ADAPTIVE AND BREAKTHROUGH INNOVATIONS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

AT SMALL, PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

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DEDICATION

To my inspiration, supporter, motivator, and best friend—

My husband, Neal, who has listened without yawning, questioned without judging, and
parented without keeping score.

I would have never had the courage to take this journey without your not so subtle
nudging.

To my son, Hanson, whose curiosity and creativity is the driver behind my passion for
innovation.
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ABSTRACT

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Peter D. Eckel

The U.S. system of higher education is under fire for lacking innovation. A key driver of this need to innovate is changing student demographics. Although a universal profile does not exist for tomorrow’s college students, these individuals are likely to be different in race/ethnicity, age, wealth, and use of technology. The future viability of U.S. higher education is contingent upon college and university leaders understanding these changing circumstances and acting in ways that will best serve the needs of these future students. Student affairs has an important and active role in educating these incoming students and driving innovation. Innovative student affairs professionals will proactively position themselves to respond to the emerging student population. What might student affairs professionals learn from innovators in the field to prepare for the emerging future?

This qualitative, multisite case study focuses on adaptive and breakthrough innovations in student affairs at small, private universities that have experienced demographic shifts in the students they serve in order to provide insights on how student affairs leaders might proactively position themselves for the coming changes in student demographics. Innovation is defined as an idea that results in either an adaptation or a radical redesign of student affairs practice. Insights gathered from this research invite student affairs educators to reflect on how the world is changing and how those changes bring about new approaches to student affairs practice.
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CHAPTE1 – THE INNOVATION IMPERATIVE

The U.S. system of higher education is under fire for lacking innovation (Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald, 2015; The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education [The Spellings Commission], 2006; Sweeney, 2015). The recent call for college and university change is not new, but it has grown in its frequency and intensity. A key driver of innovation is the evolving portrait of the typical college student. Of any unit on a college campus that should be motivated by this evolution to innovate, it is student affairs given both the breadth of the work and the close relationship student affairs practitioners have to the student experience. Student affairs leaders who innovate will proactively position themselves to respond to the emerging student population.

Who are the next generation of college students and how well prepared is higher education, and specifically student affairs divisions and their leaders, to educate them? This dissertation focuses on innovation in student affairs. To ground that notion, it looks specifically at the ways colleges have innovated in response to changing student demographics. Innovation is an often-used term, but one that is challenging to study well without grounding the inquiry in the experiences of those who are shaping innovation.

Although a universal profile does not exist for tomorrow’s college students, students are likely to be different in various ways from the college students of today, suggesting that higher education must become increasingly innovative to best educate them. The students of tomorrow are predicted to be more diverse, less affluent, and more comfortable with technology than any group of students before them—regardless of age; consequently, they are accustomed to a learning style that might not align well with the
way many student affairs programs are currently delivered (Frey, 2015; Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008; Lipka, 2014). Differences in the various segments of this next generation of students will also occur, such as “resident and commuter students, transfer and adult students, international students, veterans, male and females, full time and part time, sexual orientation, students with disabilities, and first in family to attend college” (Smith & Blixt, 2017, p. 18). What is more, the next generation of college students will bring expectations of learning experiences based on living a life where nearly everything is customizable and readily accessible (American Council on Education [ACE], 2014). Although many institutions will likely experience this demographic shift over the course of the next decade, other colleges might find that “tomorrow’s student” is already enrolled on their campuses. In both instances, the future viability of the U.S. higher education system is contingent upon college and university leaders understanding these changing circumstances and acting in ways that best serve the needs of future students.

One approach worth further exploring is the role of innovation within higher education. The changing landscape is an invitation to rethink and redesign many of the traditional systems and processes colleges and universities use to serve their missions and meet their goals. Rethinking, tinkering, breaking it apart, and starting over all requires an innovator’s mindset (Morris & Setser, 2015). Leaders at all levels within higher education are pondering the possibilities for cultivating innovative ways to reimagine their work. Known in higher education circles to be on the forefront of innovation, Paul LeBlanc, President of Southern New Hampshire University, offers this challenge to higher education leaders:
We seem to be sitting at the heart of a perfect storm where a lot of things are happening faster than our ability to predict and strategize. We can respond to this stormy weather as medieval farmers did to the next day’s weather: by simply waiting to see what arrives and then taking action, often inadequately. Or we can recognize that we actually have the tools, the technology, and the know-how to reinvent U.S. higher education in ways that will address its current failings. (LeBlanc, 2015, as cited in Morris & Setser, 2015, p. 10)

Given that we know the student profile is changing, higher education leaders would do well to be ahead of the change.

Student affairs has an important and active role in educating these incoming students and driving innovation. The author of the field’s seminal guide, Linda Kuk (2009) writes, “Given the changing nature of student affairs work and the greater societal pressures for accountability and individualized services, student affairs organizations may need to adapt to new organizational models in order to become more effective” (p. 331). Particularly for the professionals who work in the field of student affairs, data on the next generation of college students should serve to mobilize them to explore and implement new strategies and relevant models for continuous improvement of student affairs practice. Educators in the field of student affairs “must respond by embracing a new vision for student affairs, focusing not only on what must be changed, but also on how they must evolve as professionals to be effective in this new order” (Smith, Blixt, Ellis, Gill, & Kruger, 2016, p. xv).

The field of student affairs has grown in complexity in the last several decades. Of the multiple units within the organizational structure of a college, no single unit connects more broadly to the overall student experience than student affairs. In essence, they are the college and university staff responsible for enhancing the overall growth and development of college students (National Association of Student Personnel
Administrators [NASPA], 2018a). A typical college student affairs unit contains the following functional areas: admissions, campus activities, student conduct, counseling services, orientation, assessment, career services, wellness programs, disability support services, residence life/on-campus housing, dining services, recreational sports, and multicultural services (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014).

Student affairs educators advise students in the co-curriculum and design/deliver programs that aid in the social and emotional development of students. They also play a vital role in both student retention and student completion, and they advocate on behalf of students to campus decision-makers. A powerful tenet of the field is that student learning and personal development occurs through transactions between students and their environments. Student affairs educators design environments to promote student learning—a concept known within the field as the student learning imperative (American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 1996). At the heart of student affairs work is a deep understanding of college students—gleaned from research on student development theories—and a strong commitment to their personal and academic success. This understanding is key to how well student affairs educators execute their responsibility for designing the programs and services that support students as they navigate the journey toward a college degree. In other words, useful support services must be derived from an understanding of what a student truly needs. At present, the field of student affairs is at a crossroads because the traditional catalogue of programs and services offered on many college campuses may have less value moving forward given that it was designed for a student profile that is evolving. Therefore, student affairs professionals need to use
innovation to both adapt and transform their practice to meet the needs of the emerging student demographic.

**The Drivers of Student Affairs Innovation**

In rethinking and redesigning modern student affairs practices, there are particular areas of the work that would benefit from innovation. Identified areas of innovation include: (a) responding to changes in student demographics, (b) preparing students for a changing world, (c) integrating effective and adaptive technologies, (d) creating high value (outside-of-the-classroom) student experiences, and (e) operationalizing students’ search for meaning and purpose (Smith & Blixt, 2017). The first of these “innovation domains” is the focus on which this study of innovation within student affairs is framed. Innovation to respond to the changing student demographic is critical for making decisions about what services and programs are best for which student population.

As student affairs educators consider the forthcoming changes in college student demographics, they should be prepared to address the corresponding needs of this cohort of students. Higher education has responded to changing demographics in the past; however, what is unique about the emerging student profile is the intersectionality of these differences. The next decade will bring shifts of a different variety: fewer traditional-age students, a greater proportion of non-White students, a greater proportion of students from lower income families, and a greater proportion of first-generation students (Lipka, 2014). The competition for all students “will increase over the next decade as the number of high school graduates declines while the racial/ethnic/socio-economic makeup of entering students will shift” (Smith & Blixt, 2017, p. 18). The number of high school graduates who come from non-White backgrounds will increase to
45% by the year 2020 (Frey, 2015). Leaders in higher education need to “think creatively and strategically about how to personalize and strengthen the [college] experience for everyone and not allow a very small segment of the market (the 18- to 22-year-olds often living on-campus) to dominate the policies and practices” (Morris & Setser, 2015, p. 5). Student affairs educators pride themselves on designing programs and practices that are “student-centered.” The effectiveness of these programs will depend on how well student affairs educators respond to the evolving student profile. Leaders who routinely innovate may be better positioned to build a student-centered practice.

The escalating cost of higher education is also a motivation for innovation given that the financial struggles that plague many of today’s college students will not improve in the future. College will have little impact if it is not affordable to the majority of future students. This should come as no surprise to anyone paying attention to the national debate on college affordability. The U.S. Census data indicates the next generation of college students will be less wealthy than their predecessors (ACE, 2014). Data on the economic mobility of the next generation of students shows that children will have less wealth than their parents. From 1947 to 1973, income growth for the average family was extraordinarily rapid, roughly doubling over one generation. On the other hand, “since 1973 the increase over a generation’s time has been much smaller, about 20 percent . . . improvements for the youngest generation have not kept pace with what their parents and grandparents experienced” (Isaacs et al., 2008, p. 3). The future economic landscape for higher education will continue to be rocky, which only underscores the need for higher education leaders and actors to respond to the complex financial needs this next generation of college students will bring. If higher education is to address the cost
dilemma, then student affairs educators need to participate alongside other campus leaders to derive innovative solutions to make college more affordable while still maintaining quality.

Furthermore, each generation of students becomes more and more comfortable with technology and expects technology to play a role in their college experience. With this in mind, student affairs educators should take into consideration students’ digital experiences and expectations when designing innovations to meet their needs. Unfortunately, far too many student affairs units have not done so. Additionally, assumptions are often made that traditional-age students (Prensky’s [2001] “digital natives”) are the only ones using technology seamlessly given that they have grown up in the digital age. “Digital immigrants” (those who Prensky says have adapted a technical proficiency) are increasingly using technology for learning.

Adults ages 45 and younger constitute 56% of the online population, despite making up only 49% of the total adult population, according to data from the Pew Research Center’s Generations 2010 Online report (Zickuhr, 2010). Recently, the fastest growth has been participation by older adults in both communication and entertainment activities online, particularly the use of social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2017). According to the Internet and American Life Project Survey, 97% of young adults between 18 and 29 use the Internet and 90% use social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2017). Even low-income students have access to smart phones that connect them to the world (ACE, 2014). The digital revolution has created a generation of students who are both familiar and accustomed to finding answers to questions on their own; yet, they may not have the skills to think deeply about a subject and draw connections in the way
colleges and universities, and ultimately employers, expect (ACE, 2014). Student affairs educators can play a role in helping the next generation of students to both integrate and make meaning of all they have learned; technology will likely be part of that solution.

The next generation of students will differ in that they prefer to be full participants in their acquisition of knowledge—as both consumers and producers—and they want to learn from each other. A faculty member interviewed for the ACE’s (2014) Student of the Future white paper put it this way: “Before, peer-to-peer interaction tended to happen at the college or university during recreation hours, while learning was an individual pursuit. Now it is almost as if learning is part of the recreation” (p. 3). Student affairs educators contribute to the education of students, even though the learning they provide does not happen in the traditional classroom setting. Given future students’ learning styles and the expectations for the learning experience they will bring to college, the lines between curricular and co-curricular learning will begin to blur (ACE, 2014). This will require student affairs educators to collaborate with their academic colleagues to serve students in new ways. Learning is no longer tied to specific spaces with the proliferation of technology and informal learning spaces. Now, learning “happens everywhere” (ACE, 2014, p. 7).

**The Need for Student Affairs Innovation**

Student affairs professionals who find innovative ways to adapt and transform their work will be better equipped at preparing their institutions for the rapidly changing national demographic changes described earlier. Given the student-centered nature of the work, educators in the field of student affairs, in particular, need to reinvent the ways in which they provide support to students moving forward given that current college
students will be unlike those of tomorrow. The country is in the midst of a crucial period experiencing extraordinary shifts in the nation’s racial demographic makeup.

Demographers believe “if planned for properly, these demographic changes will allow the country to face the future with growth and vitality as it reinvents the classic American melting pot for a new era” (Frey, 2015, p. 106).

The future demographic landscape presents fertile ground for student affairs educators to consider innovative approaches to educating students. Innovations that are informed by an understanding of students’ needs are likely to be more beneficial.

According to the ACE (2014):

From almost every view-point, the students of the future are less and less likely to conform to our image of “college students”—traditional-aged, full time students, living on campus. Students will have a wide-range of backgrounds, skills, abilities, needs, and motivations that will have an impact on recruitment, enrollment management, advising, academic programs, facilities—virtually every aspect of the institution. (p. 2)

Student affairs divisions play a role in the education of this changing population. The work of student affairs educators is vital to creating an educationally purposeful campus community and in helping students on their journey toward attaining desired outcomes for their learning (Kuh, 2015). It is well known in the student affairs profession that practitioners are facilitators of both student development and student learning (Kuk, 2009). Student affairs educators have the unique opportunity to take a proactive role in rethinking and redesigning their professional practice by using innovation as a vehicle to improve the overall offerings for the emerging student population (McDade, 1989; see Figure 1).
The field of student affairs offers a wide range of opportunities for meaningful innovation to flourish because student affairs professionals have close contact with and a deep understanding of students (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Personnel changes resulting from external recruitment or internal reassignments, shifting job responsibilities, and committee assignments are common in student affairs units, resulting in an organizational system that operates in a consistent state of flux (Kuh, 1985). Within student affairs units, leadership can come from both positional leaders, but also from individuals who have no formal title. Therefore, this study adopts a view of distributed leadership that includes both formal and informal leaders. Distributed leadership refers to those “activities that are either understood by, or designed by, organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, and practice of other organizational members in the service of the organization’s core work” (Spillane, 2006, p. 3). A nonpositional leadership model is relevant for explaining leadership behaviors within student affairs units in particular, given the fluctuating staffing described in this section. Additionally,
leadership research demonstrates the importance of distributed leadership for furthering goals and creating change (Kezar, 2012).

**Defining Innovation in Student Affairs**

In higher education, the complex phenomena of leadership, innovation, and change are interconnected and sometimes difficult to navigate (Morris & Setser, 2015). There are few hard and fast boundaries separating these ideas from one another. Certain leadership behaviors drive innovation (Cameron & Quinn, 2006), and change is a necessary part of innovation—although the reverse is not true. What is one person’s innovation can easily be another’s status quo. What is meaningful in this dissertation, but also in practice, is that innovation is in the eye of the beholder. It is a local definition that matters and whose contours are defined through practice on a particular campus.

With this backdrop, how might student affairs divisions and the professionals within them respond to challenges related to the changing student demographics? Because student affairs work touches students at every phase of their college experiences, how might student affairs educators transform their model of practice to meet these emerging needs? Making change in turbulent times requires “genuinely innovative thrusts—new missions, new goals, new products and services, new ways of getting things done, new values and assumptions [and] developing the capacity to manage perpetual change” (Schein, 1988, p. 1). Innovation, as Schein (1988) calls for, may be a solution for student affairs educators to consider. Student affairs as a division may well need to adopt innovative practices to serve tomorrow’s students.

Innovation, the focus of this study, includes two distinct yet separate types of innovation likely to occur in a student affairs setting. The first is innovation that stems
from an adaptation or enhancement of an idea already in practice. For this study of student affairs, innovations of this type are defined as “adaptive innovations.” In contrast are innovations that arise from reimagining the way student needs are met. For this study of student affairs, bold innovations of this type are defined as “breakthrough innovations” (Smith & Blixt, 2017). Therefore, innovation is defined in this study as ideas that result in either an adaptation (adaptive innovation) or radical redesign (breakthrough innovation) in student affairs practice in response to changing student needs. This characterization describes both the innovation type (adaptive or breakthrough) and the impact the innovation has on student affairs practice. Additionally, this study will examine innovation occurring at any or all of three levels of student affairs—divisional, unit, or programmatic. Synthesizing the ideas of Hammer and Champy (1993), Smith and Blixt (2017), Tierney (1988), and West and Farr (1990), this definition reflects the breadth of innovations that are likely in student affairs organizations—innovations that are both enhancements of something already in existence and completely new to the work.

Research Questions

Student affairs units that routinely innovate are best positioned to rethink and redesign ways to support the emerging college student population. This qualitative study, drawing on three case studies of small, private universities that have seen a change in their student demographics in a reasonably short time period, pursues the following research questions:

- For private institutions recognized as innovative, what innovations in student affairs were made to respond to the changing needs?
  - What is the mix of adaptive and breakthrough innovations?
- Through what processes are these innovations brought forward?
  - Who led the innovation(s)?
• What was the inspiration for the innovation(s)?
• What process was used to generate the idea?
• How was the idea implemented?
• How was success defined for the innovation?
• Was the innovation a success according to those parameters?

These research questions will be explored through a multisite case study methodology, collecting data through interviews, field observation, and document analysis. A change in the student profile for the purpose of this study is defined as a ≥ 30% shift in one or more demographic categories between 2012 and 2017. Small colleges, as defined by the Carnegie classification system, are those with FTE enrollments between 1,000 and 2,999 degree-seeking students. The rationale for selecting small, liberal arts colleges is based on two assumptions: (a) the organizational dynamics within small colleges allow for greater ease and frequency for adaptation to change than larger institutions; and (b) small colleges, particularly those that are highly tuition-dependent, are potentially more vulnerable to not responding to change (Cook, 2015). Thus, market forces may make them increasingly responsive. Student affairs units that have used innovation to better serve a new student demographic may provide lessons to others who undoubtedly will need to adapt to impending changes. A deep dive into the details of these innovative practices, how they came to be, and the role key leaders played will provide important information to future student affairs innovators.

Part of the literature on innovation comes out of the school of design. The research questions related to the process of innovation are drawn from the design thinking framework (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Design thinking focuses on three categories: (a) what inspired the idea, (b) how the idea was generated, and (c) how the idea was implemented (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).
Significance of the Study

A study of innovation within student affairs is important for several reasons. First, student affairs work is becoming more complex and unpredictable (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014), requiring educators to find ways to consistently and creatively innovate as a means of tackling tough and persistent problems. In a climate where resources grow scarcer with each budget cycle and administrators jump from one crisis to the next, strategies for fostering innovation are needed. Second, and perhaps even more critical, is ensuring that the model of student affairs practice is relevant for the emerging student demographic. What is needed is a new vision based on new ways of relating, new ways of influencing change, new ways of learning, and new ways of leading. Student affairs practitioners’ thinking needs to change in several ways in order to integrate these new dimensions of organizing and implementing student affairs practice. (Allen & Cherrey, 2000, p. 101)

Students are arriving to college with a different set of needs and expectations than those who have come before them, which means, if student affairs educators want to remain relevant, they might benefit from a professional practice where innovation is the norm.

Insights gathered from this research will invite student affairs educators to reflect on how demographics are changing and how these changes bring about new approaches to student affairs practice. In other words, given the data showing how different students of the future will be compared to students of the past, student affairs educators—no matter their position—will find the study useful because it provides information that will enable them to adapt their practice to meet these emerging needs. Some student affairs organizations have leveraged innovation as a mechanism for addressing a shift in student demographics. This study investigates and assesses the value of innovation as an
effective practice. Student affairs educators who are interested in adding innovation to
their professional practice will find the current theories on innovation related to the field
of student affairs limited; therefore, this study seeks to expand the options available.
Finally, the concepts of innovation, leadership, and change are complicated enough when
examining them on their own—this study helps to explain the complex relationship
between these theories within the context of student affairs organizations.

An initial review of the literature on innovation and change sheds light on the
overall landscape of innovation to enhance an understanding of the factors and conditions
that contribute to building capacity for innovation in the field of student affairs. The
discussion on innovation within the context of higher education is ongoing; however, the
same discussion for those who work in the field of student affairs is just beginning. Many
theories on innovation exist in the literature—but not one focuses directly on student
affairs. Although student affairs leaders will draw value from understanding the
multidisciplinary scholarship on innovation, the limited research on student affairs as a
specific practice means that many questions remain unanswered. The analysis provided in
this study is an attempt to begin filling this gap. What is more, qualitative studies in
innovation would serve to balance the body of research, knowledge, and scholarship and
enhance an understanding of this important phenomenon.

The following is a review of the related scholarship as context for how student
affairs educators might rethink and redesign their practice to encourage innovation in
their organizations that will respond to evolving student demographics.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

A study of student affairs innovation is informed by the literature of organizational change, design thinking, and innovation from within and outside the higher education sector. These bodies of work were selected because innovation is fundamentally motivated by a need to enhance or change the organization, and design thinking is an approach for taking an innovative idea and putting that idea into action. Since the unit of analysis for this study is divisions of student affairs, it is also helpful to have an understanding of the role that change plays in higher education organizations to best address the research questions.

Understanding Student Affairs Work

As a field, student affairs is multifaceted, and the work is becoming more involved. Student affairs educators encounter students when they are merely applicants navigating the admission process and assist them all the way through graduation when they are searching for their first jobs. For student affairs educators, the growth and development of every college student is at the heart of their work. Although different college campuses organize their units in unique ways, a typical student affairs division might contain the following functions: admissions, campus activities, student conduct, counseling services, orientation, assessment, career services, wellness programs, disability support services, residence life/on-campus housing, dining services, recreational sports, and multicultural services (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014).

As higher education has evolved, so has student affairs work. The first higher education institutions in the United States bore a close resemblance to the British universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Thelin, 2011). In the British model, the role of the
faculty member, or tutor, was both pastoral and academic (Greene’s Tutorial College, 2017). The U.S. college enterprise distinguished itself by separating teaching and counseling duties into two distinct functions. This division not only provided faculty more time to focus on teaching students, but also allowed other people to step in to address students’ growing needs. These early innovators were the first to provide co-curricular support to students (known initially as Deans of Men, with Deans of Women added later), thereby establishing the field now called “student affairs” (Rhatigan, 2011).

In the last century, growing college student populations required greater attention beyond curricular matters, and a philosophy to consider the needs of the “whole student” emerged (Rhatigan, 2011). At the same time, institutions also began to grow in complexity in response to these needs, resulting in new organizational structures, including those focused on “student personnel” (Rhatigan, 2011). In 1937, the ACE published The Student Personnel Point of View, which underscored the need for considering the student as a whole person and identified 23 specific job functions for student affairs professionals.

In the last 80 years, the breadth and depth of student affairs work has increased, typically in response to the changing needs of students and expectations from society. One example is the evolution of the role of “college placement secretaries” of the 1940s who helped to place—mostly teachers—into the workforce after graduation to career services professionals of the 21st century who work with students throughout their college years on everything from interviewing skills to career development (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2017).
A more current evolution within the field is the growing emphasis on external regulation and compliance. Leaders in student affairs are consumed by the overwhelming tasks associated with managing the volume of complex federal and state regulations—the Clery Act, Title IX, the Higher Education Opportunity Act, the Campus SaVE Act, the Americans With Disabilities Act, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, Title IV, contract liability, case law, and constitutional due-process requirements—are just a few on the list (Carlisle, 2014).

**Innovation Definitions and Theories**

Throughout its history, the field of student affairs has responded to changing needs by transforming its practice. Although the general concept of innovation as it is now understood has only been around since the late 1960s (Godin, 2015), in retrospect, some might argue that past transformations of student affairs practice would qualify as innovations (Selingo, 2014). However, any study of innovation is challenged by the lack of a common definition of the term (Baragheh, Rowley, & Sambrook, 2009). If higher education institutions are in pursuit of innovation, leaders need to know what innovation means so they know when they have achieved their goal. Some experts believe “all of our institutions of higher education will need to be more innovative. There is more risk to doing nothing and staying rigid than there is in addressing alternatives regarding how colleges offer, support and deliver learning” (Doss, 2014, para. 21). Yet, these experts neither explain the qualifications for innovation nor provide a definition to their audience. Despite the study of innovation being one of the most important trends in multiple disciplines (Hoelscher & Schubert, 2015), a common understanding of the meaning of
innovation does not yet exist (Baragheh et al., 2009); therefore, it is important to explore the various ways innovation is defined in the literature.

As a term that is connected to different disciplines, such as management and business, innovation means something slightly different in different fields (Baragheh et al., 2009). Of all the definitions reviewed for this study, Smith and Blixt’s (2017) definition was the only one written with student affairs work in mind. Smith and Blixt (2017) believe that “innovations are forged from practical application of creative ideas resulting from connecting previously disparate notions, concepts or inventions together to provide value to individuals or organizations” (p. 5). This research study could have used Smith and Blixt’s definition outright; however, their definition had limitations in terms of its narrow focus on innovation resulting only from bringing together distinct or contrasting ideas. With this emphasis in mind, their definition leaves out innovations that result from gradual adaptation. On the other hand, the value of Smith and Blixt’s definition to this innovation study comes from the authors’ distinction between two types of innovations. *Sustaining innovations* are those that improve existing efforts, and, in contrast, *breakthrough innovations* are new ideas that “cannot be implemented using existing structures or systems” (Smith & Blixt, 2017, p. 5). As discussed previously, these distinctions provide context for the type of innovation occurring within organizations and provide a useful anchor for the selection criteria and data analysis of this study.

Innovation studies within the context of higher education define innovation as “an improvement to a method, custom, or device—while staying true to an organization’s identity” (Tierney, 1988, para. 5). While not explicitly stated in the definition of
innovation for this study, Tierney’s (1988) belief that innovations should not lead an organization astray from the organization’s core purpose is important for all leaders to consider. Student affairs leaders who innovate to support emerging students’ needs may find it is best to collaborate with other campus stakeholders to best operationalize a particular idea, which may lead to innovations that are more appropriate for an academic department to pursue rather than student affairs. For example, if the innovation involves supporting an emerging international student need, then there may be value in bringing leaders from Global Studies to the table. In this way, Tierney’s caution to stay true to purpose is important so the institutional unit best equipped to pursue the innovation can do so. Tierney believed his definition of innovation warranted further study and was more simplistic when compared to more robust innovation definitions (Grasty, 2012; Rogers, 1995; Smith & Blixt, 2017; West & Farr, 1990).

A more utilitarian definition for innovation in higher education says that innovation stems from “new ideas, behavior patterns, beliefs, values, and assumptions covering any aspect of the organization’s function” (Schein, 1988, p. 2). Just as Smith and Blixt (2017) provided distinction between sustaining and breakthrough innovations, Schein’s (1988) contribution to a discussion of innovation came from his differentiation between innovation that focuses on roles versus those that focus on content. Content innovation is defined as “new products, services, and ideas pertaining to the mission of the organization. Role innovation is new ways of doing things, new definitions of roles, and new approaches to performing the roles” (Schein, 1988, p. 2).

Moving into the management realm, an innovation definition was derived from an often-cited study that examined what motivates leaders to make changes in their
workplace environments. Innovation is defined as the “intentional introduction and application within a role, group or organization of ideas, processes or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption, designed to significantly benefit the individual, group, organization or wider society” (West & Farr, 1990, p. 9). A limitation of West and Farr’s (1990) definition is the belief that anything new to the organization is considered innovation (Baragheh et al., 2009). Differentiation between types of innovation helps clarify those new ideas that enhance what already exists versus those ideas that suggest a completely new approach to the work (Morris & Setser, 2015). The innovation definition for this study differs from West and Farr’s (1990) in that theirs claims that as long as an idea is “new to the organization,” it is considered innovation. West and Farr’s meaning for innovation falls in line with Smith and Blixt’s (2017) sustaining innovations. Definitions of innovation that capture both types of innovation more adequately describe the nuance that likely occurs in organizations where some innovations are incremental, and some change the total landscape of the work (Kanter, 2008).

Any study of innovation is hampered by a lack of consensus on an innovation definition. Practical limitations also exist when leaders from any field want to apply theories of innovation to a working context. One study analyzed the content of 60 innovation definitions from eight different disciplines and paradigms (Baragheh et al., 2009). The goal of this research study was to construct an integrated and universal definition of innovation in an effort to create common meaning and a shared understanding among scholars studying innovation (Baragheh et al., 2009). Analysis revealed definitions and attributes clustered into six areas. A description of the six attribute areas is provided here:
1. Nature of innovation: Does the definition account only for things that are new, or are improvements also considered innovations? (Kanter, 2008; Morris & Setser, 2015; Smith & Blixt, 2017; West & Farr, 1990)
2. Type: What is the result of the innovation? Is it a process, product, program, or service, for example? (Kezar & Eckel, 2002)
3. Stage: Does the definition favor the adoption aspect of innovation? Or, perhaps, does it speak more about the design process? (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010)
4. Environment: Does the definition describe the social context for the innovation? (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Schein, 2010)
5. Means: Does the definition discuss inputs to the innovative process, such as resources, creativity, or technology? (Hoelscher & Schubert, 2015; Kanter, 2008; West & Farr, 1990)
6. Aims: What is the purpose of the innovation? Is it to differentiate from others? Or perhaps to gain advantage over the competition? (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Drucker, 1985; Michlewski, 2008; Tierney, 1988; West & Farr, 1990)

The content analysis resulted in the following definition of innovation: “Innovation is a multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, services or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace” (Baragheh et al., 2009, p. 1,334).

The very reason why Baragheh et al. (2009) were motivated to create a universal definition of innovation might end up being its own shortcoming, in that some scholars looking to operationalize this definition might find it does not mirror the uniqueness of their fields or disciplines closely enough. This is precisely the reason why their definition was not used in creating the student affairs definition of innovation for this study. In addition, Baragheh et al.’s definition is missing any reference to mission or purpose, which is an important aspect of other scholars’ definitions (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Drucker, 1985; Tierney, 1988). Finally, competition does not play the same type of role in higher education as it does in other sectors (although some might argue that is changing). Although noteworthy, Baragheh et al.’s attempt at a single, universal
definition of innovation falls short because it does not capture nuances related to the
uniqueness of the cultures present in various organizations.

Of use to a study of the phenomena of innovation is an understanding of how
leaders promote innovation throughout an organization. This knowledge is particularly
useful within a higher education context, as leaders understand how an innovation on one
campus might take root (or not) on another campus. The diffusion of innovation theory
explains the pathway for the spreading of ideas over time, which follows an S-shaped
trajectory (Rogers, 1995). The diffusion theory is predicated on innovation being defined
as “an idea perceived as new by an individual or an organization” (Rogers, 1995, p. 325).
Roger’s (1995) diffusion model is based on the assumption that leaders within an
organization have adopted a favorable attitude toward the change prior to beginning the
innovation process. Although Rogers’ model describes diffusion of innovation within an
organization, a strength of the model is the acknowledgement that organizations are made
up of people and attitudes toward innovation that can either help or hinder the process
(Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Kezar, Gehrke, & Elrod, 2015). Moreover, a deeper
understanding of Rogers’ findings that the adoption rate of an innovation follows a
traditional S-curve trajectory enhances innovation studies, particularly where the unit of
analysis is the leader. Innovators comprise the lower end of the S-curve, followed by
early adopters, adopters, early majority, late majority, and finally, laggards at the top
(Rogers, 1995). This information can be helpful to leaders, generally, as they innovate
and to those who may need to manage expectations from stakeholders who might assume
that all innovations will take root throughout an organization from the beginning.
Just as the diffusion theory is helpful for leaders to understand the way innovation spreads throughout an organization, another framework adds additional insight into how many innovations will be sustaining versus how many might actually be breakthroughs (Smith & Blixt, 2017). Kanter (2008) offered an innovation pyramid to gauge what is realistic to expect from any innovative organization. The pyramid reflects “incremental innovation” (Kanter, 2008) at its base—Smith and Blixt’s (2017) sustaining innovations—indicating that leaders should expect mostly minor innovations from their teams. Early stage prototypes and new ventures are less common than incremental innovation and are thus found in the middle of the pyramid. At the pyramid’s apex are what Kanter (2008) called “a few big bets” (p. 80)—or Smith and Blixt’s breakthrough innovations—signaling to leaders and decision-makers within organizations that big ideas are the exception and not the rule.

Analyzing innovation definitions and theories across multiple disciplines provides leaders a broad understanding of how the concept is used in various fields, and ultimately, how it guards against a limited scope of inquiry in innovation studies.

**Creativity, Design Thinking, and Innovation**

An analysis of the myriad definitions of innovation in the literature leads to a realization that innovation is a multiphase process. When comparing any two definitions, differences seem to come from how many phases are included and what those phases are called. For example, two distinct approaches that describe the process of innovation are the dynamic componential model of innovation (Amabile & Pratt, 2016) and the design thinking methodology (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).
Some innovation research identifies the creative process specifically as a necessary component of the innovative process (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Leavy, 2014; Scott & Bruce, 1994). The dynamic componential model of innovation (Amabile & Pratt, 2016) is one model frequently cited in studies. This model names creativity as an essential aspect of the innovative process. Creativity is described in the dynamic componential model as the ability to engage in novel thinking (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Innovation studies have utilized this model because it captures what is needed for innovation at both the individual and organizational unit of analysis. Specifically, the model adds value to studies interested in understanding what leadership behaviors lead to creativity and innovation within organizations. By contrast, other innovation models treat the need for creativity in the innovative process as more of an assumption, and therefore, creativity is not named as a specific stage in the innovation process (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Doss, 2014; Grasty, 2012; Morris & Setser, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). The framework of design thinking is conceptually similar to the dynamic componential model; however, creativity is not named specifically in the process.

Design thinking describes the path an innovation takes from inspiration to ideation, and ultimately, to implementation (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). The strategy of design thinking can assist leaders in this innovation process (Brown, 2008). Design thinking was “borrowed from industries such as design, tech, and business, and serves as an impetus for innovation and creative problem solving that places the end user (the student in our case) at the center of decision making” (Croeggert, 2016, para. 2).

User-centered design is central to the design thinking framework. Design thinking fundamentally consists of three stages: (a) inspiration, (b) ideation, and (c)
implementation (Brown, 2008). Others have described similar models of change that mirror the phases of innovation reflected in design thinking. Levine (1980) described four stages of innovation that begin with the realization that a change is needed. Next, that need is transformed into a plan for actualizing the innovation, and then the plan is operationalized on a trial basis (Levine, 1980). The final stage in Levine’s (1980) description goes beyond what is outlined in design thinking frameworks and refers to either the “institutionalization or termination of the innovation” (p. 2). These concepts were viewed through a higher education lens and translated by Salaman (2016) to: (a) inspiration (understanding the true needs of students), (b) ideation (creating a host of possible solutions), and (c) implementation (how do we make this work).

One valuable aspect of using design thinking as an element of building capacity for innovation within higher education is the focus on empathy. Design thinking requires building empathy for the end user (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Empathy can help leaders “understand the users’ needs and give [them] the motivation to make their lives better” (Kelley, 2014, para. 4). Many higher education leaders choose the field because they want to make a difference in the lives of students; therefore, applying Kelley’s (2014) recommendation to use empathy in designing for students should come naturally.

Empathy is not the only thing needed for user-centered design. Organizations that want to make innovation part of their everyday practice must build in mechanisms that allow for reflection and modification of their own creative processes (Kelley, 2014; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Schein, 2010). Leaders who aim to routinely innovate would benefit from this insight by building intentional reflection into their own creative process.
**Barriers to and Drivers of Innovation**

Design thinking describes one process for innovation, and as the process unfolds, some behaviors can be helpful, while others might stand in the way. Continuing with the discussion of conditions that optimize or inhibit innovation, research has identified a number of elements that serve as barriers to innovative practice (Schein, 2010). Change is stalled when these barriers exist (Kezar et al., 2015). Research suggests two barriers in particular that can hamper innovation and change: (a) not allowing proper time for innovations to take root, and (b) not allowing a diverse and broad group of stakeholders in the innovation process (Drucker, 1985; Kezar et al., 2015; Schein, 2010). New ideas that are not given enough time to fully germinate before being declared either a success or a failure lead to a premature analysis of the innovation (Schein, 2010). Innovations need to be allowed to run their course and may even need to exist inside the organization in a space that is set aside for exploring new ideas (Drucker, 1985). Additionally, if the innovation includes a homogenous group of familiar leaders, this will “severely handicap [the] change agents” (Kezar et al., 2015, p. 500) who miss out on important contributions from other stakeholders and collaborators across the institution. Said another way, when an innovation process excludes other areas within the organization, the success of the innovation is impeded (Schein, 2010). Therefore, innovation efforts that do not include a broad section of organizational participation, or that do not “cut across established channels” (Kanter, 2008, p. 6), can be hampered.

