Institutional Supports for Student Experiential Learning in Hybrid/Remote Learning Contexts

Beata Johnson, Purdue University, West Lafayette

Beata Johnson is an Engineering Education Ph.D. student at Purdue University and recipient of an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship. She received her BS in Chemical Engineering from Purdue University. Her research interests include extracurricular and experiential learning in engineering education, students' pathways through engineering education, and transition to the workforce.

Andrew Whitehead, Purdue University, West Lafayette

Andrew Whitehead is a Ph.D student at Purdue University's School of Engineering Education. His research interests includes diversity, equity, and inclusion and empathy within the engineering pedagogy.

Dr. Joyce B. Main, Purdue University, West Lafayette

Joyce B. Main is Associate Professor of Engineering Education at Purdue University. She received an Ed.M. in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a Ph.D. degree in Learning, Teaching, and Social Policy from Cornell University. Dr. Main examines student academic pathways and transitions to the workforce in science and engineering. She was a recipient of the 2014 American Society for Engineering Education Educational Research and Methods Division Apprentice Faculty Award, the 2015 Frontiers in Education Faculty Fellow Award, and the 2019 Betty Vetter Award for Research from WEPAN. In 2017, Dr. Main received a National Science Foundation CAREER award to examine the longitudinal career pathways of engineering PhDs.

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Abstract

Students' experiential learning in out-of-class involvements encompasses a significant part of their engagement and professional development in college. The covid-19 pandemic has challenged the delivery of these experiential learning opportunities, requiring student affairs professionals to significantly adapt their programming to continue serving students in ways that accommodate social distancing guidelines, in-person event capacity limits, and remote participants. While research has investigated online learning in classroom contexts, less is known about the implications of a virtual learning environment on engagement in experiential learning. This study addresses the following research question: **How are student affairs professionals adapting their programs and services to support student engagement in response to the covid pandemic?**

This study captures how student affairs professionals at a large Midwestern research university have adjusted programming and engagement efforts to maintain key elements of experiential learning in hybrid and remote learning contexts, where students' engagement ranges from entirely on-line to various combinations of partial in-person and online participation. The Midwestern university transitioned from predominantly residential to fully online during the spring 2020 semester and then allowed students to choose whether to continue fully online or return to campus for a hybrid learning environment in the fall 2020 semester. This study draws on Schlossberg's transition theory to examine how student affairs professionals transitioned programs and services in the 2020-2021 academic year to respond to the covid-19 pandemic and the associated changing safety guidelines.

Facing unique challenges in this varied, constantly changing environment, student affairs professionals described three key elements of successful program and service adaptations: (1) a focus on student needs, (2) collaboration across student support units, and (3) creativity and innovation in approaches to engage students. Through thematic analysis of interviews with 13 student affairs professionals (including student organization advisors and administrators, student programming coordinators, and student support specialists), research findings provide further insight into the challenges and opportunities presented in adapting experiential learning to hybrid and remote formats. Research findings will help inform ongoing efforts to craft hybrid and remote student programming and services that support and engage students in these unprecedented times. These findings can also inform the development of student support programs for the growing body of online students in higher education.

Introduction

In response to the covid-19 pandemic, student affairs professionals have needed to adapt quickly to continue engaging students amidst changing safety guidelines. These professionals serve a critical role in supporting students through their undergraduate experiences [1], [2], and it is

important to understand the implications of this transition for how they support students learning online. During the covid-19 pandemic, many universities moved on-campus classes to hybrid and remote learning contexts, which included various combinations of synchronous/asynchronous, in-person/online interactions, such as in-person labs with video lectures or online discussion boards with synchronous Zoom classes. These changes presented new challenges to faculty, staff, and students in how to engage and learn in these unfamiliar and changing circumstances – navigating new learning platforms and forms of interaction, adapting to changing safety guidelines in planning potential in-person meetings, and grappling with uncertainty in personal circumstances amidst global upheaval.

As students navigated changing learning contexts and online learning, student affairs professionals also needed to significantly adapt their programs and services. These programs have previously relied on in-person interactions and spaces to engage students in experiential learning. The covid-19 pandemic forced student affairs professionals to rethink their programs and roles to envision experiential learning in online contexts. In this study, we aim to understand these professionals' experiences through this transition and how they adapted their programs and services. We investigate the following research question: **How are student affairs professionals adapting their programs and services to support student engagement in response to the covid-19 pandemic?** In doing so, we seek to inform ongoing efforts to support and engage students in hybrid and remote learning contexts. We investigate the challenges and opportunities presented in this unprecedented time, highlighting innovations in student services that have emerged through these transitions.

