

## **Decision to Enter the Profession of Student Affairs**

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### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to consider factors that graduate students in master's degree programs in student affairs identify as influential to their decisions to enter the student affairs profession. A total of 300 master's students from 24 randomly selected graduate programs participated in the study. Relatively few differences were found between men and women or between traditional-age and older graduate students.

### **Article:**

As higher education environments have become increasingly complex, there has been increased interest in attracting high quality students into graduate programs in student affairs (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Phelps Tobin, 1998). Further, as student bodies become increasingly diverse (El-Khawas, 2003), the student affairs profession has placed increasing importance on attracting a greater diversity of students to graduate preparation programs (Komives & Kuh; Phelps Tobin). Understanding what influences persons to enter the student affairs profession is important in recruiting high quality students to student affairs and in diversifying the profession.

The decision to enter the field of student affairs is not well understood. Student affairs has been called a "hidden profession" (Richmond & Sherman, 1991, p. 8) because no undergraduate major leads directly to graduate study in student affairs and because so few individuals are aware of the field as a career possibility (Brown, 1987; Komives & Kuh, 1988; Young, 1985). According to Brown, "people enter student affairs careers by accident or by quirk, rather than by design" (p. 5). Evans (1983) observed that "master's students [in student affairs] . . . often have an unrealistic picture of the profession and only a vague idea of their reasons for pursuing a degree in student personnel" (p. 15).

Limited published research exists on factors influencing the decision to pursue a career in student affairs. Forney (1994) found that students enrolled in 16 student affairs master's programs gave as their reasons for choosing the profession "working with students, contributing to students' development, and the attractiveness of the college atmosphere" (p. 340). A qualitative study of master's degree students in one large student affairs graduate preparation program identified six themes related to the students' decision to enter the profession; of these six themes, four were factors that influenced their decisions: encouragement by those in the field, critical incidents (including employment in a student affairs area while an undergraduate), shared values, and a desire to improve campus life (Hunter, 1992). A retrospective study (Richmond & Sherman, 1991) also indicated that undergraduate employment in student affairs and the encouragement of student affairs professionals were critical in the decision of new student affairs professionals and graduate students to pursue a student affairs career. Williams, McEwen, and Engstrom (1990) found the influence of a mentor or sponsor who was a student affairs professional to be among the important factors in students' decisions to enter the student affairs profession.

The literature on career paths in student affairs, including entry into graduate study and the profession, has been called "woefully inadequate" (Brown, 1987, p. 7). Further, Brown asserted that the research on the topic has been "poorly done" (p. 7). None of these studies examined differences in factors on the basis of demographic variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, or age. In addition, the study by Hunter (1992) is limited by its single-institution focus; the study by Richmond and Sherman (1991) is limited by its retrospective nature.

The profile of students currently drawn to master's programs in student affairs varies by institution (Komives & Kuh, 1988). Although many programs draw mainly a traditional-age population, some draw an older, usually part-time population, made up largely of students already employed at the institution or already living in the geographic area. Whereas some programs draw a national applicant pool, most are more regionally based (Komives & Kuh).

Despite these variations, some generalizations are possible. According to Komives and Kuh (1988), the academic quality of graduate students in nationally ranked student affairs programs "compares favorably with that of students in other programs in education" (p. 1). Approximately two thirds of the students in master's programs in student affairs are women (Keim, 1991; McEwen, Engstrom, & Williams, 1990; Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice, 1989). In a study of students in eight of the largest master's degree programs in student affairs, 80% of the respondents were women (Talbot, 1996). Most students in these programs were White; in 1989 it was estimated that no more than 4–5% of the students in student affairs were African American, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, or individuals with disabilities (Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice). Talbot found that, among the students in eight of the largest master's degree programs in student affairs, 94.4% were able-bodied, and 82% were White; program composition ranged from 64.5% White to 92.3% White.

There is widespread concern in the student affairs field (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Sagaria & Johnsrudd, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice, 1989) about the lack of diversity among student affairs practitioners and among graduate students in master's programs. Sagaria and Johnsrudd pointed out that, although members of racial and ethnic minority groups made up over 21% of the U.S. population and 17% of college students, they made up only 10% of student affairs administrators. According to Talbot, "the face of the profession is not changing to reflect the change in demographics of higher education" (p. 175). According to Sagaria and Johnsrudd, "by increasing the minority presence in student affairs, student services divisions can cultivate a more racially and culturally diverse campus environment, which can in turn enhance the achievement of minority students" (p. 105).

