

Student Affairs at Sonoma State: It's a Discipline, not a Division

Early in the fall semester, 2011, the members of the Student Affairs Committee (SAC) at Sonoma State became alarmed by the situation in the division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM). We saw departments moved from SAEM into different divisions, budgets declining drastically year after year, and a lack in personnel to accomplish the mission of the division to “facilitate the recruitment, development, retention and graduation of all students through high-quality educational and out-of-classroom experiences, programs and support services” (<http://www.sonoma.edu/saem/>, retrieved May 8, 2012).

This report has been developed because of our concerns. The objectives we set for this work are as follows:

- Demonstrate what Student Affairs was and is, and how needs are being served
- Identify best practices, in comparison with comparable institutions and national standards of student services.
- Advance recommendations based on findings.

“Student Affairs” Defined

Provided by Justin Sipes

The field of Student Affairs has always been student-centered with a distinct focus on student learning (Thelin, 2003). Student affairs, as a profession, has been guided by various philosophical documents, including two versions of the Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, 1949), Student Learning Imperative (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 1994), Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 1998), and Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). These documents focused on a holistic perspective of student development, growth of diversity in higher education, accountability, collaboration, and student affairs as a partner in the broader campus curriculum. These philosophical underpinnings are actualized by student affairs practitioners who have educational backgrounds in the history of student affairs and higher education, student development theory, legal issues in higher education, theory and assessment of educational environments, and educational outcomes of American colleges and universities.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that there are four environmental factors that assist in maximizing persistence and educational attainment: (a) students develop close on-campus friendships; (b) students participate frequently in college-sponsored activities; (c) students perceive their college to be highly concerned about the individual student; and, (d) the college emphasizes supportive services. These factors are often attributed to student affairs functions. Through an in depth analysis of available research, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that experiences or climate of the campus were better predictors of leadership development compared to the actual structural or organizational characteristics of the institution. Their review summarized that service, leadership classes, participation in intercollegiate athletics, playing intramural sports, membership in fraternities/sororities, participation in and/or discussions about ethnic-racial student organizations, holding a leadership position, and interactions with peers all

had significantly positive effects on leadership development. These again are important factors to the psychosocial and cognitive-structural development of students that take place on college campuses and are typically associated with traditional student affairs functions.

Recent documents by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2002; AAC&U, 2005; AAC&U, 2007), further expand upon the concepts of higher education in today's global society with a focus on learning. These reports detail the importance of a liberal education and the outline the expected outcomes of higher education. Student affairs functions provide opportunities for these outcomes to be achieved through experiential learning. The opportunities highlighted through Pascarella and Terenzini's review of the research (2005) are these opportunities in which students have the ability to apply learning in the classroom to real-world situations. In a 2009 article with Inside Higher Ed, Ben Eisen noted recent research from Cornell Higher Education Research Institute. The researchers found "an increase in student services expenditures of \$500 per student, on average, would increase an institution's six-year graduation rate by 0.7 percentage points. Similar increases in institutional expenditures and academic support services expenditures would, on average, increase the graduation rate by about 0.3 percentage points" (¶ 4).

If our schools are being measured by retention, graduation, and job placement rates, then we must continue to support these areas through appropriate staffing and funding models. Research and evidence demonstrates the importance of connection and extracurricular activities to the retention and graduation of students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). At the same time, the philosophies around these particular areas need to remain true to the guiding documents of our field. To alter our course to a business model will change the complexion of these outcomes highlighted by AAC&U. Their suggested outcomes are based on student learning. Student affairs practitioners play an integral part in shaping institutional environments and policies to accentuate the ability for student learning and in the creation of opportunities for knowledge to be applied, skills to be developed, and abilities to be honed.

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Student Affairs at Sonoma State University 2007 to 2012

The history of student affairs at SSU seems to be one of perennial reorganization. Departments are shifted in and out of the unit quite regularly, according to a summary written by Chuck Rhodes, a recently retired assistant vice president of the division. In 2005, the Student Affairs unit was joined with the unit for Enrollment and Student Academic Services (ESAS) and renamed Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM). Currently SAEM is a division with a vice-president who reports directly to the president of the university. Until 2007, SAEM was a unit in Academic Affairs. Since 2007, it seems that departments have more frequently been removed from SAEM than added. As of summer 2012, there is a plan to merge SAEM with Academic Affairs and eliminate the VP-SAEM position.

