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## From Collaborative to Collegial Communities: Transitioning from Student Affairs Practitioner to Faculty

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# From Collaborative to Collegial Communities: Transitioning from Student Affairs Practitioner to Faculty

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*While student affairs (SA) practitioner expertise can inform a faculty member's knowledge in the classroom, the transition into a tenure-track faculty role from student affairs administrative roles is complex. One of the differences new faculty members with SA administrator backgrounds experience is a change in the work community and shift from collaborative to collegial cultures. While studies have examined the transition of student affairs professionals from graduate programs to full time student affairs practitioner roles and graduate students into the professoriate, there is limited scholarship on the transitional experiences of student affairs practitioners moving into faculty positions. This qualitative study examined the differences in senses of community based on the experiences of 30 former practitioners in tenure-track faculty roles. Loss of SA community and differences between faculty and SA communities emerged as primary themes from this study.*

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Student affairs (SA) graduate programs often benefit from having former practitioners as faculty. The expertise of those who have worked in SA offices enhances the dialogue and connections students make between classroom and practice as emerging professionals. While students learn about being part of a larger community of practitioners inside and outside of the classroom, practitioners-turned-faculty learn about the differences between their former SA collaborative communities and their new faculty collegial communities primarily on the job.

Many of these former administrators, now tenure-track faculty, come from a collaborative developmental SA culture focused on growth and service to others (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008) that is a community-oriented culture of collaboration and teamwork (Calhoun, 1997). They shift to faculty communities that are collegiality-focused cultures of autonomy (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bess & Dee, 2014; Haviland, Ortiz, and Henriques, 2017; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). As a result, these emerging faculty can lack a sense of community and belonging.

The research question for this study was: How do experiences of community change for student affairs practitioners who move into tenure-track faculty positions? This study examined the transition experiences of former full-time SA administrators who transitioned into full-time, tenure-track

faculty roles. Our study builds on the work of Kniess, Benjamin, and Boettcher (2017) and McCluskey-Titus and Cawthon (2004) who examined challenges transitioning to faculty culture for SA professionals such as having confrontational colleagues and unproductive or adversarial faculty meetings. While the McCluskey-Titus and Cawthon (2004) study utilized a survey, we interviewed 30 participants who spoke about the loss of their SA community and the difference between SA and faculty communities. Participants shared that they lost a sense of team they had in their SA communities, lost the ability to connect with SA communities when they became faculty, and found faculty communities and cultures to be very different.

### Literature Review

Socialization in an academic context has often focused on graduate students (Austin, 2002; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). However, Feldman (1981) identified three key areas of faculty socialization: acquisition of appropriate role behaviors, development of work skills and abilities, and adjustment to new norms and values. A focus on this final transition, particularly norms and values in work relationships and community, is absent from the literature about transitions of SA practitioners into faculty roles.

Previous work focused on the absence of socialization to faculty work in

graduate education (Austin, 2010) and the lack of socialization for new faculty members (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008; Fleming, Goldman, Correll, & Taylor, 2016). In addition, new faculty struggle with isolation in their new roles (Bogler & Kremer-Hayon, 1999; Haviland, Ortiz, & Henriques, 2017; Kniess, Benjamin, & Boettcher, 2017; Tierney & Rhoads, 1994; Trower, 2010). The lack of socialization and solitariness of academic work exacerbate the sense of disconnection from others and community for faculty coming from student affairs positions.

The idea of learning new organizational cultures was examined by Feldman (1981) through the roles of behaviors, skills, norms, and values in organizational socialization of new members. Similarly, other authors have focused on the importance of social support in employee transitions to organizations (Allen, 2006; Fisher, 1986; Jokisaari, 2013; Jones, 1986; Lapointe, Vandenberghe, & Boudrias, 2014; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Previous studies explored the

differences between administrative and faculty cultures (McCluskey-Titus & Cawthon, 2004) and transition from SA practitioner to faculty roles (Kniess, Benjamin, & Boettcher, 2017), however, this specific transition from administrator to faculty and the experience of community (or lack thereof) has not been fully explored in the context of community and culture.