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) sponsors the Minority Undergraduate Fellows Program (MUFP), designed to "identify and encourage undergraduate students of ethnic-minority [status] to continue in higher education and . . . to consider student affairs as a profession" (NASPA, n.d., para. 3). From 1990 to 1995, 150 students participated in MUFP as fellows (Patitu, 1996). Of the 76 former fellows who responded to a program evaluation in 1996, 18 (56%) were currently working in student affairs; only 4 of the former fellows had obtained their master's degree (Patitu). NASPA and the American College Personnel Association also have made specific efforts during "Careers in Student Affairs Week" events to recruit more students of color into the profession. However, the success of these efforts has not been studied.

Unfortunately, little is known about factors influencing the decision to enter the field of student affairs. Even less is known about possible differences in these factors on the basis of race, gender, and age. Although Sagaria and Johnsrudd (1991) advocated encouraging undergraduate students of color to pursue graduate work in student affairs as one of their recommendations for diversifying the profession, recruiting efforts will likely not be effective if the factors that attract students to the field are not identified.

The purpose of this study was to consider factors that graduate students in master's degree programs in student affairs identify as influential to their decisions to enter the student affairs profession and to examine similarities

and differences in these factors based on graduate students' race, gender, and age. Specific research questions were:

1. Who are the students in master's programs in college student personnel/higher education?
2. When and how did they first learn of student affairs as a career? When did they first think of it as a career for themselves?
3. Where did students get information about careers in student affairs? How helpful were these sources of information?
4. Did students receive encouragement from specific individuals to enter student affairs?
5. What level of confidence in their choice do students display?
6. What attracted students to a career in student affairs?
7. Are there differences in these responses by gender, race/ethnicity, or age?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Respondents were 300 currently enrolled students in 24 master's programs in college student personnel/higher education. Selected demographic information is presented in Table 1. Approximately three fourths of the participants were women, and one fourth were men. The large majority of the sample was White (89.0%); all students of color comprised only 10% of the participants. Slightly over three quarters (76.3%) were full-time students. One hundred sixty-two (54%) were in the first year of their master's program, 99 (33%) were in their second year, and 4 (1.3%) reported being in their third year (35 participants did not respond to this question). Age of respondents ranged from 21–56 ( $M = 26.84$ ,  $SD = 6.11$ ); however, 68.8% of respondents were age 26 or younger. Of the 287 persons responding about children, 255 (85.0%) reported having no children; 32 persons indicated that they had children, with a range of one to four and mode of two children. Master's students came to graduate study in student affairs from all majors; the largest proportions received their undergraduate degrees in liberal arts (22.7%), psychology/counseling (19.7%), social sciences (12.7%), business (12.3%), and education (11.3%). Slightly over 14% of respondents held a professional student affairs position at the time of participating in the study.

### *Instrument*

The instrument, Student Affairs Entry: Factors Affecting Career and Graduate Program Choice, comprises three parts that address the generally sequential process of career choice, graduate program selection, and future plans. The first part includes 12 items, many with multiple questions, all focusing on the respondent's awareness of and consideration of student affairs as a career field. The second part, addressing graduate preparation programs, contains 17 items, also many with multiple questions, about respondents' consideration and selection of a graduate program in student affairs. The third part has 22 items and concerns demographic information and future plans in relation to further graduate study and future employment. The instrument, Student Affairs Entry, was modified by the authors from a similar instrument developed by Williams et al. (1990). Both the original instrument and the revision were based on literature related to career choice in student affairs.

**TABLE 1.**  
**Demographic Description of  
Participants (*N* = 300)**

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	222	74.0
Male	78	26.0
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Asian American	4	1.3
Black/African American	20	6.7
Hispanic/Latino	3	1.0
Native American	1	0.3
White	266	89.0
Multiracial	2	0.7
Other	3	1.0
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Gay or Lesbian	14	4.7
Bisexual	6	2.0
Heterosexual	275	93.2
<b>Enrollment Status</b>		
Full time	229	76.3
Part time	66	22.4