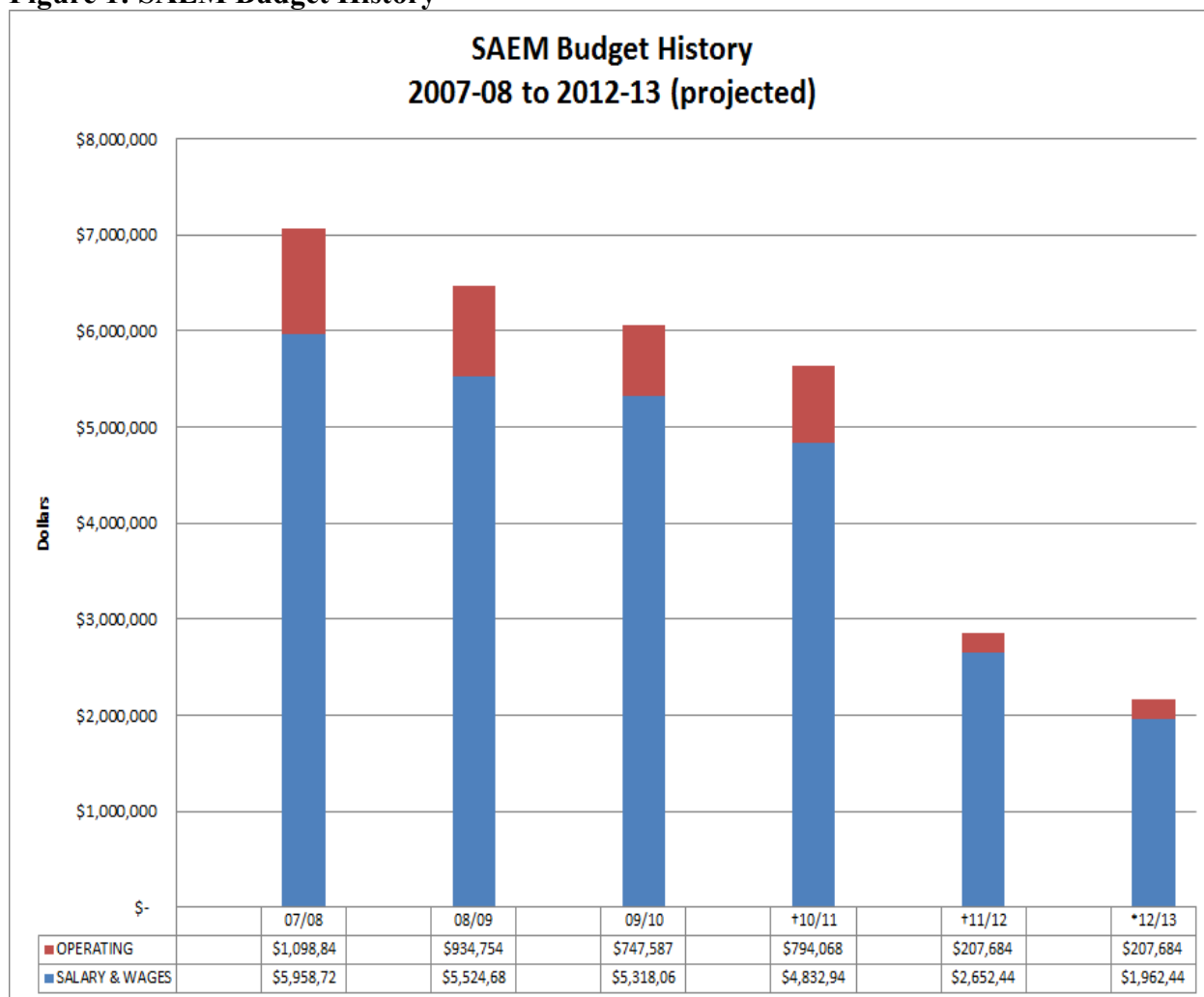
A summary of these changes appears in Table 1. A graph depicting the decline in the SAEM budget over the same period is found in Figure 1.

