DEFINING AND ADDRESSING PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT IN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

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Professional burnout is a growing concern in campus activities units. We have collected several anecdotal reflections from student affairs professionals, which we share to illustrate how the dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of self-efficacy can show up in our daily work. We will provide suggestions reexamining organization structures and professional practices to combat feelings of burnout and establish new and innovative career pathways for campus activities professionals.

As a profession, we might be in the *perfect storm* as it relates to retaining talent, recruiting future professionals, and identifying how to establish new models for encouraging morale and self-management within the profession. A *perfect storm* arises from a number of negative and unpredictable factors that create a critical state of affairs (Oxford, n.d.). As we reflect on the last two years, we recognize that an unpredictable global pandemic collided with existing concerns around mental health on campus. Those factors were compounded by our country responding to a racial injustice pandemic, and increased demands for administration to address the inequities that have plagued our campuses for centuries. Finally, the Great Resignation resulted in many professionals leaving their campus positions leaving offices understaffed and demands for student support increasing. These negative and unpredictable factors contribute to attrition in the field reaching a critical state of affairs.

A national survey that included several student affairs units within its data collection (see CUPA-HR 2022 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey), notes that "higher ed in general is facing a crisis in retaining its talent" (as cited in Moody, 2022, para 6). Recognizing the importance around retaining talent within student affairs units has consistently been part of discussions surrounding the future of the profession. Looking further into the CUPA-HR2022 survey data four broad conclusions are highlighted: 1) employees are seeking a position with a higher salary, 2) remote work opportunities are not being provided as an option, 3) employees are working longer hours and harder than in recent years, and 4) clear areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are identified in their work environment.

Reflecting on the growth of our profession, higher education institutions have experienced numerous shifts and expansions since the early 1900's that have resulted in changing organizational structures, specifically in how student success outside the classroom is managed. Increasing student enrollment and diversity resulted in an increase in student affairs personnel charged with providing meaningful learning experiences outside the academic classroom (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). Student activities has seen a tremendous growth in positions that support the out-of-class experience of students on college campuses, including expanding areas for support for student organizations, leadership programming, and campus event coordination. While we have seen these units' grow, many positions are often filled by new professionals (i.e., those in their first five years of employment post graduate school) and retention is an issue. Staffing growth being attributed to positions designed for new professions is significant to note. Holmes, et al. (1983), found in an early study that 60% of professionals who held a master's degree in the profession left the profession in a 6-year period; decades later, that percentage has remained consistent (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006; Marshall, et al., 2016).

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Most recently, *The Compass Report: Charting The Future of Student Affairs* (2022) found that the top three factors that could contribute to student affairs professionals leaving the field include inadequate compensation, crisis management roles that lead to burnout, and feeling underappreciated by the institution. Throughout the last few decades, numerous authors have suggested that burnout could be the leading cause of professionals leaving the field (as cited in Lorden, 1998; Connor, 2021; Carter, 2019; Mullen, et al., 2018). There is no doubt that burnout is a key factor in student affairs professionals' decision to leave the higher education environment. Mullen, et al. (2018), investigated student affairs professionals' level of job stress and burnout in relationship to their job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The authors concluded that "[h]igher levels of job stress and burnout were positively associated with turnover intention and negatively associated with job satisfaction" (p. 105). While these are not necessarily surprising findings, they do indicate a profession-wide inability to address the issue over several decades – and the problem may have gotten worse over the past few years. In this article, we focus on professional burnout and how campus activities units address could address burnout. We have collected a number of anecdotal reflections from student affairs professionals, which we will share to illustrate the concepts we highlight in the article. These were not intended to constitute qualitative research, but it was interesting to note how frequently the themes elicited for this article matched those of previous research. To understand more about how to address burnout, it is important to begin with defining burnout in the workplace.

DEFINING WORKPLACE BURNOUT

While many professionals use the word "burnout" to describe a variety of negative feelings associated with the world of work, a general consensus of its properties has built over the past 35 years among those who study it. Three basic dimensions exist: 1) A sense of *exhaustion*, where the person experiences a loss of energy and bouts of fatigue while engaged in or thinking about the work; 2) *Cynicism* and feeling a sense of detachment and depersonalization from the job and the people encountered within it, where the person feels irritable, lacking concern, and feels motivated to withdraw; and 3) A *lack of self-efficacy* in carrying out one's responsibilities, where morale is low and the person is perplexed or frustrated with their self-perceived lack of accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Many professionals can think of examples from the past two years when they have experienced these dimensions in some way.