The total of 51 items include a mix of response formats. Some items have categorical responses, others use a Likert-type scale, and a few are open-ended. Examples of items and their response formats for student affairs as a career field include when one first became aware of career opportunities in student affairs (categorical) and how one evaluates the helpfulness of each source of information about career opportunities in student affairs (17 sub-items, Likert-type scale). In the graduate preparation programs section, examples of items are one's awareness of the existence of graduate programs in student affairs (categorical), the helpfulness of sources of information about graduate programs (16 items, Likert-type scale), the degree of influence of selected experiences on entering the student affairs profession (5 items, Likert-type scale), factors which attract one to student affairs (15 items, Likert-type scale), and the degree of influence of various factors on one's decision to enroll in a particular graduate program (19 items, Likert-type scale). In the demographic and future employment and graduate study section, items such as gender, race, sexual orientation, age, and undergraduate major are included; interest in 25 student affairs functional areas, interest in and anticipated timing of doctoral study, concerns about entering the student affairs field, and membership in professional associations are also included. Responses to demographic items and those items related to the decision to enter the student affairs profession are reported here. All open-ended items, such as respondents' identification of individuals who influenced and encouraged them to consider the student affairs profession, were coded by content for analysis.

An initial random sample of 24 graduate programs in student affairs listed in the *Directory of Graduate Preparation Programs in College Student Personnel 1994* (Keim & Graham, 1994) was selected using a table of random numbers. The sample was stratified by student enrollment in each program (also based on information contained in the Directory). Of the 83 programs listed in the 1994 Directory, 31 programs were identified as small (fewer than 30 master's students), 35 as medium-sized (30–50 master's students), and 16 as large (greater than 50 students). Eight programs each were selected randomly from the small, medium, and large programs. Of the initial 24 programs, 10 programs (3 small, 3 medium-sized, 4 large) participated. The 14 graduate programs that had not responded in the initial data collection were contacted the following academic year and again invited to participate. The second sample included 5 small programs, 5 medium-sized, and 4 large. Of these 14 programs, all participated.

Telephone calls were made to program coordinators of all the selected programs to solicit their program's participation in the study. Each coordinator received the requested number of Student Affairs Entry instruments; each instrument packet included a cover letter to students and an envelope in which to seal and return their questionnaires to a drop box identified by the research coordinator. Research coordinators were asked to collect the surveys from the drop box after two weeks and to return them to the primary researcher.

When coordinators returned the surveys, they were also asked to indicate the number of instruments distributed and the number returned. From the 18 programs for which the coordinators provided this information, the overall response rate of student participants was 74.2%.

## Results

### *Descriptive Findings*

*Awareness of Student Affairs as a Profession.* Respondents typically became aware of student affairs as a profession late in their college careers (junior year or later) and were likely to have first considered it for themselves even later. Almost half (46%) of respondents first became aware of student affairs as a profession in their junior or senior year of college, and 27.7% became aware sometime after graduation. Over half (53.4%) of the respondents reported first thinking about student affairs as a career for themselves in their junior or senior year; another 35% reported first thinking of student affairs for themselves sometime after graduation. About one fourth of the participants (25.7%) first became aware of graduate programs in student affairs during their junior year; approximately another fourth (23.0%) became aware of student affairs graduate programs during their senior year; slightly more than a third (34.6%) became aware of student affairs graduate programs after graduation while working or while in graduate school in another field. About half of the respondents (51.7%) applied to a graduate program other than one in student affairs/higher education.

*Sources of Information about Career Opportunities in Student Affairs.* Respondents utilized a number of sources to obtain information about student affairs as a career. The most frequently used sources of information were talking with a student affairs professional (88.6%), involvement in student activities (82.6%), and reading a graduate school catalog (82.2%). Respondents also were asked to rate the helpfulness of the sources of information that they used (1 = *of little help*, 2 = *somewhat helpful*, 3 = *very helpful*). The most helpful sources of information were talking with a student affairs professional ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ;  $n = 263$ ), working in student affairs as an undergraduate ( $M = 1.82$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ;  $n = 215$ ), holding a student leadership position ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ;  $n = 224$ ), involvement in student activities ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ;  $n = 246$ ), and working as a peer helper ( $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ;  $n = 197$ ). More than 50% of the respondents had not accessed any of the following sources: program brochure (52.2%), career counselor (61.5%), academic advisor (59.5%), course with a student affairs professional (69.7%), student affairs workshop (63.6%), student affairs journal (57.2%), student affairs employment after receiving a bachelor's degree (55.3%), and student affairs graduate fair (69.4%).

*Influence.* The vast majority (80.3%) of respondents were influenced and encouraged to enter the student affairs profession by a specific person or persons. These influential sponsors most frequently held positions in residence life, generalist/dean of students/SSAOs, and activities. Most typically, these persons were employers of the respondents or advisors of student organizations.

