A STUDENT DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL

MAGIS

VOLUME 17
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY, 2023

FROM THE EDITORS

We are beyond thrilled to present the 17th edition of *MAGIS: A Student Development Journal.* We both entered the role of editor with a lot of trepidation and heavy doses of imposter syndrome. However, we both knew and felt passionately about our vision for this year's very special edition. Academic writing isn't always a space of comfort, even for graduate students. We wanted the Student Development Administration (SDA) community to feel unencumbered when it came to submitting their work and sharing their voices and experiences. Knowing this is the 30-year anniversary of the program, we chose to lead with the idea of sharing and passing along wisdom. We hope our readers will discover spaces of familiarity and feel inspired, encouraged, and connected as they read this year's journal. With that in mind, we are proud to present the theme for the 17th edition of *MAGIS*: *Pearls of Wisdom.*

Coming back from the pandemic and re-emerging as a community, it was vital for us as co-editors-in-chief to rethink how we view and approach graduate writing and writing as scholar-practitioners. We wanted MAGIS to feel like an extension of that broader SDA community. Bringing together first-year students, continuing students, and alumni for both the editorial board and contributing authors, this journal presents a throughline for the program: beginning, existing, and post-graduation. Our primary goal was to break down barriers and provide access for anyone that has something to share. We hope that is clearly displayed within the following pages.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the authors who stepped forward and shared their stories; without them, this journal would not exist. Because they answered our call, this year's edition contains creative as well as scholar-practitioner writing. In addition to the writing submissions, we also collected short "pearls of wisdom" from SDA community members, both past and present. Thank you to every member of the SDA community for sharing your wisdom and support.

Thank you to our editorial board. You all put in the extra hours, provided insight for our authors, and had a huge hand in creating the final product you see before you. Great appreciation to Bizzy Stephenson, Aaron Zhao, Mary Tran, Daniel Nash, and Andi Thomas-Sanchez. Without the dedication and commitment of the 2022-2023 editorial board, this publication would not be possible.

Additionally, we would like to thank our faculty advisor, Dr. Paige Gardner, for her continued support. Thank you for the consistent check-ins and guidance you provided along the way. We appreciate the space you created to allow us to explore and grow as leaders.

Finally, we want to thank every member of the SDA community. There is so much love and support woven throughout this program, it's no doubt this network helped us get to where we needed to be to bring this beautiful journal to all of you. We are forever grateful for and blessed by this experience.

With Sincerity and Eternal Gratitude,

Katie Goehring, M.Ed., & Katie Hoag, M.Ed
MAGIS Co-Editors-in-Chief, 2022-2023

MISSION

MAGIS: A Student Development Journal is the peer-reviewed academic journal for the Student Development Administration (SDA) program at Seattle University. Published annually and entirely student run, the journal showcases scholarly, reflective, and creative work by SDA students, alumnx, faculty, and student affairs professionals. Following the Jesuit tradition of academic inquiry, MAGIS: A Student Development Journal is committed to creating the premier forum within Jesuit higher education for dialogue on the theory and practice of student affairs.

VISION

The vision of MAGIS: A Student Development Journal is to represent the Seattle University College of Education and Student Development Administration program as a scholarly and reflective resource for student affairs graduate students and professionals in Jesuit higher education.

EDITORIAL BOARD & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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https://susdacommunity.wixsite.com/susda/take-action

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Celebrating SDA's Legacy While Reimaging the Future

Happy 30th Anniversary to the Student Development Administration graduate degree program! This year Magis commemorates 30 years of legacy through community engagement, the cultivation of transformational leadership and the practice of critical reflection. By engaging in what the Akan people of Ghana call "Sankofa," our Associate Teaching Professor Swezey and Assistant Professor, Dr. Gardner will reflect on the past and use what is learned to guide the present and reimagine the future of the Student Development Administration (SDA) graduate program. Erin will offer a reflection on the past evolution of our program and Dr. Paige will offer a vision for the future of the SDA community at large.

Reflecting and Learning from the Past 30 Years

In the spring of 1989, then Seattle University President, William J. Sullivan, SJ, announced at a campus gathering that a new graduate program would be offered as part of innovative initiatives to be launched in the final decade of the 20th century. This graduate program, the first of its kind in Seattle, and one of three in the Pacific Northwest, would serve the Puget Sound region and hold national acclaim while integrating the mission of Jesuit Education with the foundations of the Student Affairs profession. Thus, in the 1992-93 academic year, the Student Development Administration (SDA) graduate degree launched and the first cohort of students welcomed into the College of Education.

Seattle University's Student Development Administration master's degree, always grounded in the hallmarks of Jesuit Education, began with *four program themes*, later developed into our current ten learning outcomes. These original program themes were

· *Understanding Students:* Students explore the changing demographics of student populations at all types of institutions. They learn to identify the unique issues presented by each subgroup of students, including those with learning disabilities, family issues and psychological problems; adult learners; students of color; and international students. The specific issues of focus throughout the program keep pace with the changing clientele of colleges and universities.

· *Understanding and Fostering Diversity:* Courses examine the role of culture in education, explore ways to foster the development of pluralistic educational environments, and respond to the implications of increasing cultural diversity in post-secondary education.

·   *Ethics and Values:* In keeping with our Jesuit tradition, faculty and students explore ethical dilemmas in higher education, as well as the role of values in developing co-curricular programs.

·   *Environment and Culture:* Participants in the program learn the importance of adapting student services programs to the educational environment of a particular institution's culture. Relevant institutional types include the entire spectrum of post-secondary education. What role does the institution's mission play in creating campus culture?

Over our thirty-year history, together with students, alumnx, and regional partners, the program faculty shaped the vision and curriculum of SDA. Beginning with program founder, Jeremy Stringer, PhD who developed the initial program with a strong emphasis in leadership focused on our Puget Sound region and always holding a national lens, included the distinctive course on the American Community College and engaged NASPA and JASPA among the professional associations. During Dr. Stringer's tenure, Erin Swezey, MA, Bridget Turner Kelly, PhD, and Erica Yamamura, PhD joined the program providing indelible contributions and transformations to SDA. Erin, who currently serves as the program director, brought the integration of Jesuit Education with reflection, discernment, holistic care of students, and professional formation to develop SDA's hallmark professional practice internship program. Dr. Turner- Kelly, deepened the student development theory dimension, expanded the capstone courses as well as brought a social justice lens to our curriculum and launched our innovative portfolio culminating degree component. Dr. Yamamura brought a scholar practitioner lens and re-envisioned our MA graduate project, advised the Magis journal, as well as contributed a new vision for access and equity along with community engagement and finally, uplifted assessment as crucial to improving our professional practice.

When Dr. Stringer retired, Thai-Huy Nguyen, PhD joined our faculty bringing a strong research agenda, securing a National Science Foundation grant working with Seattle Colleges and support services for students of color in STEM fields. Several SDA students worked with Dr. Nguyen and this research agenda. Additionally, Dr. Nguyen developed the History in Higher Education course with a DEI lens and brought this same lens to the Leadership and Governance course.

Throughout our three decades of success, we have graduated well over 600 alumnx into our specific profession of student affairs and related higher education fields as well as college access organizations, secondary education, and aligned careers in civic, corporate, non-profit, and youth development fields. The continuous thematic strands woven throughout our history include *academic excellence and leadership*, *a student-centered approach*, *Division of Student Development collaboration*, *reflection and discernment*, *social justice and equity*, *professional formation*, *cohort community*, and *mentoring/networking*. We are only as strong as our current students, SUSDA, alumnx, regional and national partners, affiliate faculty, and the many friends and believers of our program.

What does our SDA future hold? Dr. Paige Gardner, PhD arrived two years ago and has already transformed our program with a new SDA specific DEI course, our signature Freedom Dreaming speaker series, and recaptured our scholar practitioner approach. *Dr. Paige is SDA's future* and is currently leading our effort to re-imagine our curriculum and our instruction modality, as well as to convene multiple stakeholder dialogues about the next decades of our field. Her energy and joy are palpable and set the tone for hope-filled and enduring decades to come.

In the words of Erin Swezey, *"Trust the process! Hold fast to dreams! Keep in touch!"*

Looking Forward to the next 30 Years

It is no secret that the landscape of Higher Education is quickly changing and doing so at a pace that calls educators to deeply reflect on how the personal and professional align in a balanced, joyful, and meaningful way. With that said, current and emerging practitioners will have to think deeply about personal sustainability and the use of holistic pedagogy that allows students, staff and faculty to be whole. Though this balancing act is not as seamless of a process as one would desire, I argue that the alignment of the personal and professional is contingent upon the use of a holistic praxis (critical reflection, finding balance, and taking action). To exercise this form of praxis, one must engage in radical honesty which is rooted in Black feminism. In *All About Love*, hooks (2001) would describe truth-telling as the heart of justice. The act of truth-telling can be liberating, healing, disruptive, and even transformative in the spaces we reside.

Exercising radical honesty is a liberatory praxis that empowers individuals and the larger community to self-reflect, speak truth, take accountability, and cultivate change within community. While looking forward to the next 30 years, I envision a program that prepares graduate students to be equity-minded educators who are committed to the holistic development of students, staff, and collaborative partners. Ultimately our program will use radical honesty as a tool of liberation on an individual and community level.

Individual Use of Radical Honesty

As an individual I've utilized radical honesty as a compass of truth; One that guides me to honor my authenticity, make difficult decisions that prioritize my wellness, and actualize desires for joy and peace in the present. Though radical honesty will not free me of institutional oppression and challenges in the workplace, it has given me the space and time to feel, explore, and sort through the compounded harm I've managed to suppress. Therefore I've come to use radical honesty as a *self-healing tool*.

My healing has taken the form of solitude and practicing self-reflection. By creating intentional space to acknowledge and process my energy, feelings, and patterns of behavior, I am able to exercise radical honesty. Below are examples of what I reflect on:

· I identify the triggers and challenges that impact my work-life balance

· I evaluate how time is spent and (re)align time with professional goals and personal priorities

· I track the energy and emotions that surface when setting boundaries (Did I feel empowered? Supported? Challenged? Isolated? Gaslit?)