Table 1: Shifting Departments out of SAEM

Department	Moved to	Approximate Year	Approximate Budget
Communications and Marketing	University Affairs	2009	134,000
Scheduling	Academic Affairs	Before 2006	unknown
Writing Center	Academic Affairs	2008	110,512 (student-fee funded)
Educational Mentoring Teams	Academic Affairs	2010	296,915
Scholarship Office	University	2009	72,596

	Development		
Intercollegiate Athletics	Administration and Finance		513,092
CMS-Student	Administration and Finance	Before 2007	unknown
Residential Life	Administration and Finance	2011	115,539 (director)
Center of Student Leadership, Involvement & Service (C.S.L.I.S.)	Administration and Finance	2011	232,918
Student Union and Recreation Center (funded by student fees)	Administration and Finance	2009	
Counseling and Psychological Services (now funded by student fees)	SAEM	2011	374,684 (student-fee funded)

The Women's Resource Center was closed in 2005. In 2006, the Center for Culture, Gender, and Sexuality (CCGS) was created, although it too was eliminated in 2008. More recently, the Multicultural Center (MCC) was developed within SAEM with \$0 base budget. For three years the Vice President for Administration and Finance provided funding for the MCC director's salary, with SAEM providing \$20,000 for operating expenses. The University has provided one time money to fund and staff the MCC for 2011-12. Permanent funding of this position is a priority and has moved to an off-the-top from the general fund item as noted on a recent President's Budget Advisory Committee document dated April 5, 2012.

Figure 1: SAEM Budget History

If cuts to SAEM's share of general fund money are made as projected in the 2012-13 academic year, the division will have lost 69.25% (nearly \$4.9 million) of its total budget in only six years. Of that amount, 29.4% (\$2,076,401) represents a loss of funding from the state, and 39.85% of the reduction is a result of departments being reassigned to other divisions.

The Fienman/Parrott Consultant Report

In 2010, two consultants with extensive expertise in the field of student affairs, Dr. Barbara M. Fienman and Dr. David W. Parrott, were invited to assess SAEM, and make recommendations about organization, function, or direction that would help the division work more cohesively and effectively. The resulting Fienman/Parrott report was delivered in December of that year. Key findings from the report appear below.

Generally, the consultants found that the staff working in SAEM are competent and qualified professionals. Those interviewed evinced a strong desire to serve students in spite of deficient staffing patterns. The consultants observed that SAEM staff members suffer from low

morale and stress related to the scarce resources available in the division as well as the dwindling number of staff members available to accomplish the mission of the division.

The organization structure of SAEM was deemed “too flat,” with too many people reporting directly to the vice president of SAEM. The consultants recommended reorganizing the division by thematic units, reducing fiefdoms and silos, reducing the number of single person departments, and increasing collaboration. In 2011, the Advising, Career, and EOP (ACE) department was reorganized as a result of this finding. Still, the consultants noted that there were half as many student services professionals working in ACE in 2010 than there had been in 2000.

Furthermore, the consultants recommended moving student services such as Recreation, the Student Union, and Athletics back into SAEM.

Finally, Fienman and Parrott called for the hiring of a permanent Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. Due to the current budget situation and now to the imminent dissolution of the division, this search has still not occurred.

Comparing SSU’s Student Affairs to Comparable Institutions

In evaluating whether the division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and its departments are operating with personnel and resources typical to those found at similar public universities, we examined websites of four other California State Universities (Dominguez Hills, Chico, Humboldt and Stanislaus) to form a basis for comparison. These universities were selected because they are similar in enrollment or rural setting to SSU. Table 2 provides basic information about these institutions. Following the table is a comparison of SSU SAEM departments to those found at the selected institutions.