*Confidence.* Respondents reported a high level of confidence about their decision to enter the field. The mean level of confidence that student affairs was the right career choice as they prepared to enter graduate school was 3.42 ( $SD = .62$ ), where 1 = *not very confident* and 4 = *very confident*. The mean level of confidence at the time of the survey was 3.58 ( $SD = .64$ ), using the same scale. Finally, respondents were asked how likely it is that they would remain in student affairs long term (10 years from now), with 1 = *very unlikely* and 4 = *very likely*; the mean was 3.50 ( $SD = .69$ ).

*Attraction.* Respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they were attracted to student affairs by a variety of factors. Two hundred eighteen respondents (72.7%) reported that working on a college campus was of great influence in attracting them to student affairs; 216 respondents (72.0%) reported that the ability to do personally fulfilling work was of great influence in attracting them to student affairs. Other factors that were of great influence to a large number of respondents were providing programs and services ( $n = 172$ ; 57.3%), the opportunity to nurture the development of students ( $n = 172$ ; 57.3%), the ability to continue learning in an educational environment ( $n = 147$ ; 49.0%), the variety in student affairs work ( $n = 152$ ; 50.7%), and the challenges of student affairs work ( $n = 107$ ; 35.7%).

### *Group Differences*

Group differences were examined by gender and age. Although the researchers had expected also to examine differences by race, due to the small numbers of students in each racial group of color, no meaningful analyses by race could be performed.

*Influence.* Men and women were equally likely to have been encouraged by a specific person or persons to enter the student affairs profession,  $\chi^2 (1, 300) = 1.22, p = .27$ . However, students age 26 and younger were significantly more likely to have had the encouragement of specific person(s) than students older than 26,  $\chi^2 (1, 298) = 16.59, p < .000$ .

*Confidence.* There were no significant differences on the basis of gender or age on level of confidence that student affairs was the right career choice prior to entering graduate school,  $F(1, 294) = .02, p = .88$ ;  $F(1, 294) = 1.98, p = .16$ , respectively, now that the respondents were in graduate school,  $F(1, 294) = .62, p = .43$ ;  $F(1, 294) = .39, p = .53$ , respectively, or that they would remain in the student affairs profession,  $F(1, 294) = 1.25, p = .26$ ;  $F(1, 294) = 1.32, p = .25$ , respectively.

*Attraction.* Few significant differences based on gender or age were found in the factors that attracted students to the student affairs profession. Women were significantly more attracted to student affairs by the desire to provide programs and services for students ( $M = 2.55, SD = .67; n = 220$ ) than were men ( $M = 2.18, SD = .79; n = 78$ ),  $F(1, 294) = 13.69, p < .000$ . Women were also significantly more attracted by the desire to continue to learn and develop in an educational environment ( $M = 2.39, SD = .74; n = 219$ ) than were men ( $M = 2.17, SD = .83; n = 78$ ),  $F(1, 293) = 4.57, p < .05$ ; by the desire for the variety found in student affairs work (women,  $M = 2.43, SD = .70, n = 219$ ; men,  $M = 2.12, SD = .88, n = 78$ ),  $F(1, 293) = 8.01, p < .01$ ; by the desire for the professional autonomy in student affairs positions (women,  $M = 1.96, SD = .98; n = 219$ ; men,  $M = 1.72, SD = .91, n = 78$ ),  $F(1, 293) = 4.33, p < .05$ ; and by the desire for personally fulfilling work (women,  $M = 2.71, SD = .56, n = 217$ ; men,  $M = 2.55, SD = .71, n = 78$ ),  $F(1, 291) = 4.03, p < .05$ . Graduate students older than 26 were significantly more attracted to student affairs by the desire to be primarily a counselor ( $M = 1.73, SD = .94; n = 92$ ) than were younger students ( $M = 1.51, SD = .95; n = 203$ ),  $F(1, 291) = 4.65, p < .05$ . There were no other significant differences on the basis of age or gender on factors that attracted them to the student affairs profession. Means for differences by gender and age reported above reflect a 4-point scale (1 = *no influence*, 2 = *little influence*, 3 = *fair amount of influence*, 4 = *great amount of influence*).

