

# STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTITIONER SCHOLARSHIP: STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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## **Abstract**

Student affairs practitioner-scholarship has the potential to transform higher education and improve the lives of students; however, it is rarely cultivated on college campuses. Instead, many practitioner-scholars struggle with systemic barriers to their success, much of which can be linked to the influence of neoliberalism in higher education. In this paper, we make a case for the imperative of institutional leadership to actively encourage practitioner-scholarship through the elimination of systemic barriers. We build on our own experiences as practitioner-scholars and share anecdotes that relate to our challenges and successes in pursuing and producing scholarship. We close by offering recommendations for institutional leaders and higher education faculty members.

Keywords: practitioner-scholar, neoliberalism, student affairs

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**S**tudent affairs practitioners are, first and foremost, educators (NASPA, 2004). Their scope of influence on college student experiences is immense, and their responsibility for fostering many aspects of holistic development is critical for student learning and well-being (Reynolds et al., 2009). Despite the decades of research and theoretical history that foreground student affairs practice (NASPA, 2004), the fact remains that “the people who conduct most of the published research [in higher education and student affairs] are not the same people as those who practice in the larger domain of [the] profession” (Fried, 2002, p. 123). This disconnect has implications for the students served by these practitioners, who are increasingly likely to hold minoritized identities (NCES, 2020). Student affairs practitioners are on the front lines of colleges and universities as those charged with supporting and advising students through personal relationships (Reynolds et al., 2009); as such, they often “have intimate knowledge of what can positively or negatively impact [minoritized] students’ academic success... [and] can contribute to creating a more just society” (Hatfield, 2015, p. 5) as a result. In response to this, practitioner-scholarship has been proposed as one means of bridging the gap between knowledge production and professional practice (Boss & Dunn, 2021; Boss & Dunn, 2022; Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013; Hatfield & Wise, 2015; Jablonski et al., 2006; Jones, 2014).

Though a focus on student affairs practitioner-scholarship has grown increasingly in recent years (see, for example, Hatfield & Wise, 2015), several barriers exist that prevent such scholarship from flourishing in the student affairs profession. Student affairs literature has identified some of these barriers as endemic to the culture of student affairs work and the pervasive “tyranny of the urgent” (Sriram, 2011, p. 1) “rather than taking time to unwind the complexities of practice, we are forced to move quickly” (Fried, 2002, p. 120). Indeed, student affairs practitioners themselves have reported the greatest barriers to engaging in

scholarship are lack of time, institutional or supervisory support, and access to current scholarly literature (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Sriram & Oster, 2012). Despite the systemic nature of these barriers, most literature on scholarly practice in student affairs has placed responsibility for overcoming them on practitioners themselves, who have been encouraged to act more thoughtfully and intentionally (Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013), be more motivated (Hatfield & Wise, 2015), or build more relationships with faculty (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to make a case for practitioner-scholarship as an institutional imperative through an analysis of the structural barriers to such scholarship. We agree with many scholars that practitioner-scholarship has the potential to transform student learning, students’ lives, and even entire institutions for the better (Boss et al., 2018; Bouck, 2011; Hatfield, 2015; Jones, 2014). However, as practitioner-scholars ourselves, we take issue with the notion that systemic barriers can be solved with individual grit and tenacity (Palley, 2005); this implicitly gives the message that student affairs practitioners (the majority of whom work in entry- or mid-level roles with limited decision-making authority) can overcome obstacles to engaging in scholarship by simply working hard enough, a proposition rooted in the false promises of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2002). In this paper, we take a different approach, offering a call to action for student affairs leaders and supervisors to proactively create institutional environments that foster student affairs practitioner-scholarship. Specifically, we use our own experience as practitioner-scholars and as principal investigators in an IRB-approved study (Gilbert & Burden, 2022) to illustrate challenges that these leaders can address, focusing on their ability—and, indeed, their obligation—to prioritize time, access, and funding to support the scholarship of the student affairs practitioners in their spheres of influence, as well as undertaking intentional measures to value that scholarship. We begin with a brief review of the lit-

erature on practitioner-scholarship in student affairs, as well as the barriers to and potential within that scholarship.