· I take note of people who honor or ignore my boundaries, so that I can be more strategic in the ways I seek support and build partnerships

· I take note of the times that I ask for help, I identify the emotions and/or forms of resistance that surface when I ask for help, and I notice who shows up for me

· I identify the joy and points of passion that allow me to be my best self in the workplace

· I affirm my personal strengths and develop mantras that keep me grounded and remind me of my goodness

I invite the students and alumnx of our SDA community to utilize these reflective prompts and add them to this list. Each of us has our own particular journey with navigating complex and at times, toxic working environments. As I look forward to the future, I believe that our SDA graduate program will have to create space for students to engage in this level of self-care and preparation prior to entering the workforce or simultaneously while working as a full-time professional. One of the ways our program has begun to address this is by reviewing our curriculum design and course offerings.

Embedding Radical Honesty into the SDA Community

In reflecting on what's been accomplished over the past two years since joining the SDA program as a tenure-track faculty member, I have integrated radical honesty through the development of the "Freedom Dreaming Professional Development" series where students can learn from BIPOC practitioners, executive leadership, and trail blazing alumna. These spaces offer chances for students to learn from current practices that transform community. In addition to creating networking opportunities, SDA faculty have worked in collaboration with external consultants to begin the process of reimagining the curriculum and structure of our graduate program. For example, SDA has shifted COUN 5050 to a SDAD 5050 course and the faculty have redesigned the course to give students firsthand experience in mental health first aid training, practice trauma informed pedagogy, and learn about the institutional structure of crisis management in higher education. During fall 2023, the consultants will spend time with the larger SDA community to share formal recommendations that can potentially change the modality of course offerings, streamline our Portfolio culminating project and build an educational pipeline from our SDA master program to the Educational & Organizational Learning and Leadership program.

As we launch into the next 30 years of existence, the SDA community will continue to reimagine, dream out loud and celebrate our legacy. As stewards of the SDA community, Erin and I invite each of you to think about your contribution to this vision. Begin to decolonize your notion of what success means and develop a definition that prioritizes the balance of your personal and professional well-being. To support that effort Erin and I will continue to reimagine a program that models a holistic praxis of care, commitment, and leadership development.

In the words of Dr. Paige, *"Institutional change begins with you and your sphere of influence."*

Jeremy Stringer, PhD, Professor

Paige J. Gardner, PhD, Assistant Professor (left)
Bridget Turner Kelly, PhD, Assistant Professor (right)

Erin Swezey, MA, Associate Teaching Professor (left)
Erica Yamamura, PhD, Professor (middle)
Thai-Huy Nguyen, PhD, Professor (right)

Paige J. Gardner, PhD, Assistant Professor (left)
Erin Swezey, MA, Associate Teaching Professor (middle)
Erica Yamamura, PhD, Professor (right)

Sankofa

Paige J. Gardner, PhD, Assistant Professor (left)
Erica Yamamura, PhD, Professor (right)

Paige J. Gardner, PhD, Assistant Professor (left)
Erin Swezey, MA, Associate Teaching Professor (right)

Student Development Administration:
Celebrating 30 Years

Paige J. Gardner, PhD, Assistant Professor (left)
Erin Swezey, MA, Associate Teaching Professor (right)

Returning to Academia: Tracing Pathways from Student Development Administration to

Doctoral Education

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Abstract

In this article, we present a dual autoethnography tracing our pathways from the Student Development Administration (SDA) program at Seattle University to our current doctoral programs focused on higher education. By weaving our two voices, we illuminate commonalities and differences in pursuing doctoral education, using our shared experiences in the SDA program. Connecting our narratives to the broader phenomenon of how student affairs preparation programs link to doctoral education, we conclude with implications for both students considering a doctorate degree as well as faculty and staff working with a student affairs preparation program.

Returning to Academia: Tracing Pathways from Student Development Administration to Doctoral Education

As I (Brendon) reflected on my first year experience at Michigan State University (MSU), I thought about my time a PhD, EdD, or other doctorate level degree. Within the field of higher education, this may be explained by the practical nature of higher education Masters programs. For example, the SDA program defines itself as having "a modern practitioner-based curriculum that provides strong theory-to-application training within a supportive community" (Seattle University, n.d., para 2). While SDA does have a track for research, the program focuses on practice,

at Seattle University in the Student Development Administration (SDA) program and my aspirations as a Masters student. When I heard Doug (one of my roommates from SDA) started an EdD program, I was interested to ask him about his experience returning to academia and what led him back to the classroom after almost a decade of practice. This initial curiosity bloomed into an idea to explore both of our experiences more in depth, using scholarship as an opportunity to share our experiences with other graduate students who may be (re)considering certain professional career paths.

While many scholars have investigated student experiences in Masters programs (e.g., Linder & Simmons, 2015; Moore et al., 2023) and Doctoral programs (e.g., Austin, 2002; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001), little attention has been given to how Masters programs prepare their graduates to eventually pursue hoping to attract prospective graduate students who "have a passion for working with college students beyond the classroom and advancing social justice" (Seattle University, n.d., para 1). While there is little research about the relationship between Masters and Doctoral programs, doctoral students bring with them a wealth of experiences from their prior educational settings that will influence their pursuit of a doctorate degree (Weidman et al., 2001).

This article aims to explore the relationship between our experiences in the SDA program and our current experiences as doctoral students. Using a dual autoethnography approach, we each weave our narratives to highlight moments, memories, feelings, and experiences from the SDA program that has led us to where we are today. First, we provide background on graduate student affairs preparation programs and graduate school socialization. Next, we detail our methodological process and how we co-constructed our narratives. Then, we present our narratives individually. Finally, we discuss the themes that emerged from our narratives and the implications for student affairs preparation programs.

Background
Student Affairs Preparation to Higher Education Research

Unlike other disciplines, there is no clear path from undergraduate to graduate programs in higher education studies. Many student affairs professionals come from a variety of undergraduate majors, finding a path to a student affairs preparation program through college mentors. Similarly, the path from a Masters preparation program to a doctorate program is convoluted, since Masters programs tend to focus on student affairs practice (e.g., Seattle University, n.d.). Programs ground student affairs professionals' work by teaching specific knowledge and skills as well as introducing the field's professional values (Bureau, 2018; Hunter, 2019). Since programs are catered to practitioners, those wanting to explore higher education research may find challenges in seeking pathways to further learning.

Doctorate degrees in higher education fields are sought after for two main reasons. First, as the United States' population moves towards a more educated workforce (Goldin & Katz, 2008), the field of student affairs requires more postsecondary education and training—for an individual moving into more senior positions, an advanced degree is needed (Biddix, 2013). This degree is usually a PhD, EdD, or JD. Second, an individual may seek a doctorate degree to engage in education research, either as a faculty member or as a part of the private sector (e.g., think tank or policy organization; Austin, 2002). These individuals want to shift their career while remaining in the field of higher education. In preparation programs, these career pathways may be mentioned but not talked through in depth.

Doctoral Student Socialization

Doctoral socialization begins when prospective students start exploring and applying to programs (i.e. anticipatory socialization; Weidman et al., 2001). This phase is often influenced by how prospective students access information about programs and faculty. Prospective students may be looking for specific faculty who share their research interests (Austin, 2002) or share their lived experiences and social identities (Williams et al., 2018). These connections can be facilitated by networks. For example, if a prospective student's mentor knows faculty at a certain school, the student might more easily connect with the faculty. Throughout this stage, prospective students are imagining their experience in the program and envisioning themselves as a scholar (Weidman et al., 2001).

While students may have many reasons for pursuing a doctorate degree, scholars generally agree that doctoral programs are meant to prepare students for faculty or research positions (Austin, 2002; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001). Students are socialized to the norms of their discipline, pushed to become an independent scholar, and learn about the three main responsibilities of faculty: research, teaching, and service (Gardner &

Mendoza, 2010). While doctoral student attrition is high and many who complete their degree do not stay in academia, the main goals for doctoral programs have not changed (Austin, 2002). As more practical doctorate degrees become popular and available (e.g., EdD), the mission and goals of individual programs may shift due to their students' differing goals.

Methodology

As a response to the argument that anthropologic ethnographers were objective observers of cultures, autoethnography emerged as a way to capture embodied and complex experiences, positioning the researcher inside of a community (Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography embraces subjectivity and connects individual lived experiences, memories, emotions, stories, conversations, and artifacts to broader cultural phenomena (Le Roux, 2017; Mertens, 2020; Poulos, 2021). We chose to pursue a dual autoethnographic approach to our research as a way to make sense of our doctoral experience in relation to our shared experiences in the SDA program at Seattle University. Utilizing both of our voices, dual autoethnography disrupts and complicates traditional meaning making of phenomena (Burleigh & Burm, 2022). This collaboration allowed us to reflect on the same prompting questions and build off of each other's narratives, in a responsive and active process (Burleigh & Burm, 2022; Poulos, 2021).

Initial Conversations

We met for our first conversation on August 4, 2022 over Zoom. As we caught up about each other's life, our conversation naturally drifted to our recent experiences in our doctoral programs. Our dialogue built off one another as we recounted various stories and (un)consciously connected them back to our SDA experiences. This was exciting and reaffirmed our dual autoethnographic approach. Since writing

autoethnography is a *way of life* (Poulos, 2021), we were doing autoethnography through our informal dialogue, without explicitly broaching the subject of co-authoring a paper. We eventually transitioned to talk about this project and were excited to reflect on our time in SDA to make sense of where we are going in our respective careers. Tentatively, we established a timeline where we would review and reflect on our experience while writing our personal narratives. After writing our narratives, we would read and comment on each other's writing, while revising our original narrative. Finally, we would meet to discuss emerging themes, commonalities, and differences in our experiences.

We met again over Zoom on November 9, 2022 to talk about the progress of this project. As many full time doctoral students and full time employees experience, we found a challenge in finding time to focus on our project with many competing priorities—thus, we were unable to stick to our original timeline. Our conversation was still rich with reflection on doctoral education, connecting back to the difference of rigor and time management needed for the SDA program. At the end of the conversation, we (re)committed to our reflexive project and looked forward to weaving together our completed narratives.