## **Discussion**

Despite concerns about the need for diversity in the student affairs profession (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice, 1989) and efforts made

to diversify the profession (Patitu, 1996), the respondents in this study, drawn from a sample of graduate programs across the country, generally fit the profile of the traditional student affairs professional: White (Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice), female (Keim, 1991; McEwen et al., 1990; Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice), and young, pursuing their graduate degrees on a full-time basis.

A disappointing aspect of this study was the inability to examine whether different factors attract students of color to the profession and whether students of color travel a different path to the field. Due to the limited number of students of color among the participants, no meaningful analyses could be performed to examine these questions.

In terms of the factors that attracted the respondents to student affairs, students were more similar than different. However, it is interesting to note that, on the five items on which a gender difference was found, the pattern of the means is the same—with women's means being significantly higher than men's. Women being more attracted to "providing programs and services for students" than men may be related to women's socialization to serve others (Miller, 1986); however, the other four items are not as clearly related to gender socialization. In fact, Miller would suggest that the item relating to professional autonomy would be more attractive to men than women. Means for four of the dimensions that attract persons to student affairs, where there were gender differences, were approximately at the mid-point of the 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *no influence*, 2 = *little influence*, 3 = *fair amount of influence*, 4 = *great amount of influence*). However, for professional autonomy, both the men's and women's means were less than 2, indicating that desire for professional autonomy was of little influence for women and of little to no influence for men. Older graduate students were distinguished by their greater desire to become counselors, although the means of less than 2 indicate that desire to be a counselor was of little influence. Overall, students want to be employed in student affairs in order to work on a college campus and to be engaged in personally fulfilling work. These findings are congruent with those of Forney (1994) and Hunter (1992).

Participants' confidence about remaining in the student affairs profession was generally high. These results are in contrast with Burns' (1982) finding and Evans' (1988) discussion of the relatively high rate of attrition from the student affairs profession. Perhaps this generation of student affairs professionals will exhibit less attrition from the profession than previous generations. However, it also may be that, so close to the beginning of their careers, graduate students do not anticipate leaving a career they have just chosen.

Other findings of this study support the scant previous research. The majority of respondents (80.3%) were influenced and encouraged to enter the student affairs profession by a specific person or persons. Previous studies (e.g., Hunter, 1992; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Williams et al., 1990) have indicated the importance of a mentor or sponsor in the decision to enter student affairs. Given that the findings of this study indicate that non-traditional age graduate students are less likely to have been mentored or sponsored and given the general inclination of mentors to choose as protégés those like themselves or to feel most comfortable with protégés like themselves (Ayvazian, 1997; Perez, 1993), questions are raised about who is not mentored or sponsored and the relationship to the limited diversity within the profession.

Student affairs does appear to have been a profession "hidden" (Richmond & Sherman, 1991, p. 8) from these students. Students generally were unaware of the existence of the profession at all until late in their college careers. Personal contact with a student affairs professional and personal involvement (such as in student activities) were likely modes of exposure to the profession. Again, questions are raised: With whom do student affairs professionals not interact and, therefore, not reveal student affairs as an option? How might students be better prepared for graduate work in student affairs if they were aware of the field earlier?

Over half of the respondents applied to a graduate program in addition to ones in student affairs. Some may have applied to other types of programs before discovering student affairs. Others may have been providing themselves with back-up plans in terms of graduate school or career options or may have been in the process of making a career decision during the time that graduate school applications were being considered. The data

gathered in this study do not permit us to know to what extent each of these may have been the case. What is known, however, is that each of these participants ended up enrolling in a graduate program in student affairs. Given that, how might student affairs professionals and career development professionals have helped students find their way to the profession more quickly and more easily?

Answers to questions such as these are essential for the future of the student affairs profession. Personal contact appears to continue to be a very important part of drawing students into the profession. Are student affairs professionals encouraging students to consider the profession? Are professionals thinking broadly enough about which students to encourage? Are student affairs professionals visible enough on their respective campuses? Do we as student affairs professionals communicate our enthusiasm about our profession to students? Do "Careers in Student Affairs Week" events emphasize the factors that attract students to the field?

The overall lack of racial diversity in the sample suggests that matriculation into graduate programs in student affairs is not keeping pace with the rapidly increasing diversity of undergraduate students in postsecondary institutions (El-Khawas, 2003). NASPA's Minority Undergraduate Fellows Program continues to be an important initiative to attract and mentor undergraduate students for careers in student affairs. The findings on mentoring and sponsorship suggest that more such efforts are needed.