## Review of the Literature

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The importance of scholarly practice in student affairs has been a topic of discussion within the profession for the last 20 years (Carpenter, 2001; Fried, 2002); however, a substantial gap between research and practice remains (Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013; Hatfield & Wise, 2015; Jablonski et al., 2006), and overall, “little is known regarding how much student affairs professionals engage research in their work or how to help them do so” (Sriram & Oster, 2012, p. 378). Though many graduate preparation programs in higher education and student affairs emphasize the importance of scholarly practice (Boss & Dunn, 2022; Dungy, 2011; Hirschy & Wilson, 2017) and several models for practitioner-scholarship exist (e.g., Blimling, 2011; Reason & Kimball, 2012), the day-to-day demands of the profession “may force choices that require a practitioner to leave scholarship to the faculty” (Kane, 2014, p. 7). As such, most graduate students engage with research significantly more than student affairs professionals (Sriram & Oster, 2012). Many scholars have pointed out the problematic nature of this reality and have asserted that a direct connection exists between student affairs scholarship and the betterment of students’ lives (Boss & Dunn, 2021; Hatfield, 2015; Jablonski, 2005; Jones, 2014) and, as such, that barriers to practitioner-scholarship must be explored (Jablonski et al., 2006; Sriram & Oster, 2012).

### Barriers to Practitioner-Scholarship

In their seminal text, *A Guide to Becoming a Scholarly Practitioner in Student Affairs*, Hatfield and Wise (2015) identified several barriers to student affairs practitioner-scholarship, including inadequate academic preparation, lack of motivation, and so-called second-class citizen syndrome.

However, the majority of these identified barriers—and associated recommendations—fail to account for the systemic challenges faced by student affairs professionals. In fact, there is only one systemic barrier mentioned by Hatfield and Wise (2015)—the fact that practitioner-scholarship is often not expected of practitioners nor valued by their institutions. Expectations for scholarship (or lack thereof) often are reinforced by supervisory practices (Boss & Dunn, 2021; Boss & Dunn, 2022; Jones, 2014); in their 2012 study, Sriram and Oster found that a lack of support from supervisors and senior administrators was a frequently-discussed barrier for practitioner-scholarship, and asserted that leaders must take it upon themselves to “advocate for the importance of applying research in practice” and should even “take the time to engage in scholarship regularly” themselves (p. 391). For leaders to effectively advocate for solutions to systemic barriers to practitioner-scholarship, however, the nature of these barriers—and the ways they are interwoven into expectations of the student affairs profession—must be better understood.

An analysis of norms and often taken-for-granted expectations within the student affairs profession reveals several systemic barriers to successful practitioner-scholarship. Most evidently, the high levels of burnout and attrition endemic within student affairs (Mullen et al., 2018) could lead to a lack of capacity for staff to engage in scholarly activities. Toxic work environments, including lack of effective supervision (Barham & Winston, 2006; Shupp & Arminio, 2012) and unreasonable work expectations (Squire et al., 2019), may also impact staff members’ ability to engage in scholarly practice. Additionally, salary ranges for student affairs professionals tend to fall below the national average for individuals with a master’s degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2015; Higher Ed Jobs, 2021), and many student affairs professionals are not compensated for the totality of their responsibilities, which regularly exceed a 40-hour workweek (Marshall et al., 2016). Thus, without adequate time to complete one’s job responsibili-

ties or sufficient resources to pay for living expenses, scholarship inevitably becomes a much lower priority than survival.

Many of these barriers to practitioner scholarship can be directly traced to the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideologies in higher education (Giroux, 2002; Palley, 2005). *Neoliberalism* refers to an economic paradigm that prioritizes free market conditions and impacts practices and beliefs within higher education that shift how institutions view labor, employee output, and production (Giroux, 2002). Specifically, this ideology manifests in how student affairs practitioners understand their work in connection with broader university demands and commitments, what Squire and Nicolazzo (2019) referred to as universities reforming “the working environment into a factory model of production” (p. 5). In practice, this factory model changes student affairs practitioners’ relationships to their work towards a strict focus on output. This dynamic promotes staff burnout and higher rates of emotional distress. It also takes staff away from the developmental work of student affairs. Pushing practitioners to focus on how much they are doing creates unhealthy dynamics that enable universities to take advantage of their workforce, thus limiting practitioners’ ability to engage in important scholarship and research. Unfortunately, the frequent institutional response to these concerns is to tell student affairs practitioners that they must cope with these issues individually, through self-care or otherwise, rather than institutional leaders actually addressing them systemically (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). To remove barriers to practitioner engagement with scholarly practice, there must be a shift away from personal responsibility towards structural considerations that question the ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism within institutions of higher education.