Reviewing Artifacts and Reflections

To construct our narratives, we each reviewed artifacts that related to our Masters program and wrote reflections as they surfaced in our memories. Artifacts included our final capstone portfolio projects for the SDA program, saved syllabi from SDA courses, individual assignments and writing we completed during the SDA program, and our personal statements from our application to doctoral programs. By reviewing these targeted artifacts, we triggered memories from our student affairs preparation program

and used journaling as a mechanism to capture these vignettes. From our reflections, we constructed our final narratives, sharing vignettes that had a visceral presence during the process of reflection.

Co-Constructing Narratives

After we wrote our individual narratives, we spent time individually reading and commenting on each other's writing. We met for a third time on January 16, 2023 to talk about our narratives and co-construct meaning from our experiences. We discussed the aspects of our narratives that stood out to us, weaving together themes through our conversation. As we dove deeper into our experiences in the SDA program, as well as our experiences as doctoral students, clear threads of commonalities and divergent experiences surfaced. In the following section, we present our individual narratives and discuss the emerging themes from our experiences.

Narratives

Doug's Narrative

Was a Doctoral Degree Always in the Plan?

Looking back at my collegiate experience, I have always had a desire to obtain a terminal degree. I had originally anticipated going on to law school to receive a JD. But at that time, the job market for law school graduates was bleak as there was a saturation of new lawyers. Because of this outlook, I was looking for alternate career paths when I decided to pursue student affairs given my current involvement in student organizations and government. Even during the initial search for Masters programs, I had thought about what would come next. Once I decided on pursuing a Masters degree and career within student affairs, I felt that obtaining a terminal degree was inevitable in my pursuit to one day join the administrative ranks of a college or university. Virtually all the senior level

administrators with whom I had interacted in my undergraduate and graduate experiences either already had their terminal degree or were working towards that goal. Because of this, I felt that I, too, would one day get a doctorate degree to keep alive my professional goal.

With that said, however, I had not specifically sought out the EdD degree. I was guided to the EdD program by reflecting on what would make the most sense for me in my current situation, such as a part-time program that would allow me to keep my full-time job and a program that would be financially covered by my current institution. I had reached out to several mentors I have had in my past, all of whom are SDA alumnx, to ask about the difference—in their minds—between the PhD and the EdD degree and its perception within the field. I did this primarily because it seemed from personal experience that most, if not all, senior level administrators with whom I had interacted had a PhD. Because of this, I felt that there might be some more legitimacy and clout granted to the PhD as opposed to an EdD. Through those conversations, I came to the conclusion that the EdD would not actually limit my upward mobility and would grant me the most flexibility to pursue this degree while also maintaining my full-time role.

Career Aspirations

Once I graduated with my degree from Seattle University and became a student affairs practitioner, I felt like I was missing the classroom. Specifically, I was missing the feeling of being a student and actively learning from and with others beyond what I was doing in my full-time job. Throughout graduate school, we were working in our assistantships during the day and going to classes or doing homework in the evenings and weekends. While I first enjoyed the break from coursework, I had soon enough realized that I was missing that

extra mental challenge that being in the classroom always provided. I had originally looked at pursuing a new degree (both doctoral or another master's degree) but quickly realized that the cost of any program at Penn State (my employer) would be too much to take on given my salary, even with a generous tuition remission program (75% covered). But even with that 25% on me, I knew this was not an option at the time, so I put that on the backburner.

Since moving to Georgia, I have held two different positions at UGA, both of which did not necessarily require much work in the evenings or weekends which my previous role had. I was unsure of how to spend this overabundance of time now. That, combined with constant conversations that I was having with my then-partner and her friends—all of whom were currently enrolled in either a masters or doctoral program in a different discipline—are really what led me to seriously consider pursuing this doctoral degree. It was not as if there was some sort of competitive spirit that led me to pursue this degree, but it further enhanced my desire to work towards something greater than what I was doing.

Truthfully, the pandemic really amplified my desire to spend my time more constructively. The pandemic had forced most of us to stay inside and not have the same social interactions and activities that we had prior to 2020. I did not have many hobbies to which I could dedicate my time given my living and financial situation. I had gotten into an unproductive routine that I just was not accustomed to. I had found myself reading for fun more and watching the latest Netflix show. I was certainly enjoying my time, but I also felt like something was missing—like I was needing to do more.

All these factors towards pursuing a doctoral degree were rather personal. Unlike when I first decided to pursue a Masters

degree and career in student affairs, I cannot point to conversations I have had with mentors or former faculty that were the driving factors for me to pursue this doctoral degree. I certainly had conversations with faculty and supervisors while at Seattle University and in my full-time jobs. For example, I had discussed career pathways with Erin Swezey and, while it wasn't a point in our discussion, I had thought that a doctoral degree would be needed to pursue some of what we had discussed. While my career is much less linear than I anticipated, I've always been driven by my career goals, which include becoming a generalist in this field and working towards serving in a senior administrative role. I believe it is this desire to continue gaining various experiences and skills that led me to pursue this particular degree. This degree will hopefully help to keep the doors open for me wherever this pathway takes me.

Brendon's Narrative
Multiracial Validation

I remember coming to student development theory class on the day we were talking about racial identity development. It was winter in Seattle—rainy and overcast. We read various chapters from the Evans et al. (2009) green book and I learned about Dr. Kristen Renn's (2000) work on multiracial identity development for the first time. Up until that point, no one in my life explicitly broached the subject of mixed race or mixed heritage. I can distinctly remember moments in my childhood where others highlighted my mixedness, but those moments I now realize were multiracial microaggressions (Harris, 2017). In this new space, to talk more about identity development, Dr. Yamamura broke us up into identity caucus groups. One group was a multiracial group. I was able to talk with other mixed race, multiracial, and mixed heritage folks about our shared experiences. Through that conversation, I

was able to name my experiences as a multiracial person and see myself reflected through many of the patterns outlined by Dr. Renn. *I felt seen.*

Without that experience, structured both by the curriculum and by Dr. Yamamura's pedagogical approach, I am unsure if I would have explored MSU as an option for my doctoral program. I applied because Dr. Renn was a faculty member in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program, knowing little of the program itself. From reading her research as a graduate student and professional in student affairs, I felt intimidated writing my personal statement, arguing why I wanted to work with Dr. Renn, because she is very well known in the field. I fixated on my writing, trying to show the connection I felt to her research with my goals and hopes as a future scholar. I spent the most amount of time on this application and honestly did not expect to be accepted into the program. My partner on the other hand pushed me to submit the application, assuring me I wrote authentically about my desire and future goals as a scholar.

Beyond a physical location to pursue my PhD, I also wonder how my research agenda would evolve if not for my experiences in the SDA program. Not only did it encourage me to work with Dr. Renn, but it also gave me confidence in asserting multiraciality as my research interest, even though the topic is not always seen as legitimate by the academy (Johnston-Guerrero & Combs, 2022). While I have experienced pushback in a few spaces, I came into the program already having space and connections to legitimate my own identity and the research I want to pursue (Stohry & Aronson, 2021).

Becoming a Scholar

I arrived in Seattle for preview days in March of 2012. I remember that my checked bag was lost and I was anxious about having to present myself "professionally" but not having the means to do so. Luckily, my bag showed up shortly on another flight and I made my way to campus with a current student of the program. This is where I met Dr. Yamamura, who ultimately was the reason why I chose to go to Seattle University. She told me that the SDA program had two tracks, with one focusing on a Masters level research project. In the few hours we interacted, Dr. Yamamura was convinced that I was a future researcher. Even though I was unsure at that time, she showed her enthusiasm for my potential and my unique background in engineering.

With Dr. Yamamura's encouragement, I ended up on the research track, where I conducted a study examining alcohol intervention programs as assigned sanctions for university policy violations. Currently, I feel disconnected with that particular area of research, but while in SDA, I worked in Wellness and Health Promotion and was interested in alcohol use and behavior change. Regardless of the topic, this experience gave me a *small* taste of life as an academic. At the end of the project, Dr. Yamamura invited us all to a meal, where we would present our study and our findings. I expected this meal and presentation to be a typical end of the quarter/semester presentation. However, all of us presenting were met with critical questions about our research. I felt unprepared. There were questions I had not thought about, there were questions I did not have the answer to. I stumbled through the presentation and the questions as best I could. Despite the experience, we shared a meal and we felt accomplished for finishing one of our capstone projects.

I did not make meaning of that experience until much later and understand the experience now that I am in academia every day. Dr. Yamamura was giving us an

experience of how other scholars critique work, with her goal of making our work stronger and socializing us as researchers. When I submit papers or I have the opportunity to present papers to colleagues, that experience is at the forefront of my mind and I remind myself of three things. First, because of that experience, I am overall more prepared when entering academic spaces where critique will be given. Second, *many* critiques are made by scholars who want my work to evolve and be stronger. Third, it is okay if I don't have the answer and I can share that with my colleagues.

Preparation for Student Affairs?

The SDA program prepared me well for getting my first job after graduation. I always felt like I had the knowledge and skills to confidently work in residential life and multicultural affairs. However, I felt underprepared for my career growth and development after that entry level position. I can remember vividly talking to my friends in the SDA cohort before graduation about our career aspirations. Many friends as well as myself discussed breaking into senior administration, where we felt we could make the biggest difference. We talked about becoming a Dean of Students, a Vice President of Student Affairs, and even one friend aspired to be a President of a university. What strikes me the most about this conversation was our unbridled optimism for our career growth and in turn, how our work in a senior level position could influence higher education to better serve students. After becoming a full time professional in the field and observing the day to day responsibilities of senior administrators, I quickly realized senior administration was not a career trajectory that aligned with my professional goals. And judging by the number of folks from my cohort who have left the field in the eight years since graduation, many people determined a traditional career path in student affairs also did not align with their goals.

During our Masters program, we read a book, *Where You Work Matters: Student Affairs Administration at Different Types of Institutions*, by Joan Hirt (2006) that prompted us to think about the context and environment where we wanted to work. This process of reflexivity allowed us to create a five-year plan as a part of our capstone portfolio. When I reflect on my own five-year plan, I focused exclusively on practice and building skills to transition into a mid-level position which in turn will set me up to be in senior administration (Soltis, 2014). While I mentioned the possibility of future education in a doctorate program in my plan, the thought of pursuing a PhD was not at the forefront of my mind. The process of creating a five-year plan for my portfolio was limiting. I was stuck in what a traditional career path through higher education "should be" and never considered if I even wanted to serve as a senior administrator—it was the only goal to strive for.