In contrast to barriers to innovation, there are factors that will facilitate innovation (Schein, 2010). Much research is available on the topic of creating successful innovations and/or change initiatives. One viewpoint, offered by Kezar (2011), that aligns well with
the research focus of this study, includes three elements that facilitate innovation and change to benefit the organization: (a) deliberation and discussion, (b) networks, and (c) external supports and incentives. The first element—deliberation and discussion—is consistent with the ideation phase of the design thinking framework (Brown & Wyatt, 2010) and the emphasis placed on participatory decision-making for optimum innovativeness within an organization (Schein, 2010). Kezar indicated that leaders who deliberate and discuss the innovation are more engaged in the change process and feel a greater sense of ownership of the new idea.

Networks are a powerful tool for innovators to provide support to each other throughout the innovation process, from idea to implementation (Kezar, 2011). Networks are also beneficial because they “provide the leadership that is necessary for change to occur within particular settings and to be sustained” (Kezar, 2011, p. 240). One mechanism for operationalizing the network concept is the Innovation Hub (Smith & Blixt, 2017):

[The Innovation Hub] is an incubator for creating breakthrough and sustaining innovations to transform existing patterns of organizational structures and behaviors. It is designed to mobilize and inspire faculty and staff to develop high-impact innovative solutions and will allow leaders to respond to the internal and external forces of change in creating positive, adaptive responses. (p. 8)

Given the competing priorities within many complex organizations, establishing systems for operationalizing innovative practice can help make innovation an organizational priority (Smith & Blixt, 2017).

External supports and incentives are another way to facilitate innovation and change within organizations (Kezar, 2011). Some organizations have gone to the extreme of adopting various approaches to “foster and develop the innovative potential of their
employees, such as the provision of rewards and incentives” (Magadley & Birdi, 2009, p. 315). Particularly when it comes to scaling up innovations throughout an organization (defined as innovations that have inspired other innovations within an organization), successful innovations are those that have wide external support and built-in incentives for success (Kezar, 2011).

Another driver of innovation is mindset. Leaders looking to innovate will benefit by pairing the necessary skills to innovate with an attitude or mindset open to the possibility of change (Levine, 1980). Some believe that a particular kind of mindset or attitude is ideal for innovation (Boland & Collopy, 2004). Mindset matters. For instance, design thinking makes a marked distinction between “design attitude” (Boland & Collopy, 2004) and “decision attitude.” Decision attitudes are most useful “when the feasible alternatives are well known, [however], when those conditions do not hold, a design attitude is required” (Boland & Collopy, 2004, p. 4). Innovators operating with a design attitude view projects as an opportunity for invention and relish the lack of predetermined outcomes (Boland & Collopy, 2004), similar to what Schein (1988) referred to as a “proactive” approach to innovation. With each new project, there is a chance to “ask oneself anew what is the real problem faced and what is the real best solution” (Gehry, as cited in Boland & Collopy, 2004, p. 9). Having a design attitude toward the challenges facing innovators may be particularly helpful given the constraint on resources that exist within higher education. This approach to “problem solving doesn’t have to cost more—and is the best alternative we have for breaking out of the path-dependent replication of familiar patterns of management” (Boland & Collopy, 2004, p. 10).
Innovation and Change

Understanding the factors that inhibit and enhance innovation provide a backdrop for exploring how organizations change. Innovation is a powerful mechanism for improving an organization. Innovation is solely directed by the institution, and therefore, “it is in the arena of innovation that the institution can really seek to impact its environment” (Peterson, 1986, p. 45). Even though it may be possible to create conditions that encourage innovation, it is important for leaders to remember that, in some ways, innovation is counterintuitive for any organization because many develop routines, structures, and patterns of work that can become codified and thus rigid. Schein (2010) indicated that organizations are hard to change because group members value stability that provides meaning and predictability. Another innovation scholar, Vijay Govindarajan, agreed with Schein. Govindarajan believed “organizations are not designed for innovation. They are designed for operations, which results in fundamental incompatibilities” (as cited in Leavy, 2014, p. 6) that need to be managed. Some scholars offer a counter argument and believe that organizations, as social constructs, are filled with leaders who continually create and re-create as they make meaning of their work (Weick, 1995).

Higher education leaders who believe they need to innovate are likely motivated to explore new ways to transform the way they do business, which means they might benefit from an understanding of the literature on organizational change. One powerful motivator for innovation is the desire for change. Leadership scholar, John Kotter (1995), stated, “Guiding change may be the ultimate test of a leader—no business survives over the long term if it can’t reinvent itself” (p. 57).
How can leaders in organizations design and deliver the most impactful services and programs to fulfill their missions? In addition to knowing their organization’s culture, leaders who hope to use innovation in their work must understand the role that change plays in an organization’s progress. The better leaders understand change, the more strategic they can be. By understanding the greater organization and environment in which they exist, student affairs educators can craft creative ways to effect change (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006).

As noted earlier, not all change is innovative, but all innovation involves change. Leaders who have a solid grasp of how all types of organizations effect change will be better equipped for building conditions for innovative practice in their organizations. Cummings (2016) reviewed Kurt Lewin’s (1951) change theory, which is still relevant today. Lewin’s 3-step model explains behaviors that both help and hinder the process of change—what Lewin calls “driving forces” and “restraining forces,” respectively. According to Lewin, the first step is to “unfreeze,” which involves preparing the organization for the process of change. An organization unfreezes when members of its team recognize their dissatisfaction with the “status quo” and begin to develop a sense of safety about entering the process of change. Step 2 is “movement” and is characterized by the group’s transition from the current state to a future state and is made easier by enlisting key influencers to champion the change. In this step, the intended change is both planned and executed. The final step is “refreeze” where the change is then institutionalized. Lewin believed that strong policies and procedures are necessary to truly refreeze the change. Lewin’s model prioritizes the process and forces of change at the expense of acknowledging the interpersonal dynamics between change agents, which
contradicts what Schein (1988) has instructed about role and content innovation. The simplicity of Lewin’s model may be constructive for leaders when considering change at a unit or divisional level; however, applying his model becomes limiting when used for more intricate change scenarios, such as redesigning an entire model of practice within higher education (as cited in Cummings, 2016).

The phases of change theory acknowledge the role of leaders in the process; therefore, it is applicable to a discussion of innovation in higher education. Building on Lewin’s model, Lippit, Watson, and Westley’s (1958) phases of change theory focus on the role of the agent in the change process; they concluded that changes are better when they are “rooted” (as cited in Gareis, 2010). This 7-step model partially aligns with Lewin’s model, as the first steps are the same; however, Lippit et al. recognized the need to broaden Lewin’s movement phase by breaking that phase into four separate steps. The four steps instruct the change agent to assess available resources and people’s capacity and motivation for change (as cited in Gareis, 2010). This step is particularly helpful for leaders in student affairs to consider given that resources are often scarce, and many practitioners feel as if they already have too much work to do. Creating plans/strategies and defining specific roles are also included in the four steps associated with Lewin’s movement phase. The final two steps align with Lewin’s unfreezing stage and instruct the change agents to intentionally maintain the change through clear and consistent communication and ultimately wean themselves away from the effort. Although more thorough than Lewin’s model and more appropriate for a student affairs context, the Lippit et al. model is mostly useful when applied to less complex change scenarios (Kritsonis, 2004).
For more complicated change scenarios, change agents may find value in understanding change models that take into account that change happens rarely according to plan. The stages of change model is one such framework that builds in the notion that sometimes change does not occur as anticipated. The cyclical model begins with a pre-contemplation of the change, followed by contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse before returning to pre-contemplation (Stevens, 2013). Prochaska and DiClemente’s (1984) model also differs from prior change theories in that it applies to both individuals and organizations alike. The circular design of the stages of change model allows for a feedback loop that acknowledges the importance of learning from setbacks. It is common for higher education decision makers to expect quick results from change efforts. With that in mind, this model is useful to study change within student affairs because it helps leaders understand how to address those who want to abandon a change effort when problems arise. At the same time, critics of this model believe that it is a comprehensive model only when generalized to problem behaviors (Kritsonis, 2004).

**Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture plays a role in organizational change (Schein, 2010). A study of innovation in organizations is informed by a study of culture, given that culture often dictates both what is done in organizations and why (Schein, 2010). With this in mind, leaders who want to provide optimum conditions for innovation within their teams would benefit greatly from a general understanding of the role culture plays within an organization. There are many definitions of culture within organizations. Relevant to a discussion of culture within higher education is Peterson and Spencer’s definition of
culture as “the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, belief, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work” (as cited in Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 82). Given the role that mission and values play within the organizational context of higher education, this definition helps to inform a discussion of culture within a higher education context.

A greater understanding of these few key concepts from the vast literature on organizational culture helps to explain why certain things happen within higher education and, maybe more importantly, why certain things do not. Understanding culture “will aid [university] administrators . . . in managing change more effectively and efficiently” (Tierney, 1988, p. 6). The many theories of organizational culture can be sorted into two main categories that differ based on the two separate disciplines from which the concepts originated. Theories derived from the field of sociology endorse the idea that culture is something an organization *is*, and theories rooted in anthropology believe that culture is derived from what an organization *has* (Peterson, 1986). Theories affiliated with the latter category are more abundant and include the fundamental research from scholars, such as Weick’s (1995) sensemaking, Argyris and Schon’s (1974) congruence, and Cameron and Quinn’s (2006) competing values framework. Organizational culture, to Schein (1988), is based on the assumption that tasks and technical aspects of an organization can not be considered separate from the human or people-centered aspects of an organization (Schein, 1988). In other words, to understand an organizational culture for the purposes of innovation, both the people who will benefit from the innovation and the tasks associated with conceiving the innovation should be considered for successful creation and implementation. This is what Schein calls the “socio-technical” approach to
innovation, and it is what differentiates this approach from others that seem to be more focused on innovative tasks rather than tasks and people.

Leaders who understand their respective organization’s cultures can utilize other models more fully to understand why innovation may or may not happen. Cameron and Quinn (2006) designed a framework that brings together three distinct, yet equally important, concepts of change—individual, organizational, and cultural—into one model. The competing values framework is based on results from research on organizational success and effectiveness (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). The values in “competition” in this framework are freedom vs. control on the one hand and internal focus vs. external focus on the other. The model maps out four quadrants according to the polarities described earlier, resulting in four distinct culture types: (a) clan (freedom and internal focus), (b) adhocracy (freedom and external focus), (c) hierarchy (control and internal focus), and (d) market (control and external; see Figure 2). Most organizations reflect all four culture types, typically with one type serving as most dominant.

Culture types are associated with certain behaviors. The adhocracy culture type is determined by Cameron and Quinn (2006) to be the culture that best fosters innovation. The characteristics of the adhocracy type are similar to the elements of design attitude (Boland & Collopy, 2004). Leadership behaviors associated with the adhocracy profile are a sense of freedom for experimentation and a keen understanding of the environment (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Schein 1988). Cameron and Quinn’s (2006) research in higher education indicates that “organizational effectiveness in institutions of higher education was highest in organizations that emphasized innovation and change (adhocracy) and at the same time stability and control (hierarchy)” (p. 80). This conclusion bears similarity
Leaders may want to consider providing freedom for experimentation if they want to nurture cultures that foster innovation. Another benefit of the competing values framework is the assessment tool that accompanies it. Leaders can create and analyze their organization’s cultural profile with the Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument (OCAI; Bremer, 2010), which adds further insights on their culture’s innovative capacity.

A search for organizational culture theories or frameworks designed specifically for use in student affairs yielded no findings; however, there are culture theories developed for higher education organizations. One researcher focused on higher education as a subject-specific framework to add another layer to the ongoing study of organizational culture (Tierney, 1988). Tierney (1988) also hoped his research would help college leaders “manage change more effectively and efficiently” (p. 6). Tierney’s
(1988) organizational culture framework grew out of an analysis of a 12-month, single-site case study in the United States and consisted of six essential concepts to be studied when “describing and analyzing” (p. 8) organizational cultures in higher education institutions. The concepts for consideration are: (a) environment: How does the organization define its environment? (Schein, 1988); (b) mission: How is it defined, articulated, and utilized? (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Drucker, 2002); (c) socialization: How are new members socialized? (d) information: Who holds the information and how is it shared? (Schein, 1988); (e) strategy: Who makes decisions, and how are they made? and (f) leadership: Who provides leadership? Using the six concepts listed here to analyze an organization provides leaders with a comprehensive picture of the organizational culture (Tierney, 1988). Unlike the validated instrument built by Cameron and Quinn (2006) that links organizational culture with effectiveness, Tierney’s (1988) nascent framework only proves useful in any provisional analysis of higher education cultures—anything more than that “demands further explication and analysis” (p. 8).

The following section outlines the methodology and research design and explains how the study of adaptive and breakthrough innovation in student affairs will be carried out.
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

The need for concerted innovation is very likely on the horizon for many student affairs divisions and their leaders. What might student affairs professionals learn from innovators in the field to prepare for the emerging future? The biggest task for higher education is to reshape the way it delivers the learning experience through innovation (Smith et al., 2016). For student affairs, what are those innovations? How do leaders go about innovating? What processes are used to inspire, create, and implement innovations? Developing a practice model rooted in ongoing innovation will likely unearth transformative ways to support and serve students in the future. To that end, studying innovation in student affairs organizations that have experienced demographic shifts in the students they serve adds value to the profession by offering insights on how student affairs leaders might proactively position themselves for the coming changes.

Research Questions

The focus of this study was student affairs innovation. Those ideas that result in either an adaptation or a radical redesign of student affairs practice is how innovation was defined in this study. Student affairs units that routinely innovate are best positioned to rethink and redesign ways to support the emerging college student population. This qualitative study, drawing on three case studies of small, private universities recognized as innovative that have seen a change in their student demographics in a responsibly short time period, pursued the following research questions:

- For small, private institutions recognized as innovative, what innovations in student affairs were made to respond to the changing needs?
  - What was the mix of adaptive and breakthrough innovations?
  - Through what processes were these innovations brought about?
  - Who led the innovation(s)?
• What was the driver to innovate?
• What process was used?
• How was the idea implemented?
• How was success defined for the innovation?
• Was the innovation a success according to those parameters?

The first question explored the types of changes that student affairs divisions have made at institutions recognized as innovative that saw a change in their student profile. A change in student profile for the purpose of this study was defined as a ≥ 30% shift in one or more demographic categories within a 5-year period. The first research question also examined the mix of innovation(s) within a division in terms of what innovations might be categorized as adaptive and what might be breakthrough. It helped to understand the patterns of innovation across units and various levels of the division related to demographic changes.

The second question sought to examine the processes or mechanisms that were used to innovate and who was involved. This question looked specifically at what motivated the innovation, how the idea came about, and how it was implemented. Student affairs leaders play an important role in the work within the division. Given this reality and the multitude of competing roles that all student affairs staff play within their organizations, this second question also aimed to explore the leadership roles in the innovation and change process. Student affairs units who have used innovation to better serve a new student demographic may provide lessons to others who undoubtedly will need to adapt to impending changes. A deep dive into the details of these innovative practices, how they came to be, the role the key leaders played, and the range of innovation types that may be present in student affairs divisions provided important information for future student affairs innovators.
Research Design

A qualitative approach to this study made the most sense given the nature of the research questions. Qualitative methods provide the most useful approach and tools to capture the perspectives of individuals’ lived experiences in student affairs units that have experienced a demographic shift (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research is used to “develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining” (Creswell, 2013, “When to Use Qualitative Research,” para. 3).

The specific qualitative approach for this research was the multisite case study, which allowed the researcher to explore complex phenomena at multiple sites from both a depth and breadth perspective. Case studies are typically used for current, real cases in progress, so the researcher can gather accurate information (Creswell, 2013). This methodology illustrates an in-depth understanding of a case or cases through the collection of diverse types of qualitative data and is particularly useful to discover and describe the history of a case, the chronology of events, and the daily activities of a case—all of which are useful in the study of student affairs units. The phenomena studied in this research was the journey of bringing about innovation in student affairs, so it seemed that hearing the stories of multiple innovators as evidenced in a real-life setting would provide insight on myriad factors that contribute to innovation within student affairs practice. When conducting a multisite case study, a thematic cross-case analysis and interpretation of results was used to interpret the meaning within and across the cases (Creswell, 2013).
Multisite case study methods were selected for this study to analyze and compare multiple student affairs innovations, to identify themes and issues, and to map the data into an analysis of innovation within student affairs divisions. The same research techniques, interview protocol, and procedures were replicated at each site to capture the full range of similar and dissimilar perspectives, ideas, and experiences (Creswell, 2013).

**Site Selection**

Given the limited research studies related to innovation in higher education and even fewer in student affairs, finding instances of innovation as defined in this study was challenging. Purposeful selection is recommended when using a limited number of sites; therefore, this approach was used in this study to deliberately select the most relevant sites and participants to inform the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful selection can be used to adequately capture heterogeneity of the population, to deliberatively select cases to test theories, or to establish particular comparisons between settings (Maxwell, 2013).

The initial goal for site selection was to solicit from student affairs experts the names of 20 to 25 institutions they believed had demonstrated innovation in response to shifting demographics. This list was then to be cross-referenced with student and institutional data available online—either from the institutional research data available on the campus’ website or through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)—to verify the demographic shift and to chart institutional characteristics (e.g., location, selectivity, size). Any campuses recommended through discussions with national student affairs leaders that were not confirmed through this data verification step were removed from consideration. This site selection plan proved unsuccessful because
student affairs leaders were challenged to blindly identify student affairs units that were innovating in response to demographic shifts. It became apparent that a more fruitful approach would be to shape a list of institutions who met the initial criteria (demographic shift and known for innovation) and ask leaders to react to the list with their insights on student affairs innovators.

Taking Maxwell’s (2013) advice to look in spots where one is more likely to encounter your phenomena, institutions that were nationally recognized for innovation and had also experienced a shift in their student profile in the last 5 years may have had a greater chance of engaging in the widespread innovation that this study sought to explore. Choosing individuals that “can provide you with the information you need to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions” (Maxwell, 2013, “Site and Participant Selection,” para. 6). Therefore, site selection for this study was drawn from small, liberal arts colleges that had experienced a ≥ 30% shift in student demographics within a 5-year period. Small colleges, as defined by the Carnegie Classification system, are those with FTE enrollments between 1,000 and 2,999 for degree-seeking students. This study adopted a 30% threshold because it needed a criterion to indicate notable demographic shifts. The research uses this percentage because a commonly understood demographic change threshold is the one used by the federal government to indicate when a predominantly White university becomes a Hispanic-serving institution. Following that same logic, ≥ 30% shift was used for this study as the marker for determining a significant change in student demographics.

To select sites with rich data to best inform the research questions, the researcher used student demographic data available in IPEDS to establish a list of 100 small, private
institutions that had experienced a student demographic shift between 2012 and 2017. Each institution on this list was researched to identify those institutions that had received some type of national recognition for innovation, broadly defined, which resulted in a list of 12 potential sites (see Appendix A). The culled list of 12 colleges was presented to five national student affairs leaders who provided insights on which of these institutions had innovative student affairs units.

The goal for this study was to select three sites that exhibited both adaptive and breakthrough innovations in response to changing student needs. The study aimed for three sites because this number allowed for sufficient context for the phenomenon to be explored while taking into account practical considerations related to the timeframe for the study. Six of the 12 colleges that met the initial site criteria were affirmed by national student affairs leaders as having student affairs units who were known to be innovative.

An introductory email was sent to the student affairs vice presidents at these six colleges, inquiring of their interest in participating in this study and inviting them to participate in a screening call. Selection of the three cases was contingent upon the level of interest and how closely aligned an institution was to the research criteria. Four student affairs vice presidents each participated in a call where the goal was to share the purpose and expectations of the study and to learn in greater detail about their innovative response to a shift in student demographics. In one instance, the vice president did not describe student affairs innovations that fit the criteria for this study. The remaining three institutions—Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College—were selected as cases.

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Sometimes research participants enter a study with erroneous information about how data might be used in a study (Maxwell, 2013). This underscores the need for clarity from the beginning about this study, which is why a research information sheet was drafted with full transparency on the purpose of the study and the expectations for participation (see Appendix B). This information was provided to the student affairs vice presidents at each of these institutions during the initial screening in addition to sharing the details verbally. The three student affairs vice presidents were then able to use the information sheet to explain the study to campus stakeholders.

**Data Collection**

Through multisite case studies, data is gathered “through many different forms, such as interviews that may be the primary form of data collection, but also through observations and documents” (Creswell, 2013, “The Characteristics of Qualitative Research,” para. 11). Using more than one method for collecting data also reduces the “risk that your conclusions will reflect only the biases of a specific method and to gain a more secure understanding of the issue you are investigating” (Maxwell, 2013, “Using Multiple Data Collection Methods,” para. 2). Given the iterative nature of qualitative research, the plan for data collection was not so restrictive as to limit changes as more was learned as the process unfolded (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data collection involved gathering, integrating, coding, and interpreting primary and secondary sources from each case being studied (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, memos and reflective journaling were used throughout the data collection process to “capture and process over time ongoing ideas and discoveries, challenges associated with design and analytic sense making” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 70).
Primary data sources were collected through a series of in-person, semi-structured interviews and site visits. Interviews are considered a mainstay of qualitative data collection and provide rich, deep, contextualized, and individualized data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through in-depth, in-person interviews, this study sought to understand participant perspectives on innovation within the context of their student affairs organization. Interviews with a variety of student affairs leaders was a useful method to better understand how individuals construct reality and the broad range of experiences and perspectives of the phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The research design included 10 to 12 interviews of student affairs educators at each site who were involved in the innovative practice, as well as observations and field notes of site visits (see Appendix C for the consent form). This number of interviews was selected to capture a solid variety of responses, to ensure enough data to address the research questions, and to allow “issues to become visible” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 126). A planning call was conducted with the student affairs vice president, whereby the participant criteria and goals of the study were discussed. The student affairs vice presidents were then allowed to invite the members of their team who they believed would provide the greatest insights relative to student affairs innovation. Vice presidents were encouraged to recommend participants to represent a variety of perspectives and viewpoints and from different units and levels of the student affairs divisions. The researcher did not limit the length of time in the position for study participants, which proved problematic on two occasions where the participant had only recently started working in their current role and therefore had little insight on innovation at the institution. Researchers should seek out those participants whose points of view are
needed to gather the data necessary to best respond to research questions with integrity and the appropriate range of relevant perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data were intermittently analyzed during the collection process to evaluate the point of data saturation, whereby collecting more data would not lead to further insights on the research questions.

The interview protocol was semi-structured to allow for some customization per participant and to increase the possibility for variation and range in the data. Questions were rehearsed in advance using student affairs volunteers from an institution not participating in the study. The protocol rehearsal identified a need to frame the questions with language that clearly indicated the participant should comment on innovations where they have been directly involved in the creation. Consequently, a framing section of the protocol was added to the final draft. The protocol followed the research questions (see Appendix D). The more explaining the participants do, the less inferring the researcher has to do (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each interview was recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. Contact summary forms were used for follow-up journaling at the conclusion of each interview to document immediate insights and observations (see Appendix E). These sheets were also reviewed when reviewing transcripts for clarity purposes. Observations and field notes were used throughout.

In addition to interviews and observations, this study also used secondary sources (i.e., documents and archival information) to understand the context and background relevant to the innovation(s). Student affairs organizations are data rich environments that contain existing data to inform the research questions. An essential component of data collection and analysis is the review of existing, relevant, and contextual documents. This
process is an important form of data triangulation to interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This aspect of secondary data collection included gathering and examining documents, such as strategic plans, organizational charts, mission and vision documents, and any relevant assessment or programmatic documentation associated with the innovation(s). Using multiple sources of data provided the study with greater credibility than if only one source was used (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, a research log was kept throughout the study to track any iterative changes that were made to the research methods to document when and why changes were made.

**Data Analysis**

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), “Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who takes note and often makes note of some things to the exclusion of others” (p. 171). The collection and ongoing analysis of data should be seen as integral, iterative, and recursive components of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The analyzing of text and other forms of data is a challenging task in qualitative research, and researchers must have a strategic system of coding or tagging (Creswell, 2013). Researchers must read and think about interviews, observation notes, coding strategies, and then organize data into matrices and other visual displays. Analyzing qualitative data can be done through memos, categorizing strategies like coding, and connecting strategies (Maxwell, 2013).

This study used Ravitch and Carl’s (2016) 3-pronged approach to data analysis that included “data organization and management, immersive engagement with data, and writing and representation” (p. 217). Structured reflexivity practices of mapping, dialogic engagement, reflexive journals, and memos were all used as validity strategies and to
help make sense of the data. This study used the interview recordings and transcriptions along with field notes, which were then coded to organize and draw out major themes. Although most interviews were professionally transcribed, the first few were transcribed by the researcher to gain insights on possible precoding and any needed adjustments or edits to the protocol. Once all the data were collected, they were read in their entirety to get a true sense of the data and emerging and relevant themes. All data from this study were consistently named and labeled according to a tracking system developed in advance of the collection process. A coding scheme, described in more detail next, was developed to identify emerging themes, and the data were coded and tagged appropriately. Particular attention was paid to seeking out evidence of those participants and/or data points that did not confirm the evidence from the study. This is important to ensure the rigor of the research and to contribute to the validity of the study.

A research journal, field notes, and memos were used throughout the collection and analysis of data. This study used a sustained process of reflexivity practices, including writing memos and creating graphics, to capture and organize the data and to stimulate other insights. Thematic analysis was used to note the relationships, similarities, and differences in data, both within and across sites. Both collection and analysis of data “should not be seen as two separate phases in the research process; they are iterative and integral to all aspects of qualitative research design” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 67).

In making sense of the data, several different frameworks were utilized. To determine what innovations were developed in response to the demographic shift, two different frameworks were used for data analysis. Eckel (2002) created a framework for determining evidence of transformation change in higher education organizations. Given
the relationship between change and innovation, aspects of Eckel’s model were used as a way to understand the different categories of innovation that might exist in student affairs divisions. For the purpose of this study, the following five areas were adapted from Eckel’s work and used to categorize and sort the innovation data: (a) policy innovation, (b) organizational structure innovation, (c) decision-making innovation, (d) programmatic innovation, (e) pedagogical innovation, and (f) role innovation. Innovations to student policies and/or procedures that are within student affairs oversight were labeled “policy innovations.” Innovations to reporting lines either within a student affairs division or unit were labeled “structural innovations.” Innovations in how decisions are made and by whom within student affairs units and/or divisions were labeled “decision-making innovations.” Innovations to programs designed to support student success broadly were labeled “student programming innovations.” Innovations to the curriculum overseen by student affairs educators were labeled “pedagogical innovation.” Innovations to the roles that individuals play within student affairs work were labeled “role innovation.”

At the same time, the innovations were categorized using an adaptation of Eckel’s (2002) evidence for transformation framework, evidence for the type of innovation and impact of the innovation was sought. Innovation type was coded as either an adaptive innovation or a breakthrough innovation as described by Smith and Blixt (2017). Adaptive innovations are those that improve existing efforts; in contrast, breakthrough innovations are new ideas that “cannot be implemented using existing structures or systems” (Smith & Blixt, 2017, p. 3). Emergent codes were developed during data analysis for insights that did not match the deductive codes that were initially established (see Appendix F).
As data related to the innovation process were analyzed, connections were drawn using a design thinking framework, which speaks to the process by which leaders go about imagining and implementing innovations. Three characteristics of design thinking that helped in data analysis were: (a) inspiration: Where did the idea for the innovation come from? (b) ideation: What process was used to generate the idea? and (c) implementation: How was the idea implemented? (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Within the category of inspiration, Drucker’s (1985) seven sources of innovation helped guide the coding of themes. Four such sources, according to Drucker, are internal to the organization (i.e., unexpected sources, incongruities, process needs, and industry/market changes) and three are external drivers (i.e., demographic changes, perception changes, and new knowledge). A strategy for coding data related to ideation was to use Brown and Wyatt’s (2010) brainstorming process that includes concocting scenarios, building creative frameworks (making order out of chaos), applying integrative thinking, putting the user at the center of the thinking, and prototyping and testing along the way (Brown, 2008). For coding implementation data, Govindarajan and Trimble’s (2010) framework for putting innovation into practice (building the team and running a disciplined experiment) was used. Additionally, attention was paid to possible implicit theories related to the process of innovation because they may have revealed why particular efforts succeeded (Kezar et al., 2015). Emergent codes were developed during data analysis for innovation processes that did not map to the design thinking framework described earlier.
For assistance in analyzing the data on the various student affairs professionals who played a role in the innovation(s), notations were made on the variety of positions involved to ascertain which were or were not connected to formal leadership roles.

**Study Limitations**

When working with people in qualitative research, it is always possible that the participants in the study will have biases that affect how they respond in an interview. In addition, at times, participants did not remember in great detail the key elements of how an innovation that served as the foundation for this study came to be. Additionally, there were times when the person who served as the driver for the innovation no longer worked at the institution, and consequently, any details about the process were lost. Interview protocol design techniques, such as asking a similar question in multiple ways, is one approach used to address potential biases. Participants were asked to reflect upon, in advance, documents they believed were relevant to a conversation about innovative practice in student affairs. This technique not only served to add richness to the interviews, but also it was a tool for enhancing the recall of events and circumstances related to the innovation. These potential threats to the validity of the study only underscore the need for the steps outlined earlier on mitigating validity.

The job of the qualitative researcher is to figure out how to get the most contextualized and complicated picture possible of the group being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In a study involving complex phenomena, such as innovation, and with an organizational unit of analysis, this charge is particularly challenging. Even so, the topic is important enough to not let the challenge be a deterrent. The research design and protocols described throughout were aimed at addressing this limitation.
It was possible that site selection criteria would yield limited sites that had seen shifts in the student population over a short period of time and that met the criteria for innovation as described earlier. If the researcher had been unable to locate enough institutions that met the research criteria to warrant a study, the criteria would have been expanded to allow for greater participation. Additionally, as discussed above, no significant recommendations were initially received during the original strategy for site selection where student affairs experts were engaged. Therefore, a modification was made to begin with IPEDS trend analysis for the first pass at site selection and provide that list for reaction by student affairs experts.

Given the sample size in this study, it is helpful to remember that “small samples of uncertain representativeness mean the study can provide only suggestive answers to any questions framed” (Maxwell, 2013, “General Questions and Particular Questions,” para. 5), which may end up being a limitation of this study. One of the goals of this study was to explore, in depth, a few small, private colleges and their choices related to innovation in student affairs practice. Although the insights gained from this study might be applicable to a broader student affairs audience, a wider exploration of this phenomenon across different institution types is a topic for further study.

The modified use of the participant sampling technique may not have yielded the variety and diversity of voices to add to the rigor and richness of the data in this study. The use of contact summary sheets and field notes throughout the process kept the researcher on track to notice when voices seemed to be trending toward the same responses. In this instance, the sampling technique could have been used with other
participants besides the vice presidents with the hope that these individuals would be less likely to recommend only those individuals who confirmed the evidence.

Another limitation was that student affairs practitioners who were producing innovative programs or approaches may have been unaware or unfamiliar with reflecting on their own process, thereby resulting in incomplete or narrow data. It is also possible that the participants in the study had limited knowledge of divisional innovations given that they did not have a prior history at the institution. On the other hand, there may have also been originators of innovation pushing their own agendas. In these circumstances, it was necessary to continue to identify other participants who might have had additional insights. Relatedly, this study also assumed that the leadership in the student affairs division were using demographic data to inform their work.

Given the subjectivity of the term “innovative”—particularly given that it seems to be a term that has been overused in recent years—it is possible that the researcher’s bias toward the innovation definition developed for this study might have skewed the perceptions of what others found innovative. The unclear definitions of innovations in practice might have resulted in individuals who believe they are being innovative when they were not. These possibilities underscored the importance of providing a clear definition of innovation for this study to all participants.

A final limitation of this study is the decision not to include a research question or questions related to the role that organizational culture plays in either advancing or limiting innovative behavior. Although the innovation literature indicates a strong link between culture and organizational innovation (Schein, 1988), the goal of this study was
to prioritize exploration of innovation processes; therefore, inquiries related to culture were not pursued.

**Validity and Ethical Considerations**

Several techniques were employed to maximize the validity of this study. Upon coding the data, dialogic engagement was used with fellow higher education researchers to review the data and to compare and contrast results. This level of engagement also helped to challenge any biases that might come up in the process. The goal of true participant validation processes is to create the conditions that help you to explore and ascertain if you are or are not understanding participants responses, how you are understanding them, and to be challenged on your data collection processes and your interpretation of the data. (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 200)

Member checking post-interview was also used, and participants were asked to reflect on their interview experience and provide any additional information they may have left out.

One assumption that must be acknowledged was my belief that significant transformation was needed within the field of higher education and that the general silence within the field of student affairs on how to remain relevant given the future student demographic was alarming. Ravitch and Carl (2016) speak about the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research:

> The research design does not matter unless you, as the researcher, approach the data collection process with the understanding that people are experts of their own experiences. The most well-planned and elegant research design will not be able to capture the complexity needed for qualitative research to be valid, ethical, and rigorous unless you accept the responsibility of the power you have as the researcher to mitigate that by cultivating and working from an inquiry stance that helps you to remain as authentic as possible to participants’ experiences. (p. 114)

In light of this, acknowledging the assumptions I brought to the research was an important step in offering research findings that are both trustworthy and credible.
CHAPTER 4 – GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

This chapter begins with a description of Gettysburg College, including pertinent history and background information, a summary of Gettysburg’s recognition for innovation, and the priority role innovation plays within the College and the College Life Division. Next, a synopsis of innovations in student affairs practice are provided along with a deep dive into four examples in particular: (a) the Social Justice Institute (SJI) and Diversity Peer Educators, (b) the Center for Public Service (CPS) Program Coordinators, (c) The Attic, and (d) Student Group Consulting. Four examples were chosen because they represent how the College Life team has strategically elevated students’ roles in divisional programming. Furthermore, the SJI, the Diversity Peer Educators, the CPS Program Coordinators, and Student Group Consulting are all instances of adaptive innovations offered by both the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the definition of innovation crafted for this study. The Attic represents the only breakthrough example provided in this case. Moreover, each was selected because they serve as examples of the ways in which student affairs staff have used innovation to improve student success at Gettysburg. The chapter ends with a presentation of the influences and conditions that contribute to an innovative environment at Gettysburg College.

History and Background

Nestled in a quaint Pennsylvania town that shares its name sits Gettysburg College. Eleven miles from the Maryland border, this highly selective, residential, liberal arts institution enrolls approximately 2,600 undergraduate students. Upon visiting the campus, immediately noticeable is the juxtaposition in the landscape between old and new. Traditional, ivy-covered buildings stand majestic next to fresh, modern facilities.
The messages covering construction fencing along West Lincoln Avenue advertise the multimillion-dollar renovation and new construction project set to open in August 2018. The needs of Gettysburg students were top of mind when designing the state-of-the-art College Union Building (CUB), and, as such, the formal and informal spaces for students to connect and collaborate are many. The CUB will serve as home for a number of College Life units—the Garthwait Leadership Center, the Center for Career Development, the Gettysburg Recreational Activities Board (GRAB), and the Office of Student Activities and Greek Life are some examples. Additionally, the new space will provide upgraded food service options and enhanced workspace for student clubs, organizations, and student government. The decision to invest several million dollars in a nonacademic building is a powerful testament to Gettysburg’s strong commitment to prioritizing students’ engagement with the College and with one another (see Appendix G for comparative institutional data).

**Innovation Recognition and Priority at Gettysburg College**

Gettysburg has received national notice as an institution prioritizing innovation. Of note is the College’s appearance on the 2018 unranked list of the top 50 “Colleges That Create Futures,” which are schools identified by The Princeton Review (2017) as taking innovative approaches in their efforts to “empower students to discover practical applications for their talents and interests through experiences that complement their classes and coursework” (para. 1). Similarly, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education praised Gettysburg in its recent reaccreditation review for its “exemplary and innovative practice” (as cited in National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017, p. 1) in their efforts toward student engagement.
The College’s strategic plan is organized around three themes that each focus on preparing Gettysburg students for “lives that will embrace innovative approaches to the complex issues before us” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-e, para. 2): (a) Impact, (b) Inclusion and Internationalization, and (c) Innovation. The strategic plan goes on to declare that, to prepare Gettysburg students for “lives of innovation, [the College] will promote an institutional culture of thinking and acting anew that honors the visionary leadership of President Abraham Lincoln” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-e, para. 2). Innovation is an institutional priority and not only a divisional strategic priority, and it is fundraising priority as well, as “innovation” was also named as a target area in the newly launched capital campaign, “Gettysburg Great” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-e, para. 3).