Pathways to Burnout

Relatively recent research (Leiter & Maslach, 2015) suggests four different structures of professional work burnout, each mediated to some extent by the degree of social support and social engagement experienced within the workplace. One pathway, described as "Overextended," is simply traversed by experiencing steadily increasing amounts of exhaustion within one's work. While a person on that pathway might not initially feel more cynical or ineffective than a typical employee, over time they must continually bolster themselves to show up at work, be engaged in work activities, and attend meetings. Eventually, the exhaustion becomes so strong that they leave. A second pathway, the "Disengaged," describes professionals who express consistent cynicism about their job and maybe overall profession. These employees might feel energized and effective in their roles, but their energy is negative and directed towards all they perceive is wrong with their work environment. A third, less prevalent, pathway, titled, "Ineffective," describes professionals who perceive themselves as lacking the capacity for comprehensively completing their various roles effectively, consistently finding fault with their performance, even if others may not agree with their self-assessments. The final pathway, titled simply "Burnout," describes professionals who exhibit highly elevated amounts of at least two of the three stressors.

Interrelationship of Dimensions

While these dimensions and pathways are largely agreed upon across the social sciences, some disagreement exists regarding their interrelationships. For example, a "transactional" model of burnout (e.g., Cherniss, 1980) suggests that an initial stage of too many demands outstripping one's resources for success in one's work leads to a second stage of exhaustion and inefficacy, which then leads to an increasing degree of cynicism and defensiveness. Another model suggests that emotional exhaustion due to continued high-degree work demands then leads to depersonalization within one's work, which causes a drop in energy and idealism thus leading to a feeling of inefficacy and lack of personal work accomplishment (e.g., Maslach, 1982). Other scholars (e.g., Golembiewski & Murzenrider, 1988)

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suggest that cynicism is the initial factor, which then leads to feeling a lack of accomplishment, then to exhaustion. The interrelationship of the dimensions is evident in the data we shared earlier about reasons for leaving the profession (see CUPA-HR 2022 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey (2022) and The Compass Report (2022)). As we think about pathways for the profession to combat professional burnout, we are hopefully simultaneously addressing how to improve the work environment for campus activities professionals to feel successful.

ADDRESSING BURNOUT IN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

Addressing burnout in campus activities units begins with understanding *where* change can happen structurally and *how* professionals are told to engage with the campus. The campus culture and subculture within student activities units contributes to unspoken expectations about how much time and energy professionals should give to their role. Using the lens of the three basic dimensions associated with burnout we will explore how these show up in our work. Additionally, we will reexamine where structures could change and how to create expectations around role engagement in our campus activities units.

Exhaustion

Working in campus activities units offers an opportunity for staff to create the learning and engagement on campus that we know students remember as significant moments in their collegiate journey. Engaging in such transformational work has been associated with professionals' feeling a loss of energy and uneven bouts of fatigue during the academic year. Professionals are often in a day-to-day rotation of staffing late night campus events and then being required to be on campus for administrative meetings the next morning. To be clear, the role of staffing those late-night events is explicitly situated in the job descriptions of the newer professionals (e.g., those with less than 5 years of experience). However, we question the institutional imperative of additionally requiring those professionals to be engaged during the typical administrative workday (e.g., 8 am – 5 pm). Supervisors have long heard comments from professionals about working upwards of 60-80 hours a week, multiple times, during an academic term. Repeated requirements to maintain such a schedule can lead to exhaustion and subsequent burnout.

During the pandemic, campus activities professionals we spoke to reported feeling stuck in a repetitive cycle of high expectations with low resources and high accountability. They simultaneously felt the pressure to be innovative in engaging students outdoors, through online venues, and with social distancing protocols thrust upon them by campus administration. Pines and Aronson (1988) assert that individuals are at risk of experiencing burnout after "long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations" (p. 9). The work that has been required of campus activities professionals prior to the pandemic was exhausting, and challenges of the past few years have left some professionals with a loss of energy and bouts of fatigue that have resulted in feelings of professional burnout. For example, an activities coordinator with 4 years of experience in the field shared,

> "When the pandemic hit, I was already on the verge of burnout. I was in my first year as a new professional. The pandemic made things so much worse. There were budget cuts that made me feel like I needed to prove my worth. They had begun laying people off. I went from being someone who was already overworked to someone doing several people's jobs. I was told to just make it work, no extra money, no extra resources. I was working 60-70 hours every week for the next year and half. I started considering leaving higher education. What I thought was burnout pre-pandemic was not even close to what I was feeling after the pandemic."