The turning point in my path back to academia was finally reaching a breaking point in my frustration as a practitioner in the field. I could support my students, but I had limited power to affect institutional change and often my time was taken by "customer service" tasks rather than a focus on student development. This moment caused me to seriously think about a PhD. With Dr. Yamamura's connections, I had a conversation with faculty at a prestigious graduate school of education. I will never forget the advice he gave me: Don't do it. I would be throwing away almost a decade of investment into advancing as an administrator, and starting over to pursue scholarship would be wasteful. I was shocked and did not know how to respond. The call ended shortly after and I sat in my

office full of emotion and frustration of where I was at. I realized my frustration was because *I cared so much about higher education scholarship*. I saw the potential to shape future theory, practice, and policies. And I was determined and defiant. I was going to become a scholar of higher education.

Findings
Meandering Career Pathways

Emerging from our dual narratives was the theme of meandering career pathways after graduation from the SDA program before entering our doctoral programs. Both of us worked in student affairs at different institutional types, seemingly following a "traditional" career path. But, as Doug noted, our career paths were less linear than we expected in our 5-year plans. Despite a meandering path, we both were driven to progress in our career. However, we both faced dissonance when thinking about our present and the possibilities of the future. Brendon was disillusioned with the field and felt more like a customer service agent. Doug felt like he should be working towards something greater as he saw the people around him engaging in further education. As Doug shared in his narrative, we both "felt like something was missing."

In our last meeting, we spoke at length about the 5-year career plan we wrote for our capstone project and the possibilities and limitations open to us at that time. Brendon recalled in his narrative that the exercise was limiting because he was stuck in what a traditional career path "should" look like. We both felt prepared and confident to interview and excel in our first job after graduation; and we both successfully got entry level positions relatively quickly after the SDA program ended. Conversely, when we started searching for our next position to move into the "mid-level" of administration, we found more challenges in making that transition. This could be a result of the smaller number of mid-level positions that exist in addition to the specific or generalist skill sets colleges and universities are seeking. In this transition, Brendon started developing dissolution with the field, not yet recognizing another career path in higher education outside of student affairs. Doug's ideal career trajectory still aligned with a "traditional" path in student affairs seeking to gain generalist experiences and working towards serving in a senior administrative role. However, he still experienced the limitations of the 5-year career plan which did not account for the many different roles in various functional areas he would take after graduation.

Lifelong Learning

The second theme that emerged from our dual narratives and subsequent conversations was the desire to re-enter the space of active learning. As Doug mentioned, "I was missing the feeling of being a student and actively learning from and with others beyond [the]...full-time job." The value of lifelong learning that the SDA program instilled in us never went away, even when the reality of the day-to-day tasks set in and our priorities changed.

Although we both had this desire to reignite the passion for lifelong learning in our daily lives, we noticed a divergence in the *why*. Brendon identified an alignment with specific scholars in his pursuit of both the Masters and PhD degree whereas Doug expressed a sense of personal accomplishment in his pursuit. In his reflection, we see Brendon's decision to pursue his current PhD program at MSU was driven specifically by the fact that he could work with Dr. Renn, a respected scholar in the field. Whereas Doug discussed his drive to gain different experiences through his program. While we are both pursuing a doctoral degree in higher

education for the sake of continued learning, we realized that we were looking for different opportunities and environments in which to learn.

Diving further into the differences in our respective pursuits, we found there was a stark difference in the scholarship we are pursuing. Brendon had left his full-time role to specifically pursue the scholarship on multiraciality while Doug had verbally expressed that he was open to a multitude of research topics and was struggling to identify a topic area. In our last meeting, we spoke about the contrasting styles of our research interests. We found the contrasting styles of the specific versus the generic was evident in our personal statements in the applications to our doctoral programs. As mentioned before, Doug had many varied interests and concluded that he was not driven to his program because of the research. Conversely, Brendon stated he was drawn specifically to his program for the opportunity to further the body of research around multiraciality because of his passion for scholarship and desire to shape future practice. Even though our different learning goals led us to our two distinct programs, we share a drive for lifelong learning.

Discussion and Implications

The themes emerging from our two narratives gives us insight into the structure of student affairs preparation programs as well as the experiences of graduate students who will pursue a doctorate degree in the future. While student affairs preparation programs may have opportunities to experience academic research, our narratives show a loose connection between the program and research preparation and socialization (Austin, 2002; Seattle University, n.d.). This reaffirms that student affairs preparation programs are primarily focused on training practitioners (Hunter, 2019), which could explain the lack of literature in this area.

The focus on practitioner preparedness is further strengthened by our experience with our first job in the field after degree completion. We both felt we were very prepared to interview for and thrive in an entry level position. Capstone courses at the end of student affairs preparation programs allow for students to explore different career paths, functional areas, and institutional types that may align with their aspirations (Bureau, 2018; Hirt, 2006; Hunter, 2019; Moore et al., 2023). However, aligned with the goal of producing practitioners, career exploration tended to center on the "traditional" pathways in student affairs which typically ends in a senior administrative position (Biddix, 2013). Upon reflection, we did not fully see our meandering pathway through student affairs and into our doctorate programs reflected in our capstone work (Weidman et al., 2001).

Additionally, the type of knowledge we were seeking in our graduate programs speaks to our different career trajectories. Our meandering career pathways have different goals with Brendon aiming to become a faculty member at a research institution and Doug advancing his career in student affairs administration. A research faculty role calls for specialized knowledge and expertise in a particular subject— narrowing down and establishing a clear research agenda is a critical part of doctoral socialization (Austin, 2002). On the contrary, an administrative role requires generalized knowledge of student affairs and higher education operations (Hunter, 2019). Our student affairs preparation program provided both. Brendon was able to connect personally to literature presented in a student affairs theory class and maintained interest in multiraciality into his doctorate program, establishing a clear research agenda. Doug, while showing interest in specific topic areas, took a more holistic approach to his

education. This is also reflected in his career pathways, working in many different functional areas to strengthen his generalist skill set.

In thinking critically on our experiences moving through and beyond the SDA program, we found that student affairs preparation programs could open up research pathways to more students. The SDA program may have structural barriers to their MA track, creating a perception that certain students were chosen to participate in graduate research. Exposure to research at the Masters level starts doctoral socialization earlier for those students (Weidman et al., 2001). This demonstrates the need for more research pathways and opportunities to all students in SDA to best prepare them for a multitude of career paths available upon graduation. It is important to note that a terminal degree is increasingly viewed as a requirement for Chief Student Affairs Officers, Deans of Students, and other senior level administrator roles (Biddix, 2013). Regardless of the future career paths SDA students take, a more focused effort on research skills may better prepare all graduates of the program.

Through our conversations, we questioned what programs could do better or differently to prepare students. In addition to the development of research skills, we strongly believe in the power of mentorship beyond the walls of Seattle University—and other preparation programs. Incorporating a structured mentorship program could allow preparation programs to maintain a strong connection to its alumnx while providing alumnx with a regional and national network. While programs often have an accessible list of alumnx and their current positions, it could be daunting for new professionals to reach out to those alumnx without an already established personal connection. Having a structured mentorship program could alleviate some of the hesitation and allow for helpful conversations for graduates who are looking to pivot into a new position, institution, or career path.

Future Research

Our study leads us to the following suggestions for future research. First, a more expansive study on the experiences of doctoral students and their student affairs preparation programs is needed. This type of research could illuminate the importance of certain modalities, curricula, and pedagogies to support students pursuing doctorate degrees. Second, future research should focus on alumnx of student affairs preparation programs who are no longer in the field of student affairs. Although many studies recently have focused on student affairs attrition (e.g., Mullen et al., 2018), this research could examine both their reason(s) for leaving the field and how their programs prepared them for a non-traditional career path. Understanding why professionals are leaving the field can help shape how student affairs preparation programs support their graduates in their career goals beyond degree completion.

Conclusion

Tracing pathways from student affairs preparation programs to higher education doctoral programs remains under-investigated. Our narratives weaved together provide an initial look into the many factors that influence the trajectory to seek an additional postsecondary degree. However, they are not only pathways to a doctoral degree program nor do we claim to represent the preferred or common pathways. However, we demonstrate our experiences as they connect to the larger phenomenon of finding pathways to higher education doctoral programs. Through offering our narratives, we provide a foundation for future research on the connection between student affairs preparation programs and higher education doctoral programs.

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ADHD, The Neurodiversity Paradigm and Professional Practice in Student Affairs

Eli Heller

They might as well fire me because I clearly don't deserve to be in this role. There are plenty of other grad students who could have done this job better than I can. I'm not learning everything quickly enough, and they notice. They can see how incompetent I am. They don't like me. Maybe this shows that I shouldn't work in student affairs after all. I should probably drop out…but then I would be a 23-year-old with no direction, no skills, and no job prospects, which would make me a failure and that is unacceptable…

I experienced anxious thought spirals like this one throughout my first quarter as a graduate student in the fall of 2015. Luckily, nothing I feared in those moments had much truth to it. However, my extreme anxiety, imposter syndrome and fear of failure stuck around and in October of 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact my mental health, I decided, finally, to formally investigate something I had wondered since those early graduate school days – could I have ADHD?

As the title of this reflection piece makes clear, the answer to my question turned out to be an emphatic "yes," and from that point onward, I began exploring that aspect of my identity, of which I had previously been unaware. I could finally explain my extreme difficulties with organization, time management, prioritization, black and white thinking, constant people-pleasing and why I have always, throughout my life, felt that I was trying just as hard or harder than my peers, spending twice as long on assignments, tests, and readings, and yet was still, at least from my own perspective, constantly falling behind and not performing

as well as those around me. What I hadn't considered until after my diagnosis was how my decision to work professionally in higher education and student affairs was, in fact, one of the best career decisions I could have possibly made – not in spite of my difference, but because of it.