**Student Demographic at Gettysburg**

In addition to a commitment to innovation, Gettysburg has also identified inclusion and internationalization as strategic priorities. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of domestic students of color grew from 10% of the overall student body to 15%. According to the Executive Director of Multicultural Engagement, 21% of Gettysburg students are first in their families to attend college. Gettysburg has also committed to increasing the international student presence on campus. In 2011, international students made up only 2% of the overall student population. Today, 5% of Gettysburg students come from more than 35 countries outside of the United States. Like many campuses across the United States, Gettysburg has chosen not to publish the exact number of students attending under the DACA program to ensure the utmost privacy for these students. In a letter to the campus community, the Gettysburg President referenced that, although the number of DACA students at Gettysburg is relatively small, the institution
remains committed to providing necessary support, including “meeting all educational expenses of our DACA students if they lose financial aid due to the change in their immigration status” (Riggs, 2017, para 4). The Gettysburg Class of 2021 is the most diverse in the 154-year history of the College. The freshman-to-sophomore retention rate for all students in 2016 was 91%, and for students of color, the first-to-second year retention rate is higher at 95% (IPEDS, 2017). Nearly 84% of the students attending Gettysburg College graduate in 4 years and 86% graduate within 6 years of beginning their education (IPEDS, 2017).

**Innovation Initiatives in College Life at Gettysburg College**

Gettysburg College has prioritized innovation in its strategic plan and its capital campaign. As a result, the College Life Division has launched a number of innovations to help Gettysburg students succeed. Twenty-two innovations were identified by 11 College Life staff (see Table 1 for a complete list of innovations).

Examples of innovations provided by College Life leaders at all organizational levels ranged in detail and complexity—from a pre-orientation program geared to new students of color to a new approach to the service trips concept where students become completely immersed in all aspects of a culture and community. One of the 22 innovations presented did not meet the definition of innovation outlined for this study because it is for alumni of Gettysburg College.

Of the 21 remaining examples, 20 are slight improvements or adaptations to already existing College Life initiatives (these appear in Table 1 as adaptive innovations), and one is a new approach to the student affairs work within the Division (these appear in Table 1 as breakthrough innovation). The breakthrough innovation example provided by
Table 1

*College Life Division Innovations at Gettysburg College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakthrough Innovation</th>
<th>Innovation Category</th>
<th>Decision-Making</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Attic is a student run nightclub where alcohol is distributed for to students 21 or older.</td>
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<td>Adaptive Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Leadership Certificate Program pairs leadership coaches with students interested in exploring and connecting campus involvement to meaningful career skills.</td>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>The College House Program fosters intellectual and social communities around common interests in a residential environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unique collection of units reporting up through AVP—Associate Dean as conduit for data sharing and utilization.</td>
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<td>X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of Multicultural Engagement pre-orientation program for students to get a jumpstart on their college transition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity Peer Educators facilitate conversations with peers about various issues of diversity.</td>
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<td>Public Safety officers are required annually to do a SARA Project—using problem-solving methodology (Scan, Analyze, Respond, and Assess) to address a problem in the campus community.</td>
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<td>Public Safety officers adopt-a-residence hall each year and serve as ambassador and resource for that hall.</td>
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<td>Student Organization Consulting Program allows student groups to receive consulting from Leadership Mentors to address identified organizational challenges.</td>
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<td>Concerted effort to incorporate concepts of experiential education into already existing programs.</td>
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<th>Adaptive Innovation</th>
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<td><strong>Center for Public Service Immersion Projects</strong> are off-campus, educational opportunities where students learn about a community and its history, and then travel to a location where they immerse in the community.</td>
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<td><strong>Center for Public Service Dialogue Groups</strong> challenge the cultural climate on campus, meeting weekly to discuss issues of race and gender.</td>
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<td><strong>The Center for Public Service Program Coordinators</strong> are paid student positions designed to inspire and organize volunteer action for social justice.</td>
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<td>Public Safety officers partner with fraternity leadership to assist with fraternity social events.</td>
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<td><strong>Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation Initiative</strong> is the focal point for entrepreneurship and innovation where ideas for both new social ventures and for-profit startups can be explored, cultivated, and developed.</td>
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<td>Recasting the diversity efforts under the heading of multicultural engagement, which promotes an inclusive campus climate, resulting in the restructuring of the Office of Multicultural Engagement.</td>
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<td><strong>The Greek Life Trustee Review and Implementation Plan</strong> is an effort to increase trustee understanding of the complexity of the Greek system and corresponding actions for improving the Greek community.</td>
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<td><strong>The First-Year Experience Fourth Hour</strong> is an additional hour added to the first-year seminar focused on transition issues for students.</td>
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(continued)
Gettysburg College Life staff is an innovation in student programming. Of the 20 adaptive examples presented, 12 are also student programming innovations.

Student feedback was the driver for the one breakthrough innovation presented and was the driver for one adaptive innovation. Of the 20 innovation examples categorized as adaptive, no clear theme emerged in terms of innovation drivers. In other words, drivers for adaptive innovations in College Life at Gettysburg are varied. The mix of drivers include resource utilization, strengthening ties between students and administrators, alumni donations, and risk management/risk mitigation.

Most innovations in College Life at Gettysburg were led by groups of people—either groups of students, groups of divisional staff, staff and faculty collaborations, staff and trustee teams, or a trio of faculty, staff, and students combined. All 21 innovations offered in this study were implemented through mechanisms involving teams. Approximately one quarter of the teams were cross functional and included members...
from across the Gettysburg College community. Two innovations were created by College Life division-wide efforts exclusively. Student input was central to all of the Gettysburg innovations in this study, and nine innovations originated as student ideas. Elements of design thinking (observation, brainstorming, prototyping, and implementation) were found in three innovation examples. The four steps of implementing an innovation (observation, brainstorming, prototyping, and implementation) were used in three innovation examples. Sixteen of the 21 innovations relied on research and student demographic information to help create a deep understanding of the issue at hand. One quarter of the innovations at Gettysburg used the strategy of piloting programs in the implementation phase of the idea.

Regarding the impact of innovations at Gettysburg, the College Life staff consistently based success on two main factors: (a) positive participant response, and (b) more student interest than capacity would allow. Additionally, two adaptive innovations created in response to safety incidents on campus were deemed successful because a decline in related incidents was observed. Finally, no success metrics were articulated for five of the adaptive innovations because it was either too early to determine the impact of the innovation, or because no concrete success factors had been established. A more detailed list of each innovation’s driver, leader, implementation process, and outcome can be found in Appendix H.

Presented next is a summary of four innovative practices employed by the College Life Division at Gettysburg College. Specifically, the SJI and Diversity Peer Educators, the CPS Program Coordinators, The Attic, and Student Group Consulting are detailed in the following sections. Four examples were chosen because they represent how the
College Life team has strategically elevated students’ roles in divisional programming. Also, each serves as an example of how the Gettysburg College Life staff has established an innovative student affairs practice that supports students in their pursuits, particularly as students’ needs continue to shift. Finally, these innovations were chosen because they represent a range of examples of both adaptive and breakthrough innovations.

**Social Justice Institute and Diversity Peer Educators**

As the student body at Gettysburg College has grown more diverse, one College Life staff member mentioned that the campus was exploring ways in which the Division could increase understanding and enhance dialogue on topics related to inclusion and diversity. She described a trio of programs designed to build community among the changing profile of students. She shared that two of the three programs proved successful: (a) the Diversity Peer Educators, and (b) the SJI.

The Gettysburg College website describes the SJI as “an intensive learning experience for Gettysburg students to explore personal and group identity, examine today’s social injustices, and promote social action through civic engagement” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-d, para. 3). The SJI serves as an example of addressing the needs of students in a way that speaks to Gettysburg students’ desire to be intimately involved in the program design and delivery.

Diversity Peer Educators are selected each year from students who apply to support the College’s efforts toward creating a more diverse and inclusive environment. One College Life staff member shared that the Diversity Peer Educators play an important role in the SJI because the student voice is needed when bringing together
passionate Gettysburg community members who desire to gain a better understanding of social justice and to be agents of change on campus.

The goal of the 2-day SJI, a staff member indicated, is to create an intensive environment for learning where Gettysburg students can explore issues of identity, social injustice, and social action. She went on to describe the following details of the program:

Students attending SJI apply to be in one of two tracks. The first track is focused on understanding social justice, so it is really for students who think they don’t know enough about what social justice means or their own personal identity to really have an impact on campus, but they want to know more. The second track is about becoming a change agent. These students have a good idea of what social justice means and have a decent sense of their own identity and how that contributes to the marginalization of other people on campus. This track is about figuring out how to make change on campus.

The Associate Dean of College Life described the SJI as a way for students with little to no experience with diversity issues to explore their own identity right alongside students who had significant involvement with diversity training. She shared, “That is why we ask them to apply to the program, so we can make sure students, no matter how experienced they might be, get something out of the Institute.”

The Associate Dean shared that, as she watched the student demographic at Gettysburg grow in diversity, “[she] recognized that students needed ways to engage in discussion about inclusion-related issues in a safe environment no matter how comfortable or familiar the students were with diversity.” She went on to add, “The Social Justice Institute was conceived as a bookend to the Diversity Peer Educator program,” which is why, as she explained, the two ideas were presented to the Vice President of Student Affairs (VP) simultaneously. This College Life staff member shared:

The Diversity Peer Educators (DPEs) help deliver a good share of the content at the Social Justice Institute. That is why we proposed the idea for the DPEs at the
same time, because we wanted the students to help guide their peers. It is so much more powerful that way, when students can learn from each other. Especially as our student body becomes more diverse, it makes a difference when student can talk to each other about their experiences and how to make our campus a more inclusive place.

The initial idea for the SJI came from a College Life staff member who presented a proposal to the VP. Although the content and frequency of the Institute continues to evolve, students have played an important role alongside College Life staff in keeping the program content relevant to changing issues facing Gettysburg students, one staff member explained. Students in their roles as Diversity Peer Educators also help to facilitate the Institute.

According to the Associate Dean, “Although there is still work to do, the culture now is better than it was before we began this initiative.” One College Life staff member shared that, because the program has been so well received, a handful of students have attended the SJI multiple times. The Associate Dean explained they never intended for the SJI to be something where students attended more than once; however, the College Life staff decided they did not want to stifle students’ interest or participation. To respond to the interest, they created additional levels for more seasoned students to participate. She shared:

Some students phased out of our two original tracks, so we developed something totally different for them. Now we have them lead the training instead of sitting and being trained. Because that is what being a change agent is all about, after all.

The feedback from SJI participants also indicated a desire for SJI to occur more than once a year. Consequently, in addition to SJI being held twice per year, Gettysburg now offers social justice workshops that are a spinoff of SJI; students submit topics of interest that are now tackled monthly, according to the staff.
The second innovation profiled is the CPS Program Coordinators. Like many other units within the Division of College Life, the CPS at Gettysburg is “built off the energy of students,” according to the Center’s Director. Six programs serve as pillars of CPS, with the ultimate goal to “challenge students to think critically and act compassionately” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-b, para. 3). These six programs are student leadership, summer fellowships, dialogue, reflective service, community-based learning, community-based research, and immersion projects. According to the CPS website, “Program Coordinators are central to all CPS programming. Students find voice and the power to find solutions for issues that are important to them—educating, challenging, and encouraging their peers to continually explore community work, advocacy and change” (para. 1). The Program Coordinators are students hired to work directly with agencies in the local community and serve as liaisons and partners between the agency and Gettysburg faculty and student volunteers.

The Director added that the name of the program does not adequately describe the depth and importance of the Program Coordinator role. The Director provided the following example to illustrate how the Program Coordinator position functions:

Program Coordinators are liaisons to community organizations. Let’s say you are the Program Coordinator for Big Brothers, Big Sisters. Your job is to liaison with the professional staff at Big Brothers, Big Sisters. Faculty may ask students to participate in a community-based activity as part of a course. Fellow students may want to volunteer. The Program Coordinator coordinates between his or her peers, the faculty, and the community partners to meet the partner’s needs while also training and supporting their peers on larger social issues that may connect to why mentoring youth is so important in the first place.
She went on to say, “The PC model is so much more than simply coordinating peers to serve,” particularly as the Gettysburg demographic grows more diverse. In addition to liaising with the community and educating their peers, the CPS also organizes Program Coordinators into “Learning Circles, which provides opportunities to share and draw upon the knowledge and experience of fellow student leaders” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-c, para. 5).

As indicated by the Center Director, the changing profile of the Gettysburg student called for a new approach to public service work. She described how students associated with the CPS in the past “were almost entirely White and almost entirely women. Other students perceived the CPS volunteers as ‘the people who do service ON people.’ It was definitely a different model then we have now.” In contrast, the Director shared how the Program Coordinator role has played a part in changing the model for the CPS:

Now the perception of the work we do, as well as who is involved in the work, is very different. The Program Coordinators model broadens our reach in terms of who participates in our programs, which is more important than ever since our [student] demographic has shifted.

In support of the Program Coordinator program, the Director of Public Service spoke of how integral student leadership is to the CPS infrastructure: “It was purposeful to allocate the majority of the [CPS] budget not toward professional staff, but for students. Students understand the energy and knowledge of the campus in ways the staff don’t.”

The idea for the Program Coordinator position came from the College Life staff; however, once the basic infrastructure was created, students took over from there. The Director of Public Service shared that her philosophy to generate interest in service is for
student leaders to harness the energy of their peers—“let Program Coordinators lead and the staff to support them in that leadership.”

The Program Coordinator position was conceived from the beginning to be integrally connected to the leadership and operations of the CPS. The Director explained:

As our demographics shifted, our focus very intentionally shifted away from doing service for others to a systems approach to examine ourselves and how we can be agents of change in the world. Program Coordinators are one way we make that happen.

In Fall 2017, the CPS employed 24 students as Program Coordinators, and the Director added, “They are not doing office work. These students have significant responsibility and autonomy for coordinating an important relationship between a community agency and the College.” The high level of responsibility comes with training and support from the professional staff. The Director shared:

We work hard to provide a general framework for the [Program Coordinators] without being too prescriptive. We tell them, “Here’s the framework of what we’re looking for you to do. Now, go do it. We are here in all these different ways to support you along the way.”

The Center Director went on to say:

We are not throwing students out there on their own. They have a very strong support system. We want them to do their work, then we ask them to reflect on what they have done as well as write about it. We also take it to the next level because we work with students to explore how it is we can make our community and the world better. This is particularly important to us as our student demographic continues to shift. We want to make sure we are relevant to what [students] need.

Within the design of the Program Coordinator model, “The students have the power to change how the program looks. As they learn more about themselves and social issues, they become more equip to suggest enhancements to ensure the program remains relevant,” according to the Director.
The Director indicated that one important way of measuring the success of the Program Coordinator model is to observe how the feedback from students has changed. For example, as part of their role to provide training for their peers and, according to the Director, in direct response to Gettysburg’s shifting student demographic, the Program Coordinators host dialogue groups focused on particular issues. Currently there are two regularly occurring dialogue groups—one on race and one on gender. She shared:

Before, people were not talking about issues of race or gender, at least not in the way we do now. Students will say, “Before I started coming [to events run by the Program Coordinators], I never noticed these things, now I see it all the time.” This has helped in terms of changing demographics that the work that we do is not simply as privileged people wanting to do good, you know, white guilt or whatever. I think now we are very much seen that this is a place where students are talking to each other about real issues on campus and we all care about them.

The Director also indicated that she believes the Program Coordinator model is successful as it relates to Gettysburg’s first-generation student population. She explained:

Another interesting success story is related to our increase in first-generation and/or low-income students. They get here, and it can feel like a very foreign place . . . But when they involve themselves in our programming, they find that it is a way to connect with communities that they see similar to communities they grew up in.

She added, “Connecting these students to the community and to Gettysburg really creates a sense of place beyond this campus that is truly grounding.”

**The Attic**

The third innovation focuses on student social atmosphere. As Gettysburg attracts more students who, as the VP described, “expect to play a role in designing and creating their own programs,” The Attic is an innovation that serves several purposes, one of which caters to this growing need. The Gettysburg website describes The Attic as a “student centered, student designed, and student run nightclub on campus” (Gettysburg
A College Life director described The Attic as a student run venue where beer and wine are provided free of charge to Gettysburg students 21 years of age or older.

The Attic fundamentally has two goals, according to one College Life staff member: “We are not a dry campus, so it is one way to demonstrate to students, in a controlled environment, responsible consumption of alcohol.” She went on to say, “The second goal is to allow co-mingling between people who can and cannot drink. That one feature distinguishes The Attic from any other similar venue. Our underage students can be there too.” The VP emphasized the desire for students of all ages to interact in a social setting with alcohol. She shared, “Students were asking for somewhere to go to be with their friends who are 21. Now they can go to a dance party, or whatever it is, where alcohol is present [even if they cannot drink] and still be with their friends.”

In addition to offering a nightclub setting for Gettysburg students, The Attic space can be reserved for events; however, events with alcohol are limited to Friday and Saturday nights only. The Director of Campus Safety said, “Student groups and student organizations see [The Attic] as an opportunity to use the space for social purposes. Maybe they live in a space together where the environment is not conducive to hosting an event.” The Assistant Vice President for College Life (AVP) explained the inspiration for The Attic in this way:

The Attic began as a student idea and has always been student centered and student-focused. It was something the students wanted to do to counter the strong Greek social culture. The College had unconsciously farmed out the social environment to the fraternities for many years. Our students are not going into town, drinking illegally in the bars because the Liquor Control Board is all over those little bars. Nothing is happening there.
He added that the social scene has always been important to Gettysburg students, but now with students’ increasing desire to be participants in their own learning, the College is making a concerted effort to support this interest rather than squelch it.

College Life leaders were on board with the students’ proposal from the beginning; however, some stakeholders across campus initially believed the idea was too risky, according to one College Life staff member. The AVP shared, “Before we opened [The Attic], the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board wondered what we were doing. They came, looked over the policies, process, and procedures and said, ‘Okay, it doesn’t violate the law. You’re fine. Just don’t sell it.’” It might have been easy to dismiss a student nightclub with free beer giveaways as too risky, or too expensive, or too difficult to manage, according to the AVP. However, he indicated the leaders in the College Life Division felt it was important to provide Gettysburg students this opportunity for learning, ultimately leading to a unique and secure place for students to socialize.

From the beginning, The Attic has been student-driven and student led. One director in College Life indicated The Attic is a good example of Gettysburg’s student-centered focus. She shared:

No matter what your interest, there’s something for you. If you just want to hang out, you can attend an event. If you want to drink, as long as you are 21 you can. If you want to work there . . . and if you want to lead, join the Advisory Board!

One College Life staff member recalled, “It began as a Student Senate initiative. It also became an enrollment conversation because the Admissions staff thought it would be a great thing to offer to appeal to the current DIY generation of incoming students.” Other campus stakeholders also played a role in launching The Attic. The Executive Director of
Public Safety spoke of how the idea was explored through multiple lenses throughout the College:

It was discussed at many levels and everyone wanted to see how we might make it work. Other campuses had nightclubs with permits and the ability to distribute alcohol, but underage folks couldn’t co-mingle necessarily. We wanted a unique environment and we knew we weren’t going to get an [alcohol] permit, so we decided to give the beer away—it’s so crazy!

The VP indicated the idea was endorsed, ultimately, by the trustees who approved funding for the renovation and programming, despite all the things that might have gone wrong. The VP shared, “It has been a nonissue and has turned into a great outlet for our students to gain valuable experience running an operation of this magnitude.”

As the concept moved from idea to implementation, Gettysburg students led the way. A College Life staff member shared how students named the venue, designed the interior and logo, established the policies and procedures, created the marketing materials, and booked the entertainment. Today, The Attic is managed by an Advisory Board made up students from each class, and together they “program, implement and oversee all Attic sponsored events” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-c, para. 1).

A unique feature of The Attic is the free distribution of alcohol. The AVP spoke of the decision to provide alcohol free in this way:

Some campuses have nightclubs, but they have permits that allow them to sell alcohol. The drawback to these places is that underage folks can’t come mingle with those who are drinking. We wanted to provide a unique environment, and we knew we wouldn’t be able to get a permit because they are limited within the borough. The only way we could do it would be to give the beer away.

He added, “When it comes to being student-centered, if you are going to be a campus that’s going to hang your hat on this idea, you have to be willing to engage in what might seem like wacky ideas.”
Success of The Attic can be measured by its popularity in terms of student participation. According to the Gettysburg website, students are willing to stand in long lines at a chance to get in on Friday or Saturday night (Gettysburg College, n.d.-a). One College Life staff member mentioned that, several times a year, they have inquiries from other colleges across the country who are interested in implementing the idea on their campus. To his knowledge, other schools have not been able to make it happen. The AVP shared his thoughts on the success of the student-centered idea:

The local folks were thinking, “Oh, my God, drunk students are going to be transported to the hospital from there on a regular basis.” That is not how it works. The amount of alcohol is limited. Actually, it’s probably a better place, really, because students get three tabs for 3 hours, a drink an hour. It’s much better managed than even a bar might be. We’ve not had any issues.

He went on to add an unintended benefit of the idea is the opportunity it has created for relationship building between students and Public Safety:

Our officers will be there, interacting with students. They are at work, they are on duty, they are in uniform, but they are having casual conversations with students while the students who are of age are drinking and with underage students who obviously aren’t.

The AVP continued, “The more they see us in their environment in a nonenforcing capacity, the better off we are.”

Student Organization Consulting

The Garthwait Leadership Center (GLC) offers a unique program to the student organizations at Gettysburg College. Student Organization Consulting is a customized program where “student groups and organizations on-campus collaborate with Leadership Mentors to design and facilitate a workshop for their members on a topic of their choice” (Gettysburg College, n.d.-f, para. 1). Sample topics range from conflict
management to strengths-based leadership. The Director of the GLC shared how the process begins with an initial consultation, followed by a planning session with the group led by a pair of Leadership Mentors where they discuss the details of the workshop.

Several weeks later, according to the Director, the Leadership Mentors conduct the workshop for the group, and the consulting project ends with a “close the loop” meeting a week later. Student Organization Consulting was born from staff frustration over lack of attendance at the workshops they were offering for student organizations. The Director described the origins of the program:

The idea for the program came out of my frustration that we could create as many programs each month as we wanted, but unless student groups realized they need to work on their own group development, they are not going to show. We would offer a program on conflict management and only a handful of students would show. I said, “This is silly. Why are we doing this? We’re putting in a lot of work and not meeting much need.”

The Director went on to explain how that frustration inspired a new approach to helping student groups work through issues. He said, “We knew students benefit from these programs, so we reframed our approach. We said, “If your group is having a problem, come to us. We’ll help you figure it out.” Having the initial request come from the student group, the Director explained, is an important part of the process because the philosophy behind the consulting idea is that groups first need to admit they need to improve and then be open to advice.

The original idea for a student organization consultancy came from the Director, but the program runs entirely by the student Leadership Mentors with high-level oversight from the professional staff in the GLC. The Leadership Mentors are the student staff who coordinate many of the programs generated under the GLC. These student
leaders are described by the Director as “integral to the foundation of the GLC because they came first. The concept of Leadership Mentors came before we even had a GLC. The VP knew we needed dedicated students to help us hit the ground running when the center first began.”

The Leadership Mentors receive extensive training upfront from the Associate Director of the GLC, and they confirm with the professional staff their diagnosis and recommended course of action for the student group; however, the students initiate all the analysis and strategy design. The Director of the Garthwait Leadership Center explained how groups often begin the process by presenting surface-level issues. He said:

> It is great to have peers [Leadership Mentors] who can speak candidly to student groups in ways that might be difficult for staff. The Leadership Mentors might say, “We could do a workshop on that topic if you want, but we really think it might be useful to talk about your values as an organization.”

Any group can come to the GLC with a concern, and “over the span of 3 or 4 weeks,” the Director explained, “the Leadership Mentors will help identify the root cause of the issue the group is experiencing and design a program for them that helps address that issue.”

The Student Organization Consulting program is very popular. The Director of the Garthwait Leadership Center indicated that the 13 Leadership Mentors have difficulty keeping up with demand. He added, “We are wrestling with how to say no to students at this point.” The Director reflected on the value added of the program:

> I think we’ve found a lot of success with the program because students are totally bought in, and it has given student organization leaders a lot more help. Some of the issues the groups are struggling with are quite complex, and it would be really hard for them to work their way through them on their own. Our Leadership Mentors are able to really help.
The Director of the Garthwait Leadership Center indicated the Student Organization Consulting initiative has also been tremendously popular with athletic teams and even students working together on group projects for a class. The program also serves as a valuable experience for the Leadership Mentors, the Director indicated, as they have a chance to hone organizational consulting skills that will likely be useful in their career.

**Conditions Influencing Innovation in College Life at Gettysburg College**

Given the central role that innovation plays in the future direction of Gettysburg College, the College Life Division is also embracing innovative practice in its approach to serving students, albeit without necessarily using the innovation label. The VP explained that innovation is “not a word that [they] use all that much.” She stated, “I never thought we were really innovative. We just do what we do for students and don’t really think about how we can be innovative.” The VP went on to talk about her philosophy that drives her approach to the work in College Life:

The way I often talk about this work, and one of the things I most enjoy about student life, is that it has an experimental quality to it. I always say students vote with their feet. There’s not a single thing they have to do at Gettysburg in the co-curricular area besides live in the residence halls and follow the conduct rules. After that, there’s not a single thing they have to do. In the academic area, they have to go to class. You can be a rotten professor, but if you’ve got tenure, that’s it. A rotten professor doesn’t have to change. You can’t do that in Student Affairs. If you do, you will be dead.

The VP’s staff seem more inclined to make connections between experimentation and innovation. One College Life staff member shared his perspective:

To the [VP’s] point about not being innovative, I’m calling total BS on that because what we are allowed to do here and the amount of trust we are given to experiment and try new things allows us to be innovative on a regular basis. I don’t think you’ll find that environment in most colleges.
Regardless of how the College Life staff label their work, many people spoke of how the freedom to experiment in their work helped to create an environment ripe for innovative thinking within the Division. College Life staff additionally indicated, when putting forth new ideas to pursue, the work is expected to be student-centric and mindful of the changing nature of Gettysburg students. Therefore, experimentation and a student-centric approach are two important factors that play a role in the College Life innovation story at Gettysburg.

**Experimentation**

Experimentation is an essential ingredient to innovation at Gettysburg. It helps College Life leaders to consider possibilities beyond the status quo, indicated one staff member. For example, every staff member spoke of some variation of experimentation, making the concept pervasive in the College Life Division at Gettysburg. The Director of Student Activities and Greek Life said that the College Life Division is “built on a culture of willingness to always try,” and continued by saying, “Everybody feels we should give things a try, and if they don’t work, then we call it a failure, learn from it, and move on to the next thing.” The AVP said he would have never had the opportunities to try new things elsewhere the way he has at Gettysburg, which is what has kept him interested in his job for 17 years. One Director mentioned that the “culture of autonomy and experimentation” keeps her interested in the work. The Associate Dean indicated, “People love this environment. If you have an idea, you are encouraged to explore it. If you think we can do something better, tell me how.”
A final example of the role experimentation plays in College Life is from the Director of the GLC who explained the evolution of the Leadership Certificate Program. He shared:

For the first years, we were focused on tinkering with a variety of ideas. Then we piloted a leadership certificate, which was a bare bones project—maybe eight students that first year. We then convened a group of folks around the college—we called it the Leadership Planning Council—including alumni and other stakeholders. The charge was to create a premier leadership program for Gettysburg. . . . Since then, we’ve done a lot of assessment, made some changes, [and] done more assessment followed by more changes.

The Director went on to share, “When you are building something new, some ideas work, and some do not. In the end, we learned a lot about how to do a customized leadership program that would add value to our students.”

For all its advantages, the level of support for experimentation available to College Life staff at Gettysburg is not without drawbacks. Two staff members mentioned the impediments to an environment that encourages exploration. One Director shared, “One challenge I see with our culture is something that is often found at other small private institutions. We just don’t know how to say ‘No’ to things. We don’t stop doing things well at all.” Another College Life staff member indicated that high levels of autonomy and exploration can lead to duplication of effort and inefficiency.

**Vice President Support for Experimentation**

The VP has tremendous influence in creating an environment that supports experimentation, with one member in particular who shared, “The VP empowers all of us to think creatively.” The VP has been at Gettysburg for 35 years and has been in the Dean’s role since 1991. The Associate Dean said she believed some seasoned student
affairs leaders become stale in their thinking, or even risk averse, after many years in the field. With the current VP, she shared that the opposite is true:

It would be so easy for us to do everything the same as 25 years ago . . . but we don’t. Instead we are always asking, “What else could we do? How could we do things more innovatively?” and that’s because [the VP] puts that expectation out there.

One Director talked about how the VP expects experimentation from others and also of herself:

If the [VP] is willing to throw wild ideas up against the wall herself as well as encourage others to do the same, I think that makes for a much more open and supportive environment to explore new ideas no matter how unlikely.

Another staff member complimented the VP’s style when discussing new ideas: “She always asks really good questions and usually starts from the position of how something might work as opposed to why it might not.”

**Intentional Onboarding**

The College Life staff communicate to future colleagues what to expect in terms of experimentation at Gettysburg. One Associate Dean explained that people who are “comfortable with experimenting with new ideas and have a critical eye for improvement” flourish in the College Life Division. The Director of Student Activities and Greek Life mentioned what he tells his staff:

Part of why we hire you is to bring us your new ideas, because I need you to help us see how we can improve. No matter how much I think I can be objective about my work, it’s not easy. Nothing is sacred here—everything is up for discussion.

The Director of the CPS described the circumstances similarly when she shared, “We are really good and letting people create things, build things, try things. It’s actually expected, and we have a tremendous amount of autonomy here.”
A member of the College Life Division added that she shared the following during onboarding: “If you can articulate to me how a different way is going to be better, we are going to run with it. We will at least give it a shot. That’s how we try and keep things relevant.” She went on to share how she and another staff member, as very new professionals, were given the responsibility to update the Gettysburg Convocation ceremony to serve as a more powerful symbol for all students. The staff member explained how this assignment was very important as it came directly from the President, yet “we were just two little, newbie staff members allowed to come up with the idea because we were the ones in the trenches with students.” The Convocation ceremony written at that time is still the one used today.

**Student-Driven Approach**

Student affairs work by design is student-focused, and yet the College Life team at Gettysburg prioritizes student needs above all else, a Director explained. He went on to say, “If the word ‘student’ isn’t the first word out of your mouth, then you won’t thrive here. The few I’ve known like that didn’t adapt and aren’t here anymore.”

The VP explained how understanding the fundamental social nature of this generation of Gettysburg students inspires her philosophy for student support:

One of the things I observed about our students from the very beginning is they are very social. They love to do, they love to join, and they love to get together. Some people thought we needed to change that. I thought one aspect of being social is that students like to do things together, so let’s develop programs where they can really work together. If we focus on that as a theme, we can bring students in, train them, and then we turn them around and students become part of the educational process. Students learn the processes and are constantly recruiting and training other students. I thought, “Hey, that could work—let’s try that.” Actually, it has worked out very well.
The VP shared how, from a macro perspective, the student support programming and services at Gettysburg are intentionally designed to harness the evolving characteristics of the Gettysburg student:

Our students love their faculty and appreciate them enormously, but I don’t think that’s enough in this day and age. I wanted to build a program that suits the diverse needs of our students and the nature of who they are rather than building something the way we think it should be and then trying to convert them to it.

Most units in the College Life Division have at least one program where students lead their fellow students, and many have programs that appeal to students along a full continuum of ability and/or interest.

Dovetailing with the VP’s original student-driven vision for student support, the College Life Division continues to build programs to address other evolving needs. The College Life staff meet annually with the Enrollment Management staff to discuss the characteristics of the incoming class. One College Life staff member referenced this idea:

We have so many unique student perspectives on campus now, which has driven how we think about what programs are needed for their success. Overall, I think we’ve been pretty responsive to make sure we are keeping their needs in mind.

On a similar note, another staff member described an exclusive program that is available to student leaders in their senior year who have participated consistently with the Gettysburg Recreation and Adventure Board (GRAB):

Senior staff who have been through 4 years of training at this point can come up with a 7- to 10-day trip anywhere in the world, and they plan all the logistics themselves. They do all the work in planning and running the trip. They are expected to recruit people from the college to attend.

An alumnus of Gettysburg who also works in the College Life Division mentioned that he planned one of these senior trips to Ethiopia when he was a student. In hindsight, he
realized the staff member in charge should have geared him toward a more realistic trip, but “instead what he said was, ‘Okay, you can do it, and I’ll come with you.’” Student insight, feedback, and ideas are not just welcome—they are an essential ingredient of the programming model. As one staff member mentioned, “If you look at the institutional goals, the divisional goals, and the programming we are doing, students are involved at every level.” Another College Life staff member reiterated student participation in college leadership: “We expect a lot from our students. We engage them at a much higher level than just student engagement. We have two student representatives on the Board of Trustees.” The Director of the GLC spoke to the key role that students play in College Life:

The Garthwait Leadership Center’s first employees were actually students. They were there before they hired me. The summer before I arrived, the VP made the decision we need to have students on hand, so we can hit the ground running in the fall. I love sharing that part of the history of the Garthwait Leadership Center. Students are integral to the foundation of the GLC and have been from the start.

The same Director shared, “The student voice is central to what we do. It’s really woven into the fabric of Gettysburg.”

Summary

The College Life staff at Gettysburg College used innovation to respond to the evolving needs of its student demographic. One staff member noted, “In student affairs, you have to innovate to survive.” The examples outlined in the preceding sections represent ways the leaders in College Life have uniquely responded to the changing needs of their student population. The AVP shared:

We are never complacent. We’ve never gone into a year saying, “Okay, that worked. Let’s keep doing it that way.” It just doesn’t work that way. You have to be ready to come to the table to contribute and know that, even if it was near
perfect, we are still going to make some changes because the demographics of our students may have changed, the higher education landscape may have changed, the political atmosphere may have changed, so we need to be ready to go.

The Associate Dean contextualized the work of the Division in this way:

I haven’t seen many things as robust as what we do [in College Life]. There are many similar things, if you look at different elements of what we do, but it is not woven into the fabric of the student experience and as accessible to them as what we do compared to other colleges.

Within the framework and vision initially set forth by the VP, members of the College Life Division have designed and implemented a diverse suite of student-centered programs and services that appeal to the evolving needs and interests of Gettysburg students. The atmosphere of experimentation facilitates innovative approaches to student affairs work and ultimately keeps the College Life staff connected to the needs of their students, and to each other.
CHAPTER 5 – COLORADO COLLEGE

This chapter begins with a description of Colorado College, including pertinent history and background information, a summary of the College’s recognition for innovation, and the priority role innovation plays within the institution and the Student Life Division. Next, a synopsis of innovations in student affairs practice are provided along with a deep dive into three examples in particular—the East Campus Apartments (adaptive innovation), the “We Could Be Heroes” retreat (adaptive innovation), and the Risk Project (breakthrough innovation). These examples were chosen because they represent instances of adaptive and breakthrough innovations offered by both the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the definition of innovation crafted for this study. Moreover, each was selected because they serve as examples of the ways in which student affairs staff have used innovation to improve student success at Colorado College. The chapter ends with a presentation of the influences and conditions that play a role in creating an innovative environment at Colorado College.