As resources are developed to support ongoing efforts to provide hybrid and remote student services, there is a need for greater understanding of how professionals have adapted their services in response to these transitions and key elements of virtual programs that encourage student engagement. Students, in particular, describe isolation, loneliness, and uncertainty in persisting in their online classes and report increased stress from connecting with their usual social supports due to social distancing [3], [4]. With increasing challenges and stresses from the covid-19 pandemic, students need additional support structures and connections to help them navigate these challenges and transitions. Our study examines student affairs professionals' experiences in adapting their programs and services and analyzes the challenges and opportunities encountered in these transitions. Findings inform opportunities for institutional supports of student affairs professionals through transition. Findings also contribute to understanding of student engagement in hybrid and online learning contexts with implications for future practice as more programs develop online.

Literature Review

Covid-19 Pandemic and Hybrid/Remote Learning in Higher Education

In the past year, the covid-19 pandemic has significantly altered daily life and learning contexts on college campuses. These changes have required quick responses from faculty, staff, and students to adapt to hybrid and remote learning contexts. Early research findings about the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on students indicate that many undergraduate students have

struggled to adapt to the online transition as social distancing challenged their access to social supports [3]. As social distancing measures continued into the fall 2020 semester, students expressed frustration with their learning experiences, lack of motivation, and feeling overwhelmed [4]. First-year students in particular have experienced loneliness, uncertainty, and challenges in making friends with university's social distancing guidelines and virtual events [5]. Educator resources for covid-19 suggest collecting feedback from online students, initiating student conversations and connections, holding virtual office hours, and utilizing social media [6], [7].

Pandemic-induced shifts to online learning have prompted increased attention to online and hybrid learning modalities. Prior to the pandemic, the use of online courses has increased in recent years, both for fully online learners and for residential students who enroll in an online course while at university [8]. Hybrid learning offers a flexible combination of online and in-person learning, consisting of synchronous learning environments with both on-site and remote (online) students [9]. For example, a group of students may meet on campus for a student organization meeting or class with additional students attending via a video conferencing platform. In reviewing research about the use of hybrid learning, Raes et al. [9] suggest cautious optimism about its continued use given the pedagogical and technological challenges that it poses. Hybrid learning offers flexibility in constructing learning spaces but also requires careful design to facilitate student learning outcomes.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning theory provides an integrative perspective of learning as a process that is grounded in experience [10]. As such, students' learning and development benefit from highly contextualized, hands-on, real-world learning experiences, such as those found through out-of-class student involvement [11]. As theorized by experiential learning theory, students develop knowledge through collaborative and reflective engagement in these experiences, which can be facilitated by student affairs professionals [11]. For example, experiential learning can facilitate learning between peer mentor/mentee relationships as students practice and develop interpersonal and leadership skills. Student involvement provides significant opportunities for experiential learning. Previous research has found that key aspects of student involvement include engaging with peers, receiving mentorship, and developing skills and sense of identity [12]. Students' involvement and engagement has significant influence on their well-being, positive academic outcomes, sense of belonging and community, and student thriving [13], [14].