Let's get a few things straight: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition caused by differences in the way the brain metabolizes the neurotransmitter dopamine, which in turn causes some of the more commonly known ADHD traits, such as difficulty sustaining attention, impulsivity, executive dysfunction (difficulty with organization, prioritization, working memory and time management) and a consistent need for novelty in order to remain stimulated and focused (Faraone, et. al., 2021). Lower dopamine levels can cause less-than-exciting tasks to feel impossibly tedious and take twice as long to complete. ADHD affects 2.5% of adults (Faraone, et al., 2021) and is a part of the broader neurodiversity umbrella, which also includes autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, the latter three being some of the most common learning disabilities (Walden, 2020; Singer, 1999). There are many overlapping traits among these conditions and some of their most common effects are social and academic difficulties in school and at work. An individual who identifies with one or more of these neurodevelopmental differences may use the term "neurodivergent" to describe themself. It is becoming increasingly common for individuals to receive a belated neurodivergent diagnosis well into adulthood (Caron, 2021). What follows are

some of the key reasons why I believe neurodivergence – that is, the specific behaviors, cognitions, social differences, and responses to sensory stimuli that differ from what are typically considered "normal," lends itself well to supporting students in higher education.

Hyperactivity – I am extraordinarily hyperactive. This means my mind is always racing and I am not usually able to focus on just one thing at a time or sit completely still. My constant need for stimulation and novelty means I almost always have too much on my plate – too many commitments, too many responsibilities, and never enough time to fulfill them. Yet, in my experiences as both a student and student affairs practitioner, this has allowed me to contribute immensely to any team of which I've been a part. Oftentimes, the extra pressure I feel from juggling so many responsibilities gives me the additional stimulation and motivation my brain needs to perform best, and my high levels of energy and enthusiasm allow me to easily build rapport with lots of students.

Hyper-fixation –something I found particularly freeing about the research university setting as an undergraduate was the fact that I could finally choose to take the courses I had the most interest in, and learn about the topics that most fascinated me in much more depth than ever before. This allowed me to excel in my coursework because of my ability to "hyperfocus" – the other component of hyperactivity. While regulating attention is more difficult, when deeply interested in a topic, especially something brand new, or "novel," individuals with ADHD can focus so intensely on it that we internalize massive amounts of information over the course of a few days, or even hours (Flippin, 2023). This ability lends itself especially well to

professional practice as an academic advisor, career coach or any other role in which the practitioner provides detailed information on careers, courses, or campus resources. My ability to hyperfocus allows me to quickly gain in-depth knowledge of majors, programs, specific courses and other detailed information, which in turn allows me as a practitioner to empower students with information, helping them reach further clarity.

Since executive dysfunction makes organization very difficult for me, as an undergraduate, I hyper-fixated on creating order and structure by planning out every single quarter's class schedule months or sometimes years in advance. This initially led me to become a peer academic advisor in my third year. I found it psychologically satisfying to organize and plan possible class schedules and memorize information on specific courses, and still do.

Creativity – effective professional practice in student affairs requires constant collaboration among practitioners with different specialized knowledge and expertise. Professionals with ADHD often thrive in creative spaces because our need for novelty gives us a unique ability to consistently generate new ideas for supporting students and brainstorm content for presentations and programs (White, 2019). There are no limits to idea generation within student affairs because new research findings on supporting students with varying identities continue to inform our approaches and best practices, as students' needs continue to diversify. As long as this continues, there will always be room for further research on how to best support college students, inside and outside the classroom. Novelty is a constant in professional student affairs work and in

academia, making both a good fit for the neurodiverse.

Empathy – Neurodivergent adults (and children) struggle with "emotional dysregulation," meaning we experience feelings more intensely than neurotypical people, including more intense highs and lows (Nigg, 2023). We feel so deeply that it can be overwhelming and feel impossible for us to process and manage our emotions. Within the same week, we might feel extreme enthusiasm when something new excites us, and an overwhelming sense of shame, failure, and emotional pain when faced with real or even perceived rejection from a peer, friend or family member – this particular sensation is known as "rejection sensitivity" and is likely what I was experiencing in my first few months as a graduate student (Dodson, 2023).

Similarly, from my 5+ years of full-time work in academic advising and career coaching, one specific thing remains consistent across every institution at which I have served: students often deal with extreme feelings of failure, envision the worst case scenario, and feel the weight of how much they perceive is at stake when one aspect of a plan, especially when related to academics or professional planning, doesn't turn out as expected (e.g. a poor grade in that first challenging quarter of organic chemistry). One of my more recent goals as a practitioner has been to normalize this pattern of thinking, affirm students' strong reactions to uncertainty and ambiguity, and gently reframe them. One failed exam or difficult transition does not make someone a failure and success does not have one definition. I have found that asking students how they would personally define success can be a helpful exercise.

Thus, when channeled into advocating and empowering students, strong emotions allow neurodivergent practitioners to deeply and sincerely empathize with students who might be working through difficult transitions, major setbacks, perceived failure, imposter syndrome, and any form of uncertainty – all of which are extraordinarily common among current college students, and my own experiences with each of these allows me to relate to students and support them through these challenges. Additionally, as a gay man, I am no stranger to being (or sometimes, just feeling) socially rejected from my straight peers.

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Ultimately, while identifying as neurodivergent comes with many challenges, a person who struggles with time management, performs best when supervised more closely, and takes more time to finish projects, can still succeed and forge a solid professional identity. Living with ADHD presents challenges but does not prevent success. Adults with ADHD are creative, empathetic, energetic, enthusiastic, and fully capable, despite our struggles, of contributing to a team of practitioners, when given clear permission to bring our whole selves to work. It is especially validating for supervisors and colleagues to understand that our difficulties with attention regulation, organization and memory do not make us less capable. The neurodiversity paradigm deserves a seat at the table and there is room for further scholarly exploration of the relationship between neurodivergent strengths and professional practice in student affairs.

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"For the Hyphenated…"

Jireh Reduque

As a quote-on-quote, Filipino-American, the hyphen in between always seems to distinguish who I am as a person. This letter goes out to those who carry a hyphen.

For the Hyphenated…

That hyphen always meant that you lived in two different worlds. Two different cultures.

I know what it's like to feel like you don't know where you belong.

I know what it's like to measure your own identity, trying to figure out if you are, Filipino *enough* or American *enough*. Whatever that means.

I know what it's like to be born in a third-world country, then grow up in Western society and feel like a part of yourself was missing. I never knew what home meant to me. My life has been a constant struggle of trying to understand my roots while growing up in the United States.

I know what it's like to wrestle both individualistic and collectivistic ideals that are interwoven in you. And encounter situations where your values are always being questioned. Sometimes I don't know where I fall into. Like it's a never-ending tug of war of I am, where I should be and what I should believe in.

I know that experience of prejudice, unfortunately coming from your family members who instilled in you that dark skin is ugly and that light skin is pretty. And during celebrations, they would gift you papaya soap and/or whitening products, displaying a non-verbal way to tell you that your skin is not enough. Your brown skin is beautiful. Melanin is in and will always be.

Growing up you were poked fun at by your classmates during lunch because of the strong smells that came from your packed lunch. They could never understand the hard work your ma went through to cook that delicious garlic rice and pork longanisa, perfectly packaged in reusable Tupperware or plastic Cool Whip containers. Upset, you would beg your ma to pack your lunch with Lunchables, Go-gurt tubes, Uncrustables, and Capri-Suns, just so you can fit in with your school peers.

Growing up bilingual, you carried the burden of being the translator for the family. Using multiple tongues, you realize that you had a hard time speaking each language you know. I understand the feeling of always being tongue-tied. The constant switching between languages always confused my brain and my peers when Tagalog accidentally leaves my mouth instead of the colonizer's language. I couldn't easily find the words to express what I am trying to say.

I understand that experience of judgment from your family members, who question you when you don't follow the only three careers laid out for you: medicine, engineering, or law. A silent judgment carries you in conversation. I hope that you find ways to discover your passions. It may take time but follow your interests, develop your strengths, and try new things. **Especially if you've spent your entire life so far doing what others wanted you to do.**

I understand what it means to work even harder to prove to others your worth. The sacrifices we had to make and the hardships that we went through.

I understand that the imposter syndrome runs deeply through your veins. You may feel like you don't deserve to be where you are right now. That you don't deserve the blessings and success that are pouring onto you. But, you do my friend.

I understand the many family members you have. The extensive list of cousins, aunties, uncles, lolas, lolos, that you have. Many of which you probably haven't met.

I understand the constant urge to seek your past. To understand the part of your life where you grew up and wonder what your life might have been like. To seek those pieces only to find that your puzzle is not fully complete.

I understand that feeling of pure exhilaration the moment you come to the motherland. And the excitement it brings when you know you get to discover more things about yourself. For me, Every time I come home, I always leave this place learning new things about myself, my past, and my family and I always yearn to go back.

That phrase, "for the hyphenated," sunk deep into my soul. It was like a barricade of validation swept over me and told me that, "you are part of this world."

I am so proud to be hyphenated.

It means that I don't just carry one culture, but multiple within me.

It means that I carry stories that can resonate with both my Filipino side and American side.

It means that I carry multiple tongues; speaking both my mother tongue and a universal language we call English.

It means living each day with gratitude, that you have more than what your parents could ever ask for when they were your age.

It means living my life not just for myself, but for the people around me. I carry the hard work and sacrifices my family and ancestors went through to get to where I am today.
It means the fun family reunions and the small ways you get to know more of your culture. It could be through cooking with your Mama or Lola or even watching a *teleserye* with them on TFC.

It means getting to travel; exploring outside where I live and constantly seeking the puzzle pieces of my past.

It means getting to share with others my culture. To exchange our similarities and what makes us unique.

So to the hyphenated: we need more of us to share our stories.

I hope that this letter rings true to you and validates you as an incredible human being.

Keep learning, keep growing, keep seeking, and keep discovering. *Mabuhay.*

A Very Precarious Journey Through Higher Education Student Affairs

Lindsey Pierce

I applied for the Student Development Administration (SDA) program at Seattle University (SU) in 2011, after spending a gap year working a few different uninspiring and low-paying part-time jobs. By that point, I had committed myself to a career in higher education student affairs, but I was anything but certain about it as my vocation. I had been the type of undergraduate student that couldn't decide on a major because I was interested in everything and nothing at the same time. Ultimately, I settled on a double major in Sociology and Women's Studies, partly because they were among the subjects I enjoyed the most, and partly just because I was able to apply for a scholarship for the latter. (Insert shrug.)