Table 2: Comparison Universities

	Sonoma	Chico	Dominguez Hills	Humboldt	Stanislaus
Fall 2011 Enrollment¹	8,668	15,920	14,364	8,046	9,246
Division Name	Student Affairs and Enrollment Management ²	Student Affairs ³	Enrollment Management and Student Affairs ⁴	Student Affairs ⁵	Student Affairs ⁶
Student Affairs Executives	VP SAEM AVP	VP	VP EMSA AVP Student Affairs /Dean of Students	VP EMSA	VP AVP

¹http://www.calstate.edu/as/stat_reports/2011-2012/f11_01.htm

²<http://www.sonoma.edu/saem/>

³<http://www.csuchico.edu/sa/index.shtml>

⁴<http://www.csudh.edu/studentaffairs/>

⁵<http://www.humboldt.edu/studentaffairs/index.html>

⁶<http://www.csustan.edu/studentlife/contact.html>

Advising, Career, EOP

Career services are generally better staffed and better supported on comparable CSU campuses. Most have a director, professional career counselors, and some additional support staff, including student workers in some cases.

Academic advisors are handled differently on each campus, but there appear to be about twice as many advisors available for undeclared students on comparable campuses.

EOP programs are comparably staffed and supported across the campuses, with the exception of Humboldt, which has a considerably larger staff and includes a learning center.

Admissions and Recruitment

SSU and Stanislaus have similar staffing levels in this area. The other campuses have many more individuals working in these areas.

Associated Students

SSU is staffed more strongly than Humboldt and Stanislaus in AS. We note that the hiring freeze affecting other areas is not in place for AS positions due to its status as an auxiliary enterprise.

Athletics:

Recently, SSU moved Athletics out of Student Affairs and into Administration and Finance. This is atypical in comparison to other CSUs, which have Athletics under Student Affairs.

Campus Life and Activities

SSU maintains a decentralized model for campus life and activities, distributing the oversight for these across Administration and Finance, the Associated Students Inc., and SAEM, which is not typical. The planned dissolution of the Sonoma State Student Union Corporation makes SSU atypical in relation to Humboldt and Stanislaus. Staffing numbers are relatively equivalent for the services, however.

Children's School

SSU's model is common.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

We have a comparatively equal or robust CAPS, particularly with the hiring of the crisis advocate. We note that, as of fall 2011 and the implementation of a \$50/semester student fee to support counseling services, CAPS does not constitute a general budget item within SAEM or any stateside service.

Disability Services for Students

Our services constitute a "bare bones" approach that mirrors Stanislaus but is less than what Humboldt is doing, and much less than Chico.

International Services

Comparable institutions seem evenly divided between having some staff or a portion of work devoted to international students in a well-staffed department and having little-to-no staff

dedicated to this population. SSU does not currently receive many international students, but many of our students choose to study abroad. If we hope to recruit them in the future, or to maintain services and support to our students who wish to take advantage of study abroad programs, we will not be able to support such an effort with the single current staff member.

Multicultural Center (MCC)

Even with our new hire, we are substantially under staffed and funded compared to Humboldt, and certainly Dominguez Hills. Stanislaus, however, only does programming through AS/Student Union (joint auxiliary).

Records and Registration

SSU has 14 people in these areas, including a registrar, experts in transfer and articulation agreements, and others in graduation specialists. This number is very similar to what is found at other comparison institutions. At Stanislaus, the Records and Registration functions are not a part of Student Affairs.

Residential Life

SSU's Residential Life department was moved to Administration and Finance in 2011. There are about a dozen professional staff members to direct the program, including administrative support and six residential life coordinators (RLCs) who have professional experience leading residential life at universities. CSUDH, which is primarily a university for commuters, has approximately 10 staff members in their University Housing department. Chico's residential life unit is integrated with Food Services, making it difficult to know how many staff people are in the department. Stanislaus has a Residential Life staffing pattern similar to SSU's. Humboldt's housing and dining is housed within their SAEM equivalent.

Support and Preparation Services

SSU has a generally well-staffed student support center when compared to other CSUs. These services are critical to student readiness and academic success, so it is heartening to see that SSU still devotes considerable resources to this area.