Student Affairs Professionals

Student affairs professionals serve an important role in supporting students through their college experiences [1]. Student affairs professionals serve in various roles and departments across campus, including student support programs, cultural centers, residence life, career services, student activities, student unions, and study abroad. While the specific roles and scope of practice for these professionals varies greatly within and across institutions, student affairs professionals share a unifying mission of serving students holistic well-being and development [15]. These professionals often also serve as *fictive kin* for students in supporting their
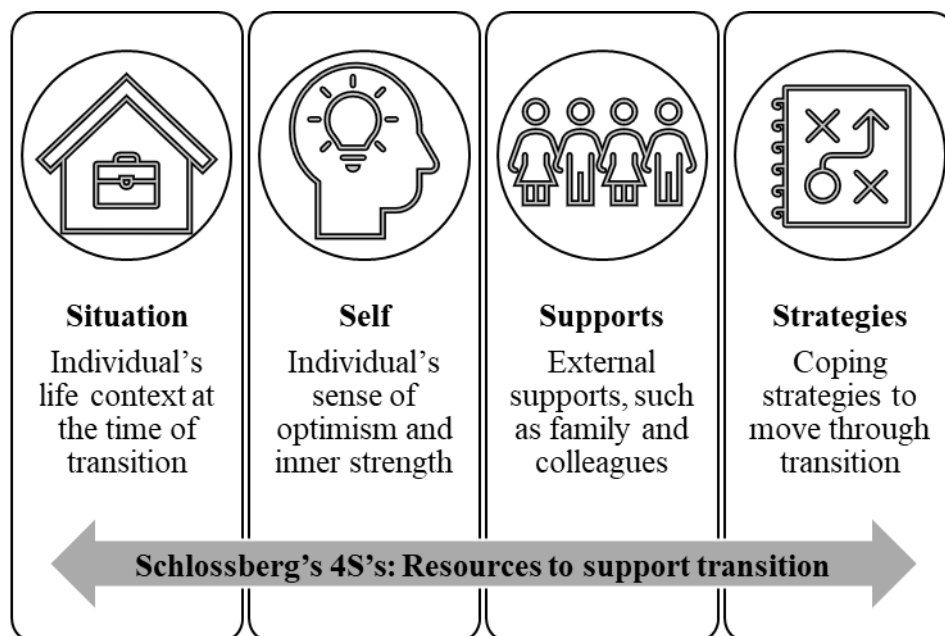
development and academic and career decisions [16]. They are key personnel in student support centers, which are uniquely situated to provide assistance to undergraduate students, particularly those in underrepresented groups [17]. These centers provide opportunities for experiential learning through interactions and interventions that support various short-term to long-term objectives in supporting students in their goals, commitment, navigation, and success through college. Current research has focused on in-person services and programs to support students, and the covid-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted students' and professionals' lives and the ways that they support students.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's transition theory [18], [19] informed our analysis of how student affairs professionals adapted their programs and services in light of changing hybrid and remote learning contexts. Schlossberg's theory applies to understanding different types of transitions, including unanticipated transitions such as the current context where the global covid-19 pandemic significantly altered students' and professionals' lives and learning contexts. Transitions are described as altering individuals' lives through their roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Schlossberg posits that these changes in roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions determine how difficult a given transition is for a person. Schlossberg's transition theory further proposes a 4S system (situation, self, supports, and strategies) that provide resources to support transition (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Schlossberg's Transition Theory: 4S system

Situation	**Self**	**Supports**	**Strategies**
Individual's life context at the time of transition	Individual's sense of optimism and inner strength	External supports, such as family and colleagues	Coping strategies to move through transition

Schlossberg's 4S's: Resources to support transition

An individual can draw on these 4S's to analyze a transition and identify resources to support the change. *Situation* refers to the individual's life context at the time of transition, including recognition of additional stressors that the individual may be experiencing. A given

transition is more difficult for an individual when they have additional existing stressors in their life, such as personal circumstances in addition to professional transition or having started a new role at the onset of the global pandemic. *Self* captures the individual's inner strength for coping and sense of optimism with respect to the transition. Schlossberg explains that an optimistic attitude can help support resilience through difficult transitions. *Supports* include external supports, such as peers, advisors, colleagues, and institutional resources and trainings. In our study, student affairs professionals affirmed the significance of colleagues' support in navigating various changes through the pandemic. Finally, *strategies* refer to the coping strategies employed to move through the transition. These coping strategies can include ways to change the situation, reframe the situation, or reduce stress.

In our analysis, we consider the transitions experienced by professionals as they needed to quickly adapt and reimagine their programs and roles. As posited by transition theory, their roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions changed as they responded to the university's move to hybrid and remote learning and changing social distancing guidance, and as they provided support for students' own transitions throughout the pandemic. In analyzing how these professionals adapted their programs to support students' hybrid and remote engagement, we examined how situation, self, supports, and strategies supported or challenged their transitions. Schlossberg's transition theory provides a framework to understand the challenges and opportunities presented in adapting experiential learning to hybrid and remote formats.