For this study, we use Schein's (1984) definition of culture as an organization's artifacts, values, and basic assumptions about relationships to examine the transition of SA practitioners to faculty roles as a theoretical framework. The table below identifies different priorities of SA and faculty communities and how each culture affects individuals engaging with one another. (See Table 1). The existing literature identifies differences in work (culture, mindsets, relationships, and styles); different guiding documents; and differences in measures of success and achievement.

**Table 1.** Faculty & Student Affairs Cultural Factors

	<b>FACULTY</b>	<b>STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTITIONERS</b>
<b>Primary Identity</b>	<b>Scholar</b>	<b>Administrator</b>
<b>Work Culture</b>	<b>Collegial</b> (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008)	<b>Developmental</b> (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008); <b>Administrative</b> (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Bess & Dee, 2014)
<b>Mindsets</b>	<b>Self-Focused &amp; Autonomy-Oriented</b> (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bess & Dee, 2014; Kuh & Whitt, 1988).	<b>Learner-Centered &amp; Community-Oriented</b> (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bess & Dee, 2014; Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

<b>Work Relationships</b>	<b>Collegial</b> (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008)	<b>Collaborative</b> (Calhoun, 1997).
<b>Work Style</b>	<b>Individuals working toward individual goals</b> (Kniess, Benjamin, & Boettcher, 2017)	<b>Individuals working toward collective goals</b> (Kniess, Benjamin, & Boettcher, 2017)
<b>Guiding Documents (Artifacts)</b>	<b>Tenure &amp; Promotion Guidelines</b> (Sax, Hagedorn, Arredondo, & DiCrisi, 2002)	<b>Job Description</b> (Hirt & Winston, 2003).
<b>Measures of Success / Achievement</b>	<b>Tenure &amp; Promotion</b> (Sax, Hagedorn, Arredondo, & DiCrisi, 2002), <b>Teaching</b> (Perry, Menec, Struthers, Hechter, & Schonwetter, 1997)	<b>Evaluation by Supervisor</b> (Creamer & Janosik, 2003).

The components in the chart above make for dissimilar work cultures and communities. Additionally, former SA practitioners often retain their administrative mindset and SA identities as they take on faculty roles (Kniess, Benjamin, & Boettcher, 2017), further complicating their culture shift.

While faculty appreciate the autonomy in their new roles (Couture, 2014), many have sought to develop their own communities. Pifer and Baker (2012) found that early-career faculty developed connections by networking, awareness, and impression management. Other researchers focused on the role of mentoring for newer faculty in building communities as sources of connection and support (LaRocco & Bruns, 2006; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008; Terosky & Gonzales, 2016). By centering the concept of community, this study contributes to existing literature by examining its role in the transition of newer SA

faculty and specifically on how SA practitioners navigate past and enter into new communities.

### Methodology

The focus on understanding participant experiences in deep and meaningful ways made qualitative research appropriate for this study (Creswell, 2013). Our focus on the lived experience of participants made a phenomenological framework appropriate for this study (Van Maanen, 1990). This approach aligns with Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) work on perceived cohesion. Additionally, phenomenology is appropriate because "[this framework] is suited to understanding a variety of collective affiliations, formed in large environments, that can contribute to an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 328). In this study, we focused on participants' own experiences with SA's collaborative work relationships and developmental /

administrative culture in the past and their current experiences in collegial faculty relationships and culture.

### Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As former student affairs professionals in tenure-track faculty positions at the time of the study, we wanted to explore the practitioner to faculty transition. Each of us worked in the field for at least 11 years and transitioned to tenure-track faculty roles just prior to data collection. Our background was similar to participants and provided a “more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study” (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001, p. 411). The shared experiences of transitioning from practitioner to faculty also helped build rapport with colleagues and were vital to data

meaning making (Creswell, 2013). Our team engaged in researcher reflexivity (Gouldner, 1971) by debriefing throughout the process to identify how constructed themes related (or not) to our experiences.