As I neared completion of my Bachelor's degree, I realized I still had no idea what I actually wanted to "do with my life" (i.e. my career). I had always been drawn to education and service-oriented professions, and my multiple career assessments told me these were a fitting career path to pursue. But, as an introvert, I had never been interested in teaching. The idea of facilitating group learning day-in and day-out got a hard pass from me. People had told me throughout my life that I was a good listener and gave good advice. They suggested I would make a great therapist. I considered this career path more seriously than others, and I started exploring Master's programs in counseling. However, the more research I did, the more the sinking feeling in my gut told me it wasn't for me. Sure, I was good at helping people work through their problems, but did I really want to do that all day, every day?

Through my exploration into counseling programs, I discovered the existence of career and college counseling as a profession. I was intrigued. The idea of being able to help people pursue their goals and interests in an education setting, without having to teach in a classroom or deal with clients' serious mental health issues on a regular basis was appealing to me. So I followed the rabbit hole a little further and started applying to higher education student affairs programs. It was a bit of a stab in the dark. I just knew that I wanted to go back to school, I could see myself doing this work, and I needed a full-time job with benefits in the not-too-distant future. You might say that student affairs was the road I ended up on when all the other ones I had followed resulted in dead ends.

Starting the SDA program in 2011 was absolutely what I needed at that time in my life. I made good friends, developed meaningful professional connections, and moved to a vibrant city that was just far enough away from my hometown of Vancouver, Washington to gain some needed independence. The Jesuit values and pedagogies also resonated with me in ways that my previous experiences in public institutions and non-Jesuit Catholic schools were unable to do. Being in the SDA program just felt right.

I neared completion of my Master's degree and again arrived at a decision point. What area of student affairs would suit me the best? Did I have enough experience from part-time work and internships to be competitive for a job in the field? Would my transition from full-time student to full-time professional be successful? There were many unknowns. I struggled to land a full-time position for several months. The struggle became more real when I was laid off from my part-time job at a local

community college, creating a greater urgency to find another opportunity. I was getting interviews, I had my foot in the door. I just wasn't getting offers. I again questioned whether I had chosen the right path. Maybe I wasn't cut out for this after all.

But then, after having applied and interviewed for a position in financial aid at SU (and not getting it), I was invited to apply and interview for a position in admissions instead. I hadn't really considered pursuing admissions up to that point, as I had never worked in admissions before, and it seemed like an extrovert-oriented avenue of student affairs. But I was honestly willing to pursue just about anything that I was qualified for at that point. I also appreciated that being an admissions counselor would enable me to help prospective students discern and pursue their educational goals and interests—the thing that had driven me into student affairs in the first place.

I spent just over a year in admissions before concluding that it was, in fact, too extroverted for me. The frequent travel and group presentations didn't give me life. I transitioned into academic advising at a local community college, and that was a better fit for me. I was honing in on my calling, but I still hadn't found it yet. Burnout and a desire to return to my hometown area brought me to Portland, Oregon, in 2016, where I started a non-management leadership position in enrollment services at another community college. In many ways, this was a better fit than anything I had done previously. It enabled me to work in education, directly helping students and the public, while also applying my analytical and administrative skills behind the scenes. I stayed there for five years—my longest tenure in anything in life. But something still pushed me to venture out.

I felt a calling to leadership that I had never genuinely experienced before, not even in the SDA program that focused so intentionally on it. I guess I just hadn't believed in my own leadership capacity until spending time in the workforce allowed me to see it in action. I felt it was time to pursue a management position. But even in my pursuit of supervisory roles, I found myself exploring and applying for positions that were more administrative in nature, sometimes even outside of higher education. I had spent about a decade in higher education at that point and still felt an emptiness that I wasn't confident it could fill. Would I always be less than satisfied in my work? Was there any career that would truly be a match for me? Or would I always wander, guided by one wrong turn after another, rather than an internal sense of purpose?

After multiple rejections, I was offered two positions at the same time—another decision point. One was a non-management but well-paying administrative support role for the city government. The other was a less well-paying management position overseeing advising and career services at another local community college. By this point, the COVID-19 pandemic had been in full swing for almost two years, and many of my former classmates and colleagues had jumped ship from higher education into more lucrative careers in other industries. I strongly considered doing the same. My discernment was full of soul searching, pro and con lists, and even a return to the career assessments I had done in my youth. I ultimately took the leap into management and renewed my commitment to higher education student affairs.

Unfortunately, that leap led to yet another dead end, or perhaps cul-de-sac, in my career. I was directly supervising about 25 employees among two functional areas and four different campuses at the largest

institution of higher education in Oregon, which was also one of the largest in the country. It gave a whole new meaning to my concept of burnout, and I dreaded each day. I felt like I had failed. I felt demoralized. I was ready to quit higher education student affairs altogether. But what would I do next? The idea of hopping to another job with no promise of longevity or success or joy was terrifying. But I knew I had to do something. This time, I thought very introspectively about not only what I want to do, but who I really am. I crawled back through the depths of my psyche to remember what I was like as a child, before formal education, the workforce, and society at large had a chance to distort me. I was a shy but kind and curious child. I enjoyed playing quietly alone but also making new friends. Academic settings always felt like home and, let's be honest, I was a teacher's pet. I loved to write and draw. I adored nature and animals. I was fascinated by language and its intricacies. I was simultaneously confounded and compelled to understand people.

All of these traits carried on in various forms throughout the later stages of my life, but I hadn't nurtured them. I became ashamed of my introversion and tried to play the part of an extrovert. I felt guilty about my desire to spend time alone. I forgot why I enjoyed school so much. I stopped making time to write and express myself creatively. I still wanted to help, connect with and understand people, but became weary of my disappointment in them.

One day I was sorting through my bookshelf at home, and I found the book *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* by Parker Palmer (2000). It had been one of my favorite books from my time in the SDA program, and I had even gotten to see the acclaimed Quaker author, scholar, and spiritual leader at a talk he delivered at

SU. I decided to re-read the book one weekend, hoping for some kind of new inspiration. In the first chapter, the following quote struck me: "True self, when violated, will always resist us, sometimes at great cost, holding our lives in check until we honor its truth" (Palmer, 2000, p. 4). And later, in the chapter titled "Now I Become Myself," the following quote elaborates:

What a long time it can take to become the person one has always been! How often in the process we mask ourselves in faces that are not our own. How much dissolving and shaking of ego we must endure before we discover our deep identity—the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation. (Palmer, 2000, p. 9)

Palmer's words spoke to me in a deep, spiritual way that I hadn't felt in a long time. They helped me recognize that I needed to stop denying who I was and find the courage to align my career pursuits with my true self. His words also spoke to the fact that oftentimes what guides us most profoundly in our vocational journeys are our failures and rejections, which help us to discern what is truly valuable, desirable, and achievable.

The older I get, the more I realize how similar I am to my mom—another thing I had denied for a long time. My mom is also introverted, thoughtful, diligent, caring, and a great listener. My mom, who recently retired, spent the majority of her career in administrative support roles in the healthcare industry. I had never considered modeling my career after hers. I had always been taught to aspire for "more," "better," and "different." But when an administrative manager position in student affairs came onto my radar, I felt a strong urge to explore it. The position paid less than what I was already making, and there was nothing

particularly glamorous about it. It wasn't the kind of role I imagined myself bragging about on social media or writing an editorial reflection on for *MAGIS*. But it had all the qualities that fit *me*. Education setting? Check. Helping others? Check. Analytical and administrative skills? Check. Leadership qualities? Check. And, likewise, it didn't have the attributes that *didn't* fit me in past pursuits. Talking to people all day, every day? Not really. Managing dozens of employees? Nope, just a couple. Constant group presentations and programming? Very little. Precarious potential for work-life balance? Not an issue.

I ended up applying for and getting the job, and at the time of this writing I have been in the position for nine months. I don't know if it's my calling or if I will be here for the rest of my career. I won't claim that it's the perfect fit or that I am thrilled to come to work each day. But it is the best job I've had in my life so far, which gives me great hope. I no longer feel dissonance between who I am and what I do each day. I feel genuinely energized, rather than drained, by my work. I no longer feel that my profession intrusively bleeds into the other parts of my life that matter so much to me. I feel truly at peace with where I'm at right now. And I feel truly content with the idea that I might end up somewhere else entirely a few years down the road.

My journey into, out of, and back into higher education student affairs has been full of doubts, fears, accidents, failures, rejections, and just plain happenstance. I am probably not the spokesperson that folks considering or new to the profession would want to hear from. But my journey has been profound in shaping my vocation and purpose. I hope that others experiencing the same feelings of apprehension, dissonance, restlessness, or disappointment will have courage to let their lives' wrong turns, dead ends, and cul-de-sacs guide them. I hope they will have faith that if they listen to and honor their inner voice, they will find their way. To conclude with another pearl of wisdom from Parker Palmer (2000), "remember who you were when you first arrived and reclaim the gift of true self" (p. 12).

References

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(Re)member in Love and Healing

Sofia Lopez Bactol

Independent Study Rationale

Overview

The intention of this heart-work originally began as an attempt to find best practices for practitioners in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Through informational interviews, literature reviews, and the continuous examination of my own positionality as an educator-practitioner, I came to realize this heart-work is a (re)minder of the love and healing that exists at the heart of our work in DEI. I utilize the parenthetical *(re)* in homage to Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard's work, referenced throughout this independent study. This parenthetical is a nod to the (re)calling we do particularly in the work of DEI – we have funds of knowledge already at our disposal through our lived experiences and familial knowledge. We do not enter into this work blankly, our heart already knows the way. Readers can expect to experience my journey as a first-year DEI practitioner, lovingly held by peers in the field, humbly affirmed by the literature in review, and tenderly called to accountability.