Data and Methods

Study Context

We conducted this study at a large Midwestern research university. The university transitioned from predominantly residential to fully online during the spring 2020 semester and then allowed students to choose whether to continue fully online or return to campus for a hybrid learning environment in the fall 2020 semester. Approximately 10 percent of students chose the fully online option for the fall 2020 semester. The university released safety guidelines for in-person and hybrid events, such as approval requirements for student organized events, maximum number of attendees, and restrictions on outside visitors. These guidelines were updated throughout the course of the semester as county guidelines changed.

Data Collection

Our research team comprised two graduate students and one faculty member. The research team members each have research and work experiences related to student support and services. The Institutional Review Board at this institution approved our study. We recruited study participants through email invitations to student affairs professionals in various student support programs on campus. We generated a list of potential participants by identifying relevant student support programs and services on campus. We then identified student affairs professionals working within these programs through our professional networks and program staff webpages. We sent email invitations to participate in our study to these identified professionals. We also used snowball sampling by inviting participants to recommend colleagues that may be interested to participate in this study. We conducted 60-minute semi-structured

interviews with each participant. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom given the remote-learning environment. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions were then checked for accuracy.

We developed the interview protocol as a research team and piloted the protocol with two student affairs professionals that also had experience with education research. These individuals provided feedback to refine the protocol questions and suggested additional points of consideration given their experiences adapting programs through the pandemic in the previous semester. The interviews were guided by questions about the student affairs professionals' experiences in adapting their programs to the hybrid and remote context. We asked questions about adaptions that they made to their programming in response to the pandemic, aspects of programming that they sought to maintain or needed to compromise on, challenges they faced in adapting programs, support that they received through this process, students' responses to hybrid and online programs, and their plans for programs and services going forward.

We interviewed student affairs professionals about how they adjusted their programming and services to adapt to hybrid and remote learning contexts amidst the covid-19 pandemic. The student affairs professionals included student organization advisors, student programming coordinators and directors, and student services specialists. We interviewed 13 student affairs professionals (see Table 1) about the challenges and opportunities they faced in adapting their programming to online and hybrid formats. These student affairs professionals included individuals in various roles, including student support specialists, program coordinators, and administrators in student support programs. The participants' years of experience in their roles ranged from less than 3 years to more than 15.

Table 1
Participant information

Pseudonym	Role	Program/Department Type
Emily	Student services specialist	Career services
Diane	Student support specialist	College student services
Aaron	Program coordinator	Cultural center
Carla	Administrator	Cultural center
Josh	Administrator	Experiential learning
Martin	Program coordinator	Experiential learning
Megan	Program coordinator	Experiential learning
David	Administrator	Non-traditional student support
Andrea	Administrator	Student organizations
Deb	Program coordinator	Student organizations
Jennifer	Student support specialist	Student organizations
Tricia	Administrator	Women in STEM
Shannon	Administrator	Women in STEM

Data Analysis

We analyzed the interview transcripts using a thematic analysis approach, following Braun & Clark's six-phase method [20]. We first read the interview transcripts for familiarity, recording memos with summaries and initial reactions and analysis. We then re-read the transcripts, generating initial codes and beginning to identify themes with respect to our research question. We then reviewed the transcripts again to further develop the themes. We drew on Nowell et al.'s [21] approach to conducting and reporting trustworthy thematic analysis. Two research team members each reviewed each transcript to begin engaging with the data. We then coded five interview transcripts together to develop a coding scheme and begin to identify themes. We used both inductive codes and deductive codes. We developed the deductive codes from our research question and Schlossberg's transition theory. We divided the remaining transcriptions to code individually, meeting regularly together and with the broader research team to debrief, discuss emerging findings, and develop themes together. After identifying initial themes, we returned to the coded data within each theme to refine the themes by checking for significance, coherency, and accuracy of representation and support. We utilized concept maps to diagram relationships between codes and refine the themes. We further ensured accuracy of representation by focusing on context and using the words of participants to convey and describe themes. We re-examined each theme with respect to the 4S's (situation, self, supports, strategies) specified by Schlossberg's transition theory. This further analysis informed our understanding of the interrelation between each of the 4S's and how the professionals employed these resources in relation to their roles and the institution.