The pathway to exhaustion as a primary stressor is linked to professionals' articulation of being overextended. Professionals who are attracted to the work in student affairs units often find their joy in helping to create conditions for students to develop holistically (e.g., including increasing cognition, exploring individual identities, and understanding how to relate to others). Creating those experiences for students requires teams of people who often collaborate to design, implement, and evaluate student programs.

The feelings of being exhausted are not limited to campus activities units. The pandemic has also caused student affairs professionals in senior level positions to feel overextended. One dean of students, who recently decided to pursue a career outside of the collegiate environment shared, "I left student affairs not because I don't believe

in the work, but because the work we did to support others no longer supported me." As student affairs units continue to struggle with large numbers of unfilled positions, feelings of being overextended can be found in the remaining staff shouldering an even larger-than-normal share of the work. A residence hall director with six years in the profession put it more plainly, saying that through the pandemic, "It…became clear how my institution saw me; a cog that needed to keep turning, regardless of damage caused, so the revenue continued flowing. Ultimately, if you stop turning, you are hastily replaced with another cog that will." These anecdotal quotes provide insight into how a lack of energy and bouts of fatigue can be pervasive in student affairs units, especially when our work environment is not viewed as a healthy social network.

Addressing Exhaustion in Campus Activities

Given the anecdotal information that time on task within our campus activities units can be a leading stressor that leads to burnout, we advocate for addressing the systemic problems associated with how professionals spend their time. Critically examining our organizational structures, job responsibilities, and how units collaborate are critical in rethinking our work and how we might mitigate exhaustion and burnout.

When Professionals Work

The first recommendation is to not repeat our past patterns of behaviors. Our organizational charts guide work distribution for our units. They both illustrate, and to a certain extent, dictate how power and authority is nested at the top and flows down in a consistent fashion throughout the organization. In this frame, adding tasks to a new professional's job descriptions simply because senior professionals don't want to do anymore can be an easy temptation. It's clear how this can directly lead to exhaustion in our new professionals. When examining your organizational charts, accurately assess how much time on task it takes to do the work and distribute those responsibilities equitably throughout the unit. For example, recognize that work weeks may exceed 40 hours, but no one's work week should consistently exceed 40 hours during an academic term.

Additionally, how might it change the way we approach our work if the traditional organizational chart was inverted – with entry level positions at the top and senior leadership at the bottom, providing support. This might illustrate the kind of organization we are envisioning and for which we are advocating. In this format, the organizational chart would not reflect how work is distributed, but how support is allocated. We aren't necessarily suggesting institutions change their organizational charts. Doing so without concrete changes would be a symbolic gesture at best. But we want to encourage organizations to be as mindful about the ways they offer support as they are of how they distribute authority.

How Professionals Work

Identify your staple programs (i.e., recurring each year) and what programs are flexible (i.e., additional programming, often requested by students, unique in any given year), and examine how they all fit together into a realistic portfolio of programmatic work. In a classic piece (1995) Nichols talked about the tendency of colleges and universities to add new responsibilities, programs and even missions without thought as to what old initiatives they might replace. He wrote, "Change will not come easily, or even purposefully, as long as higher education as an industry perceives itself to require neither greater efficiency nor a heightened sense of accountability" (p. 6). When we say "yes" to everything, we reduce our capacity to physically and psychically invest in all our work, often leading to exhaustion. Create a means for assessing the potential for new program success and say "no" to new requests that do not meet requirements. Additionally, remove programs that are no longer effective. You can also indicate that a program could be done in the future and negotiate the removal of an existing program to make room for the new. Being able to establish a manageable set of programs for your staff and document the time on task for your staff will be critical to help reduce exhaustion. We do not claim that this task will be easy or that a unit will avoid push-back to continue to do all that is asked of them. However, recognizing how to document time on task for your staff, distributing time equitably between staff members, and evaluating your programs for effectiveness are factors that can contribute to reducing exhaustion in your unit. Done together, those data and practices help create a supportive and healthy work environment.