History and Background

Adjacent to the southernmost region of the Rocky Mountains, in the city of Colorado Springs, is Colorado College, a private, liberal arts institution. Located approximately 70 miles south of Denver, this highly selective, residential institution enrolls approximately 2,000 undergraduates. Seventy-five percent of students live in a diverse neighborhood of campus-affiliated housing that includes “traditional residence halls, historic mansions and modern apartments” (Colorado College, n.d.-d, para. 2). Potential students visiting the Worner Student Center are likely to encounter Admissions Ambassadors giving tours to interested students and their families. Visitors arriving to
Colorado College in the morning hours might find the grounds unusually quiet for a college campus; however, come noon time, the campus comes alive as students emerge from their “block” to grab a quick bite before spending the afternoon involved in co-curricular pursuits. Students attending Colorado College follow the “Block Plan” where they study one course intensively over a 3.5-week period followed by a 4-day break between blocks. This unique schedule design allows for intensive experiential learning in the afternoon to serve as a bookend to the 3-hour morning curriculum.

The distinctive one-course-at-a-time curricular design at Colorado College attracts a particular type of student who seeks deep and interactive learning. Since aspects of the College are different from other highly selective, liberal arts colleges, messages from the Admissions Office strongly encourages prospective students to visit the College so applicants can see the Block Plan in action. All applicants interested in visiting the campus can do so at the College’s expense, which includes travel and overnight lodging for the prospective student and one family member. The Admissions website describes the Colorado College experience to interested students in this way:

Welcome to intensive learning that expands through and beyond the Rocky Mountain west—an exceptional location where adventure threads into each day. . . Welcome to 32 blocks of curiosity, adventure, and imagination—to the moment for unearthing your passions, exploring and understanding the world, and your individual growth. (Colorado College, n.d.-g, paras. 1, 5)

Colorado College’s Chief Financial Officer described how influential a campus visit can be for prospective students: “[Applicants] who watch an intense discussion, not a lecture, where the professor participates but isn’t in charge the whole time because the conversation is going where the students want it, they are sold.”
Innovation Recognition and Priority at Colorado College

Colorado College tied for 23rd best liberal arts college in the United States in the 2018 *U.S. News & World Report* rankings and was recognized as the #1 most innovative national liberal arts college in the United States (“Best Colleges: Colorado College,” 2018). Colorado College was also ranked #4 on the Top 50 Most Innovative Small Colleges list published by Best Degree Programs (2018). Innovation plays a role in Colorado College’s (n.d.-b) current strategic plan: “To help us realize our strategic direction, we will focus on workplace excellence to foster an organization that is as innovative and dynamic as the CC academic experience” (para. 16).

Student Demographic at Colorado College

Colorado College has engaged in recent efforts to increase the overall diversity of the College. As a result, between 2011 and 2017, the number of domestic students of color grew from 18% of the overall student body to 24%. During that similar period, the number of first-generation students increased from 5.2% in 2011 to 8.3% in 2017. For the Fall 2017 semester, Colorado College’s international student enrollment was 8.7% with 68 countries represented compared to 5.1% for the same semester in 2011 with 51 countries represented. It is unclear how many students attend Colorado College under the DACA program; however, the College remains committed to meeting the full demonstrated financial need of every admitted student, which for DACA students is through private grant aid to the College. The freshman-to-sophomore retention rate at Colorado College in 2016 was 96%. Nearly 79% of the students attending Colorado College graduate in 4 years, and 87% graduate within 6 years of beginning their education (IPEDS, 2017).
Innovation Initiatives in Student Life at Colorado College

As an institution, Colorado College has prioritized innovation in its strategic planning efforts and has experienced an ample shift in its student demographic profile as a result of its intentional commitment to “build a more diverse and inclusive institution” (Colorado College, 2017, para. 14). In line with the College’s strategy, the Division of Student Life has established a number of innovations to help all Colorado College students in their educational pursuits. Fifteen innovations were provided as examples by Colorado College Student Life staff (see Table 2 for a complete list of innovations).

Examples of innovations provided by Student Life leaders ranged in detail and complexity, from a mental health first aid program to using elements of positive psychology to inform the design of a new campus apartment complex. All 15 innovations discussed met the definition of innovation outlined for this study.

Of the 15 examples, 14 are adaptations of other Student Life initiatives already at play (see Table 2 for adaptive innovations), and one is a new approach to the work within the Division (see Table 2 for breakthrough innovations). The breakthrough example provided by Colorado College Student Life staff is a pedagogical and programmatic innovation. Of the 14 adaptive examples presented, six are innovations in student programming.

Changing Colorado College student demographics promoted the breakthrough innovation presented as well as two of the 14 adaptive innovations. Student feedback also drove three adaptive innovations. Additional adaptive innovation drivers were a desire to serve students holistically and a desire to strengthen student ties to the College and one another. One adaptive innovation was driven by a philanthropic donation to the College,
Table 2

Division of Student Life Innovations at Colorado College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakthrough Innovation</th>
<th>Innovation Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Risk Project</strong> is an in-depth retreat for students over block break or part of a class that encourages students to explore what can be learned from failure.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptive Innovation</strong></td>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-curricular programs, which might otherwise have a fee associated, are free.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wellness Resource Center redesign to focus on a holistic model of wellness; on the connections and intersections between wellness domains.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retreat for Student Life Senior Staff, &quot;We Could Be Heroes,&quot; is an adaptation of a creative writer’s workshop for college administrators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Priddy Experience is a free, 5-day, pre-orientation wilderness trip required of all incoming students, led by upper-class students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Named for one of the earliest African American alumni, the Butler Center programs focus on intercultural exchange, equity and empowerment for the entire CC community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Through a student driven program delivery model, the Ahlberg Leadership Institute provides courses and leadership experiences to students interested in leading Outdoor Education trips; five leader tracks allow for specialization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both Residence Life and Campus Safety units are paired with Student Engagement as one functional area reporting to the Assistant Vice President of Student Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counseling Center staff specialize on certain student identities as a way to meet the changing needs of the student profile.</td>
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</table>

(continued)
Table 2 Cont’d

Division of Student Life Innovations at Colorado College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive Innovation</th>
<th>Decision-Making</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalizing on the opportunities associated with tenure, a faculty member serves as the campus Title IX Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>College staff have been trained to offer Mental Health First Aid to students to build understanding of risk factors and warning signs of mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campus Safety utilizes a community policing model in their work with students.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Keller Venture Research Grant provides individual research grants to embark upon research. Since every CC student has to design their own 3.5-week intellectual adventure as part of their admissions essay, students can bring their ideas to life through this research grant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Despite architectural recommendations to the contrary and in direct response to student feedback, the dining hall redesign allows students to dine in large groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>East Campus Apartments designed using positive psychology framework</td>
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</tbody>
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and another was driven by a desire to create a residential environment that positively influences students’ well-being.

All 15 innovations implemented in this study were brought about through group or team interaction of some sort. Faculty partners played a role in five innovations—the one breakthrough and four adaptive examples. Student input was central to all the innovations in this study, and five of the innovations implemented by teams included students in the process. The four steps of implementing an innovation (observation, brainstorming, prototyping, and implementation) were used in four innovation examples.
Twelve of the 15 innovations relied on research and student demographic information to help create a deep understanding of the issue at hand. Three adaptive innovations resulted from pilot programs as part of the implementation phase.

Universally, the Student Life staff at Colorado College indicated the innovations had achieved or were on their way to achieving what the innovations were designed to accomplish. Positive feedback from students and/or staff was described as a key success factor for innovation in half of the adaptive innovations. Increased trust among and between senior members of the Student Life staff was mentioned as a measure of success for one innovation. Four innovations were determined to be successful because the interest in the program exceeds the program’s capacity. A detailed list of each innovation’s driver, leader, implementation process, and outcome can be found in Appendix I.

The following is a summary of three innovative practices employed by the Student Life Division at Colorado College, specifically a new apartment complex for upperclassmen that emphasizes community and individual wellness, a unique professional development experience for Student Life senior leadership, and a program for students where they are taught how to embrace failure and take risks. The apartment complex and professional development experience are both examples of adaptive innovation, and the Risk Project is an example of a breakthrough innovation. These three innovations were chosen in particular because they each are designed for a different audience, and they are also differing in scale. Specifically, the apartment project is a complex, multiyear innovation; the professional development innovation is more finite and for senior staff; and the Risk Project is an ongoing innovation for students. Finally,
each innovation was selected because they serve as examples of the ways in which Student Life leaders have used innovation to improve student success at Colorado College.

**East Campus Apartments**

Colorado College added a 154-bed apartment complex to its housing inventory in Fall 2017, which is open to upper-class students. The Assistant Vice President for Student Life (AVP) spoke about this project’s goals having a basis in positive psychology, saying:

> We already had a very diverse housing stock and so there were lots of different opportunities for students. But we also wanted to continue to challenge ourselves to think holistically about what would enhance students’ overall experience and what would detract from the learning environment. Also, what does housing look like as an outgrowth of the things that we, as a division, have been building around the changing student needs.

The AVP continued, “We want students to feel that they are entering a space that has a purpose, more than just a place to sleep. The place should provide retreat and privacy as well as connection.” This same person said, “Physical environment is one of the most critical learning tools we have.” See Appendix J for East Campus Apartment Floor Plans.

A staff member involved in the project described the layout and features of the East Campus Apartments, which consist of 7-, 8-, and 16-person apartments:

> The vast majority of our [East Campus Apartments] have single rooms, but they are smaller. In the bathroom, there’s a shower room, a toilet room and then we put the vanities out front. When you are in that eight-person apartment, the bottom floor is all open. There is one room down there, it’s ADA accessible. Then you go up to the next floor, and it’s four people sharing one toilet, one shower and a couple of vanities. Then the third floor, same kind of configuration. You do offer a micro-community for connectedness, but then they all have to navigate the shared space downstairs.
The AVP explained that most campus housing units geared toward upperclassmen are configured differently. He said:

“We’ve designed 8- and 9-person apartments for upper-division students, which is not your typical configuration, but it was based on this notion that group size is key, in terms of what it demands of the participants. In terms of negotiation, in a four-person environment, as soon as two people speak up, the conversation is over. When you get to the five, seven, eight, it requires more listening, more negotiation, and skill building.”

Given Colorado College’s identity as a 4-year residential campus, the AVP shared, “Our desire is for students to progress through different experiences that help them in their learning process . . . as well as help students generally feel good in the space. We didn’t just want to build housing.”

In regard to the outdoor space, a staff member explained, “There is a central courtyard, and all apartment entrances empty into that, so you can’t go out the back door. You are always entering out into your community space.” The complex also contains a community center open to all students with retractable doors to facilitate both indoor and outdoor programming. The community center has an upstairs classroom, a multiuse space made of glass with views of Pikes Peak. The AVP added, “We have a hammock garden, for example. Our outdoor area was purposefully designed to connect the outdoors with the indoors which is a value that many of our students express is one reason they chose Colorado College.”

Even though Colorado College had a variety of housing options for students, senior administrators were looking for something different in the East Campus Apartment project. The AVP shared:

“We wanted to be intentional about the type of housing that we might add to our already existing inventory. We didn’t have any apartments of that size, but we did
know that students would sometimes rent houses off campus for their senior year. That might have seven or eight people in it, you would often hear about some of the challenges that would present to them. They didn’t necessarily have someone who could help them around negotiation and things like that. Why not create an environment where students are living in that kind of configuration, with the support of a minimal number of RAs.

He went on to describe how the mission of the institution was also a driver for this new housing project, “Our goal was to conceptualize how the residential experience could be a key component to learning, particularly as the needs of our students evolve. That was a big catalyst for this project.”

The AVP also spoke of how the inspiration was drawn from what the leaders knew they did not want from the next housing project. He explained:

When you are asking students to live and learn in an environment, you have to look at both the living and the learning aspects of the environment. We had a lot of efficient approaches to how we did facilities. You’ve got these historic residences, and as they morphed to adopt the technology, the facilities themselves became submarines with piping everywhere, because we couldn’t afford to open up the wall and put these things out of sight. So, we ended up with all of this conduit everywhere, and then we paint it all the same color, so it will blend in. Ultimately, you end up with a feeling like you should be underwater in the middle of the ocean. That’s not what we’re trying to inspire.

The AVP also added that the College used as inspiration for East Campus Apartments “this notion of positive psychology of community” and other innovative housing models around the world.

Students played a tremendous role in the design process of the new housing complex. One staff member shared, “We did a lot of focus groups. We would also survey the students after some of the smaller renovation projects that led up to [the East Campus Apartments] to see where the hits and misses might be.” He went on to explain that student feedback is important and yet not taken at face value:
We also understand that part of our role is not just to give students what they want, but to create something that is going to meet our objective, which is learning. Notions around student satisfaction are important, but that’s just another point of information that’s part of the design process.

The AVP added how diverse student viewpoints were taken into consideration throughout the process: “We had listening sessions with new students during orientation, with our RAs, and many other students across campus.” The listening sessions were opportunities to pose questions in a new way to better understand how housing can better meet students’ needs, according to the AVP. He added, “One of the most important things is how we asked questions. Asking students what’s important to them in their living environment is a far better question that asking what kind of housing they want.” He concluded by saying, “For us, how we have the conversation was as important as the conversation itself.”

As the College was embarking on the initial planning phase for the new apartments, it took a collaborative and integrated approach to the ideation process. The AVP shared:

Our Chief Academic Officer, our Chief Financial Officer and our Chief Student Affairs Officer, our President, three members of the faculty and five students, along with several members of our Housing and Residence Life team, a little over 20 people in total, came together. Millennial Consulting was the group that did the facilitating. We spent the entire day—in the morning we talked, globally, about student housing and what it meant in higher education. Then as we morphed into the afternoon, we focused more on what student housing means here at CC. What are our aspirations? What does the future of CC housing look like?

This collaboration had a positive effect on the planning participants in addition to being helpful in creating a holistic vision, the AVP said. He went on to share, “Faculty who were part of that summit say that was one of the best things they’ve experienced here. It
serves as a perfect example of how we come together and envision together what’s best for our students.”

Those early discussions set the stage for what ultimately became the East Campus Housing project. One unique feature of the project is the role positive psychology played in relation to student wellness and facilities design. The AVP explained:

We looked at student wellness with certain architectural features in mind—smaller room size, larger community areas, and natural daylighting. We also spent a lot of time thinking about the aesthetics of the spaces, what color schemes inspire certain moods, what natural elements might play a role in overall wellness.

The AVP added, “Generally architects and housing professionals always think we know, but we wanted to explore the correlation, if any, between natural daylighting and how students are actually feeling about their living environment, learning environment and wellness, for example.”

The AVP explained how the new student apartment project is a befitting example of the role that space plays in creating conditions to best serve students. He shared, “We looked holistically at what might enhance and what might detract from the learning environment.” Although the building just opened in August, the response has been positive and has generated a tremendous amount of student interest, one Director indicated.

Innovative Professional Development

The Student Life Division at Colorado College provides unique professional development opportunities for all staff levels, thereby demonstrating its investment in the staff member’s growth and strengthening overall student affairs practice. A strong professional development program for the Student Life senior staff, in particular, ensures
the staff stays current on student issues and enhances their ability to lead efforts to support the evolving needs of a changing student demographic. According to the Vice President of Student Life (VP), “This is an interesting place to work in terms of professional development. We do a whole bunch of professional development, but it doesn’t always equate to traditional approaches out of NASPA or ACPA.” He went on to say, “We have to really work to get staff to appreciate that our unique way of providing professional development might be more or at less of equal value to their careers as anything they may experience through something like NASPA.”

What makes the Student Life professional development practice particularly innovative is the fresh approach to the individual and group development of the senior leadership staff. The We Could be Heroes retreat is designed to enhance the effectiveness of the Student Life senior staff individually and as a whole. The individual reflection helps staff clarify their talents and skills as a member of the larger member of the group.

We Could be Heroes was born from an idea to maximize creativity of the senior leadership staff in Student Life. The VP shared these details of how the idea began:

I wanted to rethink how we did retreats to be sure that everybody could tap into their creative side. As we typically do, I went to our creative writing faculty member and said, “I need to know that I’m getting as much creativity out of my direct reports as I can.” He said, “Why don’t we go talk to this fiction writer in Canada and see if he’d be interested in helping us adapt a writer workshop, but for college administrators.

The VP explained that after a year and half of planning, the first retreat was held and “everyone left with more energy and excitement than could have been imagined.” The creative writing faculty member who codesigned the retreat explained the concept:

Participants have to imagine what is their super power and what is their super hero name. They also share what is their kryptonite and what is their secret
kryptonite. In what ways do they Clark Kentify themselves and who is their nemesis?

The AVP describes the retreat’s purpose as “figuring out how we see ourselves coming together like characters in a single story. Our characters are based in our strengths, our vulnerabilities, and our collective possibilities.” The Senior Associate Dean of Students added the impact the retreats have had on building trust within the organization:

It may sound kind of funny, but we go deep. We go very deep. To be able to have that type of fun and to laugh with the people you work with while at the same time having that underlying depth to it as well. That type of experience builds trust.

Another retreat participant indicated the value of the retreats are in how the Student Life senior staff is able to “construct narratives around how [they] solve problems together that allows [them] to think about [their] roles differently.”

The overarching purpose behind the senior staff professional development efforts at the College is to best position the Student Life senior staff to design and deliver holistic student development programs. With that goal in mind, the professional development initiative itself is holistic and integrated. The VP describes the professional development program as a means for positioning his senior staff for success. He indicated, “At the end of the day, I want all members of the Student Life staff, and especially my direct reports, to be able to conceive an idea, execute the idea, and deliver.” The VP added that the professional development program “does a really good job in helping people to think about the institution as a whole.” He continued, “The more we can get our key leaders to do that, the better off we are.” One senior Student Life staff member described his experience with professional development at Colorado College,
saying, “We are expected to always be actively learning in order to position ourselves to do work that is meaningful to us, the College, and the students.”

Although several factors drive the professional development of the Student Life senior staff at Colorado College, the primary inspiration comes from the VP’s own experience as he was coming up in the field. He shared the following story to illustrate this point:

One of my former students told me he had a professor in graduate school that suggested that everybody should read design magazines, so you could see how things go together. So, I gave a subscription to “Traditional Home” to a mentor of mine, and then I started taking it. That kind of stuff is always in the back of mind when I think about professional development.

When conceiving ideas for developmental opportunities for his staff, the VP draws inspiration from topics and issues both inside and outside of student affairs.

Another set of drivers behind this senior staff’s professional development initiative at Colorado College is related to staff satisfaction and retention. The VP believes in the importance of preparing his direct reports to be relevant in a student affairs landscape that is changing in order to adapt to the evolving student needs. He explained this point further:

I really want my staff to understand we don’t ever know what work [on a college campus] will be. You could have asked me 2 years ago, would we ever be involved in traffic safety, and I would have laughed. But that’s now a big portfolio in the Student Life Division. As our campus changes and patterns change through campus, Student Life has been asked to lead the cultural change around how to get from point A to Z. Facilities folks are not leading it. We have been asked to lead the campus conversation on changing behavior and that is exciting.

Recognizing that staff who enjoy their work are more motivated to work hard to support student success, much effort is put forth to ensure a variety of development opportunities
are provided to the Student Life staff. The VP supported this idea: “We have to be sure people stay excited about their work here . . . so the opportunity to do things that may not appear directly related to their work, I think they’re more directly related than people realize.” Furthermore, the VP uses intensive leadership trainings, such as the We Could Be Heroes retreat, as a way to invest in those members of his staff who he wants to keep.

Although each staff member within the Student Life Division participates in some measure of professional development, the We Could Be Heroes experience is currently built for the senior leadership of the Division, all of whom report directly to the VP. The VP, then, serves as the chief architect in determining the focus and direction of the program. The VP shared, “I have a role in helping my team bring their best skills out, given the culture at CC is to think and execute almost at the same time.” Senior staff members discussed in some form their own role as participants in the retreat; however, any discussion related to leading this innovative practice were reserved for the VP.

The We Could Be Heroes retreat concept has been delivered three times, and with each new experience comes a new chapter of the story. The second year, or Part 2, of the retreat took place after a member of the staff had left the College. The VP explained:

Part two was, I had to terminate a 30-year employee, which was not so nice of a situation and we didn’t dance around it. The fiction writer/facilitator walked us through how you end a character in a script. We all knew who we were talking about, but the process of going through an ending was cathartic.

Part 3 of the We Could Be Heroes retreat focused on how you write in a new character and came as the group was onboarding several new members of the senior staff. The VP stressed how invaluable working on individual and collective stories has been to the senior leadership group. He said, “Now we know, depending on what the plot is, who
needs to be a lead character and who needs a more supporting role. [The retreats] have been really helpful in that regard.”

Another way the Student Affairs senior staff are developed professionally is their participation in off-campus volunteerism. The VP shared a story about how his own experiences helped shape his views on professional development: “For me, most of my learning was not through NASPA or ACPA. It’s through speech and debate and the higher learning commission doing accreditation.” Additionally, the volunteer roles the VP held outside the college helped him in his role on campus. He shared:

I have been very fortunate to have bosses who’ve encouraged and pushed me. I’d been asked to chair the hospital board in town, which was a working board of eight people. This was an $800,000,000 a year enterprise. I told my president that I’d been asked to chair the board, fully expecting him to say, “No.” Instead, he told me he wanted me to do it because it would improve my job performance tenfold since I would learn more about people, resources, time, etc. In the end, he was absolutely right.

Now the VP has the same professional development expectations with his staff. He shared how he recently encouraged the AVP to accept an appointment as one of the city traffic commissioners. The VP indicted, “We are becoming very intentional on what professional development looks like and feels like.” He is currently working to have another member of his staff appointed to one of the city or county commissions because, “for the staff member, it really helps them understand the role that politics plays in everything, even when you work in a liberal arts college.”

The impact of these two professional development opportunities can be assessed by the feedback from the participants themselves. The overall feedback from multiple members of the senior Student Life staff indicated they find the We Could Be Heroes
framework at Colorado College to be “refreshing,” and it serves as “inspiration to keep thinking of new ways to serve CC students.”

The We Could Be Heroes retreat series has far exceeded the expectations set at its inception. As the VP indicated, “It has had more of an impact than we could imagine. It has been wildly successful. People leave energized, and the biggest byproduct is the level of trust is shot out of the roof.” Another Student Life retreat participant shared the impact the retreat has had on work within the Division:

In a very innovative way, we are learning how to think together and create something as a group, based in our strengths with awareness of our vulnerabilities. In order to meet the needs of the future, we have to be creative. The retreats have helped us think outside the box. We are thinking creatively, exercising our minds in that way, and working together in a very different way than we would normally, which inspires us to ask, “How do we think differently about our work?”

The We Could Be Heroes retreat has had such a profound impact on the Student Life Division that the designers have plans to expand the offerings to companies across the United States and Canada. Recently, a session was conducted with a group of Colorado College students that comprised the President’s Council. The Senior Associate Dean of Students said, “Everything I’ve heard from the people that participated on the student side is it had the same impact on students as it had with us.” The Senior Associate Dean also mentioned that talks are underway to explore how they might offer a similar experience for the Student Life staff beyond the senior staff.

The Risk Project

The Risk Project is an intensive learning retreat for students, typically between 3 to 5 days in length, during block breaks or part of a course that focuses on what can be
learned from risk. The Colorado College website describes the program in the following manner:

Students join faculty and staff members to reflect on how risk-taking is intertwined with a sense of identity, self-reflection, and “success” in its many definitions. The project distinguishes between mitigated risk and thoughtful risk, emphasizing mindfulness and other self-reflective practices that help students tap into their creativity. (Colorado College, n.d.-e, para. 6)

One overarching goal of The Risk Project, explained the Director of the Wellness Center, is to help students to engage with curiosity rather than fear. She added, “When we can explain what can be learned from mistakes, we will be in a better place to serve as role models for our students.”

The inspiration for The Risk Project originally came from a desire to help students reframe the role that failure places in people’s lives, according to the Wellness Center Director. She explained how her ideas dovetailed with similar ideas of another staff member:

I was working on a project related to failure where the focus was looking at the gifts that failure can offer. I spoke with the Director of Innovation and learned of her vision to have students engage with curiosity, not fear. We both saw a lot of natural synergy in terms of the things that we were both interested in and decided to work on something together.

The Director of the Wellness Center also shared how aspects of The Risk Project at Colorado College were inspired to also be a similar project at Stanford University.

The Risk Project was developed predominantly through a collaboration between the Director of Innovation and the Director of the Wellness Center with guiding assistance from other key faculty and College Life staff members. The Risk Project was developed through a series of conversations that involved various stakeholders across the institution. According to the Wellness Center Director:
At the same time, I was thinking about a project on learning from failure, the Director of Innovation was also developing her strategic plan for the Innovation Institute. She had this idea of doing something that would engage students in what risk means and give them opportunities within that setting to take risks. The Director of Innovation and I weren’t entirely sure what exactly the outcome would be, but we knew we wanted to do something on this topic.

A group of likeminded people came together to brainstorm ideas for what a resiliency and risk project would look like at Colorado College, the Wellness Center Director said. She explained:

The Director of Innovation, someone from the Chaplin’s office, a poetry faculty member, a member from the outdoor education office, a person from field studies, and I all got together. We met a number of times and talked about what we could each bring to the table. What we ended up coming up with was a plan we thought was good, but it never got off the ground. Mostly because the timing didn’t work.

Even though the first proposed plan did not bear fruit, the Director of the Wellness Center indicated the core idea still had momentum. She explained how the second version of The Risk Project came to life:

Two faculty members, one from Economics and another in Music, had plans to teach a First Year Experience course (which spans two blocks). Their topic was creativity and logic. The Director of Innovation connected with them to explore the possibility of doing this risk project for their FYE class. [The faculty] were excited about it and felt like it would fit well with how they were approaching the idea of talking about creativity.

The Director concluded by sharing that the inaugural offering of The Risk Project occurred at Colorado College’s Baca Campus the first week of second block and had a series of sessions over the course of the 3.5 days, facilitated by faculty and staff. One student who attended The Risk Project said the experience helped her realize “there is no such thing as failure” (Colorado College, n.d.-e, para. 9).

Feedback from the students has been positive, especially considering this essentially was the pilot of the project, a College Life director indicated. The Director of
the Wellness Center spoke of what might be next for this initiative given the impact it had on the first round of participants. She explained, “Throughout the week, I was thinking how we might supersize this amazing experience for all students. I think our next step will be how to scale it up.” The Director also added that it might be hard to replicate The Risk Project on a larger scale: “What was so beautiful about the pilot was that it was 17 students and these staff and faculty members. There was a level of intimacy that might be hard to duplicate.”

Additionally, the Director of the Wellness Center mentioned how even with the success of The Risk Project, the atmosphere in the Division of College life is such that continuous improvement is always on the minds of the staff. She explained the role resiliency plays with staff:

Although I think overall the program was successful in its first offering, we are always trying to think about how we do things better. I think we need to keep in mind that there are failure and resiliency lessons for the failure and resiliency project! This is just part of our overall culture.

The Director had the following insight on the current state of the campus as it relates to learning from mistakes: “The more we can maximize the openness to failure in our culture, to say, ‘That was a miserable failure’ rather than, ‘Well that was pretty good.’ The stronger role models we’ll be for students.”

Conditions Influencing Innovation in Student Life at Colorado College

Even with innovation as a larger priority for the institution overall, the leaders within the Division of Student Life gravitate toward other terms when describing their innovative work. One staff member mentioned, “We really believe in the distinctive things [the Student Life staff] are doing here—some might call it innovation, but I just
think of it as being relevant.” The VP also avoided the innovation term when discussing the accomplishments of his staff: “I still don’t know how innovative we are, but we try our best to have impact.” Multiple members of the Student Life staff discussed how vital it is to proactively engage campus stakeholders when designing programs and services at Colorado College. Equally important to engaging students, the Block Plan serves to inspire innovative practice in Student Life as does integrating the divisional work within the overall learning mission of the College.

**Permeability of Traditional Boundaries**

The leaders in the Division of Student Life rely heavily on their relationships with students to stay informed and connected to the overall student experience, which positions them well to provide relevant supports for student success, according to one member of the Student Life staff. Another staff member indicated the small campus size also allows the staff to cultivate collaborative relationships with each other and with their faculty colleagues. A Director in Student Life indicated that he and his colleagues forge these relationships with students and other campus stakeholders through both formal and informal mechanisms, and these relationships inspire creative conversations about how best to serve the students of Colorado College.

The We Could Be Heroes retreat for senior staff in Student Life might not have been possible had it not been for the collaborative relationship between the VP and several members of the faculty. The VP shared, “We go to faculty a lot to help with different things, so when I wanted to rethink how we did retreats to be sure everybody could tap into their creative side, I went to our creative writing faculty member.” That same creative writing faculty member recalled the collaboration in this way:
I really trust [the VP] and his whole team, really, because they have helped me see the College through a different lens . . . this is one reason why Heroes has been so fantastic—because I know he and his team are willing to take a chance and do things in a way maybe others might not be willing to try.

The Director of the Butler Center provided an example of the importance of nurturing relationships with all members of the campus community. When the Butler Center opened, the Director believed it was important for all to know the purpose of the Center:

One of the first things I did at the start of the year was to send a postcard to every single member of this community—every student, every faculty member, every staff member . . . From facilities to professors, each received the postcard with our statement of purpose. I didn’t want anyone to say, “I have no idea what [the Butler Center] does.”

The Director of the Wellness Resource Center also emphasized the relational nature when she spoke of ways in which she implements new ideas: “Part of the initial [planning] conversation that we will always have when building a new program is thinking about who else might need to be brought into this conversation.”

Proactively engaging with key constituents plays a central role within the Campus Safety unit, and these relationships, particularly with students, help the officers to identify priorities for student safety. The Director of Campus Safety spoke of this one aspect of the unit’s community policing philosophy in this way:

I have a dedicated liaison officer whose job is to do nothing but follow up on every call that comes in. For example, if somebody called in to say there was a suspicious person outside their door, the next day the liaison officer will call the [student] to ask how they are doing or if they need anything.

One specific story from the Director of Campus Safety illustrated the important role of building strong relationships with students and their families:

An intruder broke into an [off-campus] house where five students lived. The police ended up arresting the guy in their house. It was very upsetting. The next day, the liaison officer went over to the house and he told the girls to ask their
parents what they wanted [the college] to do to help. [The Officer] then trimmed the bushes, put new locks on the doors, put in longer screws on the bolts—whatever the girls needed.

Even though the house was located off campus and not owned by the institution, the relationship between the College and its students was paramount. As the Director indicated, “We are always working toward relationship building, because when students know us, we are better able to do our jobs.”

For that same reason, Campus Safety has determined that their formal jurisdiction is a 1-mile radius outside the campus perimeter, and resources will always be provided within that range. The AVP, who oversees the Campus Safety unit, shared that thinking more broadly about jurisdictional boundaries, coupled with hiring students to work alongside officers, has made a huge impact on the work. After having “invited students into this space with campus safety,” he indicated that “students began to see what happens in that office and how these folks approach their work.” Now, the AVP believes these students are Campus Safety’s best advocates.

Frequent engagement with students, particularly those who are “positive and supportive,” as indicated by one Student Life staff member, facilitate listening, which helps them understand what students might need. The VP explained how he was putting together a coalition to look at food-related issues on campus because he had heard concerns from students:

We listen all the time. We listen, listen, listen. Formally, informally, and from a variety of different groups. I’ve heard about food concerns from athletes, from the student food coalition, from wealthy students, from other student leaders. It has been bubbling, and now we’ve figured out a way to address it. We listen a lot around here.
The Senior Associate Dean of Students reiterated how the students perceive the relational culture at Colorado College:

A lot of things here work off of relationships. Students don’t necessarily know this person has this big title. They know they have relationships with this person and so they are going to tell them what they need. Ultimately, they know their needs will be met.

This same staff member indicated that “students will go to who they know,” which is why she believes it is her responsibility to regularly engage with a variety of students to understand their point of view. She shared, “I always make time to visit with students and hear their ideas.”

**The Block Plan Foundation**

The Block Plan might be one explanation for why proactive engagement with key constituencies plays a particularly important role in inspiring innovation at Colorado College. Under the Block Plan, one block is the equivalent to one class on the traditional semester plan. The 8-session-per-year Block Plan system allows students to take one course at a time over the span of 3.5 weeks. Although most blocks meet between 9:00 a.m. and noon, faculty are “free to schedule classes in the format they feel is most suited to the subject matter” (Colorado College, n.d.-a, para. 4), which may include traveling away from campus for some or all of the block period.

This nontraditional approach to learning shapes the overall institutional environment in that students are conditioned to apply the short timeframe and deep engagement to other areas of their college experience. The Director of the Butler Center explained, “The Block Plan positions us to experience things at an accelerated pace.” This same staff member went on to say, “Sometimes I feel like we are in a time warp. In
this relational place, it is important to build relationships with people and establish the kind of trust needed to make changes and get things done quickly.” Another staff member shared:

[The Block Plan] is set up to teach students how to go in depth into a topic. This same thinking certainly shows its face in all other areas on campus. When students really get excited about something you see that same kind of intensity play out.

The Block Plan has a strong influence on many aspects of the Colorado College experience. This curricular format inspires expectations for deep learning that goes beyond the traditional classroom. For example, the success of The Risk Project is contingent upon participants’ meaningful and immersive engagement with the materials and one another within a relatively short period of time, “which might be harder to do elsewhere,” one staff member said. Additionally, the scheduling arrangement also dictates a particular rhythm unique to Colorado College. The student mindset in a traditional college environment works within a 15-week semester, or a 10-week quarter.

At Colorado College, students think and plan in 3.5-week segments. Consequently, the Block Plan’s pace influences innovative thinking throughout the college and the Student Life Division. When asked specifically about the Block Plan’s influences on student services practice, the VP replied:

I think the Block Plan makes integration necessary which leads to new approaches to our work. We have to be in collaboration with our academic colleagues. Coordination across the institution is essential because there is little breathing time under the Block Plan.

**Student Life Integration With Academic Mission**

A facilitator of innovation in student affairs practice at Colorado College is aligning the Student Life work with the educational mission of the College. According to
the VP, the divisional philosophy is strategic and intentional: “Our work in [Student Life] is universally integrated with the academic mission. . . . That has always been our philosophy.” The CFO for the College referenced the integration of Student Life in the educational mission when he shared, “Sometimes it is hard on this campus to separate whose program is this—is this a student life program or a faculty program, who knows! I think that really serves our students well.”

Supporting this integration with the academic mission was a comment made by a faculty member who indicated, “Everyone here, not just faculty, are involved in educating our students. The Student Life staff in particular are right there in it with us.” A different faculty member also spoke about the role Student Life staff plays: “One of the things I’ve learned [at Colorado College] is that Student Life functions as a profoundly important educational partner for [faculty] in achieving our mission here. I’m not sure we would be who we are without them.” The faculty Title IX Coordinator articulated a similar position: “It might seem unusual to have a faculty member in this role, but it works for us . . . probably because of how we think about the ethos here. Everyone teaches, and everyone does research of one type or another.”

The blurred line between curricular and co-curricular learning at Colorado College invites frequent and broad faculty collaboration atypical of most institutions. One faculty member shared this perspective: “We are a small place where [faculty and Student Life staff] like each other, trust each other, and work well together in ways that might not happen on other campuses where they refuse to work together.” The broad participation on the East Campus Apartments planning committee lent itself to a more dynamic and intentional design, according to one staff member.
In addition to the diverse makeup of the East Campus Apartments planning group, the VP provided this story to illustrate the way in which leaders across campus come together to serve students holistically:

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and I have charged a commission to explore some issues related to food on campus. We are looking at how we deliver our food options as our student body has changed. For example, is having locally sourced food still a culturally shared value for our students? [This initiative] is being co-led by the Senior Associate Dean of Students and a faculty member. The faculty member is a tenured anthropology professor whose academic background is the cultural anthropology of food. So, our Senior Associate Dean of Students is looking after student needs, desires, wants, and she is mirrored perfectly with somebody whose academic expertise is cultural food anthropology.

The VP added that this example is one of many as it “represents that blend between Student Life and academics that we do over and over again. It is regular part of how we do business.”

The integrated student services framework at Colorado College is pervasive throughout the work of the Division of Student Life. One small but powerful example sets the tone for the work of the Student Life staff and bears no financial expense. There is no mission for the Division of Student Life at Colorado College because the mission of the division is the mission of the College. The VP spoke of the relationship between the mission of his Division and the College’s mission in this way:

The [Student Life] holistic approach represents the type of institution we are. We truly believe that liberal arts is about educating the whole person. We accept that learning doesn’t occur only in the classroom and yet the mission of the institution is based in the classroom. Therefore, everything should advance the academic mission of the college. Within the academic mission of the college, we see ourselves as well as the work we do [in Student Life]. It could be just this place, but it is deliberate in many ways.