Study Limitations

We conducted this study in the midst of these professionals' transitions during the covid-19 pandemic, thus our findings present a snapshot of their ongoing adaptations and navigation of change. Additional perspective could be gained as these professionals reflect back on their experiences through transition. Findings about the overall successes, challenges, and feedback on the adjustments made to their programs are also limited as the student affairs professionals had not yet received the annual end of year feedback from students for their programs. This study focused on how the professionals navigated transitions in their roles and programs through the covid-19 pandemic; additional research is needed to better understand how they experienced these transitions to provide more insight into the *self* element of Schlossberg's transition theory. Research into students' experiences of these transitions in programs would also provide a more holistic understanding of experiential learning in hybrid and remote contexts. Notably, this study was conducted at a predominantly residential institution; thus, findings may not apply directly to experiential learning for existing online programs.

Results

In analyzing how student affairs professionals adapted their programs and services to hybrid and remote formats, we explored both the challenges and opportunities encountered through these transitions. We found that student affairs professionals described three key elements in transitioning their programs: a focus on student needs, collaboration across student support units, and creativity and innovation in approaches to engage students. These three elements

demonstrate the professional's use of *situation, self, supports,* and *strategies* in navigating the transition.

A. Understanding student needs guided professional's efforts to adapt programming

The student affairs professionals expressed keen awareness of *situation* elements in how they described their efforts to adapt programs in terms of students' needs. The professionals described how this time of change and decreased in-person interaction added additional stressors to students' lives and impacted what students needed to be engaged and successful. The professionals' descriptions of students' needs centered around three areas: need for interaction, mental well-being, and motivation.

Students' Need for Interaction. The student affairs professionals emphasized the importance of interaction to students' collegiate experience, sharing conversations that they had with students through the fall semester and the challenges students experienced in acclimating to a newly virtual learning environment. For example, Carla, an administrator at a cultural center, said, *"[The students] missed the fact that they couldn't come to the center, hang out and have coffee with us, and have that face-to-face interaction or those conversations*." The professionals said that students were "just craving any interaction." Shannon, an administrator in a women in STEM program, shared how some students in her program had not realized they lived in adjoining rooms in the same dorm because there were few opportunities to interact outside their rooms. She said:

"*And that, you all know, **that's not a typical freshman experience in a dorm… So I really think that they were just craving any interaction**… I think there's so much more into that, like all these little aspects of that life that they had, which was just so different than anything we can imagine of what our freshman year, we lived on campus, was like."*

The professionals' awareness of these challenges (*situation*) led them to be more intentional and personal when reaching out to students (*strategy*); they sought to convey care to the students and to help them interact more. Megan, a program coordinator for an experiential learning program, shared how she was "*really trying to make sure that every student feels heard*." Several of the professionals noted how the desire for more interaction seemed to weigh heavier on undergraduate students, particularly first-year students. Shannon said that first year students were "*just looking to make friends...they just didn't have that freshman college experience*." Accordingly, she and other professionals shared that they placed an emphasis on mentoring and connecting students throughout the fall semester. Other undergraduate students also experienced this desire for more interaction, as they had more limited ability to utilize spaces such as program offices and cultural centers as they were accustomed and where they would often see their friends. While the need for interaction was conveyed by many of the professionals interviewed in this study, some students seem to experience this need in different ways. For example, David, an administrator in a non-traditional student support program, said that many of the students in his program focused more on their desire to interact with their instructors. Carla also shared that the graduate students in her center seemed to enjoy communicating via virtual platforms more than

the undergraduate students. She said that the graduate students adjusted more easily to working and studying in their own spaces when the center's space was less accessible due to safety restrictions.

Student Mental Well-Being. In their efforts to make personal virtual connections with students, the student affairs professionals emphasized the increasing need to focus on students' mental health. They shared about the many various challenges that students were facing through the semester's transitions, including uncertainty around career, fear for family health, inability to focus in class, perceived lack of empathy from some professors, and negative self-perceptions. Diane, a student support specialist in college student services said, "*We **were worried about their mental, emotional well-being**, especially our first-year engineering students, **because they didn't have a good atmosphere to meet and greet students**, you know, get student clubs and activities.*" She shared how she helped the administration understand the importance of prioritizing mental well-being for students through this time: "*Even our students that come in with the best metrics does not mean that they escape well-being issues. If anything, a lot of imposter syndrome, lots of imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and so I started having to really educate the administration as well as [being] proactive.*" She and other professionals helped to organize collaborations across campus with mental health services to provide both virtual and in-person services to students. Student affairs professionals also sought ways to help students relieve stress. Andrea, an administrator in the office for student organizations, said, "*Any kind of stress reliever we can [create] for students… we recognize that that is crucial.*" The professionals organized various hybrid and online events aimed at relieving stress for students and helping sustain motivation through the semester, such as providing craft supplies for students to pick up for an online event or handing out plants for students to bring back to their dorms.