Cynicism

So, what happens when the capacity to care for students holistically is diminished? The short answer is that it can lead to feelings of disengagement. As we mentioned, cynicism is expressed through feelings of detachment and depersonalization from the job and people in those work environments. The pathway to cynicism as the primary stressor in burnout is expressed through a focus on negativity toward the toward the work and the environment. The work of a campus activities professional is dependent upon the professional being able to have the support necessary to construct experiences for a changing student population. Professionals who are being asked to provide support to students while armed with fewer resources and in suboptimal work conditions unsurprisingly often express feelings of negativity toward the work and environment. A campus life manager with 20 years of experience in the field explained this phenomenon, saying:

> "The cycle of hard and time-consuming work and direct impact and appreciation from students and institutions sustained me for a long time. Even at the height of pandemic, I still had excitement for new approaches to student services and differing communication with students. But suddenly, I found myself highly micromanaged with across-the-board proclamations from student affairs leadership without adequate knowledge of background, context, or impact. I spent my own energy with students and staff addressing concerns, encouraging persistence, and considering workable alternatives to nearly every obstacle. I could not expect the same [from my own supervisors]."

The conditions that create feelings of cynicism can be complex. Revisiting findings from *The Compass Report: Charting The Future of Student Affairs* (2022) can give us some insight into the factors that may contribute specifically to student affairs professionals expression of cynicism. The report notes that "[n]early nine in 10 respondents said that salaries and compensation packages are not competitive enough given the level of experience and education required for the job" (para. 4). Compensation will always be a critical component in looking at retaining personnel. However, compensation alone will not address burnout. Compensation is one indicator a professional can use to judge if they feel valued and appreciated by the institution. While addressing compensation in campus activities work would require an entire article itself, we can summarize its impact on burnout by considering it in combination with how professionals are recognized for their contributions. A director of student activities, who recently left the field shared,

> "I loved my time in higher ed and student activities...until the pandemic. COVID shined a very bright light on all the inequities in higher ed and student affairs. I had been content to just keep putting up with things because I figured 'I chose this field, I'm good at it, it's all I know.' Turns out that I had a wealth of skills that work really well in other fields!"

The inequities that professionals may experience in their roles on campus lead to feelings of cynicism. Feelings of wanting to disengage are often associated with the negativity we experience. It is important to acknowledge that our senior leaders are also experiencing these challenges, as one vice president for student affairs shares,

> "The COVID-19 pandemic along with ongoing racialized incidents and a nationally divisive political climate has made the past few years in higher education very difficult. Our brains are not wired to be in continual crisis mode and I have felt a level of weariness physically, emotionally, and professionally these past months and now years. In my role on campus, it's been important for me to maintain a positive and professional demeanor while also recognizing and acknowledging the challenges we've all faced. I try to strike the right balance, to not be Pollyanna or exhibit "toxic positivity" but also not give in to the darkness that can so easily overtake how we think and feel about our lives and work. I talk a lot about our circle of control – what can we reasonably control in our work, our space, our lives. Focus on those things and try to let go of those things in our circles of concern and to some degree our circles of influence. Narrowing down gives us a chance to regain some of our own control and footing and is a way I've found to give my brain the break it needs."

The degree of support an employee feels from those around them in their work environment and within their personal lives can directly affect their capability to manage each of the three central aspects of work-related burnout. When an employee perceives themselves as part of a healthy social network at work and feels support for their

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co-workers and supervisor, such perceptions can help reduce or delay feelings of exhaustion, even if these feelings may not directly address feelings of depersonalization, cynicism, and inefficacy within one's job (Halbesleben, 2006). Alternatively, the same meta-analytic research suggests that feeling part of a healthy social network *outside* of work can help alleviate or reduce feelings of cynicism and ineffectiveness but hasn't been shown to alleviate or reduce feelings of exhaustion within the work environment (Halbesleben, 2006). It is interesting to think that one's friends and family might have a larger role in helping professionals make sense of their work effectiveness and sense of idealism within their jobs than those that are actually embedded within those jobs, especially one's supervisor. Still, the fact that burnout and social support are strongly negatively correlated is not surprising.

Addressing Cynicism in Campus Activities

Cynicism is a feeling that is associated with a professional's lens within their work. Thinking about how we address cynicism begins with developing and understanding what factors contribute to expressions of negativity.

Transparency and Trust. Reflecting on where you can structurally address cynicism requires a focus on transparency and trust. Since cynicism that leads to burnout manifests itself as a behavior of negativity, it is important to understand how practices (e.g. sharing information, implementation of policies, salary negations, etc.) within your organization might create negative responses. The key is not only being transparent with reports and information, but also being able to articulate why an action was taken, as well as being able to share when you are unable to provide an explanation. As professionals, building trust in supervisors and other administrators within the organization is critical to understand when information might be confidential and to not respond negatively when you are not privy to that information.