The Senior Associate Dean of Students echoed the VP’s sentiment on the role of the academic mission within the Student Life divisional context:
You do not come up with our own set of values and mission when the College’s values and mission are overarching. It is then the task of the [Student Life staff] to translate the academic mission into ways in which we might best support the needs of all CC students.

The Director of the Wellness Resource Center mentioned how foregoing a divisional mission in support of the academic mission of Colorado College impacts staff: “This decision feels really good to people. . . . When I’m focused on things that are less connected to the overall purpose of serving students to help them learn and grow, I don’t enjoy my work as much.” The AVP put it succinctly: “The Division of Student Life exists primarily to fulfill the mission of Colorado College.” According to the AVP, “We cannot treat students holistically, but then come at them compartmentally.”

On several occasions, the VP indicated the integrated approach to holistic student development at Colorado College may not appeal to some student affairs educators. Over the years, the VP has cultivated ways in which he talks about the work with candidates interviewing for positions. Specifically, he indicated, “I have two questions I like to ask. One is, ‘What will I learn from you?’ If they answer with what I will learn about them, they’ve already missed the question and that tells me a lot.” The VP also asks candidates to describe how they think as a way to determine “if they can see themselves thinking across different parts of the college or the division,” and that line of questioning can reveal how the person may succeed at a place like Colorado College.

Summary

The leaders in the Student Life Division at Colorado College have taken an innovative approach to preparing for and responding to the recent shift in their student demographic. As one staff member indicated, “Innovation is in the air at Colorado
College. We don’t want to just keep doing things the way they’ve always been done.”

The two examples outlined in this chapter represent examples of how Student Life team members at Colorado College have responded to the changing needs of their student population, first by providing a fresh approach to developing staff so they may be best positioned to design and offer a holistic student success program for Colorado College students. The Senior Associate Dean provided a concise description of the unique approach to work in the Student Life Division: “We don’t really label a lot of our stuff as innovative because it’s not those big things. Innovation seems to be more in the details. In the day-to-day way we do business with our students.”
CHAPTER 6 – POMONA COLLEGE

This chapter begins with a description of Pomona College, including pertinent history, background information, and a summary of Pomona’s recognition for innovation and the priority role innovation plays within the College and the Division of Student Affairs. Next, a synopsis of innovations in student affairs practice is provided along with a deep dive into two examples in particular—the restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs (breakthrough innovation) and the subsequent creation of a new unit titled Student Community Resources (adaptive innovation). These two examples were chosen because they represent instances of adaptive and breakthrough innovations offered by the literature, as reviewed in Chapter 2, and the definition of innovation crafted for this study. Moreover, each was selected because they serve as examples of the ways in which student affairs leaders have used innovation to improve student success at Pomona. The chapter ends with a presentation of the influences and conditions that contribute to an innovative environment at Pomona College.

History and Background

Sitting on the far Eastern edge of Los Angeles County lies Pomona College, a private, liberal arts college in Claremont, CA. Pomona College enrolls approximately 1,700 undergraduate students, 98% of whom live in residential communities owned and operated by the college. Immediately noticeable to campus visitors is the Mission-style architecture so prevalent in the Southern California region. The natural beauty of the park-like surroundings serves as inspiration for clusters of students enjoying various activities throughout the Marston Quad. Students waiting in line for beverages at Cecil’s Coffee Bar can peruse the dozens of involvement opportunities and programs advertised
on the bulletin boards around the Smith Student Union building. Creative writing workshops, chemical reactions camp, and a concert kicking off the inauguration of Pomona’s 10th President are just a few of the many available options. One posting invites students to engage with Roger Martin (author and innovation scholar) for an informal lunch and discussion on how students might use integrative thinking as a basis for applying innovation to their work. The surroundings at Pomona College suggest it is a place where creativity is nurtured, and an innovator’s mindset is welcomed.

Students attending Pomona College have the advantage of experiencing a small college environment alongside the many opportunities that come with a larger institutional setting of nearly 8,000 students created by The Claremont Colleges or the “5Cs.” Pomona College is the founding member of the 5Cs, which consists of five undergraduate colleges (Pomona, Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd, Pitzer, and Scripps) and two graduate schools (Claremont Graduate University and Keck Graduate Institute). All seven independent, autonomous institutions are located within one square mile, and undergraduate students at each campus have access to courses at any of the other 5Cs. The consortium model enables these otherwise small institutions to maximize their resources and supports for students in myriad ways.

**Innovation Recognition and Priority at Pomona College**

Pomona also has received accolades for innovation—#13 most innovative college by *U.S. News & World Report* (“Most Innovative Schools: Pomona College,” 2018) and #47 on the Top 50 Most Innovative Small Colleges list from Best Degree Programs (2018). Both organizations indicate that the consortium model helps position Pomona for innovation, and yet Pomona is the only one of the 5Cs recognized as such by *U.S. News*
& World Report. In addition to Pomona, three of the other 5Cs are on the Top 50 Most Innovative Small Colleges list for innovation by Best Degree Programs.

Innovation is also a concept that resonates from those within the Pomona College community. David Oxtoby served as President of Pomona College from 2003 to 2016, a time when the College prioritized its core values of creativity and innovation. When asked to reflect upon his accomplishments as President, Oxtoby, a chemist by training, used the periodic table as a metaphor to describe the key themes of his tenure at Pomona. Innovation was called out specifically:

Silicon is the namesake of Silicon Valley, but in truth, every valley is a kind of Silicon Valley, since silicon is the basic building block of every kind of rock. But when you separate it out, it becomes solar cells and semiconductors. It’s not a metal or a non-metal, but a bridging element—that’s the crucial aspect that allows it to expand our ability to do things and to innovate. So, in a way, it symbolizes [Pomona’s] future. (as cited in Wood, 2016, “Silicon / Innovation,” para. 1)

Serving as the capstone to Oxtoby’s presidency was the Daring Minds campaign. This fundraising effort raised $316,000,000 dollars to position Pomona as a “source for global citizens who possess not only the knowledge and understanding to give them mastery in their field, but also the creativity and intellectual daring necessary to use those resources to make a difference in the world” (Wood, 2016, “Silicon / Innovation,” para. 2).

Of the several key initiatives born from the Daring Minds campaign, one accomplishment drew national recognition for innovation for Pomona—the Rick and Susan Sontag Center for Collaborative Creativity. Due to a generous $25,000,000 gift from the Sontag’s, the Center for Collaborative Creativity (which goes by the name “The Hive”) was established as a place where students from all 5Cs come together to “address society’s most ambiguous, complex challenges while teaching students to embrace the
mindsets of human-centered design and design thinking” (The Claremont Colleges, n.d., para. 1). The Hive is designed to help students from different backgrounds and across the consortium work together in an environment built to accelerate their creative thinking. The Hive is also a resource for faculty and staff to explore new ways of approaching their work with the help of experts from the design thinking and innovation world.

**Student Demographic at Pomona**

Pomona’s commitment to building opportunities where students from diverse backgrounds can hone their collaboration and problem-solving skills stems from the realization that choosing to commit to building a diverse community requires more than simply admitting a diverse class of students. Between 2003 and 2017, the number of domestic students of color grew from 27% to 57% of the overall student body. In 2017, 20% of Pomona students identified as first-generation (an increase of 5% from the previous year). In 2003, international students made up only 2% of the overall student population. Today, 12% of Pomona students come from more than 45 countries outside the United States. Pomona College has also been a national leader advocating for the continuation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation. DACA students make up 4% of Pomona’s student population. The Class of 2021 is the most diverse freshman class in the history of Pomona, and the institution is known to be “one of the most diverse liberal arts colleges in the nation” (Wood, 2016, “The Halogens / Diversity,” para. 2). Among all colleges, Pomona’s freshman retention rate is admirable at 98%, which ties it with other elite liberal arts institutions, such as Amherst and Williams Colleges (“Best Colleges: Pomona College,” 2018). Nearly 93% of the students attending Pomona College graduate in 4 years, and 95.7% graduate within 6 years of
beginning their education (“College Completion: California Private Colleges (4-Year),” n.d.).

**Student Affairs Innovation Initiatives at Pomona College**

As an institution, Pomona College is nationally recognized for innovation and has experienced a sizeable shift in its student demographic profile as a result of its intentional commitment to increasing diversity on multiple fronts. As a result, the Division of Student Affairs has launched a number of innovations to help Pomona students succeed. Seventeen innovations were provided as examples when nine Student Affairs staff were asked to describe the ways in which they have innovated in response to the institutions’ evolving student profile (see Table 3 for a complete list of innovations).

In this study, innovation is an idea that resulted in either an adaptation or a radical redesign of student affairs practice. Examples of innovations provided by Student Affairs leaders at all organizational levels ranged in detail and complexity, from the drafting of a Statement of Respect for Pomona student athletes to a complete redesign of the Division of Student Affairs. Three of the innovations discussed did not meet the definition of innovation outlined for this study because they were not about student affairs practice or undergraduate students.

Of the 14 remaining examples, 11 are adaptations of other Student Affairs initiatives already at play (these appear in Table 3 as adaptive innovations) and three are new approaches to the work within the Division (these appear in Table 3 as breakthrough innovations). All three breakthrough examples provided by Pomona Student Affairs staff are innovations to the roles and structures within the Division. Of the 11 adaptive examples presented, seven are innovations in student programming.
Table 3

*Division of Student Affairs Innovations at Pomona College*

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<th>Breakthrough Innovation</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Programming</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Structure</th>
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<td><strong>Student-driven programs</strong> are designed, implemented and evaluated by students with minimal staff oversight.</td>
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<td>The Division of Student Affairs re-organizing using a clustering exercise.</td>
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<td><strong>Student Community Resources</strong> supports to the student-led mentoring programs.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive Innovation</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Programming</th>
<th>Role</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Indigenous Peer Mentoring Program</strong> helps recruit, retain and support Indigenous students.</td>
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<td>Newly created Associate Dean for Academic Success and Assessment to use assessment to better understand students and advance quality improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Athlete Advisory Committee drafted a Statement of Respect to demonstrate an inclusive atmosphere for all students.</td>
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<td><strong>Pomona Partners</strong> mentor students from a local school.</td>
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<td>A free clinic, food banks, and social services resource map was created by student for the local community.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Draper Center for Community Engagement</strong> focuses on building deep connections between students, the institution and the community.</td>
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<td>A train-the-trainer approach links peer mentor leaders to specialized training so they may be better equipped at training their own student volunteer mentors.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td><strong>High Ropes Course</strong> was built through a partnership with the local Girl Scout Troop.</td>
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<td><strong>Orientation Adventure Trips</strong> are off-campus orientation trips for all new Pomona students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small dinners are for students to informally dine with a small group of college administrators in student spaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dean's On-Call Group regularly utilizes the mentor framework as a conduit of information regarding the overall health and wellness of students at Pomona.</td>
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Changing Pomona student demographics prompted every breakthrough innovation presented and 4 of the 11 adaptive innovations. Resource utilization also drove four adaptive innovations. Additional adaptive innovation drivers are strengthening student/administrator ties, presidential priority, and community engagement.

Individual staff members created 6 of the 11 adaptive innovations at Pomona and students developed two. One of the adaptive innovations was led by a division-wide effort and another was led by a staff partnership with an organization outside the institution. All three breakthrough innovations described in this study were led by groups: (a) student-driven programming was led by students, (b) divisional restructuring was led by the management team in Student Affairs, and (c) the new unit Student Community Resources was led by a group of Student Affairs staff. Each of the 14 innovations offered in this study were implemented through the mechanisms involving teams. Retreats also played a role in launching the ideas for two of the three breakthrough innovations. The Division of Student Affairs restructuring allowed for two innovations (one adaptive and one breakthrough) to take shape. Five of the adaptive innovations were implemented through a process drawn from other similar programs. Student input was central to the implementation of all the innovations in this study. One breakthrough innovation used all four steps of the innovation implementation process: (a) observation/research, (b) brainstorming, (c) prototyping, and (d) implementation. Nine of the innovations relied on research and student demographic information to create a deep understanding of the issue at hand. Four of the innovations used the strategy of piloting or prototyping as part of the implementation process to test the effectiveness of various aspects of the idea.
Overall, the Student Affairs staff at Pomona College indicated the innovations either have achieved or are on their way to achieving what the innovations were designed to accomplish. Feedback from students or external partners was described as a key success factor for innovation in four of the adaptive innovations. Retention data was also mentioned as a measure of success for three innovations. Given the recent nature of the three innovations associated with the divisional restructuring, the staff at Pomona indicated it was too soon to determine if the restructuring, the new Student Community Resources, and the new responsibilities for the Associate Dean for Academic Success and Assessment were meeting expectations. A more detailed list of each innovation’s driver, leader, implementation process, and outcomes can be found in Appendix K.

Next is a detailed discussion of two innovative practices employed by the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona—specifically, a redesign of the divisional structure and the creation of Student Community Resources. These two examples were chosen because each represents an example of breakthrough innovation outlined by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the definition of innovation crafted for this study. Each was selected because they serve as examples of the ways in which Student Affairs leaders have used innovation to improve student success at Pomona.

**Student Affairs Organizational Redesign**

In 2014, the leaders in the Division of Student Affairs spent a year reflecting on the ways in which their organizational structure might be helping and/or hindering their ability to serve their changing student demographic. The VP acknowledged that she and her staff were not initially set up to respond to the changing student demographics;
however, she shared the following philosophy, which she likened to the concept of
“building the plane while flying it”:

There’s a type of critique that colleges and universities shouldn’t accept a more
diverse population until they’re ready to support them. For me actually, part of the
engagement of change has to do with living with the change . . . you won’t even
recognize all you don’t know until you’re actually trying to deal with change.
This notion that you can plan in the abstract is just not the way life works.

Additionally, the VP added, “We realized we had an infrastructure built on conventional
groupings,” and that design was not sustainable given the multiple, integrated identities
of the Pomona student.

Taking time to understand the challenges and opportunities, two main questions
helped to frame the discussion during their Division’s year of analysis: (a) How can the
Student Affairs staff at Pomona honor and serve the multiple and intersecting identities of
their students? and (b) How might the Division of Student Affairs capitalize on the
natural and likely connections between its traditional areas of work to create synergies
and more effective student support programs? In response to these questions, the Division
of Student Affairs designed a new organizational structure in 2015 informed by a
clustering approach where they arranged the work with the overall student experience in
mind (see Appendices L and M for organizational charts before and after restructuring).

The VP shared this example as she explained her thinking about clustering:

With clusters, you can think about the different ways that students are connected
[to the division] to come up with new areas to serve students. We started thinking
about student engagement, student learning and student support and recognized
that we needed to pull out some senior leadership to focus more directly and
explicitly on marginalized student populations as they relate to our mentoring
programs.
This example resulted in the creation of a new unit called Student Community Resources with the charge to take an intersectional approach to support the mentoring of Pomona students. This adaptive innovation is outlined in greater detail next.

In addition to changes to the organizational structure, the clustering effort provided Student Affairs leaders at Pomona an opportunity to examine the skills and talents of their current personnel and revise policies and practices. After the restructuring, the only members of the Student Affairs management team that remained in their original roles were those who were hired relatively recently. All other senior staff are now in new roles. The VP also shared the following example of the iterative nature of any restructuring exercise:

We also changed our policies and practices around emergency and urgent needs, grant funding, working with financial aid, but doing all this and not thinking, “Okay, we start at A and then move on to B and then we will have a solution.” This was a very dynamic process.

Ultimately, the VP said restructuring allowed the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona to better “address the challenge in front of them” in serving their evolving student needs so they can continue to “be the place for students to thrive.”

Although there were a number of factors that inspired the innovative restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona, at the forefront was the institution’s changing student profile. When asked to share the key drivers behind the restructuring, the VP was very clear:

I am not someone who continually restructuring my division . . . the driver was the changing demographics and the related changing needs. Changing demographics in terms of race and ethnicity. Changing needs in terms of mental health and other kinds of support—both academic and otherwise.
Another member of the senior management team indicated that changing student needs also drove the Division to restructure to create new ways to support students:

We were seeing not simply a demographic change, but also a change in needs. We were coming from a position where we had new marginalized populations emerging and they weren’t fitting into the models of support we had in place.

Perhaps unique to their location in Southern California, the Student Affairs team at Pomona had to factor into their changing student demographic the unique and layered needs of first- and second-generation immigrant students on top of any ideas for how to support students of color, first-generation students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Although not identified directly, a secondary driver behind the innovative restructuring was resource constraints, even within a highly resources institution like Pomona. The VP laid out three available options when trying to determine the best course of action for meeting students’ diverse needs: “You have to either put more resources into it, put more staff into it, or try to figure out how to [re]configure it.” She also shared that, although Pomona is a highly resourced institution, it is always better to “be creative in how we are addressing” the institution’s challenges relative to meeting the needs of the changing student demographic.

The VP at Pomona College brings to her role an understanding of the changing student profile as a former professor of politics specializing in immigration. Additionally, her experience as Special Assistant to the President at her former institution provided her with the skills to see the institution from both a micro and macro level. While the clustering effort involved dozens of people from across the institution and the Division, the innovative restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona College was led
by the VP. When the VP speaks about the restructuring, she consistently uses inclusive language—“we restructured” or “our clustering process.” Conversely, when members of her management team spoke about the restructuring, a number of them described the process differently, attributing the restructuring directly to the VP.

Other campus stakeholders played a role in the Student Affairs restructuring process, which the VP described on a number of occasions as an “integrative institutional approach.” The Student Affairs team worked closely with colleagues in Academic Affairs along the way, feeling it was vital to tap into their knowledge to help better understand the changing demographic. The Dean of Campus Life shared how “it’s important to work closely with academic affairs colleagues around [student demographic] issues” as they bring a “valuable and unique perspective.”

Students also played a secondary and supporting role in the innovative restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona. Students initially participated in discussions in the early stages of the process where each Student Affairs office was constructing student learning outcomes. Staff also worked closely with their student constituencies on needs assessment exercises, which consisted of asking students to provide general feedback on what support programs/systems they need to be successful at Pomona. The assessment process also invited students to think about the physical spaces they occupy on campus and whether they believed those spaces were adequate, or if they felt there was opportunity for improvement. Through this process, students spoke about what they needed to be successful at Pomona, and then mechanisms were provided where students’ feedback was shared broadly across the Division. The VP summed up the role
that students played in the process when she said, “We recognize that the contributions, experiences, and perspectives of students help transform this campus.”

Following on the Pomona philosophy, shared by the VP that “we can always be better and do better for our students,” the Division embarked on a yearlong process where they used a clustering technique to identify points of intersection and gaps in their current student services model. This technique to identify patterns or “constellations” in the Student Affairs workflow resulted in new organizational structure that better positions the Division to serve the diverse students of Pomona.

The VP described how the challenge of considering students’ multiple identities launched the clustering approach to restructuring:

We had these emerging student populations that required our support . . . and our current infrastructure is based on conventional grouping. For example, we have at least 10 different kinds of mentoring groups—everything from first gen, low-income to undocumented students, to international students, to South Asian American students, to queer students to Native students . . . . Philosophically, are stand-alone centers the best way to support the intersectionality of our students in terms of their needs and experiences? We started thinking about what we’re doing in terms of clusters and [the results] could have gone in different ways if you really think about all the different ways [our work with students] is connected.

As the Student Affairs management team began to think of their work through the lens of clusters, they spent a year talking with their staff and with each other about the services and programs, with the goal to identify functional clusters. The team recorded the various services and programs on index cards and spent time in retreats over the year exploring the various options for a new structure. The VP recalled one retreat where the team placed all of the index cards out on a table and began moving them around to create functional clusters:
We had a whole table full of index cards and people could move things around, so you could see the clusters. For example, with the Draper Center for Community Partnerships—which is our community engagement center. Well, in some ways they’re really closely aligned to the career development office and internships. On the other hand, we have an outdoor education center, who is also trying to do community engagement around sustainability. Wow, these areas can be connected.

The Division of Student Affairs at Pomona used retreats as a way to bring about the innovative restructuring.

Supplementary to the retreats, the Student Affairs staff participated in various trainings to help them understand in greater detail the needs of the changing student demographic. The collective learning of the group was enhanced by discovering how many of the staff in the Division were first-generation students themselves. The Student Affairs team were well positioned for the clustering exercise, according to the VP, because she has made it a priority to ensure her units are serving diverse populations of students. The VP explained this preparatory work as follows:

Back in 2008, we were asking everyone who had student leadership positions, “What’s your composition? Who’s becoming your leaders? Is it reflective of the demographics?” That was something we were looking at—everything from Orientation Adventure Leaders to our internships. Are we serving and reaching out and recruiting students across different populations?

The staff from Enrollment Management were brought in to present student profile information to the Student Affairs team. The UndocuALLY training was also offered to staff interested in becoming allies to undocumented students on campus. One training in particular focused on first-generation students at Pomona. This training was presented as “All Hands,” which means every staff member in the Division was invited. Finally, the
team relied on research on high impact educational practices related to cohort models, as well as best practices at both small, liberal arts colleges and larger universities.

Throughout the yearlong process, the VP met individually with every member of the Division at least once with the primary purpose of getting to know each person individually. The VP also shared another goal for these interactions:

My goal was not to walk away from any of those meetings with the person having a “to do” list. Because I’m such an idea person, I can easily find myself saying, “Oh yes, why don’t we do XYZ?” . . . It’s so easy for people in positions like mine to kind of assign and to give tasks. I didn’t want to undermine my management team.

According to the VP, Pomona’s small size allows for this individualized approach, which is “important when you do organizational change.” Her approach was “to be really transparent and collaborative.”

The innovative restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona was an examination of what duties might cluster together and which staff members are best positioned to serve in which functions. The VP described this duality as examining functionality and personality:

Where are people’s best talents utilized? Where are some places where we actually need to create some changes? Where might there be gaps and who among us could actually fill that gap? That’s one of the things about restructuring, it’s not like there’s one right pathway. Actually, functionalities can be clustered in different ways. It was a matter of functionality and personality.

The range and scope of processes used to plan for and ultimately implement the new organizational model and corresponding staffing plan helped to position the team to better address the needs of the Pomona student population.

After a year in full operation, the new organizational model is seen by the staff as a key enhancement to student affairs practice at Pomona. The VP recalled that the
restructuring was “certainly a key moment for [her]—[and they] are in a different place because of it.” Shortly after the new roles were cast, the nascent structural model was tested when a series of student protests took place on the Pomona campus demanding enhanced resources and services for marginalized student populations. The VP proudly shared:

The Division was already positioned to help support our students in ways we wouldn’t have been in our old structure. It would be amazing to think about how we would have managed otherwise. It was still really difficult, but [the new structure] made such a difference.

A number of other Student Affairs staff members agree that the Division is much better equipped at meeting the needs of students. One Associate Dean indicated that even some of his staff who originally questioned why things were changing recently admitted that the new structure is a better design for students and for them.

As with all substantive change, the leaders in the Division of Student Affairs shared thoughts about what they might have done differently. The VP commented:

I’ve done different kinds of restructuring in the past, and I think this time there were some really great outcomes, but I would work differently in terms of laying out some community ground rules in ways that I didn’t quite realize that people needed.

The Dean of Campus Life added some recommendations for how he might get through another future transition:

Especially in the first year, the transition was challenging. I think there was a functional part of the restructuring that [the VP] didn’t talk as much about that was very real—there were some underperforming areas from the start, which made the first year pretty rough. . . . Over the last 2 years, we have been changing culture, and I wish in that first and second year that my future self could’ve visited to say, “Hey, keep focused on the vision.” Now finally we are on the other end and the momentum is in our favor. . . . Good things have happened, and I feel really proud of it.
Even with recommendations on how to improve the process of restructuring, team members in the Division of Student Affairs universally agree that the outcome was well worth the journey.

**Student Community Resources**

The second innovation focuses on the development of a new unit to better address unmet student needs. One of the new functional units that emerged during the clustering exercises was Student Community Resources—an evolving collection of support services design to fortify Pomona’s growing assortment of student mentoring groups. Given the long and treasured history of student mentoring programs at Pomona—the first such program started in 1927—the Student Affairs team had a difficult challenge to try and honor the tradition of these key student-run programs while at the same time exploring new opportunities for support and oversight. The decentralized and independent network of more than 10 student mentoring programs are explained on the Pomona website:

> Students support each other in ways very different from that of an advisor since student mentors have gained wisdom from recent experiences through firsthand lessons. [Mentors] are sincere in their desire to help each other, and this has inspired a trend of peer helpers across campus for both social and academic support.

> The first year of college is a challenge for most. Many students believe their situation is different from the majority of other students for a variety of reasons. As a result, mentor groups have developed organically by the students themselves, with mentors engaging with mentees individually, in groups, through program-sponsored workshops, and/or social events.

> Many sophomores choose to become peer mentors, extending support to new students because of the support they received as first years. In following years, some mentors choose to build upon this experience by becoming head mentors who provide leadership for the mentor group. (Pomona College, n.d.-a, para. 2)
The website goes on to explain the purpose and rationale for establishing the Student Community Resources function under the leadership of the new position of Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership:

Since the mentor groups are decentralized by theme, head mentors work closely with the Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership for setting training and program goals, ongoing program evaluation, and in achieving an understanding of effective team building strategies. For all mentor groups, the objective is to provide individual support and encouragement with the intention of fostering successful integration into the Pomona community. Inclusive excellence is a guiding principle of Student Affairs in meeting the needs of individual students to maximize the rewards inherent in a diverse student body.

Ultimately, Student Community Resources will be a way for the Student Affairs staff to provide the necessary support to the many student mentoring groups across the Pomona campus, according to one Student Affairs staff member.

There are two types of student mentoring program at Pomona: (a) the Sponsor Program, and (b) theme-specific mentoring programs. The Sponsor Program matches every first-year student with a mentor (Pomona College, n.d.-c). First-year students may also seek out additional mentors if they would like to be matched with a fellow student with whom they share a particular identity, which defines the second type of program (Pomona College, n.d.-b). For example, a first-year African American student who identifies as first-generation and queer in theory could have four different mentors: (a) her assigned sponsor, (b) her chosen African American mentor, (c) her chosen first-generation mentor, and (d) her chosen queer mentor. Some of the theme-based mentor programs receive professional guidance through their association with a particular staffed resource center; however, most mentor programs have no such affiliation. As stated by the Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership:
We are hoping to create synergistic relationships between the various mentoring programs. If you have the Black Student Mentor Program over here, and the Sponsor Program over here, and the International Student Program over here, what do you get? I don’t know. But if they’re all working together, you get something much better. That’s been the idea.

Prior to the creation of Student Community Resources, the student-run mentor programs operated independently with little to no institutional level coordination, and the college relied heavily on student efforts for the success of the program. More than one Student Affairs staff member referred to these programs as the foundation of Pomona College. Specifically, the Associate Dean and Director of the Draper Center shared, “It is hard for a first-year student to go off the radar or to be hitting a rough patch and someone not know about it.”

As the student population at Pomona grew in diversity, the students began to request new mentor programs to address new identities. Much like the divisional restructuring, the changing student demographic was the main driver behind the creation of the new Associate Dean position and the new Student Community Resources area. The VP described how the old approach would no longer work given the diversification of the Pomona student populations:

We were having these new student groups and marginalized populations emerging that weren’t fitting into our current [student] mentoring models . . . our infrastructure was built on conventional groupings. “You have an identity? We need to make a mentoring group for that!”

The VP went on to explain how difficult it can be for students to see beyond what already exists to suggest new mentoring approaches that might work better. She shared, “It is really hard for students to think about how else they might support one another . . . we
need to create intersectional space in a way that actually meets students’ needs to help them thrive.”

Resources were also a factor in establishing the Student Community Resources unit. The leaders in Student Affairs realized it was also unrealistic from a resource perspective to add a new mentor program with every new request. One Student Affairs staff member stated, “We don’t have enough resources for everyone to have their own center.” Given the importance of these programs to the success of the first-year experience, it was important for the Division to figure out a more efficient and effective way to support the mentoring concept and the emerging populations. Currently, Pomona staffs eight resource centers for the following population of students: (a) Asian American, (b) Chicano/Latino, (c) DACA, (d) international, (e) African American, (f) LGBTQ, (g) students with disabilities, and (h) women. The VP challenged her team to address these issues: “We can’t always jump to the solution of more resources. Let’s be more creative about this.”

Various people played different roles in the design process for creating the Student Community Resources unit. Given that the rough idea grew from the divisional restructuring exercises, the VP and members of her management team played the most central role in putting together the skeleton outline for the idea of what is now called Student Community Resources. The VP was very clear about involving stakeholders from the beginning:

This has to be done in collaboration with students, with the faculty, and with the staff. We’re not going to “staff” our way out of this. We won’t have the right resources. This [issue] really involves both conceptual frameworks as well as organizational frameworks.
The Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership confirmed the VP’s position: “One person can’t have all the right answers . . . [find] people who have some stake in the [issue] and who understand the challenge, and then hopefully, together, we can come up with creative solutions to try.”

Even though the Student Affairs staff took the lead in the process of shaping Student Community Resources, students played a significant role in the process. Student involvement in institutional decisions is a hallmark of the Pomona experience. The Dean of Campus Life compared how the student-centered approach at Pomona is different from other campuses: “I’ve definitely noticed it’s different here than everywhere else I’ve worked. We want to learn from students . . . and students are really good at telling us what they need.” His colleague, the Associate Dean of the Draper Center, agreed with the Dean of Campus Life: “Everything we do here or [that] I’ve been a part of, has been student centered . . . because [we] are a residential campus, it’s almost impossible not to be.” Another Student Affairs staff member shared that the reason they involved students in the conversation around mentoring programs is because “anyone who suggests they have a clear grasp of the student body of today—what they need to thrive—would be lying.”

The leaders in the Division of Student Affairs realize there are trade-offs that come with involving students in any institutional process. One Student Affairs leader talked about the burden it places on students when staff rely too heavily on them for education: “Students are the experts of their own experience and we do need to be student centered . . . [but some students ask], ‘Why do we have all this emotional labor? We are only students.’” Finding the right balance between listening to the student voice and
utilizing staff expertise is always a challenge, particularly when the VP hails from the faculty ranks. She said:

Students certainly own their own experience. At the same time (I think this comes from my faculty background) the staff are the experts. There’s a tension there, between the staff being more directive and the students wanting to own it.

The overall implementation of the Student Community Resource model is still in progress at Pomona College. An integrated mentor training model is the first concrete initiative from the new unit. Both staff and students identified this goal as a priority. The train-the-trainer approach will be used, and the idea is “already very popular with both students and department heads,” according to the Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership. The next step for Pomona is to figure out how to put the training model into place, about which the Associate Dean said, “Getting there is not so easy.”

Previously, the annual August mentor trainings provided by the college were offered independently to each mentoring group and had been coordinated on more of an individual basis, which was putting a tremendous strain on staff at an already busy time of year. One priority identified for Student Community Resources was to provide training for mentors in all programs, regardless of its affiliation to a center. As the Associate Dean of Student Mentoring and Leadership put it, “The capacity to train mentors when there are one or two programs is one thing. Doing it times 10 is another.” As the staff member who now leads the new Student Community Resources unit, he explained his short-term goal related to the low-risk/high-yield opportunity related to mentor training: “We’re not quite there yet, but we don’t have the capacity to provide trainers for all the training that is already required for these various programs. So, we need to build different capacity.”
A multilayered approach was explored to address the training issue. The Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership began by meeting on a regular basis with students who experienced the trainings firsthand to hear their perspectives. This leadership group included students who run all the various mentor programs across campus and leadership from Pomona’s Student Government. At the same time, the deans and department heads in the Division of Student Affairs also met regularly to discuss ideas and share their perspectives since many of the Student Affairs staff were the individuals conducting the past trainings. Eventually, the Associate Dean brought the two groups together to explore a train-the-trainer model as an approach.

A first attempt at implementing a scaled-back version of the train-the-trainer idea was attempted in Spring 2017; however, due to staffing changes, the initiative did not really get off the ground. Currently, the Associate Dean is making plans to launch the training in Spring 2018 with the help and support from Student Government, whom he feels is integral to the process: “It has to be a partnership with student government if this is going to work.”

Throughout this development process, students associated with the mentor programs have been asked to respond to questions about what specific goals they may have and what they are looking for when it comes to institutional support. The Student Affairs leaders at Pomona acknowledged that when you ask students for their input, it is best to act on recommendations quickly. This notion was articulated by a staff member who shared, “It’s not just about getting [student] input alone. It is about getting their input and then, within a year, having their recommendations put into action.”
The VP talked about the implementation process broadly for Student Community Resources, which involves students and academic affairs colleagues:

Right now, we’re once again working really closely with the students and they’re very involved in the process of what a student community resource space or spaces could look like. We are listening to all the needs that [students] are thinking about from their own [identity] group’s perspective . . . and we are bringing in folks from Academic Affairs, so the students can also see what’s feasible and realistic, even as we’re also grappling with what we are philosophically guided by.

There are some Student Affairs staff on campus who have a greater stake in the Student Community Resources game than others—the Directors of the ethnic-specific resource centers. The implementation phase for Student Community Resources is complicated by the fact that any idea pursued that addresses challenges with mentoring the emerging student demographic has to take into consideration that the resource centers (e.g., the Asian American Mentoring Program is advised through the Asian American Resource Center) may feel threatened. The VP warned, “It could be really problematic if we diminish the role of existing ethnic or racial resource centers” as they assemble this new unit, and she indicated that it was important to “bring together the whole leadership team of student affairs [to ensure an] integrated approach.”

Relatedly, one Student Affairs staff member posed the difficult question, “Philosophically, are stand-alone centers and mentor programs the best way to support the intersectionality of students in terms of their needs, identities, and experiences?” As the VP was explaining the conundrum of creating more integrated support networks for students without making already existing programs obsolete, she indicated that the answer had yet to materialize when she said, “That’s the question of today.”
It remains to be seen if the creation of Student Community Resources and the Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership role will be a viable solution to both the conceptual and organizational challenges associated with the longstanding student mentor programs at Pomona College. When asked about success factors related to this innovation, the VP claimed, “That’s a continuing conversation. We are still in the process of working through the needs and philosophy around how you . . . take an intersectional approach to support students while not creating siloed centers.”

The Associate Director of Student Mentoring and Leadership explained why the implementation might be slow: “You don’t just snap your fingers and then all of a sudden you have a fully formed new unit.” When asked about his measure of success related to the first initiative from Student Community Resources, he responded:

When you survey first years and they say their mentor program was ineffective in helping them transition to college, that’s a pretty good indicator we didn’t get it right. Secondly though is the mentors, because this is a program for them too. It’s not just about them mentoring first years, it is also an emerging year for them as a student leader. It has to be a program where [the mentors] feel like they can be effective as a mentor, that they feel like they’ve had adequate training, and that they get adequate support to do their role as a mentor.

By measuring the experience of the mentee and the mentor, the Associate Dean believes the Division should have a good indication of the early success of Student Community Resources.

The intentional clustering exercise and resulting creation of Student Community Resources are two examples of breakthrough innovation in Student Affairs at Pomona. These two innovations and the 12 others presented in this study were all influenced by certain institutional and division factors. The following is a summary of two conditions that play a role in encouraging innovative Student Affairs practice at Pomona.
Conditions Influencing Innovation in Student Affairs at Pomona College

Innovation is a priority, not only institutionally at Pomona College, but also in the Division of Student Affairs. The VP explained that, within the Division, “We try to examine our structure, people, practice and program with an eye toward innovation.” In Student Affairs, there are particular factors that play a powerful role in creating optimal conditions for the type of thinking the VP describes. A strong understanding of the Pomona student culture and how students’ needs are changing is important when innovating at Pomona. Additionally, resources play a powerful role when it comes to innovative practice in student affairs. Particularly at a highly resourced institution like Pomona, recognizing the complicated role that resources play in both advancing and inhibiting innovation is an important part of the Student Affairs innovation story.

Awareness of the Pomona Student

The Student Affairs staff at Pomona College have a keen understanding of how the student demographic is changing, not only on their own campus, but also around the country. The Associate Dean for Student Mentoring and Leadership recalled a recent speaker whose message resonated strongly with him given how well it captured his own thoughts on the Pomona students:

Van Jones spoke here a few years ago now. Something that he said I have taken to heart since then as a practitioner in student affairs. What he said to the audience of college students was, “You are the generation we have been waiting for. You are going to help us discover new industries. You are going to create new jobs—things we can’t even see.” That had a big impact on me that day.