Student Motivation. In addition to the need to support students' mental well-being, student affairs professionals also identified sustaining motivation as a particular challenge throughout the transitions of the pandemic and hybrid/remote learning. Diane shared how she had discussed motivation with many students: "*At the end of the day, it was usually, 'We understand,' just being compassionate, empathetic. Trying to be their cheerleader, trying to keep them motivated and optimistic and in a positive mindset was probably all of our biggest endeavors of something that we could do.*" Students' challenges in staying motivated also stemmed from virtual platform burnout and the challenges of conducting much of their work in their dorm rooms without opportunity to work in other locations. Diane said, "*The other challenge that many of the students I [talked with shared] was **it was hard to stay focused as well as engaged and excited about learning when you do everything in the same room** or on your bed or on your couch.*" Student affairs professionals encouraged students to develop routines to help with motivation and sought to provide creative programs to engage students in different ways. As students tired of using virtual platforms for all their classes and engagements, student affairs professionals recognized the need to continue rethinking how they might shape their programs to support students.

B. Increased collaboration helped professionals adapt services and support

Student affairs professionals described how the transition to hybrid and remote learning prompted increased collaboration with partner programs, departments, and universities. These professionals shared how the need to rethink many of their programs and services provided impetus to "break silos" that had existed prior to the pandemic and build new collaborations with other programs and departments. These collaborations served as key *supports* through the professionals' transitions, helping them to brainstorm how to adapt specific types of programming and share lessons learned about methods for supporting students virtually and technologies that they were implementing. For example, Tricia, an administrator in a women in STEM program, shared how she had regular conversations with colleagues in peer programs to discuss practical tips on implementing new online programming efforts:

"***I was in regular communication with [colleagues in peer programs]****. You know, 'How are you doing this? How did that work? What did you think? Would you do it again? What would you change? What technology are you using? Has anyone figured out this tutoring thing?'… I think **everyone was really trying to stay flexible and adaptable. We got tired quicker this semester**… We didn't do everything perfectly, that's for sure, but we were really trying.*"

Tricia describes how she and her peers supported each other in identifying new *strategies* for engaging students and troubleshooting challenges in implementing new technologies in their programs. Similarly, Andrea described an increasing inter-reliance among programs in addressing new challenges that arose through the shift to hybrid and remote programming. She said that she was surprised by how many collaborations she saw forming since the pandemic began, as she felt that programs in the university had previously operated in different silos. She described how different people were increasingly reaching out to her and her department:

"*I have been thoroughly surprised by that… really the relying on people. 'Okay, [Andrea], I'm trying to reach this population.' or 'Hey, did you all see that you could do this with your students over in [different department]. I think it would be a great program.' or 'Hey can we partner on this with the alumni association?' So, **lots of, I think, good synergies, opportunities**… Like that, **in my entire time here, at [university], never seen it***."

Andrea said that these synergies had often developed in efforts to support specific student populations, such as first-year online learners. Megan also felt that the pandemic and subsequent necessary shift to hybrid and remote programs provided impetus for new collaborations. She said, "***[Collaborations] have been, I guess, more critical, as we've had to adapt to the virtual environment****… that was something that was an area where we were going toward and wanted to collaborate, but again, with the shift, it just accelerated that and became even more important*". Several other participants also described new collaborations that had arisen while working to transition and adapt their programs.