The Need to Care. The term "compassion fatigue" was first coined by Figley (2013) to describe a secondary traumatic stress that can impact those who work with others in stressful circumstances. In describing the concept, he wrote, "[t]here is a cost to caring. Professionals who listen to… stories of fear, pain, and suffering may feel similar fear, pain, and suffering because they care. Sometimes we feel we are losing our sense of self to (those) we serve" (p. 1). Simply stated, caring for others can make student affairs professionals more susceptible to compassion fatigue. Campus activities professionals are often the support for students who are struggling on campus. Figley (2013) observed, "Those who have enormous capacity for feeling and expressing empathy tend to be more at risk of compassion stress" (p. 1). Since empathy involves experiencing the emotions of others, these experiences over time can lead to burnout. Viewed in this frame, empathy can be a double-edged sword. While our care for students brings meaning to our work and helps foster the type of culture in which students can thrive, we also must understand our care can contribute to burnout. Being cognizant of how to share the load of compassionately supporting students between staff is essential. As a field, we need to be more effective in creating an environment where it is acceptable for a professional to recommend a student to another professional when they don't have the emotional capacity to work with that student in that moment. This should be a shared role among all professionals in the unit.

Lack of self-efficacy

A lack of self-efficacy refers to a perceived lack of accomplishment and the low levels of morale that result from this perception. Bandura (1977) initially defined self-efficacy as "… the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce (desired) outcomes" (p. 193). In our work, when we observe a student display a lack of self-efficacy, we often intervene to help the student identify the barriers to their success and outline a plan for overcoming those challenges to produce the desired outcomes. However, what happens when the professional responsible for providing that support feels ineffective?

A feeling of lack of self-efficacy is not commonly the primary stressor that leads to professional burnout. Still, a lack of self-efficacy often contributes to burnout when connected to either exhaustion, cynicism, or both. For example, we acknowledge that campus activities professionals often find joy and satisfaction working directly with students who frequently share their appreciation with them directly. However, changes to how campus activities professionals conduct work on campus can result in their feelings of being ineffective. The culture of our campus environments does not often provide space for professionals, at any level, to express how they may

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feel ineffective. A chancellor shared,

> "The truth is presidents and chancellors cannot talk about having professional burn out. There is not going to be empathy for someone who is compensated as highly as we are. We are paid to weather the stress and storms facing our institutions. On the other hand, I have to be vulnerable and authentic, so I often talk or write about the fact that it is OK not to be OK, but I follow that up with providing resources and tell about ways that I have used those resources to try to role model that it is safe to do so."

It is important to appreciate that feelings of being ineffective are human. As an academic institution we want to think about how we make space for all professionals to ask for support to reach their desired outcomes.

Addressing Lack of Self-Efficacy in Campus Activities

Self-efficacy, as we stated earlier, results from someone feeling they will be successful in acting to achieve desired results. Therefore, we might think about addressing a lack of self-efficacy in two parts: 1) Providing clear communication about desired results; and 2) possessing a mental model for how to intervene to create those results. While this seems simple, consider the challenges to professionals in campus activities over the past few years. Building innovative programming in an online environment with an ambiguous timeline. Supporting students from a variety of marginalized identities who possessed the energy and societal momentum to want to create new programs focused on social justice and equity. Determining how to effectively collaborate with students and professional colleagues through unfamiliar virtual environments. And perhaps most fundamentally, navigating life in the midst of the worst global pandemic in over a century.

While many of our campuses have resumed more "traditional" in-person programming, we are still navigating how to make meaning of what we should continue to use from these last few years. These challenges call for defining the priorities of campus activities work (while being able to let other priorities slip down the list), and for building in professionals the mental models that help them achieve the highest priorities. Combating a lack of self-efficacy requires intentional professional development programming. That programming needs to exists at all levels of a campus professionals work environment. Earlier in this article we discussed the importance of providing. The unit should be providing opportunities for employees to build their skills, competencies, and dispositions with the intention of providing them with a career pathway within the profession.

CREATING CAREER PATHWAYS

Creating conditions to decrease burnout within our units will improve the morale and working conditions within our campus activities units. But creating those conditions might not be easy or result in implementing convenient solutions. Lorden (1998) reviewed the existing literature surrounding student affairs attrition through 1998, and notes that career patterns in student affairs are not documented to help identify patterns for advancement or areas for improvement. Over twenty years later, no clear pattern for promotion in the profession exists within the multiple functional areas that are considered student services (e.g., career services, student activities, residence life, Greek life, leadership development, etc.). In too many instances, the only clear promotion for campus activities professionals is to take the role that is currently held by one's supervisor, leading many young and effective professionals to move-out of an institution in order to move up in the organizational structure. As Carpenter, Guido-DiBrito, & Kelly (1987) note "[t]he bad news is that there is not enough room at the top for all the talented people…the good news is that preparation and experience…are very much applicable and transferable to other endeavors" (p. 13).