### Participants

Participants were recruited through a faculty listserv (CSPTalk) and social media (a Facebook group for new faculty), as well as snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013) via our connections. Thirty full-time, tenure-track faculty (11 men and 19 women) in SA/higher education programs participated over the course of three years (Table 2). Their full-time SA experience ranged from 4-20 years and included work in residence life, campus activities, leadership advising, and new student programs.

**Table 2.** Study Participants

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Years in Student Affairs	Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Years in Student Affairs
Abigail	W	17	Mary Ann	W	16
Alex	M	5	Maxine	W	6
Alice	W	17	Melissa	W	18
Audrey	W	4	Mitchell	M	14
Beth	W	12	Mona	W	10
Callie	W	5	Nancy	W	12.5
Carol	W	18	Nathan	M	15
Deanna	W	17	Owen	M	7
Eileen	W	10	Artie	M	6
Erica	W	21	RB	W	20
Jason	M	11	Ruth	W	4
Joe	M	12	Ryan	M	12
Zoey	W	6	Sebastian	M	6
Leonard	M	10	Suzanne	W	13
Lynn	W	11	Virgil	M	5

### Data Collection and Analysis

We used semi-structured interviews to afford participants the opportunity to share their perspectives (Giorgi, 1997). Interviews were conducted by phone, transcribed and shared with participants for review to ensure accuracy. Open coding was used to create categories and construct themes (Saldaña, 2013). Each researcher reviewed categories for themes and we collaborated to narrow those themes. Throughout the data collection period, we discussed emerging themes, participant perspectives, and ways participants made meaning of their experiences. This began as interviews were conducted and continued through transcription, analysis, and development of findings.

### Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), indicators of trustworthiness include dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability. Typically, dependability is assumed if credibility is established (Lincoln & Guba), and we established credibility through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation occurred as multiple investigators were immersed in the data (Lincoln & Guba). Member checking (Lincoln & Guba) was employed, with participants reviewing both transcripts and themes. While not all participants had the same experiences, there was consistency among

themes. Additionally, we engaged a peer reviewer familiar with the topic who confirmed our initial findings and themes. Finally, both confirmability and transferability were addressed through conference presentations where we received affirmation from attendees whose experiences mirrored those of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Findings

The research question for this study was: How do experiences of community change for student affairs practitioners who move into tenure-track faculty positions? Two overarching themes emerged regarding sense of community in transitioning from SA to faculty roles: loss of a sense of team and of SA community, and differences between SA and faculty communities. The findings are highlighted below.

#### Loss: Loss of SA Community and Isolation

For participants, loss included losing collaborative SA communities and SA connections in general. This was accompanied by more individualized and less team-oriented work. While participants had a desire to maintain connections with SA practitioners, that interest was not always reciprocated. Alice said,

I wanted to be connected and I felt like I made a lot of overtures for students and staff... I just felt like they

didn't care at all. Like they didn't really want me involved... I was really surprised there seemed to be no interest in partnership.

RB shared a similar perspective. Beyond an introductory meeting with departmental directors, he had no connection to student affairs on his campus. He said he believed there should be ways to connect, stating, "There has to be a logical way in which I can contribute. And maybe I haven't figured that out yet and so it's on me. And maybe they're not interested... It feels like we're underutilizing each other." Participants sought both competence as faculty and to be acknowledged for the experience as former practitioners but found their expectation to maintain SA connections unmet. Instead of utilizing their practitioner knowledge and experience, participants felt their expertise as former practitioners had gone untapped.

In their faculty communities, participants noted challenges in making connections. Zoey said faculty do not encounter one another often. She said that in SA, because most people are working and on campus at similar times, they have more interaction. This is often missing in faculty connections since faculty do not have to be on campus to do their work. She said, "When you don't see people as frequently... you can't just have happenstance that you're going to run into someone." Participants' sense of connection

in SA went beyond job tasks, and included locations and work style, which were different as a faculty member. Instead of working together in a single office or space on campus as a team focused on shared goals, faculty work on campus, off campus, at research sites, and other locations on individual projects.