Student affairs professionals described collaborations both across departments in the university, as well as increasing collaboration with peer programs and departments at other universities. David, an administrator in a non-traditional student support program, shared how an existing

collaboration with other programs at surrounding universities became more regular as they encountered new challenges in transitioning programs online:

"We historically would meet every year in the fall, and then we would, oftentimes, we have a listserv email that we would troubleshoot things across campuses if we had problems going on, or questions, or someone wanted to implement some new programming… **As soon as the pandemic started, our colleague in [partner university], she was like, 'Hey, let's get together and talk,' and we started every two weeks**. *We're now doing every three weeks. But we get together and just have an hour-long conversation about what's taking place on our campuses, the things that are working, the things that aren't working."*

Other professionals described similar experiences of reaching out to peers in other universities to compare notes on programming ideas and innovations. Some programs also partnered with other universities to host virtual events together. For example, Aaron, a program coordinator in a cultural center, said that through an informal collaboration with cultural centers at other universities, they developed a virtual reading program for students: "***We had really great collaborations to meet other students and peers from other institutions***, *and we had a really great turnout for those. So that was something surprising and* ***something that we hope to continue again for either next semester or next school year as well***." Student affairs professionals shared that, while the unexpected transitions for their programs created many challenges, they found increased collaboration both a necessary *support* and an unexpected positive outcome.

C. Program transitions required innovation in approaches to student engagement

Student affairs professionals described varying trends in student engagement as they transitioned programming online. They described both increased and decreased attendance at different types of events and at different times throughout the fall semester. Each program recognized the need to be innovative in how they approached student engagement on virtual platforms, implementing new incentives, gamification aspects, and breakout rooms for small group settings. These professionals relied on their persistence (*self*) to identify new *strategies* to engage students. In some programs, professionals described attendance as comparable to previous years or better than they had expected; though, programs described a general decline in attendance over the course of the semester, which they attributed to "Zoom burnout." For example, Carla said, "*Initially, we had a good group. We had a lot of participation. But as the semester went on, we saw a tapering off of attendance in our virtual presentations, and many students were telling us that they were just burnt out from all these video conferences and so forth*." Participation varied by program, with some indication of higher participation rates among programs that targeted first-year college students and lower participation rates among programs focused on graduate or non-traditional students. Additional research could further explore the differences in student experience among these student populations.

In continuing to adapt student programs to changing hybrid contexts, professionals noted the need to innovate in how they engage students as a continued challenge. Aaron described

engagement as a critical element in his program considerations, noting that it is 'always on our minds':

"*I feel like if students are bored at the very beginning, there's not really a motivation to join virtual programs after that because they're like, 'Oh, I know what to expect. It's going to be boring.' Just **trying to create excitement and drive the passion of people wanting to be in a community and translating that into our virtual engagement**, and then keeping alive enough so that way students are motivated to participate throughout the semester.*"

He said that one way he had been encouraging greater participation was seeking to 'create a chain' of connections where students invite their friends to events so that "*it's you and a friend, and maybe your friend might know someone else, something like that. That way, we kind of create a chain of events where people are like, 'Oh I know that person,' or 'I know that person,' in their Zoom screen, so that's something that we try to do for encouraging engagement.*" Shannon also described facilitating connections and community as a key *strategy* in the higher rates of participation she saw amongst a virtual mentoring program that she coordinated. She said that she was surprised to not see a drop off in participation over the course of the semester for this program, which she attributed to the community building that the student leaders emphasized by using small group breakout rooms in larger meetings. They also encouraged personal connection through ice breaker activities and discussion prompts. Professionals emphasized that seeing friends and seeking connection strongly motivated students to engage in various programs.

Professionals also described increasing social media use to connect with students through the transition to virtual programming. Andrea said: "*Our social media presence picked up. We went from like 200 to [more than 1000] followers on Instagram. It's not me doing it, its' the younger staff doing it, but it was a way for students to connect with us… so we're reaching them in various ways.*" Professionals described using social media to advertise virtual events and to stream virtual speakers or post recordings of events. They said that these channels had additionally broadened their audience for events. For example, Carla said:

"*Something that has gone well, I would say, that we're reaching our larger audience. Typically, when we host events, it would be primarily [university] faculty, staff, students, our [university] community. However, when we've moved to this virtual environment, we've been able to, we've seen some of our guests that are coming from as far west as the Pacific Northwest.*"

Other professionals also described being able to engage international online students through recordings of presentations. Professionals noted both the opportunities and challenges presented as they explored new mediums for student engagement.

