collaborate and that is the norm for the institution (Kezar, 2006). Through thoroughly integrating structures and

engaging in the *Sustaining* stage of collaboration, NSU appears to have established a collaborative identity for their campus (Kezar, 2005). This not only happened from the work of faculty and staff but also from campus leadership establishing a clear institutional identity and creating a space where innovation and collaboration could thrive and be celebrated.

Assessment

Assessment played a major role in understanding the institution's strengths and weaknesses. Assessment gave ability to identify opportunities where collaboration was necessary in reaching campus community goals. This knowledge also aided in knowing who would and would not be open to collaboration. Assessing the relationship between academic and student affairs gave insight into which collaborations worked well and which ones did not. Regardless of the group being focused upon, assessment was key in laying the groundwork for collaboration and ongoing assessment allowed needed changes to be addressed during the process.

Distributed Leadership

In development and implementation of the collaborative initiatives, leadership roles and responsibilities were distributed among participants. Various campus constituencies were represented in the collaborative effort. This created campus networks, which is an element Kezar (2005) listed as necessary for collaboration to occur and are integral to the *Commitment* and *Sustaining* stages of collaboration. This team approach led to a shared, collective responsibility to the effort being put forth, to the students, and to the mission. Distributed leadership was an asset to successful collaboration

and aided in everyone being clear on the mission, goals, and desired outcomes.

Institutional Mission

Institutional mission was key to successful collaboration at NSU. Mission plays an important role in and is an element that should be present and considered when attempting to successfully facilitate collaboration (Kezar, 2005 , 2006). Furthermore, mission is a key element found in the *Commitment* stage of collaboration (Kezar, 2005). NSU clearly defined their current mission and made clear the necessities for its proper execution. In deciding that collaboration was an integral part of reaching the desired student success, all constituents were able to be on one accord. Communicating collaboration in the mission made clear to constituents that collaboration would be an expectation.

Conclusion

Our work is significant in that it continues to add to the growing body on collaborative work at colleges. However, it adds to a missing representation and understanding of how collaboration happens within a unique and specific institutional type such as HBCUs. Our study unveils the process of collaboration at NSU and how it has aided in the institution serving its students well. Also, our study shows how one institution used collaboration to navigate shrinking funding and lack of resources. This insight can serve as a model to similar institutions that must increase student retention with limited resources.

HBCUs have a historic legacy of cultivating and maintaining student-centered cultures. In an era of extreme austerity, where the most endowed, research-intensive institutions are privileged and considered for attention and funding support, HBCUs and other under-resourced institutions must alter their strategies in supporting students with fewer resources. It is highly possible this has been the case at HBCUs for some time. Further research will allow to see if this is a practice common across the HBCU sector or unique to certain institutions there within. NSU, through their models of success and collaboration across student and faculty affairs, represents an institution that has successfully weathered the inclement economic recession without compromising their commitment to students. However, because the results of the current study are limited to this case, further research should expand on this study design to include other MSIs and broad access institutions. With more evidence, a model of collaboration can be identified and resourceful for the institutions of the most financial need.

Ethics Statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Pennsylvania with written informed consent from all subjects. All subjects gave written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania.

Author Contributions

FC led the research team and writing for this article. MG and CC led the overall research project, conducted all interviews, edited this work, and

contributed to the writing. T-HN assisted with the research project and helped with writing and editing the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Footnotes

1. ^ For the purpose of this study, minority serving institution designations include: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, Hispanic Serving Institutions and Tribal Colleges and Universities.

2. ^ Internal Document, Norfolk State University, 2012.

3. ^ All names provided in this paper are pseudonyms as to protect the identity of participants.

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