Faculty meetings were infrequent and interaction outside of meetings was rare, and as a result some participants felt they lost a sense of workplace community. Carol said, "I kind of miss that camaraderie from the office. When you're in an administrator position you have people around you all of the time, you're always in meetings, and you seem to be a little more socially connected." The transition from a highly engaged community to one with infrequent interaction was a significant change for some participants. However, not all participants experienced this community change as a loss. Jason said, "I don't think about it as I lost a community because I'm not [in] residence life anymore... I'm not sure I ever felt I needed to replace a community that I never felt I needed to begin with." Jason said he defined his community as immediate family and not work, so the need for a community at work was not an issue.

**Isolation.** Some participants experienced the shift to autonomy and independent work as not just a different type of



community, but as isolating. Joe said faculty do much of their work independently and rarely have opportunities to be “working closely with people, forming relationships with the staff you supervise or who are supervising you.” Deanna also spoke about the isolation her work required:

I prepare my classes alone, I teach alone, yeah students are there, but there's no other faculty member there, I grade alone, I do my research pretty much alone, even when I collaborate, it is usually at a distance.

Joe said, “What I found as a faculty member is [the experience is] so isolating.” Callie agreed, describing her experience as “incredibly lonely.” Though most participants realized this would be part of the nature of their work as faculty members, both the shift and the impact of that shift were greater than participants had anticipated.

Owen went so far as to share he felt unsuccessful in transitioning to a faculty role because of his lack of community. He said, “If ‘successful’ has to do with building relationships with other faculty, to build my community of folks that I can reach out to and connect with at my institution, then probably no, I haven't been very successful at that.” Participants measured success not only against the traditional academic areas of achievement – research, teaching, and service – but also against the residual measures

of success related to collaboration, connection, and community associated with their SA experiences.

Ruth said she was ready for the transition but cautioned that others could experience loss moving to faculty roles. She said, “You really have to evaluate when you transfer into a faculty role... you have to be very conscious of why you're making that choice... because I think that student affairs professionals [may be] set up to be disappointed.” Trading SA community for faculty autonomy was not negative for all participants. Some were ready and had different community needs and expectations; they were ready for working independently on their own projects and tasks rather than expecting teamwork to be the focus as it had been when they were SA practitioners. Others felt isolated and a sense of loss in shifting from one type of community to the other.

### **Difference: SA versus Faculty Work Culture**

Although faculty and SA professionals work in the same campus environment, the culture of faculty work was identified as markedly different from SA culture. In addition to being surprised by the isolation they experienced, some participants did not realize how different the leadership of their academic departments would be from their SA departments; they also did not anticipate the pace of

administrative work that participants felt took longer.

#### **Loss of leadership and guidance.**

The role of leadership in participants' new work environments was different than in SA. Department Chairs and other leaders within the organization do not function in the same sort of hierarchy or with the same kind of influence as supervisors in student affairs organizations. Additionally, faculty administrative leaders often lacked the administrative training and skills of their SA counterparts, which was evident to our former administrators-turned-faculty. While participants were accustomed to departmental or divisional leaders with significant experience, Deanna talked about faculty leaders' lack of experience:

Some [faculty leaders] don't know what they are doing in terms of administrative work. They aren't good at running meetings, and they're not good at being timely, they don't know how to process paperwork.

Deanna did not see clearly demonstrated leadership in her academic department that aligned with what she experienced in SA.

Participants also talked about having less guidance as new faculty members than they had as SA professionals. Audrey expected more support from senior faculty, but "that expectation wasn't met." Eileen added,

"That has been one of the harder things for me to work through. I do feel like I'm working through [my new role] on my own." In SA, orientation, training and supervision tended to address these issues, but the independence of faculty work did not result in similar guidance.

**Loss of collective goals.** The collaborative versus collegial culture was highlighted by Melissa, who noted both the similarities and differences between her faculty and SA experiences:

We would have great discussion [in SA] and that's very similar to the faculty role. The one thing that was different when we sat around in my office, we had one specific goal ... As a faculty, we bring our similar expertise, but we have 10 different people in the room; we may have 10 different goals.