Student Health Center

SSU's Student Health Center appears to be staffed at a similar level as those at our comparison institutions. Health Centers are largely funded by student fees rather than the general fund, which may explain their robust nature.

Student Orientation

Each Orientation program has a similar structure of a full-time coordinator, some type of student coordinators, and a staff of Orientation Leaders. We have an Orientation Director that also shares his time with Judicial Affairs and Special Programs. If you compare the prices to attend Freshman Orientation, ours is significantly higher than every other school due to the lack of support from the school and the orientation program being essentially self-supported.

Note of Comparison

In general, the services that comparable campuses provide to students are similar to what SSU continues to deliver. In general, staffing levels seem to be similar across the universities.

Those services generally included in Student Affairs that are not in SSU's SAEM reflect both special outreach efforts to particular groups (such as Veteran's Affairs, Students' Rights, and Faculty/Student Mentor programs) and the inclusion of housing and/or dining services (which are housed at SSU under A&F).

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)

According to their website, CAS is an organization that “develops and promulgates standards that enhance the quality of a student’s total learning experience in higher education.” (<http://www.cas.edu/index.php/about/overview/>, 2010). This group has developed professional standards to guide universities in developing student affairs, services, and development programs. These standards reflect important student services such as: academic advising, campus activities, career services, support for students with disabilities, counseling, residential life, and a variety of services for students from diverse communities. Each of these areas, in concert with academic programs, helps develop students into the “learned men and women,” that the SSU Mission Statement emphasizes.

The members of SAC believe that the CAS standards are the “gold” standards of funding, personnel, and service in Student Affairs. We would encourage that these standards be used for benchmarking as well as for planning in order to bring all student services to the appropriate level. Further, the committee believes that the CAS standards are important, regardless of the division in which student service units reside. The CAS standards will assist student services professionals in coordinating the activities and services they provide so that the goal of helping SSU students become well-rounded and well-developed individuals can be met.

Summary Comments and Vision for the Future

In reviewing the history of Student Affairs at Sonoma State, we see that the division of SAEM is a relatively recent organizational structure. As we conclude our research, we are faced with yet another change in that structure, as SAEM is dismantled. Many student affairs activities have been shifted into the division of Administration and Finance in recent years (see Table 2). As of July 1, 2012, the remainder of the division will be absorbed by the division of Academic Affairs.

As these changes occur, the members of SAC urge the administrators who oversee student affairs functions to remember that student affairs is a discipline, like any academic discipline, with scholarly research about best practices, student development theory, and linkages between student affairs practices and graduate outcomes. It is not simply a division within a university, nor is it a loosely bundled set of services that students want or need. The priorities for student affairs must be related to the guiding principles on which the discipline is based, not on financial convenience or organizational exigencies. Individuals who have expertise in student affairs must be the people who directly administer these services.

Furthermore, we urge that the title of “Associate Vice President for Student Affairs” be retained as the services are moved into Academic Affairs. In addition, we urge the President to make the AVP of Student Affairs a cabinet level position and to direct this individual to serve on faculty governance bodies, such as the Academic Senate, as the former VP of SAEM did. This title honors the discipline of student affairs and emphasizes its significance in the education of the whole student. The title, position on the Executive Cabinet, and service on faculty

governance bodies, would serve as a reminder to students, faculty, staff, and administrators alike that the student experience is an important matter on this campus.

It is unclear to us at this point what the future is for student affairs at Sonoma State. However, we wish to emphasize the vital importance of co- and extra-curricular activities, and of support services such as advising or career counseling, in meeting the stated mission of this institution:

“The mission of Sonoma State University is to prepare students to be learned men and women who:

- *have a foundation for life-long learning,*
- *have a broad cultural perspective,*
- *have a keen appreciation of intellectual and aesthetic achievements,*
- *will be active citizens and leaders in society,*
- *are capable of pursuing fulfilling careers in a changing world, and*
- *are concerned with contributing to the health and well-being of the world at large.”*

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