Introduction

As a professional in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion education, I have a responsibility and duty to continuously seek out opportunities for growth and learning. This constant learning and unlearning have been central to my approach in my professional role over the past year. Within my first year as a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within a Catholic Archdiocesan high school, I have had the opportunity to actively cultivate a culture of belonging where students from diverse backgrounds are empowered and provided with equal opportunities and access. Throughout this first year, I have become aware of my areas of growth – the areas in which my continued formation and (mis)formation directly impact the students I serve, particularly students with multiple intersectional minoritized identities. To better serve all students, I have engaged in research to investigate best practices for DEI educators that shed light on utilizing mission integration as a means of strategic implementation.

In the spirit of building a community of care, I pursued cultivating connections with DEI educators across secondary and higher education institutions, particularly institutions versed in a faith-based mission. A supplementary goal for these connections, was to gain insight into how the different levels, secondary and higher education, could support each other. Additionally, the focus on institutions with faith-based missions was an attempt to better understand my own institution's utilization of mission as a means of carrying out efforts in the areas of DEI. The ultimate hope for this project is to offer guidance, support, and cross-institutional connections to DEI educators across institutional levels and contexts. I intend to share my findings with the interviewees, fellow DEI educators, my colleagues, and the senior administration at the institution I serve at.

This research paper is a labor of love and heart-work vital to my vocational call. To help guide me throughout this process, I have relied on the generosity of fellow DEI educators, generosity of time, heart-knowledge, expertise, experience, and resilient joy. This project is meant to be shared for the benefit and wholeness of all students.

Positionality

I am a Master of Education candidate studying Student Development Administration at a historically white, faith-based institution within the Pacific Northwest. I am an *hija*, *comadre*, partner, and educator. I identify as Xicanx, cisgender, heterosexual, Catholic, first-generation college graduate, daughter of teen parents, *nieta* of migrant farm workers, laborers, and Indigenous relatives that the border crossed. My critical consciousness is evident at the intersection of my salient identities, my 'borderlands' of self that exists both minoritized and privileged, complicit and resistant, colonized and decolonized (Anzaldúa, 1987). When I reflect upon my intersectional identities, particularly on the positions of power I hold, I recognize my perspective lacks the funds of knowledge of my LGBTQIA+ relatives, especially Black and Indigenous LGBTQIA+ identifying relatives. I also recognize the context in which I function as an educator within a faith-based, Catholic institution comes with immense privilege and much needed institutional reconciliation. My dualities and positionalities elicit a responsibility to interrogate my roles in the dynamics of perpetual institutionalized minoritization and structural harm carried out against underserved communities.

My positionality is a call to employ theories and frameworks such as Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1995) *Critical Race Theory*, Tara J. Yosso's (2005) *Tenants of Community Cultural Wealth*, and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands Theory* to examine my privilege within systems of inequity. From Critical Race Theory, I am called to utilize a critical lens to examine race and power across societal structures and uplift counter-narratives as a means of liberation. From Community Cultural Wealth, I am called to utilize an asset-based approach to tap into the wealth of knowledge and capital that individuals bring with them into educational spaces. From Borderlands Theory, I am called to recognize the dualities individuals carry within themselves as both privileged and oppressed. My identities provide me insider status within several communities. However, I simultaneously hold outsider status within several communities. It is my responsibility to take ownership of these dual statuses and actively engage in critical self-examination, along with institutional interrogation. My professional practice exists in this reality of lived dualities, where I must challenge myself to be accountable at an individual and institutional level.

Methodology

Approach

Within my first year as an educator practitioner of DEI, I have found my continued formation as an opportunity to become the educator I so badly needed as a student. My salient, intersectional identities have driven my ability to navigate my role at the individual and institutional level. In my short time as a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, I have experienced an immense amount of internal and institutional pressure. This pressure has manifested itself as anxiety, stress, and feelings of inadequacy. As a result, I have found myself working in isolation, striving for unobtainable perfectionism, and left with little to no room for self-care or rejuvenation. Over the last year, my formation as a professional has been a process of discernment. I have found myself discerning areas of growth and strength that will sustain me in this role, within the community I serve, and within my overall growth as an educator practitioner. My discernment process has revealed that my current approach to professional development is not sustainable or reflective of the love, healing, and joy I hope to bring

to my role. Through research and informational interviews, I have found three implications for the sustained and transformational roles of educators of diversity, equity, and inclusion: student-centeredness, co-creation, and commitment.

Procedure

Beginning this project, my goal was to conduct four informational interviews with educators from secondary education institutions and four informational interviews with educators in faith-based higher education institutions. I began conducting informational interviews with four Directors of Diversity and Inclusion across Catholic and independent high schools in the Seattle area. Then, I conducted six informational interviews with directors of DEI work at faith-based institutions of higher education, honing in on institutions with a Jesuit and Roman Catholic affiliation. At the same time, I began researching articles and studies that examined the roles of women of color in leadership roles, the role of diversity and inclusion in education, and tangible steps to establishing diversity initiatives across institutions by utilizing mission integration. I read *The Spirit of Our Work: Black Women Teachers (Re)member* by Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard (2022) and *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* by Dr. Bettina Love (2019).

Research of Best Practices

I began with research, as it provided a starting point for the informational interviews I conducted and my wider understanding of the aforementioned works by Dr. Bettina Love (2020) and Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard (2022). My approach to this research was born out of a hope to ground my professional practice. Admittedly, over the last year I have found myself ready to give up, unsure about my capacity to engage in this work. I have found myself wrought with imposter syndrome, often brought on by lack of community connection. This research has helped me to redefine what it means to be a DEI professional and educator with multiple minoritized identities serving at a predominately white and faith-based institution.

I began my research with the work of Katherine Cumings Mansfield. Mansfield (2013) illustrates the value of including student voices in educational leadership development and research practices. Mansfield's work illuminates the potential that including student voice has to positively improve leadership practice. Her research illustrates how professional development is not linear, rather, it is ever evolving and circular, where we have continuous strengths and areas of growth. Additionally, professional practice and development must include open dialogue and interaction with those most impacted by our leadership. Lastly, student voice should be made central to social justice and diversity work. Mansfield states:

> Too often youth – especially those historically marginalized due to race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status – are the subject of policies rather than the actors in shaping policy. Thus, prioritizing student voice in educational research and leadership practice is the most authentic means of advocating for social justice and promoting change in communities. (p. 00)

To be an effective educator, particularly in the areas of DEI, it is vital to continue to prioritize student-centered approaches as a component of professional development. Professional development ought to include student voice. My development as a practitioner must be student-centered. Mansfield's research provided a necessary

reminder to ground my heart-work alongside the voices of the students that I serve.

Scholar Lorri J. Santamaría (2013) builds upon the understanding of educational leadership within a multicultural perspective. Santamaría examines how leaders of color meaningfully tap into positive attributes of their identities to address issues of social justice and educational equity. Utilizing a Critical Race Theory lens, she establishes several leadership characteristics that educators use when practicing leadership for social justice and equity in educational settings. Of the several characteristics highlighted, I identified three that are most poignant: critical conversation, honoring constituents, and servant leadership. Educators initiate and engage in critical conversations. Educators uplift and honor all constituents, particularly those that have often been silenced when it comes to decision-making. Educators view their role as a call to servant leadership, moving beyond simply a career choice and towards a vocation. Santamaría shares, "applied critical leadership suggests the possibility that a type of multicultural funds of knowledge might be at play for leaders who draw from positive aspects of their diversity to inform leadership practices" (Santamaría, 2013). Leaders with minoritized and underrepresented identities bring a wealth of knowledge into the educational space. With multicultural capital exists immense assets to be able to lean into critical conversations, uplift voices that are often left out, and overall, see leadership roles as an opportunity to engage in wider changemaking. This asset-based approach to leadership is a reminder that multicultural leadership has the capacity to engender an authenticity that enriches the entire institution. Santamaría's research served as a 'calling in' moment for me: a calling to allow myself to tap into my authentic voice and view my own identities and experiences as capital.

Along the same lines of building upon pre-existing capital and funds of knowledge, I sought to find practices that bolstered a more collectivist approach to leadership. Academics Sharon D. Kruse, Shaheem Rakha, and Shannon Calderone (2017) offer insights into co-creation as a means to developing cultural competency across institutions by way of tangle steps and definitive characteristics. Among the conditions that support strong cultural competency agendas is the notion that supportive leadership bolsters an institutional-wide commitment to social justice (Kruse, et al., 2017, p. 745). This is a reminder of the necessity of co-creation at the administration and executive leadership level. Without supportive leadership, educators cannot be sustained in their roles, nor can their work make an impact on the wider community. This finding was a clear signal that I needed to maximize my relationships with my senior administration team.

Continuing to focus on the application of co-creation with institutional stakeholders to enact institutional shifts, I sought out research that would shed light on persistent formation in the areas of DEI. In the article "How Leaders Can Become More Committed to Diversity Management," researchers Theodore L. Hayes, Leah E. Kaylor, Kathleen A. Oltman, and Aishwarya Belgudri (2020) explore the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion across three different entities: boards, organizational culture, and individual managers. Their findings pertaining to organizational culture offer significant insight into the importance of meaningful engagement and ongoing action in the areas of institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion training. They share, "effective anti-bias training is long term and specific and focuses on breaking prejudice-

related habits" (Hayes, et al., 2020, p. 251). Practitioners should demand a shift in organizational culture, stressing the need for continuous commitment and investment into ongoing formation. As a means of professional development, the shift in organizational culture is also dependent on individual investment to continuous formation. This research is a reminder that our institutions and organizations should be collaborators in the continued commitment of shifting organizational culture away from complacency and towards unremitting growth.

Finally, to address the pervasiveness of imposter phenomenon, I sought out research that could speak to disrupting this phenomenon that exists deeply within many professionals with minoritized identities. Professional development and formation are intricately woven within the ability to overcome this phenomenon. Scholars Ague Mae Manongsong and Rajashi Ghosh (2021) offer a conceptual framework that utilizes a developmental network perspective to address imposter phenomenon and develop positive leader identities. Within their conceptual framework exists a transformational offering to combat imposter phenomenon – the power of mentorship. Manongson and Ghosh state:

A trusting connection with their diverse mentors can encourage minoritized women to cultivate their ingenuity and support their growth toward higher stages of cognitive development where they can construct their own standards of effective leadership instead of succumbing to impostor feelings. (Manongsong, 2021) An authentic relationship of mutuality and support is vital for first year and continuing DEI educators. Moreover, trusting connections and mentorship are vital components towards empowering practitioners to recognize and stand in their power for long-term formation. This finding

was monumental in my path to informational interviews, painting a clear picture of the heart that exists at the center of this work: meaningful connections.