Nathan also noted differences between SA and faculty meetings:

The [faculty] meetings were so slow... [Faculty] would talk for hours about nothing... Senior faculty would just fill the time with air... [In SA] the supervisor says you've got to make it happen, and meetings are efficient.

As SA administrators, participants shared work and common goals, but when a group of faculty focused on individual goals came

together, the conversations were difficult to facilitate. Faculty work focused on individual achievement and personalized goals rather than shared goals accomplished by a team, and while participants understood this cognitively – individual research agendas and teaching assignments mean individual work - the lack of team focus on success of the organization or department remained a disconnect.

Zoey saw this lack of teamwork as a practical result of the nature of faculty work. “If [interaction] happens all the time as a faculty member, then you don’t get your work done.” Many participants talked about the need to protect their time. They appreciated having fewer meetings – even if it meant less connection with others.

Most participants expected and looked forward to a different routine and fewer meetings as faculty. Erica said, “I thought it would be different in that I would no longer have 20 meetings a day.” Leonard agreed, “I wasn’t interested in spending the rest of my career sitting in meetings from sun-up to sundown.” However, many participants did not understand the impact of the change. Robin said, “I spend a lot of my time working on my own and that’s very new. I think I expected that but I don’t think I expected it to the degree that I’m experiencing.” Navigating this change – whether seen as positive or negative (or both)– was an

important theme in their experiences of community.

Some faculty also shared how their work routine decisions impacted their ability to find time to connect with other faculty. Deanna said, “I rarely have to come to campus for anything after I teach... people come in, do their thing, and then leave.” Leonard agreed adding, “For the most part I’m only on campus one to two days a week and then when I teach at the satellite campus, I just go down there.” For some faculty, the lack of engagement was related to how they exercised autonomy in their schedules.

### Discussion

This study reinforces existing scholarship about faculty socialization and fills a gap in literature specific to former SA professionals shifting to faculty. Previous work focused on the lack of cultural socialization for first-time faculty (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008; Fleming, Goldman, Correll, & Taylor, 2016). While that scholarship is essential to understanding the experiences of faculty, our work further contributes by examining the cultural shift of practitioners moving into faculty roles. Similar to previous studies (Bogler & Kremer-Hayon, 1999; Haviland, Ortiz, & Henriques, 2017; Tierney & Rhoads; 1994; Trower, 2010), our participants discussed ways that they as new faculty struggled with isolation. All participants also affirmed they

experienced different cultures in SA and faculty contexts - a collaborative and administrative SA culture (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Bess & Dee, 2014) and collegial faculty culture (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008).

### **Sense of Community**

An area addressed in this study that has not been fully explored in other studies is the sense of loss of participants' practitioner communities in exchange for faculty communities. Participants more quickly felt a connection to SA communities and their roles within those communities whereas it took longer to feel a sense of belonging in a community of scholars. This finding aligns with challenges identified in other studies on the experiences of early career faculty in terms of connections in new faculty communities (Berquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bess & Dee, 2014; Haviland, Ortiz, & Henriques, 2017; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Participants acknowledged aspects of SA communities they missed, but also discussed advantages to the faculty culture such as autonomy and flexibility. What participants shared fits with what McCluskey-Titus and Cawthon (2004) found in terms of a trade-off in making the shift from SA to faculty; one trades strong senses of community for more autonomy.

Additionally, participants' struggles to navigate their new culture emerged as loss related to community. This loss surfaced in

participant descriptions of teamwork, leadership, and isolation. Participants highlighted the difference between collegial and collaborative work, teams, and communities that aligns with Berquist and Pawlak's (2008) work. Our study also highlights what surprised participants in navigating the new culture of academics and faculty communities – senses of isolation and a lack of shared goals, which LaRocco and Bruns (2006) found as well.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study provides a number of implications for practice and for future research. Sharing information about transitioning to faculty roles with SA administrators and full-time doctoral students with SA work experience can provide helpful guidance so they can best decide whether or not to move from SA practice to faculty roles. By providing first-hand accounts of what that transitional experience is like – particularly in terms of the changing nature of community – current practitioners can discern if faculty communities will meet their personal and professional needs. In addition, former SA professionals who take on faculty roles can be informed about the differences and potentially be change agents if a different sort of community is needed for faculty. Additionally, it can prepare potential faculty job seekers to ask

key questions about community and connections during the job search.