Discussion

Our study examined how student affairs professionals transitioned their programming and services to support student engagement in hybrid and remote learning contexts. We examined

these findings through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory [18], [19] to understand how the professionals experienced this transition and how they adapted their programs in recognition of the transitions experienced by students. Schlossberg's transition theory is useful to understand the various ways that the professionals navigated these transitions and the resources that they employed. The professionals' emphasis on student needs helped them to identify resources to best support students. These professionals provided strong examples of *supports* in how they utilized collaboration to navigate challenges they encountered through transitions in their roles and programs. The professionals shared a recognition of *situation* in how they identified student needs and the accumulation of stressors brought about by the covid-19 pandemic and associated transitions in student learning. They shaped *strategies* for support around the identified challenges of interaction, mental well-being, and motivation for students. These strategies included intentionality in interactions with students and expressed care for students' well-being. These identified strategies are consistent with current suggestions for educators in supporting students through covid-19 [6]. Through these adaptations, student affairs professionals have demonstrated remarkable use of *self* through their creativity and flexibility in adapting their services to support students in hybrid and remote environments.

These findings illustrate how the professionals each drew upon multiple resources to navigate the transitions in their roles and programs through the covid-19 pandemic. Their response to these transitions evidences the interconnected nature of *situation, supports, self*, and *strategies* in responding to change. The participants in this study described their responses to this transition as largely organic and individually driven. Their can-do attitude to find solutions and new approaches as their roles and situations changed exemplified Schlossberg's construct of *self*. These professionals also sought *supports* through their personal and professional networks. These supports ranged from informal conversations with peers to the development of communities of practice around specific student needs and services. Through these supports, the professionals were able to identify and create new *strategies* to help manage new stresses and constraints imposed by the pandemic and ensuing personal and global challenges. As noted by Angela E. Batista, the 2020-2021 NASPA Board Chair, student affairs professionals were well prepared to respond to the transitions and student needs from the pandemic given their experience in managing crises and the unexpected [22]. While the *situation* in which these professionals worked continued to change through the academic year, including personal stresses experienced by the professionals, their mission to serve students' well-being remained constant.

While this study explored how professionals transitioned their programs and services, our findings indicate a need for further exploration of how professionals experienced this transition themselves, emphasizing the impact on and supports needed for their own well-being (e.g., [23], [24]). The student affairs professionals' successes in navigating transitions to hybrid and remote student services amidst a global pandemic points to their adaptability and dedication; though, the stresses of this transition weighed heavily, as many participants described feelings of burn out and strain on mental health prevalent in their workspaces. These findings indicate opportunity for institutions to provide greater support of these professionals through transitions and stressful events in their roles. Schlossberg's 4S's framework can facilitate developing systems of support

for both students and professionals through such transitions. Our findings about how the professionals used the 4S's in their transitions through these unprecedented events demonstrate how this theory could be utilized to provide more structured supports. For example, institutions can apply Schlossberg's transition theory to provide support for faculty and staff transitions by recognizing and responding to burnout, promoting collaborative efforts, and unifying efforts through the university's mission. Future studies could analyze how university administrators used the 4S's to support staff through transition and help plan for upcoming academic years.

Notably, though the professionals experienced significant challenges through the pandemic, the forced transitions also brought about new ways of approaching their programs and services that they indicated they would carry forward in their work with students. Through reflection on the successes and difficulties of transitions through the academic year, they identified new strategies to improve engagement and expand participation, new opportunities for support from other programs, including cross-university collaborations, and new ways to execute their mission of serving students as student affairs professionals. This study contributes to research on experiential learning through its findings about how student affairs professionals can support student engagement online. By applying transition theory to understanding how professionals navigate role transitions and responses to stressful events, we provide insight into these professionals' agency and directions for institutional supports. Future work will examine how students experienced these transitions and the interrelations between the students' and professionals' navigation of transition to hybrid and remote learning.

Conclusion and Implications

Our study's findings highlight the various ways that student affairs professionals drew upon available resources to adapt their programs and services to students' needs amidst changing hybrid and remote learning contexts. We additionally note the need for consideration of the well-being of these student affairs professionals as they navigate their own transitions in their lives and roles. Many of the professionals interviewed indicated the significance of collaborations, often informal, in supporting them through these transitions. The professionals shared many examples of how continued iteration in their approach to programming led to successful adaptations and student engagement. This innovation illustrates their persistence through uncertainty, providing opportunity to rethink approaches to student engagement, though it has also required great commitment and perseverance from these professionals. These professionals served to provide key institutional supports for students through the pandemic. We seek to recognize their efforts through this work and recommend continued support and research around this changing environment in student affairs.

Acknowledgments

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