Some of these structural considerations—such as a livable wage, reasonable expectations, and a supportive supervisor—have been found to be associated with higher job satisfaction amongst

student affairs professionals (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006). Additionally, research has suggested that higher levels of job satisfaction amongst student affairs professionals are correlated with lower levels of burnout, attrition, and desire to seek another position (Mullen et al., 2018). Arguably, higher levels of job satisfaction may result in greater capacity to engage in scholarly practice for student affairs professionals. Thus, higher education leaders should take into account how these systemic barriers impact the scholarly engagement of their team members and make active strides toward removing these barriers; in doing so, they may not only improve staff retention and overall well-being but may also unlock the potential that practitioner-scholarship holds for higher education.

### Potential within Practitioner-Scholarship

Student affairs professionals are among the most well-informed individuals on college campuses about the needs of college students (Reynolds et al., 2009); as such, their scholarship has significant implications for student success and well-being (Hatfield, 2015). The specific contributions of practitioner-scholarship are revealed across Boyer’s (1990) four domains of scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. In each of these four domains, there are unique opportunities for student affairs practitioners to contribute to knowledge about students given their position and perspective within institutions to impact student learning, growth, and development. While Boyer’s (1990) model focuses predominantly on the professoriate, we share his desire to redefine the role of research within institutions and extend this model to re-envision the role of student affairs practitioners and challenge neoliberal structures within higher education.

### Scholarship of Discovery

From building residential curriculum models to fostering learners who desire to transform our world, student affairs practitioners are educators

at their core (NASPA, 2004). Efforts to promote the discovery of knowledge regarding the experiences of college students are enhanced by engaged educators who act as practitioner-scholars. Within the scholarship of discovery, Boyer (1990) asserted that the pursuit of research should be driven by the desire to discover new knowledge. Practitioner-scholars are well-positioned to guide this discovery given their close contact with students (Reynolds et al., 2009). There is also potential for practitioner-scholars to center community-based research practices that view students, faculty, staff, and community members as partners in the scholarship of discovery and, in doing so, promote a more just and equitable university community (Hacker, 2013; Stringer & Aragon, 2021).

### **Scholarship of Integration**

Beyond discovery, Boyer's (1990) model extends to the scholarship of integration, defined as "disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research" (p. 19). Integration builds on discovery, placing new insights in the context of inter- and trans-disciplinary work and synthesizing these insights to reach a broader understanding. Practitioner-scholarship can play a critical role in such efforts, as student affairs practitioners draw from multiple disciplinary backgrounds in their training (Manning et al., 2013) and encounter unique opportunities to impact student learning on several dimensions within and outside the classroom (NASPA, 2004). As such, they should be viewed as contributors to the scholarship of integration in an attempt to create more meaningful engagement with research, bridging the gaps between theory and practice commonly seen within university communities (Boss & Dunn, 2022; Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013; Hatfield & Wise, 2015).

### **Scholarship of Application**

Boyer's (1990) third domain, the scholarship of application, considers how one of the main functions of research should be to change social

conditions. This requires an acknowledgment that research is impacted by societal conditions and as such, should work to transform our world. There are ample opportunities in the scholarship of application for practitioner-scholars to leverage their expertise (Schroeder & Pike, 2001), specifically in the implementation of transformative practices that change the structural conditions of higher education and transform systems that negatively impact minoritized individuals (Boss et al., 2018; Bouck, 2011; Hatfield, 2015). As a field of professional practice (NASPA, 2004), student affairs practitioners are well-positioned to identify applications for scholarship; indeed, this is what is of most interest to practitioner-scholars, who have reported being "most interested in engaging research for the purpose of practical application" (Sriram & Oster, 2012, p. 389).

### **Scholarship of Teaching**

Boyer's (1990) fourth and final domain, the scholarship of teaching, challenges student affairs practitioners to consider their responsibility to pass along knowledge to others within their community, actively working against the competitive spirit that can dominate within the field (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). Boyer (1990) asserts that, to be effective, scholarship must be made public to others for learning and potential replication. Student affairs practitioners can engage in the scholarship of teaching by sharing their work at conferences, consulting with colleagues, and publishing through formal or informal means. This domain specifically supports student affairs practitioners' ability to enact change within their spheres of influence by publicly sharing promising practices for promoting student well-being while publicly critiquing structural conditions of institutions that cause harm.