The Assistant Director of Athletics mentioned that she tries to keep in mind that her students seem to prefer to be more hands-on in their own learning than they were in the past. She indicated that she has experienced colleagues at other institutions who do not
take the time to understand that students are changing, which means that practitioners also have to change. This Student Affairs staff member indicated that innovation is hampered when leaders do not acknowledge the changing student profile:

You can always tell when student affairs departments are moving in an innovative direction, and ones that just want to stick in the stone ages. Our students are learning in different ways now. They need to touch. They need to visualize. For example, if we are giving them everything on paper, there is a good chance they are not going to read it. Students have to be able to relate to it. If they can’t relate to it they aren’t going to pay attention to it.

Another important realization of the changing student demographic that is particularly poignant for Pomona College given its diversity is the multiplicity and intersectionality of student identities. The Associate Director of Student Mentoring and Leadership spoke of this reality when discussing the challenge of designing ethnic-specific programs for students on their campus:

How do we create synergistic relationships between our various student support programs? What we know is students in today’s world don’t just identify in one way. . . . They will often say, “I’m Black and I’m first gen.” Or, “I’m Black and I’m queer.” So [it is] a real challenge to build a new kind of infrastructure to support students participating in our different programs if [the programs] were originally designed to support only one of their identities.

This same staff member shared that the way he stays in touch with what students need is by asking them. He talked about how vital it is for administrators to include students in discussions related to how best to support them, rather than assuming to know intuitively what students might need:

I haven’t lived in a residence hall in 500 years. I haven’t tried to organize and get students to come to my program in at least 450 years. At the end of the day, it’s the end user you want to . . . take advantage of whatever you are providing. Do that without student input? No, I’m not doing that.
Student Affairs staff at Pomona recognize that putting students at the center of conversations on designing student support programs and services ensures their work is relevant and useful. Additionally, the awareness the Student Affairs staff at Pomona have about the changing student demographic on a national scale and what makes the students at Pomona unique helps to inspire innovative approaches to their practice.

**Resources**

Another factor that influences innovation in Student Affairs at Pomona acknowledged by the staff is the resources invested in supporting the student experience. Several individuals mentioned the link between resources and innovation, very succinctly described by one leader in this way: “Resources create opportunity.” One Associate Dean who formerly worked at a large, public institution contrasted the challenges in his prior role with the opportunities at Pomona. He talked about the privilege that comes with resources:

> Given our resources, we can do amazingly innovative things. . . . I think the two biggest things about Pomona are we are small, and we have a large endowment [and] this allows [us] to be creative and innovative. Coming from [a large public school], I had to be careful about how I used every penny, and 90% of my time was spent rationalizing why the work was valuable. Not that stuff doesn’t matter [at Pomona], but here, innovation is given space. Folks are more willing to do things because they have resources and we are small and nimble enough to move. What probably empowers me the most, in terms of feeling I can be innovative, are those things.

When it comes to garnering resources to pursue particular innovative ideas, resources beget resources at Pomona, according to the Dean of Campus Life, who indicated that he has observed a certain pattern in donor support over his 7 years on campus:

> When I arrived at Pomona, I felt like there was momentum. People and [donors] were excited about what Pomona was doing, and success begets success and opportunity. I think that part of the reason for Pomona having opportunities like
The Hive is because there is real momentum going, and donors are excited and want to be a part of it.

Student Affairs staff at Pomona are keenly aware of the advantage that comes from working at a highly resourced institution and the privilege associated with not having to justify every innovative idea they may have.

Senior leaders at Pomona College are keeping an eye toward the future as they make strategic decisions about the financial health of the college. Even highly resourced institutions must control costs, as the VP indicates: “On the one hand we have a very large endowment, and yet we’ve made changes to make sure that we are going to be healthy financially inter generationally, which has narrowed our capacity for resources.”

This perspective was observed when speaking with one Associate Dean who indicated that resources are not just handed out blindly, but are allocated when Student Affairs staff illustrate the need. Another Student Affairs staff member who serves as the Director of one of the ethnic-specific student resource centers mentioned that she is doing her best to “make so much of a small budget.”

Relatively, another Student Affairs staff member spoke of a challenge related to highly resourced institutions:

If you create a culture where you are handing out money like Band-Aids to solve [problems] that is where you run the risk of creating a culture of entitlement. How do you manage students’ expectations when handing out money for this and that? Students will ask, “You handed out money for this, so why not for that?”

Intentionality seems to be an important factor when deciding which programs are resourced and the impact such choices will have on those that may not receive support.

Resources come in several forms on college campuses, and space is typically one that is highly coveted. The situation is no different at Pomona College. Several Student
Affairs staff members talked about how providing space for students to collaborate can be a cultivator of innovation; however, space alone is not enough. One Student Affairs staff member recalled an example where the college set aside space for a lounge for students of color along with programming funds:

It is called the SOCA Lounge and it is a students of color space. . . . It has been struggling, and the reason why? [Because] it’s just a space. There’s no staff to help the students think through what they actually might want to do in the space and with the funding.

A similar situation was described by another staff member when talking about a space that was allocated for students working with the Native American and South Asian mentor programs: “Honestly, the kids might study there, but unless you have staff members in that office, [students] will come to our office because that is where the staff are. If they have a question, they look to us for help.”

Summary

Leaders in the Division of Student Affairs have taken an innovative approach to respond to the sizeable shift in its student demographic profile that Pomona College has experienced in the last several years. The two examples provided in this chapter represent the ways the Student Affairs team at Pomona has responded to the changing needs of their student population within the context of programs vital to their institution (the mentor programs) while continuing to honor the campus’ student-centered culture. As the Student Affairs leaders at Pomona strive to be as the VP says—“viable, sustainable, and relevant”—they do so with these words from the VP in mind: “One of the things we say at Pomona is we are not an institution bound by its tradition. Take us or leave us, we’re always looking how to do better, be better, and really support students better.”
CHAPTER 7 – ANALYSIS

The case studies of Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College provided insight into innovations in student affairs practice to improve student success and how those innovations were brought about and evaluated for effectiveness. This chapter begins with an analysis of each of the cases, with particular focus on why and how certain innovations were created and who were the players involved in the implementation process. Other significant observations about the collective suite of innovations provided are also explored. The latter portion of the chapter provides a comparative analysis of innovation drivers and processes as well as innovators themselves. Finally, the differences in cases are considered in an effort to understand how motivations and approaches to innovation in student affairs units may vary. The discussion and implications of this analysis are offered in the next chapter.

College Life at Gettysburg College

Eleven College Life staff at Gettysburg College provided 21 examples of innovations when asked to describe their approach to help their evolving student demographic succeed. The innovation types were almost entirely adaptive—the innovation was a modification to a current student affairs practice (with one breakthrough example provided)—and most were innovations in the programs offered to their student population, rather than staff-focused innovations, for example. Drivers of innovation varied. Innovations were mostly led by groups, although the group makeup was mixed. The College Life staff used some design thinking steps as they launched their innovations—specifically, a number of innovations began as pilot programs. Overall, the College Life staff described the examples of innovation as successful.
This analysis is organized around the following points: (a) redefining the role of
the student, (b) the factors that drive innovation, (c) innovation leaders and processes, and
(d) the impact of innovation on student affairs practice at Gettysburg College.

**College Life Innovations: Redefining the Student Role**

Taking inspiration from the VP’s charge to embrace the social nature of the
Gettysburg student, the College Life staff have generated a variety of programs that
engage students along a continuum from participant to student program coordinator.
Some of the student programming innovations led to reimagining roles for student leaders
at Gettysburg. For example, although the Student Organization Consulting Program was
fundamentally designed to serve leaders of campus clubs who needed assistance with
managing and leading their groups, the initiative also created opportunities for the student
leaders who serve as consultants to gain valuable “real-world” skills while helping their
peers and reducing staff workload. Similarly, as the SJI evolved, the staff created new
roles expressly for students who, despite having been through the program a number of
times, were seeking a deeper learning experience. These innovations offered progressive
opportunities for student participation, ranging from student participant to program
leader. Consequently, this approach created a new type of paraprofessional role for
students at Gettysburg. All of the 21 innovations put students in important decision-
-making and leadership roles. The VP’s comment supported this notion. She shared,
“Even sometimes I am amazed at how much responsibility students have. I see who is
really in charge around here and it is not me. It’s the students and that’s good.”

A number of innovations described by College Life staff at Gettysburg College
aimed to create spaces and places where students can explore issues related to diversity,
inclusion, and social justice, both formally and informally. Innovations that allow students to engage with one another in a highly structured format are the SJI and the Immersion Service Projects. Innovations designed to encourage students to explore these issues in a more informal and indirect manner are the Peer Coordinators for the Center for Public Service (CPS) and the dialogue groups.

Another consistent theme in student programs is the juxtaposition between student as volunteer and student as employee. In traditional student affairs settings, student volunteers regularly assist with programs in all manner of roles. Although some students at Gettysburg provide support for programs in a voluntary capacity, what is more prevalent is that, because of their responsibilities, students are compensated. Compensated students are given greater latitude in planning, decision-making, and program design and are ultimately responsible for the success of the programs they lead. In two adaptive innovations, students receive compensation for their work: The CPS employs 24 students to serve as Program Coordinators. The 13 Student Leadership Mentors are paid for their work providing organizational consulting services to Gettysburg student organizations.

**The Drivers of Innovation**

The most consistent driver of innovations at Gettysburg College was responding to the changing student demographic, which is responsible for the creation of more than a quarter (6) of the adaptive innovations. Donations made to the College for a particular initiative also served as external drivers influencing two innovations at Gettysburg: (a) the Garthwait Leadership Center, and (b) the Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation Initiative. The mix of drivers for the remaining 13 innovations is diverse, although one
common thread is the number of proactive drivers as opposed to innovations that are driven by a response to a problem. Nine College Life innovations were driven by the staff’s desire to set the organization and/or students up for success. Among these proactive drivers, resource utilization and enhancing ties between students and the administration emerged more than once (see Table 4 for a list of proactive drivers).

Not all College Life drivers of innovation at Gettysburg were proactive; some were driven reactively. The responsive innovation drivers at Gettysburg were either student feedback, which inspired the Attic and the College House Program, or came as a result of a negative incident. A bias-related incident on campus drove the creation of the Diversity Peer Educators and a series of risk management challenges stemming from fraternity parties inspired the partnership arrangement between Public Safety and fraternity leaders. The Director of Public Safety indicated:

We had worked for several years with the students on how to manage their parties without much success. We continued to have a lot of incidents. With our new approach, not only have we reduced incidents, we have built some really positive relationships with our Greek students.

When explaining the factors that motivate innovation examples at Gettysburg, responses from College life staff revealed layers of drivers. Not only did the staff speak of the drivers previously mentioned, while telling the story of how the innovation came to life, they also unearthed additional drivers that played a minor, yet still important role in the innovation process. The most consistent secondary driver of innovations at Gettysburg was the desire and expectation for continuous improvement of the programs and services offered to students. For example, one staff member shared, “The true test of
Table 4

**Proactive Drivers of College Life Innovations at Gettysburg College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gettysburg College Life Innovations</th>
<th>Proactive Driver</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique collection of units reporting up through AVP</td>
<td>Creating Organizational Synergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA Projects</td>
<td>Stronger Student/Admin Ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt-a-Residence Hall</td>
<td>Stronger Student/Admin Ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Organization Consulting Program</td>
<td>Resource Utilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential education added into already existing programs</td>
<td>Resource Utilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coordinators for Public Service</td>
<td>Enhanced Student Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Greek Life Trustee Review and Implementation Plan</td>
<td>Mitigate Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Student Life Committee</td>
<td>Integrated Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The GRAB Senior Leadership Trip</td>
<td>Reward Student Efforts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

what we are creating here for students will be its enduring legacy. This might be why we put so much pressure on ourselves to always think bigger and never settle for status quo.”

Another secondary driver was the scaling of resources. For example, although the primary driver for the CPS Peer Coordinators was to capitalize on the unique role that students play inspiring their peers to serve others, a secondary motivator was the fact that the College can have a greater impact in the community by engaging a cadre of students as agency liaisons than it could with professional staff.

**The Leaders and Process of Innovation**

Individuals working collectively consistently led innovations in College Life at Gettysburg. Students led the way on five different innovations discussed, including the only breakthrough innovation provided, which was The Attic. Students led all three of the student programming innovations sponsored by the CPS. Multiple members of the College Life staff worked together to lead an additional five innovations.

Individual College Life staff members, working independently, also led innovations. These individuals pursued the innovation initiative within the context of the
expectations and duties of their job. For example, the Director in charge of diversity and inclusion efforts on campus initially established the Diversity Peer Educators program. Additionally, the Director of Public Safety led the two innovations within his unit: (a) SARA Projects, and (b) Adopt-a-Hall. For some innovations, an individual staff member may have led the initial stages of the innovation’s development, but the implementation process involved other collaborators and stakeholders across campus. For example, the Director of the Multicultural Engagement Office led the Multicultural Engagement Pre-Orientation Program; however, he worked closely with students when developing the idea and with other College Life staff in charge of new student orientation. The Director shared:

> We have a number of pre-orientation programs here. It can be hard to make sure we aren’t stepping on each other’s toes. We work closely with other staff to supplement what our students might get from other programs, not repeat it.

Elements of design thinking were used to implement College Life innovations. Each of the 21 innovations benefited from extensive research on current trends, best practices, and overall student interest. For example, one staff member shared how she ensures the SJI continues to be relevant:

> I think part of staying relevant and innovative in today’s day and age is keeping tabs on how the world is changing and more importantly how college students are changing—not only students at your own campus, but also overall.

Moreover, every innovation example the College Life staff provided was informed by student input and/or feedback that was gathered through informal and formal mechanisms. An Associate Dean explained, “I never turn down an opportunity to ask students how we can be better in helping them succeed.”
The Gettysburg case also contains examples of the use of prototyping or piloting in the process of implementing College Life innovations. Five adaptive innovations benefited from this design thinking technique whereby the idea was tested, and improvements were made. One example where prototyping continues to play a valuable role in improving an initial idea is the SJI. According to one staff member, the framework for delivery and program design continues to evolve as the demographic of the student body at Gettysburg changes. She went on to say:

The original idea for the Social Justice Institute was that students would attend one time. It ended up being so powerful for them that they wanted to keep coming. We had to totally rethink our approach to accommodate the need, but that ended up being the thing that makes this program so distinctive.

One design thinking tool that was limited in the innovation stories presented by College Life staff was the brainstorming phase. One Associate Dean discussed how brainstorming was used in relation to a college-wide strategic planning committee; however, that was one of the only mentions of any process whereby multiple ideas and diverse viewpoints were sought to identify the best approach to address a problem or enhance an experience. Given that brainstorming is fundamentally a group activity, perhaps there is a relationship between the number of individually led innovations and the void in brainstorming as a common implementation tool for innovation.

**The Impact of Innovation**

The Gettysburg case shows that staff rarely measured or thought about the indicators of success. One College Life staff member indicated how difficult it is to measure success when conditioned to always think about continuous improvement. He said, “Sometimes you provide a service or program for students and you end up with
more questions than answers because we expect people to always think about how it can be done better.”

Although the success metrics across the 21 College Life innovations at Gettysburg were cursory in nature, some minor themes emerged. The College Life staff deemed four of the innovations as successful because of positive feedback from program participants. Another four College Life innovations have more student interest than the program has capacity, which in the minds of the innovators is an indication of programmatic success. For some innovations, the creation of the program itself was a marker of success, such as the pre-orientation outdoor program for incoming students at Colorado College. For other innovations, specifically those inspired or driven by external factors, a decrease in the number of incidents of concern is how success is determined. Finally, no success factors were identified for three College Life innovations, and for another two, the staff believed the initiative was so new to the Division that it was too soon to determine whether the innovation had achieved what it was designed to do.

Summary

The Student Life staff at Gettysburg College described innovations that redefined the role of the student. These innovations were informed by a deep understanding of students’ needs gleaned from mechanisms for generating student input and feedback. Inspired by the VP’s vision for the Division, these innovations speak to the various ways in which student programming can assist students in their educational pursuits.

Student Life at Colorado College

Ten Student Life staff at Colorado College gave 15 examples of innovations. The innovation types were almost entirely adaptive (with one breakthrough example
provided) and were mostly innovations to programming offerings. Student Life staff described a range of innovation drivers. The most common driver was the division’s response to a changing student demographic. Innovations were mostly led by Student Life staff working together in groups. The Student Life staff employed all four elements of design thinking to launch their innovation (observation, brainstorming, piloting/prototyping, and implementation) and the College Life staff described nearly all of the 15 innovations as successful.

This analysis is organized around the following points: (a) holistic nature of innovation, (b) the factors that drive innovation, (c) innovation leaders and processes, and (d) the impact of innovation on student affairs practice at Colorado College.

**Student Life Innovations: A Focus on the Whole Student**

The holistic nature of the innovation examples reinforces the College’s philosophy of engaging the whole student—mind, body, and spirit. Some of the Colorado College innovations are designed to create the optimum living/learning spaces and others are innovations designed to enhance the Student Life infrastructure to meet the demands of the evolving student demographic. Additionally, the innovations presented by Student Life staff provide training and development for the staff who work on behalf of students.

Innovations in programming were the most common, accounting for seven of the 15 examples. In three of the student programming examples, students can choose to attend as participants, or students can take on a peer leader/facilitator function. For example, returning students lead small groups of new students in a 5-day, pre-orientation wilderness adventure (the Priddy Experience). One programming innovation was designed for staff. The We Could be Heroes Retreat was designed to develop the senior
members of the Student Life staff. The only breakthrough innovation example presented by Student Life staff at Colorado College was The Risk Project, which has both curricular and co-curricular elements and is offered both as an independent program during block breaks and as part of a first-year seminar course.

As a mechanism to ensure students’ needs are being met in a holistic way, the Student Life staff have made changes to the organizational structure of certain units within the Division. Student Life staff provided three examples of structural innovation: (a) the Wellness Center reorganization, (b) Residence Life and Campus Safety units pairing with the Student Engagement unit, and (c) the Title IX team. Two additional innovations were changes to physical spaces that play a significant role in the lives of students—the main campus dining facility and a new residential apartment complex. One staff member recalled how the architects of the dining hall questioned some of the recommendations being made, “The architects kept asking us, ‘Are you sure you want those long tables? Nobody else wants that.’ We were sure because that’s what our students wanted. We listen to [students] because they know what’s best.”

A final theme that emerged across several innovations is the link between resources and the innovation. This theme is particularly important to Colorado College because of the extreme economic diversity in the student body. Three innovation examples might otherwise be unaffordable to some students if not for the financial backing from generous donor initiatives of various kinds. For example, a portion of the expenses related to the Ahlberg Leadership Initiative (ALI) is funded through corporate donations. One staff member said, “As our student demographic has changed, we’ve started allocating funds to outfit these students. We’ve not only purchased backpacks and
sleeping bags, but also clothing. Not everyone comes to college with a really nice puffy Patagonia jacket.”

The Drivers of Innovation

No common driver of innovations. Changing student demographics played a role in three innovations (including the only breakthrough innovation—the Risk Project at Colorado College). Within this subset of three innovations driven by the evolving student profile, each innovation spoke to a different aspect of the changing demographic. The Counseling Center’s identity work focuses on the increasing ethnic and gender identity diversity. The decision to make co-curricular events free was motivated by the increasing socioeconomic diversity of Colorado College students. Finally, as a highly selective institution, Colorado College is committed to helping students deal with the pressures of an academically rigorous environment. One way it has done so is The Risk Project. One staff member shared, “Part of our culture as a highly selective institution is we have a lot of driven people. We have some cultural things that are less conducive to acknowledging when we fail.” She went on to say that the value of The Risk Project is to help students reframe failure as a healthy and productive part of life.

Student Life staff described an assortment of other drivers, with the common theme being that they each were proactive in nature. Following on the VP’s philosophy of “approaching the work with students in a holistic and integrated way,” several innovation examples were driven by a desire to serve students holistically. For example, the reorganization of the Wellness Resource Center was inspired by a need to think of wellness in a more comprehensive way. One staff member noted:
We are doing a very holistic wellness approach now. Our model is one in which we talk about how your decisions over here in this domain of your life impact these other domains and that living an integrated life is really what we’re trying to achieve.

The use of positive psychology as a factor in the design of the East Campus Apartments is another proactive inspiration example. The housing project was designed with an eye toward creating a positive relationship between the student and where they live (see Table 5 for a list of proactive drivers).

Three innovation examples were influenced by the responsive driver of student feedback. Mental Health First Aid, the ALI, and the Dining Hall redesign were all driven directly by student feedback. Student Life staff at Colorado College offered layers of drivers, which played a smaller, yet still important, role in the innovation process. Two consistent secondary drivers emerged: (a) efficient resource utilization, and (b) strengthening ties among various groups.

The desire to use resources more efficiently and effectively was a secondary driver in 3 of the 15 innovations presented in the Colorado case. For example, although the primary driver for the Wellness Resource Center reorganization was to approach student wellness from a more holistic and integrated perspective, the number of staff also drove the decision to use a resource collaborative model. The Wellness Resource Center Director indicated, “Our office is small. With the breadth of things that we are doing, we have to collaborate with other folks around campus. We learn what other folks are doing in their areas and pass that info along to students.”

Another secondary driver of innovation at Colorado College was the desire to create stronger ties between individuals and the college. For instance, the We Must Be
Table 5

*Proactive Drivers of Student Life Innovations at Colorado College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Life Innovations</th>
<th>Proactive Driver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Center reorganization</td>
<td>Holistic Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Could Be Heroes Retreat for senior staff</td>
<td>Inspire Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Priddy Experience (adventure program)</td>
<td>Stronger student/student and student/college ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler Center programming model to integrate diversity</td>
<td>Holistic Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure for Campus Safety and Residence Life</td>
<td>Holistic Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Center identity specialization</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Title IX Coordinator</td>
<td>Raise awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Policing</td>
<td>Stronger student/college ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Campus Apartments</td>
<td>Positive Psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Heroes Retreat was primarily driven by the VP’s desire to increase the level of creativity coming from the senior staff in the Division of Student Life; however, a secondary driver was the goal of strengthening the bonds between individual members of the senior staff team. The VP shared because of these retreats, “We know intimately what we each have. We know what folks think about the mission and how they relate to it. These exercises helped us make connections to each other in ways we didn’t even know we needed.”

**The Leaders and Process of Innovation**

Student Life innovations at Colorado College were all led by various groups. The most common group makeup was multiple members of Student Life staff working together toward a common initiative, making up one third of the examples provided. Similarly, one third of the innovations included at least one faculty member as part of the group of innovators. The ALI is the only innovation example led solely by students (see Table 6 for list of innovation leaders). A mix of several staff and faculty working in collaboration led the only Colorado College breakthrough innovation, which was The Risk Project. This innovation resulted from two staff members working together to merge...
Table 6

Leaders of Student Life Innovations at Colorado College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Life Breakthrough Innovation</th>
<th>Leader(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Risk Project</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Faculty (multiple)</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Life Adaptive Innovations</th>
<th>Leader(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free co-curricular programs/events</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Center redesign</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Could Be Heroes Retreat</td>
<td>VP/Faculty (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Priddy Experience</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler Center programming model</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahlberg Leadership Institute (ALI)</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure for Campus Safety and Residence Life</td>
<td>Senior Staff (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Center identity specialization</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Title IX Coordinator</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Policing</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keller Venture Research Grants</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining Hall redesign</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Campus Apartments</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students/Faculty (multiple)</td>
</tr>
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ideas each had individually into one collaboration. One staff member invited several faculty to join the collaboration and their contributions took the ideas to the next level.

A diverse group that included faculty, students, and staff working collectively led the East Side Apartment innovation. This was the only innovation at Colorado College where the three main constituents on a college campus—faculty, staff, and students—worked collectively on an innovation. Consultants led the work of this assembly of students, faculty, and staff from Association of College and University Housing Officers, which allowed everyone to be fully engaged in the process without having to also facilitate the planning.

Regarding the process for implementing Student Life innovations at Colorado College, 12 of the 15 examples benefited from design thinking techniques—specifically,
the use of extensive research on current trends, best practices, and overall student interest. For example, the decision to remove the financial barrier that existed for students to participate in co-curricular programs was grounded in Colorado College student socioeconomic profile data and a greater understanding of college access issues facing students in general. One staff member indicated, “How can we meet students’ needs if we don’t understand what those needs are and where they might be coming from?”

The Colorado College case also contains several examples of staff using all four innovation implementation steps to bring an idea to life. The dining hall redesign, East Campus Apartments, the reorganization of the Wellness Resource Center, and the alignment of Residence Life and Campus Safety units with Student Engagement are all innovations that employed observation/research of the issue, brainstorming, prototyping, and implementation. One staff member described how her process aligns with design thinking as she explained the reorganization of the Wellness Resource Center:

I started by doing a lot of reading and research. I surveyed other institutions to find out what they were doing for wellness. We wanted to find out as much as we could about our students needs and what other campuses are doing in this area. First, to generate as many ideas as possible and to make sure we really understand the student landscape. I went to colleagues and asked them to brainstorm with me. This sometimes revealed some sort of wild thing that gave us another idea of a direction to go. We also were able to pick people’s brains once we had some ideas to try and get a sense of whether what we had planned would be useful to them.

There is a pattern among the innovations where Student Life staff used design thinking techniques. Nearly all of these innovations were innovations in organizational structure.

**The Impact of Innovation**

The most common success indicators were the positive feedback provided by students and other campus stakeholders (six examples). Similarly, four innovations had
more student interest than capacity, which the Student Life staff believed was a positive success indicator for the initiative. The community policing model was the only innovation where quantitative evaluation metrics were developed. Said the Director of Campus Safety, “We now get about 20,000 calls into Campus Safety a year. Four years ago, we had around 12,000. . . . From my perspective, it means our approach is working.”

Student Life staff also indicate that a marker of success is the extent to which others want to modify or replicate the innovation for a different setting or audience. Plans are underway to expand two innovations—We Could Be Heroes Retreat and the Risk Projects. The VP described how they piloted the Heroes retreat for students recently: “Everything I have heard from the people that participated—both on the student side and the faculty side—is the experience had the same positive impact with them as it has had with my team.” Another staff member spoke of the plans to grow The Risk Project: “It would be great if all incoming students could experience this. How could we supersize this? That will be our next step to try and figure out.”

Summary

The Student Life staff at Colorado College presented innovations that focus on the whole student. Although most innovations individually aim to enhance one aspect of the student experience, when analyzed as a collective, the innovations demonstrate the priority for supporting the development of a student’s mind, body, and spirit. These combined innovations not only prioritize a holistic focus on the student, they also prioritize integration between the curricular and the co-curricular.
Student Affairs at Pomona College

Pomona College had 14 innovations. The innovation types were both adaptive and breakthrough. Innovations that focused on the role of student affairs professionals and the structure of the Division were most frequent, and the innovations in student programming were most prolific among the 14 examples presented. Drivers of innovation coalesced around the changing student demographic at Pomona. Innovations were mostly led by individual Student Affairs staff members. Overall, Student Affairs staff described the examples of innovation as successful.

This analysis is organized around the following points: (a) redefining the organizational structures and roles, (b) the factors that drive innovation, (c) innovation leaders and processes, and (d) the impact of innovation on student affairs practice at Pomona College.

Student Affairs Innovations: Redefining Roles and Structures

Pomona’s Student Affairs innovations tell a story of a division recasting the roles of students and staff and reorganizing the divisional structures that serve as the infrastructure for student support programs and services. Additionally, some innovations are incremental changes made to existing student support initiatives to align more closely with the present-day Pomona student profile. These innovations, known as adaptive innovations, are rejuvenations of longstanding, successful Pomona programs made more relevant to the current Pomona student. Given the greater frequency of adaptive innovations in organizations, Pomona’s efforts to evolve successful programs to match changing needs is important to note.
An example of an adaptive innovation that serves as an updated approach to a longstanding practice is how the Student Affairs staff use a train-the-trainer model to provide training for the dozens of students who lead the various Pomona mentoring programs. These student leaders receive substantive training and apply what they have learned in their own training to the student mentors they oversee. Given the role that mentoring programs play in the overall retention of Pomona students, several Student Affairs staff spoke of the importance of ensuring the leader training is substantive and high quality.

Other Student Affairs innovations at Pomona are completely new approaches to student affairs practice, which are labeled in this study as breakthrough innovations. An observation from this case is that each of the breakthrough innovations are changes to roles and to structures within the Division. Because of innovations at Pomona, students play a vital role as paraprofessionals. Through this role, they function almost as extensions of the Student Affairs staff. For example, the student mentoring programs for ethnic-specific populations are completely run by students, with staff serving to advise and counsel only. Relationally, the other two breakthrough innovations (the divisional restructuring and Student Community Resources) both are new approaches to a typical Student Affairs structure and the familiar roles students and staff play. The divisional restructuring resulted in individual role and organizational structure changes throughout Student Affairs. The new organizational unit—Student Community Resources—was designed to redefine the position played by student mentors and College staff in the various and ever-growing number of mentor programs that exist at Pomona.
The Drivers of Innovation

Student demographics at Pomona College appears to drive most (7 of 14) innovations. Of the three cases presented in this study, Pomona College is the most ethnically diverse and has the largest percentage of students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, it is not surprising that 7 of Pomona’s 14 innovations were directly inspired by the diversity of student profiles. The Student Affairs staff at Pomona were acutely aware that their work needed to evolve to match the needs of their students. The VP indicated, “I think that our focus on the changing [student] demographic has enabled us to be really well positioned to leverage opportunity to pursue ways we can meet students’ needs and be a place for students to thrive.” One Associate Dean shared, “We don’t need to understand students in a ‘changing’ demographic because our demographic has already changed.” Four innovations were driven by resources.

When describing drivers for a particular innovation, several Student Affairs staff began by describing one driver, and as they spoke, they inevitably began mentioning additional drivers that also played a role. One example where both primary and secondary drivers were present was the restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs. The driver for this innovation, according to the VP, was the changing student demographics at Pomona. As the VP explained the process, she explained how the institution could not continue to fund new programs for emerging student populations as had been past practice. She said, “In the past, in order to support emerging student population, the conventional thing was to have a resource center.” The VP went on to discuss how the diversity of the Pomona student profile makes it impossible to start a resource center for every category of student. She added that this notion is even more challenging when you
consider the intersectionality of current students. The primary driver for the divisional restructuring may have been the changing student demographics, but a secondary driver seems to be resource utilization. Resource utilization similarly served as a secondary driver for additional innovations—ethnic-specific mentoring programs and Student Community Resources.

Four of the 11 adaptive innovations were primarily driven by the desire to enhance the use of resources. This emphasis on the effective use of resources is particularly interesting given the perception that Pomona is a highly resourced institution. A scan of primary and secondary drivers of innovation in Student Affairs at Pomona revealed a high frequency of resource utilization as a driver. Eight of Pomona’s innovations were revenue neutral, four innovations run on budgets less than $1,000, and of the remaining two, one innovation is funded by an external partnership and the other through a donation.

**The Leaders and Process of Innovation**

Collective groups of people led all the breakthrough innovations. Conversely, individual staff members responsible for the particular initiatives led more than half of the adaptive innovations. These Pomona innovations, although largely led by the individual responsible for the initiatives’ outcome, all required multiple stakeholders to bring them from idea to reality.

What is common across the adaptive and breakthrough innovations at Pomona is the central role of students in all 14 innovations. One Student Affairs staff member described the role student voice plays in the work of the Division: “Knowing what students think about the programs we offer as well as having a deep understanding of
what students’ need—that lands on me.” This same staff member went on to add, “In order for our work [in Student Affairs] to make a difference for students, we need to be partners with students and involve them directly in our process.”

The Pomona case demonstrates that student affairs administrators often do not have an intentional strategy for creating and implementing innovation. Several Student Affairs staff described the innovation implementation process as “organic” or “natural.” One Director indicated she could not recall exactly how a particular innovation was brought to life, only that it was “intuitive” and that she “hasn’t every really put much thought into the steps involved [in implementing a new idea].” Although some staff members indicated they do typically have a plan for putting ideas into practice, these plans are often not written, which can make describing them in any detail somewhat challenging. This casual and imprecise approach to actualizing innovations may prove detrimental to the longevity of the innovative practice, on one hand. On the other hand, it may also impede any future replication of the innovation if so desired.

In contrast to innovations led by staff, the innovation led primarily by the VP had clear plans for creation and implementation. The implementation process for the divisional restructuring was highly structured, and each step was thoughtfully considered. The VP indicated the success of the restructuring was tested not soon after it was implemented when students began protesting about increasing support to marginalized student populations. She explained, “When the protests happened, we all felt like we had a great jump start on what the students were asking for. We had a new infrastructure that was better equip at providing the very kind of support they demanded.”
The Pomona case also shows how “innovation specific” implementation can be. In other words, for the innovations presented in this study, no substantive or consistent patterns or themes emerged specific to the implementation process itself. Even though Student Affairs innovations at Pomona were each implemented in highly individualized ways, a number of innovations were improved by insights gathered from an initial piloting of the innovation idea.

**The Impact of Innovation**

Although there was tremendous variation in success factors across the 14 Student Affairs innovations at Pomona, what was consistent was the fact that the measures of success were superficial. It is not clear from the cases why greater detail on the impact of innovation was not provided; however, few student affairs professionals offered substantive insight on measuring the success of the innovation examples. For some innovations, the creation of the program itself was a marker of success. For others, particularly those related to the restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs, the staff believed it was “too early to tell if this new approach is serving students.”

**Summary**

The Student Affairs staff at Pomona College presented innovations that redefined the roles both students and staff played. These innovations also redesigned the structures within the Division to better serve the changing needs of Pomona students and best utilize financial and human resources. Finally, given the nascent stage of several innovations, the long-term impact of success of some Student Affairs innovations remains to be seen.
Cross-Case Analysis

While the innovations implemented on each campus vary, there are common patterns and themes across the three cases. Moreover, there are also places where the cases diverge. The themes across cases are examined through the following lenses: (a) patterns of adaptive and/or breakthrough innovation, (b) innovation trends in student programming, (c) shifting roles for student affairs staff and students, (d) strategies employed in moving innovations forward, (e) the path an innovation takes from initial idea to implementation, (f) the involvement and interaction of innovation collaborators, and (g) prime conditions for student affairs innovation.

Adaptive and Breakthrough Patterns

The three cases in this study are all of small, highly selective, residential, well-resourced colleges in the United States—Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College. Most of the innovations presented in this study were moderate departures of existing student affairs practice (i.e., adaptive innovations) and only a handful were new student affairs ventures (i.e., breakthrough innovations). Specifically, of the 50 innovations described across the cases, 45 were a modification to some aspect of student affairs already in existence on a particular campus, and five were breakthrough innovations, which were radical redesigns of student affairs practice. Each of the three cases offered at least one example of a breakthrough innovation, with the largest number of breakthrough innovations (3) provided by Pomona College (see Figure 3).

Trends in Student Programming Innovation

Twenty-nine of the 50 total innovations in this study were program innovations. Three of the five breakthrough innovations were also innovations in student
Figure 3. Breakdown of adaptive and breakthrough innovations from 2012 to 2017.

Even with the array of unique student programming innovations presented across three cases in this study, it seems that institutional innovations related to student programming sought to do one of following three things. First, some innovations harnessed students’ creativity and desire to build their own programs or launch their own ventures. Second, another set of innovations included educational programs designed to engage students on multiple levels, from novice to expert. Last, a cluster of innovations has students teach, train, facilitate, and/or lead other students.