Almost 75% of the participants as women points again to the feminization of the profession (McEwen et al., 1990; McEwen, Williams, & Engstrom, 1991). Attracting men to the student affairs profession, particularly men of color, is important in order to provide diverse role models for undergraduate students (McEwen et al., 1991).

This study has four primary limitations. First, data were collected at two different points in time, approximately one year apart. Second, the instrument is not standardized and was designed by the researchers, although it was based both on the literature related to career choice in student affairs and on a previous instrument designed for similar purposes. Further, the scales used were not consistent across all items, and the range of some scales, such as 3 points, was too narrow. Third, data are limited by the nature of self-report. Fourth, because of the small number of people of color among the participants, it was not possible to answer some of the questions we had hoped to explore.

In contrast, however, strengths of this study are several. Approximately 25–30% of all the graduate programs in student affairs were included in the study, and a random sample, stratified by size of program, was used. Further, the findings of this study are congruent with previous results, but also add to the understanding of graduate students' decisions to enter the student affairs profession. Finally, this study contributes to the literature by providing a contemporary examination of master's students' decisions to enter the field of student affairs.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The question of whether different factors attract students of color to student affairs needs to be explored. Perhaps this study could be repeated with graduate programs known to be successful in recruiting students of color. In-depth interviews with graduate students of color in student affairs might also yield rich information.

Although in this quantitative study we were able to obtain a national sample of graduate programs and a large number of master's students, the study is limited by its survey methodology. To provide an in-depth understanding of master's students' selection of student affairs as a career field, their choice of graduate programs, and their future plans, a qualitative study is recommended. Further, if the student affairs profession and graduate programs in particular are interested in also attracting to the profession persons who were not involved as student leaders or paraprofessionals, it would be useful to conduct a qualitative study of such persons who are in the profession in order to better understand how they learned about the profession and what attracted them to student affairs.

It also would be helpful to explore whether graduates of student affairs/higher education preparation programs find in their positions in student affairs the qualities that attracted them to the profession. How these expectations may be "undermet" or "overmet" (Louis, 1980) may be a factor in retention in the profession.

## **Implications**

One of the strengths of the student affairs profession, due to the nature of the work, is the people in the profession. For more than two decades discussion has occurred about the need to diversify the student affairs profession so that student affairs professionals reflect the increasing diversity of college students (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Phelps Tobin, 1998). Yet, based on the findings of this research, persons entering the student affairs profession continue to reflect a traditional path of having been involved paraprofessionals and student leaders. It seems important to continue to draw on this group of undergraduates as prospective professionals for student affairs. However, with the lack of diversity of persons entering student affairs, based on respondents in this national sample, questions must be asked about whether student paraprofessionals and student leaders are themselves a diverse group or not, or whether student affairs professionals are mentoring a diversity of individuals to enter student affairs. If paraprofessional and student leader positions are not attracting a diverse group of individuals, or if a diverse group of students are not being selected for those positions, then the likelihood of attracting a diversity of persons to the student affairs profession is greatly reduced.

To attract a diversity of persons to student affairs graduate programs, recruitment should be not only to graduate programs, but should begin earlier with the recruitment and selection of a diverse group of student paraprofessionals and student leaders. The ranks of RAs and orientation assistants need to become more diverse, and possibly the pools from which these paraprofessionals are selected needs to become more diverse as well. Recruitment and selection policies and procedures should be examined to determine who is being targeted and who is being left out. It also is important to define and mentor a broader group of involved students, such as those in work-study positions. They too are working on campuses in helping positions and may be attracted to careers in student affairs as well.

Student affairs professionals, career counselors, and materials and programs related to careers in student affairs, including events like "Careers in Student Affairs Week," should emphasize the factors that attract students to the profession: opportunities to work on college campuses and to do personally fulfilling work, as well as opportunities to provide programs and services, contribute to student development, and engage in on-going learning. As student affairs professionals speak to students about the profession, these are aspects that can be highlighted. Particularly because many of the persons attracted to student affairs, based on the results of this study and previous research (Hunter, 1992; Richmond & Sherman, 1991), are student leaders and paraprofessionals, it is important that student affairs professionals look beyond traditionally involved students to identify other current students and past students who might be excellent student affairs professionals to inform them about the student affairs profession and to encourage their consideration of student affairs as a career. A greater diversity of student affairs professionals, in terms of demographic characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability, as well as major and college experience, can only serve to enhance programs and services for students and also strengthen the student affairs profession and its contributions to institutions of higher education.

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