These four domains are interconnected and provide an important framework for how the work of practitioner-scholars can be envisioned. Next, we further illustrate challenges and opportunities within practitioner-scholarship through anecdotes

from our journey as practitioner-scholars.

### **Our Journey as Practitioner-Scholars: Challenges and Opportunities**

We, the authors, collectively identify as white, cisgender, and LGBTQ+ scholar-activists and practitioner-scholars who had a working relationship for four years in an office dedicated to institutional inclusion and equity. We worked to prioritize our own and one another's scholarship during that time while balancing our many responsibilities to supervisees, students, and colleagues. Together, we engaged in several activities across Boyer's (1990) domains, including serving as principal investigators in a critical quantitative research study (Gilbert & Burden, 2022), intentionally building scholarship time into our weekly schedules, and disseminating our research findings and learnings via conference workshops and at institutional, professional development opportunities. We draw from those experiences—while holding our unique positionalities and associated privileges constantly in mind—as we reflect on the challenges and opportunities evident in our practitioner-scholarship.

### **Time**

Student affairs professionals have frequently reported numerous duties in addition to their explicit job responsibilities (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2018). These time limitations have been identified as barriers to practitioner-scholarship (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Sriram & Oster, 2012). We likewise experienced these challenges as practitioners and decided to address them by allocating our time intentionally through weekly scholarship mornings that were prioritized similarly to weekly 1-1 meetings or staff meetings. At first, these scholarship mornings consisted of dedicated time to read and discuss recent articles in student affairs and higher education journals. Soon, however, we began to connect much of what we read to the work we engaged in as practitioners and had a strong desire to share that work with

others. We submitted proposals to present at professional conferences and continued staying informed about relevant literature to our areas of interest. When a half-day supervision workshop we conducted received highly positive feedback, we decided to formalize it into a study on student affairs professional staff supervision that we soon submitted for approval to our Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Though we felt motivated to pursue our scholarship, as full-time practitioners, we found it necessary to make the case to others for why scholarship was a critical part of our praxis and to justify the time we spent in our weekly scholarship mornings. Student affairs practitioners are rarely encouraged by supervisors to engage in scholarship (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Saunders & Cooper, 1999; Sriram & Oster, 2012). As such, many student affairs practitioner-scholars must justify their desires to engage in scholarship to their institutional leadership. We went directly to our vice president to make the case that our scholarship was important work, framing the issue as a means of achieving greater prestige and recognition for our university. Though this argument was successful, it was only necessary due to the lack of a supportive institutional context that proactively enabled our research. We likewise felt it necessary to justify our time in scholarship to other stakeholders, such as donors, parents, colleagues, and students. We highlighted our efforts in our annual reports each year and frequently spoke about the ways our scholarship directly impacted our work with students. We were fortunate to have the support of our constituents more often than not; however, issues of access continued to impede our scholarship.

### **Access**

Engaging in scholarship requires access to a number of resources (e.g., technology, scholarly literature, and institutional literacy) that we were fortunate to have at our disposal due to our employment at a research institution. Many practi-

tioner-scholars, for example, have reported struggling with accessing scholarly literature relevant to their fields of practice (Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Sriram & Oster, 2012). However, we encountered several challenges with access to resources necessary for our study to occur; chief among them was the IRB approval process at our institution. We were required to receive a letter of support from our vice president to serve as principal investigators in our study; this gatekeeping mechanism created a dynamic that inhibited our ability to be seen as valid researchers. There are also significant differences within the IRB process from institution to institution. Some non-faculty may be completely unable to access their university IRB processes (see, for example, Office of Responsible Research Practices, 2021). Though the IRB approval process is complex, we leveraged the institutional partnerships we had built as practitioners. We also relied on connections within the IRB office for support in successfully submitting our application, which was approved about a month later. Though we were able to successfully navigate this process based on our working relationships, IRB **approval** remains a significant barrier for many aspiring practitioner-scholars.