**Student venture programs.** Several innovations in student programming across the three cases were examples of initiatives where students were given access to resources to pursue an idea, project, or initiative. For example, Gettysburg Recreational Adventure Board members in their senior year are given a free trip anywhere in the world as long as they design and plan the trip and recruit other paying students to attend.
This opportunity is seen as a reward for students who have helped to lead recreational trips during their time at Gettysburg. Also, at Gettysburg, students with entrepreneurial ideas are encouraged to apply for the Entrepreneurial Fellowship where they are matched with an innovation mentor and $10,000 to launch their idea. As part of the admissions process, Colorado College applicants are asked to design their own block session on any topic of their choice. Once admitted, students who want to follow through on the plan they put forth can do so with financial backing from the College through a grant program called Keller Venture Grants. Student mentors at Pomona receive funding to design all programming related to various ethnic-specific resource centers. These examples speak to students’ desire for playing a participatory role in shaping their own learning environment. Each of these innovations signal a trend in student programming where students are creators and participants, and institutions provide necessary resources (e.g., staffing, funding, mentoring) for execution.

**Levels and phases in programming.** Many of the innovations in this study provided students with the chance to participate in various phases or levels of an educational program. These institutions recognized that student programming is more effective if it takes into account the variability in students’ developmental stages and their needs and interests. Thus, these educational programs have tracks for emerging and advanced participants, and a subset placed more experienced students in the role of facilitator, leader, or coordinator of that same program.

The tiered educational programming framework has multiple benefits: (a) it harnesses the power of peer-to-peer interactions, (b) it allows new learning to build on prior learning if a student has attended the program before, and (c) it speaks to a wider
and more diverse audience, which consequently increases the program's value to the organization. Furthermore, highly structured and intensive training is given to the students who are selected to facilitate these programs to ensure they are prepared to lead their peers competently and with subject matter expertise. Hence, the student facilitators themselves gain valuable leadership skills from the additional training and the experience in training fellow students.

The SJI at Gettysburg College is an example of a phased program. Students apply to the program and are placed in the track best matched to their level of experience. This program benefits the student with no prior exposure to social justice work just as much as the student with a strong background on the topic. The SJI also benefits from select student leaders serving in a facilitation role for this program. Another example of an innovation in student programming that offers levels of participation is the ALI, which trains Colorado College students to serve as outdoor education leaders, thereby significantly building the capacity for and variety of the types of trips and activities that can be offered through the Office of Outdoor Education. ALI leader tracks (each with multiple levels of certification) are available for students to receive specialized training (at no cost to them) in backcountry travel, skiing, climbing, rafting, and/or kayaking. Certified ALI students lead all types of trips for students—from short hikes to weeklong programs.

**Programming scale and audience.** The innovations identified across the cases were a mix of programs geared specifically to students and innovations that were directed toward students along with staff and faculty. The student-only programming innovation ranged in scale from accommodating a small handful of students, like The Risk Project at
Colorado College, to programming for an entire incoming class, like the pre-orientation adventure trips at Pomona College.

On a much smaller scale, each case contained a single programming innovation that benefited students, faculty, and/or staff combined. For example, the Gettysburg Public Safety SARA Projects allow officers to identify any issue in need of improvement across campus and address that issue using the Scanning, Analyzing, Responding, and Assessing (SARA) method as a framework. Another example, on a lesser scale, are the Pomona College small dinners that benefit both the student leaders who attend and the administrators who serve as hosts.

A final observation on the student programming innovations presented in these cases is the large number of programs that are “opt-in.” Only two of the examples of student programming innovations required students to attend. Both of these “mandatory programs” were for newly admitted students as a part of their college orientation process.

Innovative roles and innovative structures. Each of the three cases contained innovations (40%) that affected the structure of the Student Affairs Division and the roles of individuals—either staff or students—in that structure. The structural innovations at Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College vary in terms of scope and complexity. Each structural innovation can be described as follows: (a) a complete restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs (Pomona), (b) a restructuring of individual units within the Student Life Division (Colorado), and (c) a modification of individual staff reporting lines in College Life (Gettysburg).

With regularity, structural innovations from the three cases (11 out of 12), also included changes in the roles of individuals—either the role of the student or the role of
the staff (see Tables 7 and 8 for specific examples of crossover structural and role innovation). However, some role innovations were not connected to structural innovations. For example, Colorado College’s ALI is an example of role innovation in which students are trained to serve as guides for outdoor adventure trips; however, this innovation, as described by the participants, did not involve any innovations in organizational structures within Student Life at Colorado College. Additionally, the Gettysburg Adopt-a-Hall initiative by Public Safety allows officers to play a positive, community-building role with students living in the residence halls, and this relationship does not modify the structure of the unit or College Life Division at Gettysburg.

**Student paraprofessionals.** An insight emerging from the innovations is the evolving role of the student in student affairs work. Although students have always played a role in assisting student affairs staff with design and even delivery of student support programs, the innovations presented in these three cases point to an increase in student scope of authority and an expansion of student responsibility for student affairs work. This evolution has resulted in situations where students are taking on roles that had been assumed by student affairs staff in the past, thus resulting in new category of staffing support—the student paraprofessional. For example, the CPS Peer Coordinators at Gettysburg outnumber the professional staff in the Center by 5 to 1.

**Strategies in Advancing Innovations**

The innovations in student affairs practice presented across three cases in this study all began with a desire to improve and enhance the support efforts offered to students at Pomona College, Colorado College, and Gettysburg College. This desire to elevate the work on behalf of students came from dozens of different sources; however,
Table 7

Examples of Student Role and Structure Innovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Innovation</th>
<th>Student Role Innovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gettysburg</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coordinator</td>
<td>Considered part of the staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>model for the Center for Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students as paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pomona</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Peer Mentors</td>
<td>Newest ethnic specific mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>program relied upon by college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>units to represent indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>student voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students as paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pomona</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train-the-Trainer</td>
<td>Formalized mechanism for scaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>up training support for growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mentoring programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students leaders will take on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>training duties previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provided by staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

Examples of Staff Role and Structure Innovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Innovation</th>
<th>Staff Role Innovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colorado</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Resource</td>
<td>Changes were made to the organizational structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Reorganization</td>
<td>of the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New approach prioritizes connecting to already</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>existing resources and programs and not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>duplicating efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pomona</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisional Reorganization</td>
<td>Changes were made to the organizational structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New positions were created; staff took on new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the most frequent driver of innovation across all three cases was the student affairs staff responding to the changing student demographic at each institution. One third of the innovation examples provided by student affairs staff at Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College were inspired by an evolving student profile that is more diverse than it has been in the past. This innovation driver is the only consistent theme across these institutions. This finding is explained by the fact that changing student
demographics was a criterion for site selection for this study; however, it is reassuring to note that student affairs divisions at institutions whose demographic profile has shifted are evolving their practice to align with students’ emerging needs.

Inherent in the notion of changing student demographics driving innovation is the assumption that student affairs staff have an understanding for the qualities and characteristics related to the institution’s student profile. A consistent finding across the cases was that each innovation began from creating a deep understanding of the nature of the students on each particular campus. This understanding was established by exploring national trends on the characteristics of college students and by building a deep understanding of the unique profile of the students attending each institution. The student affairs staff in this study used these two mechanisms for gathering student information to inspire innovations in their work.

As a complement to an empirical understanding of students from a macro perspective, direct student input, gathered both proactively and reactively, informed the innovations across this study. Each case offered examples of formal and informal mechanisms for staying current on what students need from the perspective of students themselves (see Table 9). Open forums, surveys, and evaluations were common approaches; however, the most effective mechanism, and likely the easiest to implement, was simply making an effort to informally interact with students. Several innovation examples in this study were born from casual conversations with students. A number of student affairs staff indicated they strategically locate the student affairs office in close proximity to areas with high student traffic to capitalize on informal encounters with a
variety of students. Collectively, this information was used across the cases as background to inspire innovation (see Figure 4).

For example, Student Life staff at Colorado College recognized that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were not participating in the co-curricular programs at the same rate as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. At the same time, the Student Life staff also knew the number of Pell eligible students at Colorado College was on the rise. These important pieces of information helped to seed the innovation that all co-curricular programs are free to all students.

Across the cases in this study, staff employed routine strategies for staying in touch with how the student profile is changing. At Gettysburg, the College Life staff meet annually with the Enrollment Management staff to discuss the characteristics of the incoming class. Several staff who participated in this study indicated they have attended workshops on the changing demographics of college students across the United States. Finally, at Gettysburg, one staff member is charged with staying up-to-date on the institution’s student profile for the purpose of providing key data points to certain units across the division.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Proactive</strong></th>
<th><strong>Reactive</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal</strong></td>
<td>Open forums to solicit student feedback</td>
<td>Responding to demands of student activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal</strong></td>
<td>Student gathering spaces in close proximity to staff offices</td>
<td>Providing staff support to an underserved student population in lieu of adding a new staff member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even with congruence in changing student demographics driving innovation across the three sites, the aspect of the changing demographic that drives student affairs innovation is case specific. For example, the ALI, The Attic, and Student Community Resources were all driven by changing demographics at each institution. In the first case, the ALI provides equal access to ordinarily expensive outdoor education certifications at no cost for all students. The Attic, by contrast, speaks to the increasing social nature of the student profile at Gettysburg College. In addition, the creation of Student Community Resources was driven by the layers and intersections of multiple identities represented across the Pomona College student profile.

**The Path From Idea to Implementation**

Across cases in this study, the innovations presented consistently began with a keen awareness of issues at hand, which was informed by student demographic data. Consequently, several innovations in this study were grounded by student demographic data and/or information on student needs. One surprising finding was the consistent lack...
of routine and/or substantive brainstorming across the cases in this study. Although consistently evident in all five breakthrough innovations, the majority of the adaptive innovations across the cases in this study did not indicate evidence of robust idea generation as part of the innovation process. Mostly, it seemed, student affairs staff members identified an idea worth pursuing early on in the innovation process, and that idea was launched without taking time to let a multitude of ideas emerge.

There was consistent piloting of programs across cases in this study; however, it is unclear if the student affairs staff leading such innovations intended to prototype, or if they were behaving in ways consistent with what is standard practice in student affairs in terms of seeking feedback and making necessary modifications. This tendency to enhance what is already available may be one explanation for the proliferation of adaptive innovations across this study. For example, the CPS dialogue groups is an innovation that is consistently evolving in response to feedback from student participants, yet the Director in charge of the program did not describe the innovation as one where prototyping or piloting was used in the implementation process.

Innovations that were implemented using the following four stages—observation/research of the issue, brainstorming, prototyping, and implementation—were of the breakthrough variety. Said another way, three of the five breakthrough innovations presented in this study followed these four innovation implementation stages. One explanation for this finding might be that the nature of the breakthrough innovations across this study were all initiatives that took considerable time to implement, therefore increasing the likelihood that there would be enough time to pursue each stage. Conversely, it is possible that the pace of student affairs work inhibits the full
undertaking of each stage for adaptive innovations. Additionally, when the intention of
the innovation is to change the organizational structure and the roles people play, the
evidence in these cases suggests the student affairs staff recognized the importance of
taking ample time to make sure the various stages are considered since the outcome
ultimately impacts people’s jobs. Given that the majority of the breakthrough innovations
in this study were modifications to the organizational structures and the roles of
individual staff, this notion might help explain why evidence of all stages were found in
these breakthrough innovations.

Continuing the discussion on innovations that employed multiple implementation
phases, another trend observed across the cases was that the innovations that involved
any unit or job restructuring showed evidence of using three of the four phases. For
example, the redesign of the Wellness Resource Center at Colorado College, the Office
of Multicultural Engagement restructuring at Gettysburg, and the creation of the
Associate Dean for Academic Success position at Pomona are all innovations that came
to life after developing an understanding of student needs and brainstorming solutions.

Innovations that involved any consultants and/or facilitators outside the institution
were those in which evidence was shared of all four phases of innovation
implementation. For example, the East Side Apartments innovation benefited from a
group of consultants who led multiple meetings with diverse stakeholders to explore
options for the new residential facility. Finally, innovations where there was a
considerably large lead time, such as the Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation
Initiative, showed evidence of all four phases of innovation implementation.
Who Is in the Driver’s Seat?

In terms of the actor(s) involved in the innovation implementation process, a few key themes emerged. Staff consistently drove innovations across all three cases—both as individuals within the context of their own portfolios and in groups of fellow student affairs staff. Although other campus stakeholders, such as faculty and trustees, were invaluable collaborators in the innovation process in some examples, this circumstance was not consistently found across each case. Relatedly, a key finding across each case was that breakthrough innovations were led by groups every time—whether they be cross-functional groups, divisional groups, or groups of students.

Furthermore, students seemed to have played an impactful role in the innovation process across cases. Students exclusively led two of the five breakthrough innovations in this study. Similarly, students led more than one quarter of all innovation examples in this study. Another key insight across cases was the frequency with which students led innovations driven by changing student demographics. This circumstance seems to suggest that student affairs staff at the three institutions in this study believe students may have the greatest insights in implementing innovations to support their own needs.

Prime Conditions for Student Affairs Innovation

There are key factors that contribute to creating an environment ripe for innovation within the student affairs divisions across these three cases. A strong understanding of the linkages and interactions between the different organizational units throughout the institutions and how those units collectively and holistically support the changing needs of students is important when innovating in each case. Further, the optimistic outlook maintained by the student affairs staff plays a powerful role in how
innovation practice is nurtured at Gettysburg, Colorado, and Pomona. Integrative thinking and embracing optimism are two important factors of the student affairs innovation story at each of these institutions.

**Integrated Approach to Student Affairs Practice**

Student affairs staff at each of the three sites spoke of the various ways they used an integrated approach when creating initiatives to enhance the student experience on their unique campuses. This approach to work required the staff to explore how different functions of the institution can work in concert with one another, which ultimately helped open doors to innovation. The staff maintained a clear focus on the entirety of the college and the interrelationship between each distinct organizational unit as they worked together to fulfill the mission of the institution. Various team members throughout the cases provided examples of their integrative thinking practice. One staff member referred to the integrated approach as “changing lenses.” Another staff member at a different site shared that it is a divisional expectation to respect the “layers of identities” a student brings to college.

One innovation example where the integrated approach is operationalized is the Student Life Committee at Gettysburg College. The Student Life Committee was designed to be an important part of the infrastructure and serves as a mechanism to ensure integration between students, faculty and staff. Ultimately, understanding the entire campus as an integrated system allows the student affairs staff across the three cases to see innovative approaches to supporting students who they might not have supported otherwise.
Favorable Attitude Toward Change

A favorable attitude toward change in general is an essential ingredient in innovation as it helps leaders to consider possibilities beyond the status quo. Optimism is pervasive in the student affairs divisions across these sites; in their own way, the leadership at each institution has cultivated a strong atmosphere of growth where staff are empowered to think creatively. Creating this climate in each case begins with the VP, each of whom are considered veterans in their chief student affairs officer roles (Gettysburg for 26 years, Colorado for 20 years, and Pomona for 11 years).

None of the VPs in this study came to student affairs work through what might be considered a traditional route. Two of the three VPs spent time as special assistants to college presidents prior to their work in student affairs. Two of the three VPs have served in faculty roles. The VPs in these cases provided examples where their background contributed to their general openness to change. For example, one VP mentioned that her experience working in a president’s office helped her understand from a macro level how the institution works, which in turn has facilitated a greater comfort for risk taking. Another VP shared that he had mentors throughout his career that taught him to look outside traditional higher education circles to inspire change within student affairs.

The favorable attitude toward change in general is modeled by the VPs at each of the three sites in this study and has a positive effect on the environments across all three sites. Consequently, the general feeling among the student affairs staff across the institutions is that change is welcome, which leads to greater possibilities for innovation. In each case, examples were provided where student affairs staff were encouraged to explore ideas for improvement no matter how seemingly unrealistic the idea might seem.
The Attic is one innovation example that illustrates this notion of an idea that could have easily been rejected, given the potential risk associated with having students operate a venue where the college provides alcohol for students 21 and older.

**Variation in Innovation Approaches**

One area where these cases diverged was the extent to which resource utilization drove innovation at one site, but not the other two. This finding is noteworthy in that resources have been theorized to be a vital condition for innovation. All three cases in this study are financially healthy institutions, and yet the institution with the largest endowment (Pomona) was the one case where resource utilization was frequently mentioned as a driver to innovate in student affairs. Perhaps the fact that the Pomona College innovations clustered around the divisional restructuring project helps to explain why resources were a consistent driver of innovation exclusively at this site.

For as much as the innovations across cases focused on changing student demographics as a driver of innovation, only one case provided examples of innovations driven by the intersectionality of student identities. The Student Affairs staff at Pomona College created innovations that speak to the intersectionality of students needs and identities while acknowledging the importance of the identity-specific resource centers across campus. One benefit of the Student Community Resources innovation is to have both an integrated institutional approach to serving students coupled with an intersectional approach to how the multiple layers of students’ identities and experiences are acknowledged when designing systems of support. Although other innovations across the three cases demonstrated integrated institutional collaborations, Student Community
Resources and the related restructuring of the Division of Student Affairs at Pomona were the only two innovations that pair these two important concepts within its design.

One case in particular had no innovations that were entirely student-led and no innovations that were entirely led by individual student affairs staff members working independently. In other words, all innovations at Colorado College were led by collective groups of student affairs staff in collaboration with either one another, faculty, or students. Furthermore, students played a fairly minor role in the Colorado College innovations when compared to the roles played at the other two institutions in this study. Students were highly influential to innovations throughout the Colorado case, yet the magnitude of their role was vastly smaller than the roles other students played at either Pomona or Gettysburg. One possible explanation for this finding is that the rapid pace of the Block Plan curriculum does not allow for student initiative or substantial student participation in what might be the time-consuming process of innovation.

**Summary**

The cases of Pomona College, Colorado College, and Gettysburg College demonstrate how student affairs leaders initiate, implement, and evaluate innovations to their student affairs practice to meet the needs of their changing student demographics. The individual- and cross-case analyses reveal patterns of adaptive and breakthrough innovations and certain trends in the types of innovations at work on these three campuses. The nature of innovations in this study centers on a singular set of issues and themes, and the themes vary from site to site. The link between innovations in the roles that students and staff play and the resultant innovations in organizational structures was also a noteworthy theme across all cases. In addition, student affairs staff have created
opportunities for student participation across a broad spectrum, even employing students as paraprofessionals as extensions of current divisional staffing models. Across all three cases, strategies for moving innovations forward included the use of design thinking and the process theory of innovation to launch innovations, with more evidence supporting both a greater use of observation and piloting across the board. The next chapter discusses the importance of the findings and explores the potential implications and applications of this research.
CHAPTER 8 – DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The topic of innovation is a frequent headline in the field of higher education. Although there are some occasions where institutions are lauded for using innovation to creatively problem solve, more commonly institutions are critiqued for lacking innovation (Christensen, 2016; The Spellings Commission, 2006; Sweeney, 2015). One key driver behind this recent call for innovation is the changing student demographics. Although a universal profile does not exist for the emerging student demographics, these individuals are likely to be different from today’s students in race/ethnicity, age, wealth, and use of technology.

Many believe the future viability of the U.S. higher education system is contingent upon college leaders understanding the changing demographics and acting in ways that will best serve the needs of these diverse students. As a field, student affairs has an important and active role in educating students and can lead the way in creating innovative approaches to meet changing student needs. Moreover, student affairs professionals who innovate will proactively position themselves to be responsive to the needs of the emerging student population.

This qualitative study, drawing on three cases studies of small, private universities recognized as innovative, first sought to understand the types of innovations student affairs divisions have made at institutions that have experienced a change in their student profile. Second, the study examined the mix of innovations within a student affairs division in terms of what innovations might be categorized as adaptive and what innovations might be categorized as breakthrough to understand the patterns of innovation across units and various levels of the division. Third, it focused on the
processes or mechanisms that were used to innovate and who was involved, which
required an examination of innovation drivers and processes through which innovations
were implemented. Finally, it explored the impact the innovation had on the overall
student experience.

The Variety of Innovation

Even though each case provided examples of breakthrough and adaptive
innovations, none of the three institutions indicated it had an intentional student affairs
strategy for innovation. For all the talk in the student affairs profession about the
importance of being strategic and “working smarter, not harder,” the absence of an
intentional innovation strategy beyond “respond to students” was somewhat surprising.
At the same time, this circumstance might be explained by the fact that participants in
this study were more reluctant innovators—they think of their efforts as continuous
improvement more than innovation or simply just doing their work.

When student affairs professionals wanted to modernize tried-and-true programs
and/or practices to meet the needs of their students, adaptive innovations were the result.
Similarly, when they sought completely new approaches to student affairs work,
breakthrough innovations were the result. The findings in this study suggest that adaptive
innovations in student affairs require less time and fewer implementation steps than do
breakthrough innovations. Therefore, when considering innovation, timeframe and
process are key factors to consider. For reliable programs or services that need updating
(i.e., adaptive innovations), student affairs professionals can implement the updates as
long as they have a solid understanding of students’ needs. On the contrary, for complete
redesigns of student affairs practice (i.e., breakthrough innovations), leaders might
benefit from moving through each innovation implementation stage. This finding deviates from an early assumption that student affairs units that were responding to changing student demographics were building new programs and processes to support student success. In other words, the ratio of breakthrough to adaptive innovations was expected to be more balanced than ultimately was the case.

Consistent with research on innovation (e.g., Kanter, 2008; Smith et al., 2016), the innovations in this study were mostly of the adaptive type, meaning they came about through a process of continuous improvement as a way to reimagine what already exists. There is tremendous value in innovations of this scale because they are a way to enhance already existing efforts worth sustaining. Given that adaptive innovations typically do not require as much time or as many resources as breakthrough innovations, they also are an efficient and manageable way to ensure student affairs work is relevant for the student population. The findings demonstrate a disconnect between the idea of innovation and the work of innovation. Most discussion of innovation is about the new and novel—the breakthrough variety (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Christensen, 2016; Kanter, 2008). However, the reality is that the majority of innovations are improvements to existing activities. This might explain why so many participants in this study initially balked at using the term innovation when discussing the evolving student affairs practice in their divisions. This fanfare for the importance of breakthrough innovations should not be done at the expense of appreciating the benefit of adaptive innovations. Both are necessary in organizations and certainly in student affairs work.

Much like the relationship between organizational change and innovation, innovation and continuous improvement are also tandem concepts that play out in the
findings of this study. The 45 adaptive innovations paint a picture of the many ways student affairs educators have ensured that initiatives stay current in meeting students’ changing needs through continuous improvement of programs. This is innovation, albeit not as groundbreaking or sexy. On the other hand, the five breakthrough innovations were not modifications of already existing programs, but were entirely new initiatives (see Figure 5).

Another insight related to adaptive innovations is how much variety exists when considering the 45 examples in this study. In other words, the spectrum of adaptation is wide when it comes to different ways in which student affairs educators modify or improve their work to align with students’ changing needs. This notion raises the question of whether or not there would be value in thinking of adaptive and breakthrough innovations along a continuum rather than as two distinct subdivisions of innovation.

The distribution of adaptive and breakthrough innovations in this study align with the innovation strategy offered to organizations by Kanter (2008). Kanter’s research claims that an organization’s innovation strategy can be described as a pyramid with the most innovations being of the incremental or “quick win” variety and the fewest innovations being “big bets” (see Figure 6). Consistent with Kanter’s findings, most of the student affairs innovations in this study were moderate departures of existing student affairs practice (i.e., adaptive innovations), and only a handful were new student affairs ventures (i.e., breakthrough innovations).

Despite the alignment of the distribution of adaptive and breakthrough innovations in this study to the distribution of Kanter’s (2008) quick win and big bet innovations, the findings in this study deviate from Kanter’s research in that she suggests
the pyramid reflects an organization’s strategy toward innovation. None of the cases in this study presented evidence of an intentional innovation strategy within the student affairs division. Further, Kanter’s strategy describes a classification of innovation—the “promising not proven” innovation—that was not referred to by participants in this study. Given the amorphous nature of the promising not proven innovations as described by Kanter, it is likely that the nature of the research questions in this study focused
participant responses on innovations already realized versus those still under consideration.

The Complexity of Innovation Drivers

These findings show that the drivers of innovation are multiple, even if people initially describe a single innovation. Participants indicated what they believed to be deductive innovation drivers, followed by narrative that included evidence for additional emergent driver(s) of innovation. For example, although the changing student demographic drove the creation of the Student Community Resources innovation at Pomona College, this innovation was also driven by constraints around serving so many intersecting student identities. It is important to acknowledge the likely presence of both deductive and emergent drivers of an innovation to explore all that might influence the decision to innovate. Rather than asking to recognize a single driver of innovation, a more useful approach is to understand that innovations are often driven by a set of factors. Moreover, acknowledging the complexity of innovation drivers helps to create a better understanding of the true rationale behind the innovations.

New Opportunities in Student Affairs Practice

The 45 student affairs innovations analyzed in this study reveal insights into new opportunities for the field of student affairs that can serve as a compass rather than a roadmap. The findings of this study speak to ways in which innovation impacts student affairs practice—specifically, a contemporary approach to student buy-in and a commitment to routinely evolving student programming.

Student buy-in 2.0. The innovations in this study suggest a new way for student affairs professionals to think about student buy-in. Many a student affairs staff member
has toiled over ways to garner student participation for programs and/or support services. The insights from the data in this study suggest that when students build programs, their fellow students tend to come. When student affairs professionals allow students leaders to design and deliver student affairs programs, the programs are more relevant and better attended.

**Routine evolution of student programs.** The student affairs staff at the three institutions in this study articulated a strong commitment to and strategy for continuous improvement. The priority placed on ensuring quality and relevance in their student affairs practice is admirable as it served as a springboard for innovation. Many of the innovations were tweaks or modifications to student programs that were already successful. Still, the staff and students sought to examine how they could make things better. What evolved from this pursuit of excellence was an innovation in delivering student programming. This approach allows student affairs staff to address a full range of diverse student needs in one program by establishing phases or tracks of curriculum. Although it might be true that some student needs are universal and timeless, the way in which student affairs professionals support those needs requires routine examination. What is emerging from this research is that continuous improvement that inspires innovation is one strategy for student affairs professionals to ensure their work is relevant to the emerging student demographic.

**Empowering Innovation**

The findings showed that innovation does not simply happen, but that they are the work of key individuals acting in certain ways and taking advantage of key
environmental factors. Whether or not a student affairs division is well positioned for innovation is dependent upon a variety of interrelated factors.

**Vice President of Student Affairs: The Innovation Promoter.** Chief among these contributing factors is the behavior of the VPs who set the tone for innovation in their unit through the messages they send their staff about risk and experimentation. Vice presidents who value experimentation by expecting their staff to explore possibilities and challenge traditional approaches to the work are giving their staff permission to innovate. In addition, VPs who support risk taking also communicate to their staff that they recognize failure is a natural part of the innovation process. It is not enough for VPs to infer their support for experimentation and risk-taking. Greater value comes from overt expressions of support for these behaviors, and even more power is gleaned when VPs model these behaviors themselves. For example, the student affairs staff at Gettysburg College indicated the VP is transparent with her staff when she pursues solutions that are exploratory or unproven. The VP at Colorado College has created a culture where staff are comfortable pitching ideas to him no matter how outlandish, as long as the idea is well-researched. Furthermore, VPs who give their staff the autonomy to act independently in combination with these other factors will position the student affairs staff favorably for innovation (see Figure 7).

**Student Affairs Staff: The Innovators.** Innovation is a team sport. The student affairs staff in this study demonstrated an observance of the world around them—both in terms of the larger higher education landscape and the individual institutional setting. Being observant in this way inspired a curiosity to learn about their student profile and what their students need. This pursuit created empathy for the student experience, which
Figure 7. Enabling innovative practice by student affairs vice presidents.

led to questions about how particular programs or services might be enhanced—or, how something entirely new might improve student affairs practice? Risk-taking and experimentation played a role as the student affairs staff explored various options for answering the question posed. The findings in this study suggest innovation is not dependent upon participation of individuals with particular titles or positions within the institution. It is dependent, however, upon participation of individuals, across the division and maybe the institution, who interact with the student in different ways. When groups of people with different viewpoints come together, they create innovations that could not have been created by student affairs individuals working alone.

Additionally, the findings suggest that all innovations in student affairs were connected to formal leadership roles except on the few occasions when students were the sole innovators. Moreover, staff consistently drove innovations in groups of fellow
student affairs staff. This finding is consistent with past research on the value of networks as a powerful tool for innovators (Kezar, 2012). Cross-functional groups also led innovations across the cases in this study. This finding is consistent with Kanter’s (2008) findings that explained that innovations that cut across “established organizational channels” (p. 6) have the greater possibility of success.

**Students: The Innovator’s Apprentice.** Students played an impactful role in the innovation process across the cases in this study. It is likely that students bring the greatest insights to implementing innovations in order to support their own needs. When it comes to innovation in student affairs practice, the findings of this study suggest an increase in student scope of authority and an expansion of student responsibility for student affairs work. Students at the three institutions in this study are trusted partners in the innovation process, albeit with highly structured training and intentional mechanisms of support to ensure quality and shield students from unnecessary risk.

**Specialists: The Innovation Catalysts.** Some innovations in this study were influenced by stakeholders outside the institution who played a role in how the innovation came to be. One institution used the professional services of a consulting firm, which freed up the student affairs staff to participate in the design process alongside faculty and students. Faculty and/or staff at the institution who are tasked with staffing an innovation center and/or a campus-wide innovation initiative cultivated several innovations alongside student affairs staff. Finally, an alumnus who had expertise in design thinking assisted a student affairs staff member when he explored various options for a particular innovation. Each of these examples underscore the value of identifying a
network of innovation experts who might assist student affairs staff in their desire to use innovation in their work.

**Physical Space: The Innovation Habitat.** Space was a catalyst for innovation at the institutions in this study. Many participants shared how the physical space around them played a role in their innovation process. Proximity was one of the ways that space supported innovation. Intentionally locating student affairs offices near student spaces helped to facilitate informal interactions. These informal interactions between students and student affairs staff built awareness, which increased the staff’s level of understanding of students and their needs. Similarly, student affairs staff mentioned how locating office units in unlikely groupings within the division also encouraged networking, which broke down silos and opened doors to collaboration. Student affairs staff also mentioned how they used casual and/or unplanned interactions with students and other campus stakeholders as opportunities to vet ideas or seek input. Each of these factors should be considered when thinking about how space can be a catalyst for student affairs innovation.

The three institutions represented in this study have prioritized innovation college-wide. One campus built an innovation center, and the other two have initiatives that sponsor events and provide tools and resources for faculty, staff, and students to cultivate their practice of innovation. Student affairs staff used the tools offered through these initiatives; however, few mentioned they took advantage of the $25,000,000 Innovation Center on the Pomona College campus. The key takeaway from this study relative to spaces for innovation is that student affairs staff need not rely on structured innovation labs or centers to inspire or nurture innovation. What is important to
innovation is for student affairs staff to take time to identify spaces that boost creativity without the distractions of the day-to-day routine.

Nascent versions of several innovations in this study grew roots from a retreat experience. One innovation itself is a creativity and trust building retreat for senior student affairs staff. When it comes to putting student affairs staff in the space to innovate, retreats are a powerful and useful tool. Retreats allow participants to gain new perspectives, to regroup, and to find inspiration. Several student affairs staff mentioned how changing the environment helped them and/or students to be in the frame of mind to consider new possibilities in ways that were not possible otherwise.

Findings in the Context of Existing Literature

The findings from this study are congruent with the existing multidisciplinary literature on innovation. This study also revealed areas where innovation in student affairs practice deviates from prior research in fields outside of higher education. The findings also add to the scant research on innovation in the field of student affairs. Given the link between creativity and innovation (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010; Scott & Bruce, 1994), initiatives that cultivate the creative process among student affairs staff are likely to contribute positively toward the establishment of routine innovative practice. Another unique distinction relative to the plethora of programming innovations presented in this study was the pair of professional development innovations designed for Student Life staff at Colorado College. The We Could be Heroes Retreat for senior Student Life staff has resulted in enhancing the creativity and trust within the team.
Innovators need not be at the top of the organization. The findings suggest student affairs staff operating within the scope of their job functions led innovations in student affairs. Given the competing roles that student affairs professionals play, it is reassuring to know that the staff in this study have prioritized innovation in their work regardless of the positions they hold in the division. The vice presidents in this study were all well versed on the range of innovations happening within their divisions, yet the VPs did not play a leadership role in the direct creation and implementation of most of the innovations, although they were important to creating a supportive context.

The findings in this study suggest a connection between student affairs innovation and a changing student demographic. For student demographics to drive innovation, student affairs staff must maintain a keen understanding of the qualities and characteristics that make up the institution’s student profile. Brown’s (2008) design thinking techniques offer one way to understand the importance of knowing as much as possible about the students for whom you are innovating. Design thinking techniques allow the innovator to gain a deep understanding of the students’ needs from the students’ own perspectives, which Brown (2008) describes as building empathy (see Figure 8).

Even without acknowledging the elements of design thinking, many innovative student affairs professionals used these processes implicitly. Therefore, a more intentional use of design thinking techniques may offer student affairs staff a more useful method for innovation by replacing any assumptions they may have about what students need with a better understanding of the overall student experience. With this concept in mind, a consistent finding across the cases was that each innovation began from creating empathy for the student. This empathy was established by exploring national trends on
the characteristics of college students and by building a deep understanding of the unique profile of the students attending their own institutions. The student affairs staff in this study used these two mechanisms for gathering student information to inspire innovations in their work.

To make sense of the data on the process by which an innovation came to be, two frameworks were considered in tandem: (a) process theories on innovation, and (b) design thinking techniques. Process theory research on innovation can be useful in understanding the processes of the innovations presented across this study. According to Wolfe (1994), various stage models of organizational innovativeness have been proposed with little variation and generally indicate the pathway of any innovation from initial idea spark to full implementation includes some version of the four phases provided in Figure 8. When Brown’s (2008) design thinking techniques are considered alongside the stages of innovation implementation, the journey of the innovations presented in this study can be explored (see Figure 9).
There is wide agreement on the innovation implementation phases among the handful of process theory of innovation models that exist (Wolfe, 1994), and those four phases are represented in Figure 8. The one area where the many models differ is that some indicate a linear and straightforward path between the phases, and other models describe the innovation implementation process as more scattered and iterative (Wolfe, 1994). The findings in this study suggest that the innovations in this study began by identifying a problem to be solved, which was informed by data on student demographics and needs. As a result, the innovations in this study were each grounded by reliable background information on student needs and showed evidence of the design thinking technique: creating empathy.

The student affairs innovation data indicate that three of the five breakthrough innovations followed Wolfe’s (1994) four stages of innovation implementation presented
in Figure 9. Conversely, although some adaptive innovations followed Wolfe’s four stages, most did not. The adaptive innovations in this study most often dabbled in one or two of Wolfe’s stages, rather than follow a stringent prescription. This finding is surprising given that the innovation research in the management field indicates that adaptive innovations tend to follow this linear order and that innovations more complex in nature tend to skip around the different phases (Wolfe, 1994). The student affairs innovations in this study show the opposite outcome from innovations outside the field of higher education. The adaptive innovations in student affairs are those in which stages are skipped, and the breakthrough innovations in student affairs are those where evidence of each stage was found. This might be explained by the time-intensive nature of student affairs breakthrough innovations allowing the proper time for full consideration of Wolfe’s four stages. By the same measure, the expectation for rapid delivery of adaptive innovations might prohibit a full undertaking of all four stages. Further, since the breakthrough innovations were modifications to organizational structures and individuals’ roles, this finding suggests that staff recognized the importance of taking ample time to make sure the various stages are considered, since the outcome ultimately impact’s people’s jobs.

The design thinking process emphasizes the need for prototyping as a mechanism for gauging the innovation’s effectiveness early on, so that any tweaks or changes can be made before an innovation gets too far down the road. Although prototyping is more commonly used in the product design world, Morris and Setser (2015) indicate that prototyping in the field of higher education looks more like idea testing through pilot programs or gathering widespread feedback across the organization. With this in mind,
there was evidence of prototyping throughout this study. The motivation behind this continuous improvement was not clear.

The findings in this study suggest there are environmental factors that influence innovation within divisions of student affairs. One such factor is an individual’s positive attitude toward change. Leaders who maintain a positive attitude toward change are better innovators because they are open to continuous improvement (Schein, 1988). The competing values framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2006) is one model that explains the relationship between organizational behaviors and innovation. According to Cameron and Quinn (2006), leaders who have a deep understanding of their environment and the freedom to experiment in that environment are best positioned for innovation. The behaviors exhibited by the student affairs staff in this study are aligned with behaviors described by Cameron and Quinn as positive for innovation. Specifically, the staff consistently demonstrated a positive attitude toward change and articulated a freedom to experiment. The VPs also modeled experimentation and risk-taking. Together, the cumulative impact of these facilitating strategies, along with the behaviors of the staff and the VPs, led to greater possibilities for innovation. This may or may not create an institutional or divisional culture of innovation as a cultural assessment was beyond the scope of this study.