Numerous professional associations, including NACA (www.naca.org), ACPA (www.myacpa.org) and NASPA (www.naspa.org), have created explicit professional competencies that professionals should master within student affairs. NACA.org, for example, lists detailed individual and organizational competencies addressing student organization advising, program management, human resource management, and community building. However, how professionals are judged or expected to demonstrate mastery of these competencies are currently absent beyond platitudes pointing to non-specific opportunities for career advancement. The narratives and

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literature we shared above strongly indicate that campus activities professionals are interested in advancing within the campus organization chart, earning higher salaries, and being provided with flexibility – both in hours and physical location – for fulfilling their responsibilities. If we are to fundamentally reduce the number of high-achieving young professionals who experience professional burnout and end up leaving not just their role but the profession as well, we must address the root causes. Addressing those issues, will result in a paradigm shift for how we organize our units, as well as structure promotion opportunities within the profession.

One potential radical-sounding idea might be to mirror more closely the way faculty are promoted. Academic faculty (including tenure track, non-tenure track, research scientists, etc.) are provided with promotion opportunities that include three tiers. Essentially an entry level, mid-level, and senior level title. Many of us are most familiar with tenured faculty ranks. Full-time academic faculty begin their careers as Assistant Professors, if they achieve tenure, are promoted to Associate Professor and can also be promoted to full Professor, and ultimately retire from their role. All three titles are often associated with teaching and advising students, scholarly research and writing, and service to their profession and campus. At each promotion level larger salary bumps are provided to retain the faculty talent. The difference is that promotion is awarded, through campus committees, from the review of the individuals work by peers. Given that, it is no wonder that faculty roles often experience higher retention rates.

This model also exists in some institutions (see Indiana University - https://ovpue.indiana.edu/strategic-initiatives/advisor-promotion.html) for academic advisors. This structure mimics the academic faculty promotion structure. The fundamental shift in student affairs would be to create pathways to promotion that allow high-achieving professionals to continue to do what they are good at and that provide them energy and personal fulfillment – without requiring them to exhaust themselves in ways that will likely lead them to leave. Utilizing the already established competencies in the profession offer an opportunity to design standards for success that could provide promotion levels within our existing organization structures. For example, student activities coordinators could be able to hold their same role and be promoted to an association coordinator, and a senior coordinator WITHOUT having to wait for a position to vacate in the unit. Some additional areas ripe for discussion include increasing flexibility to address office hour staffing patterns, the ability to divide time on task for programming more equitably for ALL staff in the unit, and how to intentionally build experiences that would increase professionals' competencies in the field.

Another proposal might be to institute a culture of cross-training across student affairs units. Consider a high-achieving campus activities professional with five years of experience who has become exhausted advising student organizations – along with a high-achieving campus recreation professional with the same years of experience similarly exhausted after years managing the campus intramural sports program. Both skill sets are similar; but they are not nearly identical and are carried out in very different contexts. A culture of institutional cross-training might allow each to essentially switch jobs, continue learning, gain energy doing something new, and become a stronger candidate for an advanced administrative role given their increased breadth of experience.

CONCLUSION

To be clear, we are not suggesting the ideas we shared above as panaceas for burnout or employee retention issues. But they do represent steps in the right direction, and the discussions that would be necessary to potentially implement them might result in other ideas – unique to any particular campus – to better address burnout and retention within each unique campus context.

While the CUPA-HR 2022 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey presents a gloomy outlook for higher education employment, we must remember that these data have prompted us to consider the factors that are leading to professionals leaving our collegiate campuses. Luckily, we also have current data to help us understand our own profession and how they are viewing their work environments. As we shared at the beginning *The Compass Report: Charting The Future of Student Affairs* (2022) outlined the top three factors that could contribute to student affairs professionals leaving the field. The report also highlighted that 81% of the respondents indicated they feel underappreciated/undervalued by their institution and yet, 61% plan to stay in the field for the next five years, and nearly that many (57%) would recommend the field to others. The COVID-19 pandemic represented one of the largest crises to student affairs work that has emerged in the past century, while also disrupting the

way campus activities professionals interact with students and the greater campus. Now, while the perfect storm is still fresh, might be the best time to make headway on these issues that have long been in existence.

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