Access to an appropriate participant pool was another challenge we encountered in our study. Because we specifically were interested in staff members' experiences in our research, we decided to recruit participants amongst our local professional connections in the region. As a result of our inter-institutional connections with fellow practitioners, we were fortunate to gain access to listservs and other methods of dissemination of the opportunity to participate in our study. However, despite this significant population of potential research participants, we found it challenging to recruit a robust amount of participants for our sample. This may have been partly due to structural conditions that limit staff members' ability to be available to participate in research projects, such as job responsibilities outside of the scope of one's position description (Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen

et al., 2018). We also wondered whether our status as staff members—and associated biases that others may have about what that may have meant about the quality of our research—also impacted our challenges with participant recruitment. Finally, we could not offer significant incentives to participants given our limited budget.

## Funding

After receiving approval from the IRB to begin our research, we sought out funding sources to cover our study expenses, including compensation for participants and a subscription to a survey software platform. The majority of academic research is grant-funded (NSF, 2020); thus, we considered both internal institutional grants as well as national and international grants to fund our work. Unfortunately, we found that national higher education professional organizations like ACPA and NASPA lack organized support for practitioner research, especially within their research grants and other funding initiatives. Additionally, we could not access institutional funding sources, as all were explicitly earmarked for faculty. As an alternative, once again, we turned to our skills as practitioners and sought funding and sponsorship from various offices within our institution; as a result of relationships we had built, we were able to find financial support that ultimately allowed us to move forward. Specifically, the Division of Student Affairs and Center for Ethics at our institution supported our work with small co-sponsorship grants. Without these partnerships, we may have been unable to conduct our study successfully, revealing a substantial gap both within higher education institutions and professional associations in support for practitioner-scholarship.

Funding for statistical training was also necessary for us to complete our study successfully, as neither of us had taken a statistics course since graduate school. Some student affairs and higher education graduate programs do not include extensive training on research methodologies at all (Young & Janosik, 2007). To bolster our skills in

this area, we sought out supervisory approval to undertake a statistics course as non-degree-seeking students and, as a result, gained the necessary skillset to analyze the data that we had collected through our study. Many higher education institutions provide some form of tuition benefits for their staff members; however, at times, these benefits are restricted to training deemed relevant for one's job or associated with a formal degree program (see, for example, Human Resources, 2021). In addition to dedicated professional development funding for conferences, seminars, and professional association membership, institutional leaders should prioritize advocacy for tuition benefits for research methodology coursework. Funding to pursue this training to advance our scholarship allowed us to successfully complete our study and submit it to a peer-reviewed journal for publication; however, challenges remained in obtaining institutional recognition for our work.

### Value

We received many accolades from colleagues outside our institution due to our scholarly work. However, we also experienced an institutional culture that did not often value or validate our scholarship. For example, when our library staff sent out a call for information regarding recent manuscripts written by faculty so that they could purchase a copy for their collection, we excitedly informed them that we had chapters included in several recently published edited collections as a result of our scholarship. However, we were informed that the library would purchase only collections that included faculty members. Likewise, the student affairs and higher education journals where our work was published were not included in our library's collection, eliminating the ability for colleagues at our institution to read and engage with our work. This gave the implicit message that our scholarship was less valuable to our institution. Other norms within our institution, such as press releases highlighting faculty publications and presentations, also excluded our scholarship,

as did intra-institutional research forums where we might have otherwise presented our work.

A culture that genuinely values practitioner-scholarship is unfortunately rare at many institutions (Boss & Dunn, 2021; Boss & Dunn, 2022; Jones, 2014); often, student affairs divisions “dictate that research is a nice activity to do but not a requirement for good practice” (Sriram & Oster, 2012, p. 390). Indeed, the CAS standards for individual excellence, often considered foundational to professional development within the field, do not explicitly mention research or scholarship (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2006), which some have called an affront to good practice (Jablonski et al., 2006). Valuing practitioner-scholarship begins with establishing it as an expectation (Jones, 2014); however, in the absence of an environment free from barriers to staff success and well-being when it comes to scholarly practice, “it is irresponsible to demand that staff members fit scholarship into their packed schedules” (Gilbert, 2021, para. 14). Expectations for scholarly practice must be complemented with actions that improve the lives of the staff who will engage in such scholarship. Thus, we conclude with key implications and recommendations that may address systemic barriers to practitioner-scholarship while also elevating its importance both within and outside higher education institutions.