In addition to informing those considering making this transition, this study can inform the practice of SA professionals / supervisors. As staff members consider doctoral work, supervisors can encourage them to think strategically about the future. By sharing the themes that emerged here, SA practitioners can reflect on what they need and value through supervision dialogue. What values around group interaction do staff members hold? How might those be met (or not) in a faculty position? Answers to those questions can aid practitioners in making this career decision.

This study also highlights a need and an opportunity for professional organizations to play a significant role in the development of additional cross-institutional faculty communities that bridge both the student affairs and faculty cultures. Organizations planning faculty-specific events are important as well as planning opportunities for faculty and administrators to build and maintain connections around the work they each do. These initiatives could take the form of conference sessions, webinars, faculty-SA circles or learning communities, faculty retreat experiences, or other chances to foster connection and provide support to new faculty.

Participants shared that once they became faculty members, there was often no

longer a place for them in SA beyond research and teaching. Participants attributed the lack of connection with their SA divisions to a lack of interest on the part of SA to work with faculty. A number of possibilities for mutually beneficial collaboration emerged from this study. Examples include partnering around student projects, assistantships, and field experiences; research pairing faculty and practitioners; and the opportunities for faculty to meet service expectations through collaborations with SA. SA leaders should recognize that, while the general faculty may feel the need to “protect their time” and thus not be interested in student affairs-related service activities, those faculty in student affairs/higher education departments may feel differently and may welcome those service opportunities that are fitting with their teaching and scholarship.

### **Implications for Research**

In terms of future scholarship, this study provides the foundation for a variety of additional areas of focus related to communities for administrators moving into faculty roles. These include studies related to the role of identity in the SA to faculty transition and search for community; studies identifying strategies for academic administrators (program coordinators, department chairs and others) for onboarding new faculty who come from SA positions; and potentially how

understanding SA and faculty communities might help each group identify new opportunities for collaboration.

This scholarship can inform future research in a number of ways. While the study focused on SA, there is a need to explore similar transitions of other practitioners to faculty, such as business, K-12 education (teachers and administrators), and public administration. In addition, this study was not designed to explore issues of identity. How gender impacts individuals' experiences navigating academic culture as new faculty members is an area for additional research. Similarly, the difference in experiences based on race, ethnicity, ability, religious affiliation or any other identity (or the intersectionality of multiple identities) is important to explore. Finally including an examination of institutional type could provide deeper and richer information about these transitions and community (or lack thereof). An examination based on the types of institutions where individuals worked as practitioners and the types of institutions where they work as faculty would be useful. This could also include issues such as institutional size and geographic location.

### **Limitations**

In this study, nearly two-thirds (19/30) of the participants were women. While we had a number of women participants, this study

does not focus on gender issues and how gender identity influences one's sense of connection, desire for, or ability to build community. Although the data were not analyzed for themes related to gender, the disproportionate number of women participants may impact the findings. Additionally, we did not collect demographic information about race, which prevented any analysis of the experiences of community through a lens of race for faculty participants.

### **Conclusion**

Participants in this study experienced loss of their SA community and identified differences between collaborative SA communities and collegial faculty communities. Participants felt a sense of loss of previous SA communities and lost a sense of connection with SA altogether. While participants generally enjoyed the new autonomy of their faculty roles, they missed the sense of working together toward common goals. Additionally, participants talked about a lack of leadership and guidance for faculty. This study can serve to inform faculty orientation and onboarding for former SA professionals. By stating the differences between the work and the communities of each culture, new faculty will have an understanding that this is part of the shift rather than a shortcoming of their departments or their own abilities to navigate the job transition. Perhaps most importantly,

this work provides insight into the experience for SA practitioners considering a move into faculty roles.

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