Schein’s (1988) theory on organizational behaviors that favor innovation supports not only theories offered by Cameron and Quinn (2006), but also the findings of this study. Schein (1988) says, “Innovation capacity will increase to the extent that members assume that innovation is possible and necessary, which derives from their optimistic assumption that the environment can be influenced” (p. 19). Another way to describe this
phenomenon is the student affairs staff at each of the sites in this study maintain a mindset described as design attitude (Boland & Collopy, 2004). When individuals view projects as opportunities for invention and subsequently are open to the possibility of change, they are demonstrating a design attitude (Boland & Collopy, 2004).

**Discussion Summary**

Using a multisite case study approach, this study aimed to shed light on how small, private, liberal arts institutions with changing student demographics use innovation to evolve their student affairs practice. The emerging student demographics require student affairs professionals to assess how they do their work to insure it is relevant to students’ needs. Consequently, the findings from this study provide key insights for leaders in the field of student affairs across various institution types, with particular value for those leaders at small, private, liberal arts institutions. The findings from this study provide the following conclusions: (a) an ethos of listening, trying, and evolving is critical for ensuring relevant student support programs and services; (b) innovation is enhanced by an environment that supports experimentation and risk-taking; (c) stakeholder partnerships are critical for advancing innovation efforts; (d) space for innovation and creativity matters; and (e) innovation opens doors to new approaches to student affairs practice.

**Implications**

The findings of this study have 15 relevant implications for vice presidents of student affairs and other leaders within student affairs divisions. Given that this study suggests that vice presidents of student affairs play an influential role in creating
conditions optimum for innovation within student affairs, the implications are divided by divisional role.

**Recommendations for Innovation Promoters**

Innovation within student affairs divisions requires leadership from vice presidents of student affairs. The nine suggestions outlined next will position VPs who want to create an environment supportive of routine innovation within their student affairs divisions with a strategy for meeting the changing needs of the emerging student demographics.

**Give yourselves credit for innovating.** Despite the reluctance by VPs to use the term innovation, the student affairs staff in this study expressed no difficulty providing examples of initiatives designed to meet the needs of changing student demographics. Innovation happens, and it happens in a variety of ways throughout student affairs work. Given the fact that innovation as a concept is only recently making its way into conversations about student affairs practice, it is not surprising that leaders were unsure, hesitant, or even altogether resistant to the term. Moreover, the lack of a useful and accepted definition of innovation within student affairs seems to minimize good and meaningful work. For innovation to become a routine competency in student affairs practice, leaders in the field must begin by acknowledging that innovation is happening within their organizations. The reluctance to embrace the innovation term is an impediment to innovation’s usefulness in the field. They are shortchanging themselves and their colleagues. Given the public criticisms of higher education not being innovative enough, claiming credit for work well done benefits not only student affairs leaders, but also their institutions.
Recognize and reward innovation from staff. Encouraging innovation is essential for VPs who aspire to have staff routinely innovate. Perhaps even more important than encouraging innovation is recognizing the innovation efforts of student affairs staff regardless of the outcome. In other words, VPs who encourage experimentation and risk-taking, but who bristle when innovations fail, are indirectly signaling to staff that innovation is not truly valued. The VPs in this study not only recognized and rewarded staff innovation efforts, they expected the student affairs professionals on their team to pitch ideas or propose new ventures as a standard business practice. Vice presidents interested in building a pro-innovation environment may also consider engaging in a discussion with their staff on ideas for incentivizing innovation as part of their student affairs practice.

Be intentional with innovation. As with most things, a greater understanding of a process leads to greater intentionality. The innovation process is well studied in management and other fields (Argyris, 1964; Drucker, 1985; Dunne & Martin, 2006; Kanter, 2008, Schein, 1988); however, less is known about how innovations come about in the higher education setting. Within the field of student affairs, only recently has research emerged on the innovation process. It is clear that, as the innovations in this study were implemented, some evidence of the stages of an innovation process were found. What is not clear, however, is whether the student affairs leaders were intentional in their application of the innovation process.

Lack of awareness of the innovation process has implications for an innovation’s usefulness. Student affairs leaders, who are aware of the process of innovation, can be intentional about how to use it in their work. Some innovations in student affairs practice
described in this study resulted from intermittent application of the innovation process, while others were performed more systematically with an emphasis on engaging in all parts of the innovation process. The findings in this study suggest that either approach resulted in innovations, albeit of different types. Intermittent application of the innovation process was the approach for adaptive innovations, and systematic application of the innovation process was the approach for breakthrough innovations. Therefore, the extent to which a student affairs leader understands the innovation process, the more they are able to design an intentional strategy for innovation.

**Create divisional capacity for innovation.** The findings of this study point to key factors that positively influenced student affairs divisions’ capacity for innovation. Vice presidents interested in creating an environment that supports innovative practice would benefit from creating conditions that might enhance innovation. Identifying the aspects of the environment that accelerate innovation is useful to VPs as it allows them to continue to cultivate these factors and perhaps even make it a priority to strengthen them. Additionally, this exercise may also reveal features of the organizational environment that need further attention to maximize the divisional capacity for innovation.

Innovation in student affairs practice at the three institutions in this study were enhanced by certain organizational conditions. Specifically, the conditions that accelerated innovations coalesced around these themes: (a) mechanisms for understanding the institution’s student profile and corresponding needs for support, (b) an environment that supports experimentation and risk-taking, (c) resources for staff (particularly new hires) to explore new ideas, (d) actively seeking students to drive programs, and (e) making traditional institutional boundaries more permeable. Using
these themes as a guide, VPs may choose to reflect on these themes as a way to determine which conditions are currently present and which might need to be developed.

**Time, not money, is what matters.** The capacity to innovate in student affairs at the three institutions in this study was impacted by the availability of certain resources, and not necessarily financial. Contrary to most assumptions, 60% of the innovations were no cost or revenue neutral. This is important to emphasize given that Pomona College, Colorado College, and Gettysburg College are all highly resourced institutions.

The resources that did influence the capacity for innovation were access to expertise and time. Each case in this study has access to innovation experts who either consulted, facilitated, or provided guidance for innovation initiatives in the student affairs division. On a number of occasions, the student affairs staff used innovation experts as sounding boards or even collaborators for particular ideas. In the one case where an innovation lab was recently erected, the lab played an insignificant role in bringing about student affairs innovations. This finding is somewhat reassuring for the many student affairs leaders who do not have an innovation lab on their campus. In general, innovation experts can be identified within the local community, among the faculty, or even from alumni. Time was also an important influence in the capacity to innovate. Given the quick pace of student affairs work, providing time for leaders to innovate was seen as an important factor in the innovation process.

**Have patience.** Innovation takes time, and yet, too often, the expectations of student affairs work is that things will happen quickly. Of the 50 stories of innovation told in this study, not once did a participant indicate they felt rushed to produce an idea or solution. Even when external forces placed constraints on the staff, they still took the
time they needed to cultivate the innovation. The VPs at the three sites in this study showed patience in allowing the creative process to unfold, and by doing so, they were instrumental in allowing the staff the time they needed to innovate. Being patient is not only about allowing people enough time to innovate. Patience is also intertwined with risk-taking and experimentation because the process of innovation often results in repeat attempts and multiple versions before the best approach is selected. As risks and experiments are playing out, VPs may be reassured by reminding themselves that patience also means tolerating the various iterations an idea may take before it is finalized.

**Seek out tools and resources.** The VPs in this study connected their staff to resources that catalyzed innovation in different ways. One VP worked with creative writing faculty to design a retreat for his senior staff that drew upon techniques used in writer’s workshops. Another VP connected several different groups of her staff to a design thinking expert. The third VP facilitated a yearlong redesign exercise using techniques like organizational clustering and workflow mapping. All three VPs considered retreats as a vehicle for engaging the staff in ways that inspired new approaches to student affairs practice. Exposing student affairs staff to innovation tools helps to demystify the innovation process itself and reveal the usefulness of innovation as another tool available to them as they do their work.

Some student affairs staff have become innovation literate—either out of their own interest or because they do not have a traditional student affairs background. Student affairs staff who have developed a certain mastery in innovation are of high value to a student affairs division. These leaders may be a prime resource for their campus
colleagues. The innovation skill set brings such value to the student affairs division that VPs may want to seek out this competency when hiring new staff.

**Commit to improvement, as it is more useful than strategy.** Innovation is one tool to help student affairs professionals ensure the work they do in support of students’ growth and development is relevant to their changing needs. Contrary to innovation research outside of higher education where a strategy for innovation is recommended (Kanter, 2008), the institutions in this study introduced innovations despite the lack of a divisional innovation strategy. The lack of an innovation strategy does not mean the VPs were unintentional in their approach to meet changing student demographics. The findings also point to the VPs’ commitment to continuous improvement in serving students, which is passed down to the staff to act on. With these findings in mind, VPs who want to incorporate innovation into their divisional student affairs practice might profit from a plan for continuous improvement as one way to make certain the work done throughout the division is relevant to changing student demographics.

A commitment to continuous improvement signals an intentionality to incorporating innovation into the regular student affairs practice and keeps innovation a divisional priority in decision-making and resource allocation. Given the insights from this study on the reluctance to use the term innovation to describe student affairs work, a continuous improvement plan establishes a level of legitimacy that may be needed to prioritize innovation division-wide. Finally, VPs who inspire continuous improvement within their division are likely to indirectly build habits among the student affairs staff for new ways to approach student affairs practice.
Look beyond programs. The findings of this study suggest that innovations in student programs and in organizational roles and structures were most frequently created to respond to changing student demographics. Therefore, when considering innovation, VPs may do well to work in collaboration with their staff to assess how the processes, programs, and structures within student affairs might benefit from innovation. As this process is conducted, it is important to keep in mind that not all innovations in this study were designed for a student audience. In other words, as student affairs staff are considering how to use innovation to maintain relevance in serving the changing needs of students, they would also benefit from considering how to use innovation to ensure student affairs staff are positioned to support student success. Keeping in mind the findings of this study, a particular emphasis should be given to divisional roles and structures when establishing a strategy for innovation, as the structure is one of the most compelling ways to position the division for innovative practice.

Recommendations for the Innovators

As the findings of this study indicate, the student affairs professionals led nearly all of the 50 innovations presented. Consequently, student affairs staff play an important role in using innovation to ensure the programs and services offered are responsive to a widening spectrum of students. The following four suggestions will assist student affairs professionals in their pursuits to build innovation into their student affairs practice.

Recast the students’ role. As student affairs professionals strategize to meet the ever-widening spectrum of students’ needs, this research suggests that student affairs professionals will likely have to rely on students to lead student support initiatives. This insight has the potential to change the nature of student affairs work, shifting students
from primary consumers of student affairs initiatives to students as creators and consumers of the services and programs provided. Although students have always played a role in assisting student affairs staff with design and even delivery of student support programs, this research points to an increase in student scope of authority and an expansion of student responsibility for student affairs work. This evolution has resulted in situations where students are taking on roles that student affairs staff assumed in the past.

One example that best illustrates this shift is Student Organization Consulting at Gettysburg College. Student Consultants in the Garthwait Leadership Center essentially run their own organizational consulting business by providing services to their fellow student leaders with the oversight of student affairs staff. By recasting the role that students play, the staff at Gettysburg address multiple issues simultaneously: (a) they more effectively address group dynamics issues of campus clubs than they could do themselves, (b) they provide advanced leadership opportunities for students who qualify, (c) they increase overall reach and subsequent capacity of the Garthwait Leadership Center, and (d) they allow student affairs staff to focus on other strategic initiatives.

This shift has both philosophical and practical implications. As student affairs staff rely more on students to take on duties previously performed by professional staff, it is important to be cognizant of the impact the work may have on students’ academic success. Another consideration is the balance between student as volunteer and student as employee. In traditional student affairs settings, student volunteers regularly assist with programs in all manner of roles, which has its benefits. Alongside this approach, however, may be a call to explore ways to engage students as paraprofessionals. This research suggests that students in a paraprofessional role are compensated and are given
greater latitude in planning, decision-making, and program design. Moreover, these findings also propose that adequate training, accountability, and staff oversight are essential when it comes to students leading student affairs programs and initiatives.

**Build a network.** The findings of this study suggest that many of the student affairs staff maintained a clear focus on the entirety of the college and the interrelationship between each distinct organizational unit as they worked together with colleagues across campus to fulfill the mission of their institution. Student affairs staff interested in building a network to prime the pump for innovation should challenge themselves to look for how their work can be integrated and interconnected with other work across campus. In other words, if student affairs professionals expect to serve students holistically, they cannot expect to do their work in a compartmentalized fashion. Therefore, when student affairs staff want to use innovation to address the wide spectrum of students’ needs, it is vital to consider the multiple facets of students’ needs and also to collaborate with the various units across campus. The needs of the changing student demographic are complex, and innovation is one approach student affairs professionals can use when designing student support services.

Innovations that are redesigns to student affairs practice—the scarce breakthrough innovations—all were influenced by cross-functional groups. These groups varied from different units within divisions of student affairs, different units across campus, or student affairs staff and students. The mixture and interplay of diverse voices brought about new possibilities for meeting the changing needs of students. Adaptive innovations in this study were also influenced by cross-functional groups; however, the diversity was limited to only viewpoints within the divisions of student affairs. In these cases, a variety in
perspectives led to new ways of thinking. This finding indicates that as student affairs staff consider building a practice of innovation, they would benefit from involving more stakeholders outside of the profession to enrich the conversation.

**Establish mechanisms for staying current.** The innovations in this study were primarily driven by the student affairs staff’s desire to meet the needs of the changing student demographic. To assure the innovations were relevant to the students for whom they were designed, this research suggests the student affairs staff employed intentional mechanisms for understanding the qualities and characteristics of the institution’s student profile and for gathering input on what students need. Although the particular student demographic and student feedback mechanisms used by participants in this study may not apply to other institutional contexts, what is valuable is forming some type of framework for staying current.

What is refreshing to discover is that the student affairs staff at the three institutions in this study are listening to what students have to say and are responding in kind. The synergy between staff and students matters, and it matters a great deal. For example, the innovations in this study were enhanced by student input and feedback. As student affairs leaders experience more frequent and regular changes in the profile of students attending their institutions, identifying ways in which students can play a central role in the innovation process will enhance the innovation’s impact.

Student affairs professionals who want to create mechanisms for understanding students and their experiences might begin exploring ways for staying ahead of changing student demographics. This research suggests that certain partnerships are very useful to student affairs professionals in this regard—particularly with those staff who work in the
enrollment management unit on campus, as they are important collaborators for keeping the pulse of the changing student profile. To be useful for innovation, the mechanisms should include strategies for learning about the current student profile, as well as gathering and analyzing student input and/or feedback. As student affairs staff come to understand the profile of the students on their campus, it is also important to recognize the diversity that certainly exists within the group; therefore, analyzing the student data in terms of similarities and differences is key to understanding. This research also suggests that informal mechanisms for learning who students are and what they need (e.g., staff offices in close proximity to student gathering spaces) may be as important as the formal mechanisms (e.g., student surveys). Finally, when gathering student input, the findings indicate how important it is to be discerning and not simply take student requests on face value. The participants in this study synthesized student information and feedback using their own professional expertise to distill what was most useful. In the end, having deep knowledge of the student demographic and their corresponding needs helps student affairs professionals to build support programs that are customized for the unique student profile of a particular institution.

Commit to an innovation process. For innovation to be used as a consistent tool in evolving student affairs practice, student affairs staff need to adopt a process for innovating. Drawing from the findings of this study, a possible innovation process is suggested in Figure 9. The sample innovation process is intentionally nonlinear as this research suggests there are times when all stages of a process are important to execute in succession and other times when it is not. Specifically, for occasions where a fundamental rethinking or redesign is needed (i.e., breakthrough innovation), the findings
suggest each step in the process should be followed. Conversely, for adaptations of current programs, it may not be necessary to follow each step. The one aspect of the process that is vital to the innovation process (labeled green in Figure 10) is establishing an understanding of the student profile.

**Some types of assessment are more valuable than others.** Although it may be difficult to do, student affairs educators interested in innovating in response to changing student demographics need not worry about assessing the impact of the innovation. The findings of this study indicate that success indicators for innovations in student affairs were rare. The absence of success metrics did not have a deleterious impact on the innovations presented in this study. Innovations may ultimately benefit more from investments in needs assessments, which focuses on developing new and interesting ways to respond to changing student needs, than in summative assessments of impact.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study speak to the ways in which student affairs professionals at small, private, liberal arts colleges use innovation to respond to their changes in student demographics. The innovation data from three cases—Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College—each highlight unique stories of how innovation is used in student affairs practice. The analysis of the data from these cases suggests research opportunities worthy of further exploration.

In light of the scant research on innovation in student affairs, many opportunities exist to add to the body of scholarly work on this subject. The cases in this study reflected one distinct institutional type—the small, private, highly resourced, liberal arts college. Although there are likely implications from this study for student affairs practitioners at
other institution types, there may be value in exploring innovative practice in different settings. Of particular interest, given the findings related to the interplay between resources and innovation, would be studies of student affairs divisions at small, private, tuition-dependent institutions. Following that same line of thinking, narrowing the aperture to research student affairs innovation at a particular type of institution would also add value (e.g., historically Black colleges and universities, Christian colleges, art and design schools).

The cases in this study were all of colleges who have experienced a recent shift in their student demographics. For purposes of this research, the type of demographic shift was less important than the shift itself. With this in mind, further research on student affairs innovation should be conducted on what innovations are being deployed to respond to a particular type of demographic shift (e.g., adult learners, student veterans,
first-generation students). Another angle to approach this type of research would be to consider hallmarks of the incoming generation of students and study how student affairs is responding to an aspect of that particular generation (e.g., seeking a customized/personalized experience, high level of comfort with technology).

One finding in this study that invites further research is the relationship between the backgrounds of the vice presidents for student affairs and innovation. In other words, are student affairs divisions led by vice presidents with nontraditional backgrounds more innovative? Any scholarly research on the backgrounds and/or educations that inspire innovation in student affairs would be an important contribution to the field, as it may have implications for graduate preparation programs as they consider ways to build innovation into their curriculum.

Understanding the factors that drive innovation is important to practitioners who seek to build capacity for innovation in student affairs. The analysis from this study revealed that drivers have great complexity—often appearing as a set of interconnected motivators rather than as a singular driver. Additionally, given that some drives come from within the organization and some from outside, research on how these two factors align or diverge when it comes to innovation in student affairs would provide insight on how practitioners can respond and/or influence these drivers.

Gettysburg College and Colorado College have prioritized innovation in their institution strategic plans and, as a result, have ongoing initiatives to support innovation college-wide. Pomona College also has prioritized innovation in their strategic efforts and took their commitment one step further by committing $25,000,000 for an innovation lab and other related initiatives. In light of the findings relative to the indiscriminate way in
which institutions in this study used some of the innovation resources at their disposal, a deeper dive into the value institutional innovation initiatives bring to student affairs is worth exploring.

Finally, as early research on innovation in student affairs, this study sought to shed light on the innovations in student affairs and how they came to be. The findings suggest there are particular factors and conditions that optimized innovation in these student affairs divisions. The next logical step in analyzing these factors is to research the role of culture in advancing innovation in student affairs. Much research has been conducted on culture and innovation in settings outside the field of higher education. A study on how student affairs leaders build a culture of innovation would add value to both the field of student affairs and the larger study of innovation itself.

**Conclusion**

While the business sector may be growing weary of the topic of innovation (O’Bryan, 2013; Taylor, 2012), higher education and student affairs specifically is just getting started (Doss, 2014; Morris & Setser, 2015; Smith et al., 2016). Student affairs work is becoming more complex and unpredictable (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014), requiring educators to find ways to consistently and creatively innovate as a means of tackling tough and persistent problems. The aim of this study was to explore student affairs innovations designed to meet the needs of a changing student demographic at three, private, liberal arts institutions who are nationally known for innovation. The student affairs divisions at Gettysburg College, Colorado College, and Pomona College showed the innovative ways they support the next generation of college students. This research
points to ways in which student affairs educators, no matter the role, can use innovation more comprehensively to ensure a relevant practice.

In response to the guarantee that students attending college in the future will be different in various ways from the college students of today, student affairs educators need to become increasingly more innovative to best educate them. Student affairs leaders wanting to innovate more comprehensively can take from this research that breakthrough innovations are both important and rare. Further, it is more common to find multiple ongoing innovations that are adaptations of existing student affairs initiatives, and those adaptive innovations are just as impactful as the breakthroughs. Regardless of the type and distribution of innovations throughout the division, student affairs leaders will benefit from acknowledging and appreciating innovations in all forms. Given the call for higher education to innovate, acknowledging innovation benefits both student affairs leaders and their institutions.

A central finding of this study is how institutions who engage students in new ways, specifically inviting students to be creators and participants in student affairs work, will be well positioned to support changing student needs and ultimately advance student affairs and institutional objectives. Relatedly, as the findings of this study show, student affairs leaders cannot assume they have all the answers on what is best for students without a keen understanding of the institutional student profile and the insights gathered from students. Student affairs leaders who have mechanisms for routinely garnering student input and intentionally staying current on the changing student profile are best prepared to innovate. Innovations that are informed by an understanding of students’ needs are likely to be more impactful (ACE, 2014). As leaders consider how to respond
to the call for a new vision of student affairs (Kuk, 2009; Smith et al., 2016), this research suggests that innovative approaches to understanding students and redefining their role may be part of the answer.
### Appendices

#### Appendix A

**Site Selection Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Demographic Shift in Last Five Years</th>
<th>National Recognition</th>
<th>State or Region</th>
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*Blue shading indicates nationally recognized for innovation*

*Bold indicates sites selected for this study*
Appendix B

Research Study Information Sheet

Background
The U.S. system of higher education is under fire for lacking innovation (Christensen, 2016; The Spellings Commission, 2006; Sweeney 2015). A key driver of this need to innovate is changing student demographics. Although a universal profile of tomorrow’s college student does not exist, these individuals are likely to be considerably different from the students many colleges and universities are serving today in many ways—thereby affecting the manner and provision of these vital student support services. The future viability of American higher education is contingent upon current and future college and university leaders understanding these changing circumstances and proactively acting in ways that will best serve the needs of future students.

Student affairs has an important and active role in educating these incoming students and in driving innovation in student affairs practice and delivery. Student affairs professionals who innovate will therefore proactively position themselves to respond to the emerging student population(s). What might future student affairs professionals learn from current student affairs innovators—such as those at Pomona College—as they prepare for the challenges presented by the emerging changing future student demographic?

This qualitative, multi-site study focuses on innovation in student affairs organizations at innovative private universities that have experienced demographic shifts in the students they serve.

Innovation Defined
For the purpose of this study, innovation is defined as ideas that result in either an adaptation or a radical redesign of student affairs practice.

Research Questions
The research questions for this study explore the innovative practices employed by student affairs leaders, the process by which the innovation(s) developed from inspiration to actuality and the impact the innovation(s) had/has/have on student success at the institution.

Timeframe
The goal of this research study is to conduct site visits and corresponding interviews between mid-September and mid-October 2017. Estimated time commitment: 1) CSAO = 3 to 5 hours, 2) Other student affairs innovators = 1 to 2 hours, 3) Campus point person = 1 to 2 hours.
Commitment and Benefits

Student affairs organizations participating in this research will commit to the following:

1. One hour, on-site interview with chief student affairs officer
2. Between six and ten one hour, on-site interviews with student affairs innovators (identified by CSAO)
3. Sharing of support materials (i.e., assessment data, organization charts, etc.) identified by CSAO as relevant to the study
4. Identification of a campus representative to serve as point person to answer logistics questions related to the site visit

Participating in this unprecedented study of innovation in the field of student affairs will allow you to influence best practice research, share your innovations with colleagues beyond your own campus, and provide critical insight as to how other student affairs leaders might proactively position themselves for the inevitable approaching changes in student demographics nationwide. It is my sincere hope that insight gathered from this research will invite student affairs educators to reflect on how the world is changing and how those changes might in turn drive new approaches to future student affairs practice and pedagogy.
Appendix C

Innovation in Student Affairs Consent Form

Thank you for taking part in a research study on student affairs innovation as part of my doctoral dissertation research through the University of Pennsylvania. As an innovator at XXX College, XXX recommended you for this study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to learn how institutions improve student affairs practice through innovation—particularly in response to changing student demographics. You should have some experience with innovation in your work—either in the idea creation or implementation phase to take part in this study.

Participation
If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your work, innovative practices within the division of student affairs and details about the innovation(s) themselves (who is involved, how the innovation is implemented, etc.). The interview will take about 50 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview.

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. The benefits are that you will play a key role in providing professional insights on your innovation work.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you without your prior permission. Research records will be kept in a locked computer file; only I will have access to the records. If you allow me to audio record the interview, I will destroy the file after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within three months of its taping.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with your supervisor or anyone at your institution. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Questions
The researcher conducting this study is Christina Rajmaira. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Christina at (703) XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@marymount.edu.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (215) 573-2540.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked.

- [ ] I consent to take part in the study
- [ ] I consent to having the interview tape-recorded
- [ ] I consent to the researcher quoting me directly for this study

Name (printed)  
___________________________________________

Signature  
___________________________________________ Date  

Name of person obtaining consent  
CHRISTINA RAJMAIRA

Signature of person obtaining consent  
___________________________________________ Date  

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.
Research Questions
RQ1. For private institutions recognized as innovative, what innovation(s) in student affairs were made to improve student success?
   RQ1a. What is the mix of incremental and breakthrough innovations?

RQ2. Through what processes are these innovations formed?
   RQ2a. Who led the innovation(s)?
   RQ2b. What was the driver to innovate?
   RQ2c. What process was used to generate the idea?
   RQ2d. How was the idea implemented?

RQ3. How was success defined for the innovation?
   RQ3a. Was the innovation a success according to those parameters?

Opening Remarks
1. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.
2. My research is on how student affairs leaders have used innovation to adapt their practice to respond to changing needs.
3. I am going to record our discussion—mainly so I do not have to take detailed notes while we are talking.
4. Given the nature of this study, if I stop you, it is not to interrupt but because I may want to hear specifics about an example, you just shared.
5. I will not use any direct quotation from you without your permission. The only people who will see the transcripts of the interviews will be the transcriber and me.

Overview – Getting a Sense of the Participant Within the Context of the Organization

1. Let’s start by telling me what drew you here.

2. I am here because of your reputation for innovation in student affairs. Did you bring something that you believe is innovative to share with me?
   a. Tell me about it
   b. Why do you choose it?

3. If you didn’t bring something, what do you consider innovation?
RQ1/RQ1a. – Understanding the Innovation(s)

4. Think of something innovative in student affairs that you have been a part of during your time at Pomona. What is the most relevant example that comes to mind? (If not connected to student success, then ask for another).

Potential probes:
- Can you provide some detail about the example?
- What is it designed to do?
- Was this idea an extension of something that already exists?
- Was this idea completely new? In what ways?
- Why did you choose that example?

RQ2/RQ2a.-d./RQ3/RQ3a. – Understanding the Innovation Process and Impact

5. I’d like to hear more about how this innovation came about. Tell me how this innovation started and why it was initiated?

Potential probes:
- What was the driver to innovate (generally)?
- What was the driver to select this particular innovation?
- Why this idea over any other idea?

6. I’m interested in understanding how this innovation came to be. Tell me the story associated with the development and implementation of this innovation.

Potential probes:
- Who was involved? What did each person do?
- What roles did they play?
- Were there multiple ideas generated to address this need?
  - If so, where did they come from? How were they generated?
  - How was it decided which idea to pursue?
  - Who made the decision?
- How was it implemented?
- What was needed to make this idea a reality?

7. To what extent or in what ways has this innovation proved successful?

Potential probes:
- Has it done what it was intended to do?
- Has it served its purpose?
- How do you know? What evidence do you have?

IF TIME – ASK ABOUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE
Conclusion – Parting Thoughts

8. Do you see any drawbacks to innovation? Why are these drawbacks?

9. If a new student affairs professional was to ask you for advice on creating and sustaining innovation at this institution, what advice would you give that person regarding how to initiate and implement an innovation?

10. What lessons would you offer based on the experience of what we’ve discussed today?
## Appendix E

### Contact Summary Form

Contact Summary Form – Innovation in Student Affairs  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact type:</th>
<th>Site:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact date:</th>
<th>Today’s date:</th>
<th>Written by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you with this participant?

2. Pick out the most salient points in the contact. Number in order on this sheet and note page numbers on which point appears. Number point in text of write-up. Attach theme or aspect to each point in CAPITALS. Invent themes where no existing ones apply and asterisk those. Comment may also be included in double parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Salient Points</th>
<th>Themes/Aspects</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Anything else that struck you as interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

5. What concerns do you have at this time?
### Appendix F

#### Inductive and Deductive Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions of innovation ideation</th>
<th>Description of innovations purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of idea generation process</td>
<td>Description of the idea - innovations value to the organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of innovation hubs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of integrative thinking (ideation)</td>
<td>Descriptions of organizational conditions for innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of making order out of chaos (ideation)</td>
<td>Descriptions of change being &quot;rooted&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of unlikely things connected</td>
<td>Descriptions of diffusion of innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of having empathy for the student (design thinking)</td>
<td>Descriptions of fundamental incompatibilities for innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of ways to routinely innovate</td>
<td>Descriptions of operationalizing innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions of innovation implementation</th>
<th>Descriptions of mechanisms for reflecting/modifying creative process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of building an innovation team (implementation)</td>
<td>Descriptions of risk appetite</td>
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<td>Descriptions of prototyping an idea</td>
<td>Descriptions of participatory decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of running a disciplined experiment (implementation)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Descriptions of people's influences on innovation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of external inspiration to innovate</td>
<td>Descriptions of decision attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of innovation drivers</td>
<td>Descriptions of design attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of internal inspiration to innovate</td>
<td>Descriptions of attitudes toward change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of drivers of innovations</td>
<td>Descriptions of feelings of freedom to experiment</td>
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<td>Descriptions of innovation types</td>
<td>Descriptions of fostering innovative potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of innovators mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of adaptive innovation</td>
<td>Descriptions of restraining forces for change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of breakthrough innovations</td>
<td>Descriptions of the student demographic</td>
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<td>Descriptions of content innovation (Schein)</td>
<td>Descriptions of how student have changed</td>
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<td>Descriptions of decision making innovation</td>
<td>Descriptions of responding to changing student demographics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of pedagogical innovation</td>
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<td>Descriptions of policy innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of programmatic innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of role innovation (Schein)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Descriptions of structural innovation</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Descriptions of who was involved</th>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of networks aiding in innovation</td>
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<td>Descriptions of collaborators</td>
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Appendix G

Comparative Institutional Data

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<th>Colorado College</th>
<th>Pomona College</th>
<th>Gettysburg College</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman to Sophomore Retention Rate</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition and Fees</td>
<td>$50,892</td>
<td>$67,225</td>
<td>$52,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room and Board</td>
<td>$11,668</td>
<td>$16,150</td>
<td>$12,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endowment</td>
<td>$743 million</td>
<td>$2 billion</td>
<td>$283 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Pell Eligible</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Receiving Financial Aid</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Aid Package Per Student</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$37,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Institutional Aid Per Year</td>
<td>$10.8 million</td>
<td>$40 million</td>
<td>$51.5 million</td>
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<td>% Residential</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>2600</td>
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<td>Student/Faculty Ratio</td>
<td>10 to 1</td>
<td>8 to 1</td>
<td>9 to 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Ratio</td>
<td>54% female/46% male</td>
<td>50% female/50% male</td>
<td>53% female/47% male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black or African American</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Asian</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Two or more races</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-resident Alien</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% International</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 24 and Under</td>
<td>99%</td>
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### Appendix H

Gettysburg College – College Life Innovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Implementation Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Attic</td>
<td>Breakthrough</td>
<td>Student Feedback</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>all four stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Leadership Certificate Program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>multidisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College House Program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Student Feedback</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>prototyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique collection of units reporting up through AVP</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Synergy</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>divisional involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OME pre-orientation program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Peer Educators</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Bias Incident</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College House Program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Student Feedback</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>multidisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OME pre-orientation program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Peer Educators</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Bias Incident</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt-a-residence hall</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Stronger Student/Admin Ties</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>sara method to indentify projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Organization Consulting Program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>leadership mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential education added in existing programs</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>prototyping</td>
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<td>Public Service Center Immersion Projects</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>director background</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>prototyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coordinators for Public Service</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Enhanced Student Understanding</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>student vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Safety officers partnering with fraternity</td>
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<td>Manage Risk</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>prototyping</td>
</tr>
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<td>Student Organization Consulting Program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>leadership mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coordinators for Public Service</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Enhanced Student Understanding</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>student vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Multicultural Engagement restructuring</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>input considered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greek Life Trustee Review and Implementation Plan</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Mitigate Risk</td>
<td>Staff and Trustees</td>
<td>trustee brainstorm</td>
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<td>The First Year Experience Fourth Hour</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff and Faculty</td>
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<td>Social Justice Institute</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>prototyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Student Life Committee</td>
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<td>Integrated Approach</td>
<td>Students, Staff and Faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>The GRAB Senior Leadership Trip</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Reward Student Efforts</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>student vision</td>
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Appendix I

Colorado College – Student Affairs Innovations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Implementation Process</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Risk Project</td>
<td>Breakthrough</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Faculty (multiple)</td>
<td>Observation, Research, Prototyping</td>
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<td>Free co-curricular programs/events</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students</td>
<td>Problem Solving, Financial Element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Center redesign</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Holistic Approach</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students</td>
<td>All Four Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Could Be Heroes Retreat</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Inspire Creativity</td>
<td>VP/Faculty (multiple)</td>
<td>Research, Prototyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Priddy Experience</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Stronger Ties</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>Financial Element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler Center programming model</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Holistic Approach</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>Campus-wide Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alhberg Leadership Institute</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Student Feedback</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Financial Element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure for CS and RL</td>
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<td>Holistic Approach</td>
<td>Senior Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>All Four Steps</td>
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<td>Counseling Center identity specialization</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>Prototyping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Title IX Coordinator</td>
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<td>Raise Awareness</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Faculty</td>
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<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
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<td>Community Policing</td>
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<td>Stronger Ties</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>Keller Venture Research Grants</td>
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<td>Donor</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Faculty</td>
<td>Financial Element</td>
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<td>Dining Hall redesign</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Student Feedback</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students</td>
<td>All Four Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Campus Apartments</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Positive Psychology</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)/Students/Faculty (multiple)</td>
<td>All Four Steps</td>
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</table>
Appendix J

East Campus Apartment Floor Plans at Colorado College
## Appendix K

**Pomona College – Student Affairs Innovations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Driver</th>
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<th>Implementation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic Specific Mentoring Programs</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Retreats</td>
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<td>Divisional clustering and restructuring</td>
<td>Breakthrough</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Retreats</td>
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<td>Student Community Resources</td>
<td>Breakthrough</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Indigenous Peer Mentoring Program</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Modeled after like program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assoc. Dean for Academic Success and Assessment</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Respect</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Modeled after like program</td>
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<td>Pomona Partners</td>
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<td>Community Engagement</td>
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<td>Resource map</td>
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<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>Utilized course knowledge</td>
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<td>The Draper Center for Community Engagement</td>
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<td>Changing Demographic</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>Change in leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A train-the-trainer for mentor program leaders</td>
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<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>Modeled after like program</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Ropes Course</td>
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<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (1) and external partner</td>
<td>Modeled after like program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation Adventure Trips</td>
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<td>Presidential Priority</td>
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<td>Expansion of existing program</td>
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<td>Small dinners</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Stronger Student/Admin Ties</td>
<td>Staff (1)</td>
<td>Stakeholder buy-in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentor framework as a conduit of information</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Resource Utilization</td>
<td>Staff (multiple)</td>
<td>Stakeholder buy-in</td>
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</table>
Appendix L

Pomona College Student Affairs Organizational Chart – Before Restructuring


237


240


241


242


243