### Implications

Our experiences as practitioner-scholars, our associated challenges with finding resources to support our scholarship—including time, access, and funding—and our efforts to establish our scholarship as valuable within our institutional context yield several important implications in conversation with the scholarly literature on practitioner-scholarship. We specifically offer these implications (and associated recommendations) for those with institutional power and authority to enact systemic change in this area—including



student affairs supervisors, senior higher education administrators, research staff, and faculty. Ample resources exist for practitioner-scholars themselves interested in embarking upon their own scholarly journeys (see, for example, Hatfield & Wise, 2015; Sriram & Oster, 2012). We have further organized our implications using Boyer's (1990) model, using it as a lens to re-envision student affairs practitioner-scholarship and challenge neoliberalism.

### **A Practitioner-Scholarship of Discovery**

The scholarship of discovery centers the process of inquiry toward knowledge creation (Boyer, 1990). To cultivate a practitioner-scholarship of discovery, leaders of student affairs divisions must first explicitly articulate the importance of scholarship for their teams (Sriram & Oster, 2012) while at the same time making active efforts to create conditions for that scholarship to thrive. This includes attending to the basic quality of life and well-being of student affairs professionals through ensuring pay equity and sufficient time off (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). Additionally, individual supervisors and senior administrators alike can provide time for staff members to focus on scholarship as both leaders of inquiry processes and research participants, which may require a reconceptualization of student affairs staff job responsibilities. Research staff should examine IRB gatekeeping mechanisms that may preclude practitioner-scholarship of discovery and remove barriers that prevent appropriately-trained staff members from leading and conducting research. Finally, student affairs and higher education professional associations—both academic in nature and practice-focused—can work to provide ongoing professional development on research methodologies and other skill-building sessions that would benefit practitioner-scholars, as well as create funds for grants that can support their discovery-focused projects. While professional organization funding for staff-led research is limited, the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA), which spon-

sors the College Student Affairs Journal, offers an encouraging model through their Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Grants (AER) program, which is available to anyone interested in advancing research projects related to college student affairs (Research Grants, n.d.).

### **A Practitioner-Scholarship of Integration and Application**

The scholarship of integration emphasizes synthesizing inter- and trans-disciplinary perspectives to generate new insights, while the scholarship of application extends those insights into practical efforts that lead to social change (Boyer, 1990). Both of these components of Boyer's (1990) model support practitioner-scholarship that contributes to changes in student affairs practice (Schroeder & Pike, 2001). There are promising examples within K-12 settings of establishing cultures of practical, solutions-focused scholarship amongst practitioners (e.g., Albion et al., 2015; Babkie & Provost, 2004). Action research is one such model conducted in K-12 settings to improve teacher practice that draws from transdisciplinary origins that emphasize bridging the gap between research and practice (Stringer & Aragon, 2021). Action research offers a promising approach for student affairs practitioner-scholarship. Action research is a systemic research approach where practitioners investigate their practices through a reflexive cycle that results in change that benefits stakeholders (Herrera, 2018; Nolan & Vander Putten, 2007; Stringer & Aragon, 2021). Though a compelling model for practitioner-scholarship, action research is largely underexplored in higher education, especially outside the postsecondary classroom (Gibbs et al., 2017).

Several barriers must be addressed to further the use of action research as a means of practitioner-scholarship of integration and application. First, college and university libraries should provide access to transdisciplinary literature on student affairs practice so that such resources are readily accessible to student affairs practi-

tioners. Second, providing practitioners with access to non-degree-seeking classes focused on action research and other forms of qualitative and quantitative research training is crucial given the widespread lack of research training in higher education graduate programs (Young & Janosik, 2007). Faculty working in student affairs preparation programs may also consider incorporating course content to educate future practitioners about action research and its potential role in their work. Third, by normalizing action research as a valid form of scholarship, the practitioner-scholar dichotomy can be further blurred (Blimling, 2011), and the potential for practitioner-scholarship as a source of institutional change can be more fully realized.

To foster integration- and application-based scholarship, student affairs leadership must also grapple with and challenge the emergence of a customer service model for student affairs practice (Cairo & Cabal, 2021). This model places significant and, often unrealistic, time demands on student affairs professionals and pulls them away from the possibilities of practitioner-scholarship. The option of a sabbatical for student affairs practitioners offers a promising intervention that may lead to greater engagement and participation in student affairs research (Furr, 2018). By reconceptualizing the day-to-day demands and ideal worker norms placed upon student affairs practitioners (Sallee, 2020), senior leaders and practitioners can collectively build a profession that is invested in and contributes to scholarship that directly impacts student learning and practitioners' professional development.

### **A Practitioner-Scholarship of Teaching**

A scholarship of teaching involves sharing knowledge with one's broader community (Boyer, 1990). To foster the dissemination of practitioner-scholarship, scholarly journals within higher education and student affairs should seek out practitioner perspectives and/or create pathways for practitioner perspectives to be highlight-

ed (e.g., the "practitioner perspectives" submission category in the *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education*). Book editors should likewise seek out practitioner-scholarship, especially that which demonstrates praxis, or theory-informed work (e.g., Marine & Gilbert, 2022). Once published, institutions should elevate the scholarship of practitioners in the same way that faculty scholarship is highlighted (Gilbert, 2021), including purchasing copies of texts written by practitioners for university libraries and highlighting practitioner-led research in institutional symposia and press releases. All of these changes require a dramatic shift in how academic institutions traditionally approach the role of student affairs staff members in knowledge production.

### **Further Research**

Finally, in addition to the necessity of practitioner-led scholarship, further research is also crucial for providing insight into the experiences of practitioner-scholars themselves (Boss & Dunn, 2022; Jones, 2014; Sriram & Oster, 2012). Specifically, a more thorough analysis of the barriers to practitioner-scholarship and a broader understanding of the conditions that lead to successful practitioner-scholarship are both needed. An analysis of nuances of practitioner-scholar experiences across race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other facets of identity is likewise necessary for understanding how systemic oppression impacts practitioner-scholarship and exploring strategies to work toward the disruption of these systems. Practitioner-scholars themselves are well-positioned to undertake this research, and faculty members interested in investigating this further should find ways to partner with practitioners.

### **Limitations**

We have argued that student affairs practitioner-scholarship has the potential to transform student learning and well-being at institutions (Boss & Dunn, 2022; Hatfield & Wise, 2015; Jablonski, 2005); however, structural barriers

within higher education and student affairs stemming from neoliberal ideologies impede many practitioners from engaging in scholarship (Palley, 2005; Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). We firmly believe that providing practitioners with the time, access, and resources necessary to engage in scholarship has the potential to improve the quality of life for student affairs practitioners and students alike. That being said, we also acknowledge that there are a wide variety of ways that student affairs practitioners may engage in scholarship outside of Boyer's (1990) model, such as decolonizing research practices and intentionally resisting the institutional structures that give merit to certain types of research over others (Patel, 2015). Higher education leaders should value, respect, and celebrate each of these scholarship types.

Additionally, it is crucial to note that academic freedom is a central component of colleges and universities (Poch, 1993); however, this is a luxury only afforded to tenure-stream faculty members. Thus, practitioner-scholars may experience vulnerability in their scholarship that their faculty colleagues do not. Because "the ability to access, integrate, and apply multiple sources of knowledge is key to successful student affairs practice" (Hirschy & Wilson, 2017, p. 8), institutions must also consider ways to protect the individuals engaging in that scholarship, especially if those practitioner-scholars already occupy positions of less structural power and prestige. Finally, as with any research, centering the protection of all human subjects, especially those who come from vulnerable and/or historically minoritized communities, is imperative; efforts to expand access to practitioner-scholarship, including ensuring that staff members can serve as principal investigators in IRB processes, should always be enacted in the context of those commitments.

### Imagining Practitioner-Scholar Futures

Envisioning the just, equitable world we endeavor to create is critical for resisting neoliberal notions of resource scarcity (Pitcher, 2015) and is

an invaluable tool for fostering a "collaborative, collective experience that invites complexity and possibilities" (Wagner & Thuot, 2022, p. 166) within student affairs and higher education. In reflecting on the challenges and opportunities evident in our own experiences as practitioner-scholars, we find ourselves resonating with the question posed by Carpenter and Haber-Curran (2013): "What if student affairs professionals fully embraced a role as practitioner-scholars engaging in practice in a thoughtful and intentional way that is both informed by research and informs research?" (p. 3). As we imagine a world where this is the case, we imagine not just individual practitioner-scholars engaging in transformative work but also institutions that support, cultivate, value, and celebrate that work. We imagine the lives and experiences of minoritized students being centered in higher education research and practice. We imagine divisions of student affairs that pay living wages, provide ample time off, and genuinely value the well-being of their team members. We imagine colleges and universities where neoliberal realities do not dictate institutional priorities and where people are valued above rankings, donations, and profit. This is the world to which our scholarship aspires and the world that we hope you will join us in working to create.

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