Findings
Informational Interviews

I bring this research to the ten informational interviews I conducted. I engaged in four informational interviews at the secondary education level and six at the higher education level. For the sake of safeguarding their sacred storytelling, I will be omitting the names and institutions of the educators I connected with. Each interview began with base-level questions inquiring about the shape and scope of their functional areas and quickly developed into conversations about the realities of serving as practitioners within the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Each interview utilized the following questions as a guide to our conversations: *What is your why? What are the bright spots of your work? What are biggest challenges to your work? How have you utilized mission integration as a means of carrying out DEI initiatives? What have you found to be a best practice as a DEI educator? How do you sustain yourself?*

On challenges, each interviewee shared on the realities of burnout, lack of institutional support and resources, struggles for recognition across departments, and lack of institutional commitment to the strategic implementation of DEI initiatives beyond the words shared in mission statements. An educator within a secondary school shared on the realities of being one of very few Women of Color serving at her institution and the realities of burnout as a Woman of Color. Several educators at the higher education level emotionally shared on the realities of navigating feelings of imposter phenomenon amidst the constant justification of their work. Across each educator's testimony was a common experience: the intersection of the personal

and professional. Two educators at the higher education level shared about the weight of having to convince colleagues, students, and senior administrators of the value of DEI work, while simultaneously attempting to convince the same individuals of the value of their lives as People of Color. When asked about the challenges they face, all ten of the interviewees shared that lack of institutional resources and authentic, dedicated commitment to DEI were at the core of the challenges they faced. Yet, even amid such gargantuan challenges, all each interviewee shared on the love, joy, and hope that sustains them in this work – all of which pointed to the students they journey with.

On their why, each educator reflected through the powerful use of storytelling to share their driving force to do this work. Each shared on the necessity of being mission driven as individuals engaged in this work. When asked what their 'why' was, each educator shared similarly how their own lived experiences drove them to do this work and how the relationships they cultivate with students sustain them in this work. Additionally, each educator emphasized the necessity to find collaborators and allies across the institution, across functional areas, and perhaps across neighbor institutions themselves. A shared message of sustaining the self by way of healing in and through community was evident across each interviewee's reflections, as each educator advised me to invest in myself as a means of sustaining my 'why.'

On mission integration as a means for strategic implementation of DEI initiatives, each interviewee shared a common approach: be critical and intentional. An educator in the higher education level shared bluntly that institutions often hide behind mission statements as a way out of actively dismantling the harm inflicted on students by the institution itself. Echoed across several interviewees, a level of skepticism and accountability must be applied when utilizing mission integration to drive DEI efforts, initiatives, and planning. An educator in the higher education level shared a tactical tool of accountability to point senior leadership back to the mission as a guiding light and reminder: *if this is who you say you are, prove it*. The biggest takeaways I gained from the responses to this question are: mission integration requires action, investment, cross-functional implementation, and strategic navigation. To utilize mission integration as a tool for DEI initiatives, I must know my audience and build coalitions of committed co-creation, while always keeping students at the center.

The takeaway I gained from each interview was the importance of relationships. We cannot maintain our roles as educators of diversity, equity, and inclusion if we do not prioritize meaningful connections with institutional stakeholders, mentors, the students we serve, and ourselves. Leading with a relationship first approach opens the door towards co-creation, dedicated commitment, and true student-centered approaches. We can find our power, voice, and avenues of change in and through community. Our individual empowerment has the capacity to engender institutional changes. As educators of DEI, it is vital to include co-creation and community connections as part of our professional development and continuous formation.

Literature Review

I interweave this research and these informational interviews with the heart-work of Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard (2022) and Dr. Bettina Love (2020). It is within their profound heart-work and generous soul-work that I have found understanding, critical reflection, and inspiration toward

answering the vocational call of being a DEI educator. It is my goal to utilize the learnings I have gained from their work to inform my practice and provide recommendations for educators of DEI.

In her book *The Spirit of Our Work: Black Women Teachers (Re)member*, Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard (2022) offers critical reflections on the power of (re)membering as Black Women teachers and the wider implications of healing that this approach to education could have on all students. Dillard defines (re)membering as:

An act of resistance, given the continuous ways that Black people and our presence in the diaspora are rendered invisible within structures of capitalistic, patriarchal, anti-Black structures of domination… it is used to (re)mind us all of what Black people have *always* known about ourselves in the contexts that consistently act otherwise… (re)membering is a promise to all of the ancestors…. Ancestors who chose to survive so that we might have the awesome opportunity to thrive as Black people today. (Dillard, 2022, p. XV)

It is in this revolutionary act of (re)membering that we recognize, celebrate, protect, and uplift the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of Black folks, past, present, and future – by way of tapping into the rich knowledge that has always been held for time immemorial.

Dillard centers her teachings on African thought and ways of being, linking the sacred knowledge of those who came before to those who are present now, and those who have yet to arrive earthside. Within the African ways of being Dillard builds upon, the principle of Sankofa is ever present throughout her book. Sankofa means "to go back and fetch what you need from the past to build what you collectively need in the present and future" (Dillard, 2022, p.

XV). Dillard suggests that for Black Women teachers, Sankofa is a promise between present and past spirits, therefore it is essential that the spirit be a priority alongside the mind and body. She shares, "in order to face adversity, oppression, and exclusion and remain steadfast in one's right to exist and be, it is often the *spiritual* life that has supported and affirmed (and continues to support and affirm) culturally relevant and sustaining practices in educational spaces with Black students and teachers" (Dillard, 2020, p. 3). For those engaged in fostering DEI work, it is essential to utilize spiritually conscious approaches for sustainability. This spiritual consciousness is born out of the richness of (re)membering African ways of thinking and being. To be spiritually conscious is to draw upon strength that is beyond this realm, beyond time, enriched by the resilience and persistence of Black ancestors. For educators of DEI, it is imperative that our approaches to culturally relevant, anti-biased and anti-racist frameworks include engaging within spiritual learning and unlearning in a way that uplifts and (re)centers the vast beauty of Blackness.

In her book *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, Dr. Bettina Love (2020) draws upon her life's work of teaching and researching to argue that educators must teach students about the pervasiveness of White supremacy within American educational institutions. To heal and do more than survive we must move toward abolitionist teaching in pursuit of liberatory education. Love defines abolitionist teaching as:

Choosing to engage in the struggle for educational justice knowing that you have the ability and human right to refuse oppression and refuse to oppress others, mainly your students… abolitionist teaching ensures that students feel safe in schools and

that schools are not perpetrators of violence toward the very students they are supposed to protect. (Love, 2020, pp. 10-11)

Abolitionist teaching recognizes that educational institutions are spaces of Whiteness and White supremacy. To disrupt the terror this causes students of color we must move beyond performative educational practices and wholeheartedly embrace an educational approach that is liberatory and extends beyond the classroom towards equity at all levels – social, political, economic, et cetera.

Throughout her book, Love suggests several strategies to pursuing educational liberation through abolitionist approaches. Within these approaches, the power of coalition building, and spiritual well-being are continuous themes interwoven throughout the text. Love suggests that abolitionists "do more listening than talking, especially in the presence of wise counsel" (Love, 2020, p. 156). To be an abolitionist is to be a perpetual student, learning, unlearning, (re)membering alongside coalitions of intergenerational guides. And, within this space of coalition and community building lies the necessity of spiritual wellness. Love profoundly shares:

For schools to be well, and therefore, the children in them, schools must place more importance on students' mental, physical, and spiritual health than on any test… For schools to be well, educators need to be well… Teacher wellness is critical to creating schools that protect students' potential and function as their homeplace. (Love, 2020, p. 160)

As educators, *wellness* must be at the forefront of our efforts – wellness that is spiritually conscious and prioritizes critical self-reflection on the ways in which we actively, consciously, and subconsciously, perpetuate White supremacy. From Love's teachings I recognize that taking critical inventory of my role within White supremacy is essential to promoting true wellness and liberation for all students. It is within critically spiritual conscious (re)membering that systemic shifts towards educational liberation are possible.

It is in a (re)membering of self that these pervasive systems of harm, trauma, displacement, and racism are broken. It is a (re)membering of the wholeness of Black people that we can come to know and experience education as an act of liberatory love. Dillard and Love remind us that all students have a right to an educational experience that heals, but before we offer healing to the young people we serve, we must create sacred space for (re)membering the culture, history, spirit, joy, and persistence of our Black relatives. As the concept of ubuntu teaches us, "I am because we are," to do more than survive, to be more than alright, we must (re)remember we belong to each other (Dillard, 2022, p. 56). This sense, action, and proposal of belonging echoes the reminder Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard shares throughout her book, "(re)member who and whose you are" (Dillard, 2022, p. 176). To be engaged in best practices as an educator for DEI is to engage in constant (re)membering, seeking out healing through radical love – love that persists, love that is accountable, love that transcends time and space.

Implications for Practice

Through research, informational interviews, and review of literature I have found that my personal and professional development inform each other. The educator I am and will be isdeeply intertwined within the relationships I foster – relationships across the institution, with students, the wider community, and myself. The implications for my future practice will be inspired by African ways of knowing and being, particularly the concepts of Sankofa and Ubuntu. My continued formation will be heart-work done in collaboration, a

(re)membering done in and through communities of love and healing. I will prioritize my ability to maintain spiritual, emotional, physical, social, environmental, relational, and intellectual wellness through critical self-reflection and soul-care. My future practice as a DEI educator will be critical and intentional of mission integration at the individual and systemic level. I will utilize my gained network of co-conspirators across secondary and higher educational levels as spaces for accountability, mentorship, and support. I will become the educator my students deserve by challenging, knowing, and caring for myself in collaboration with others.

Recommendations for DEI Practitioners & All People That Engage in this Heart-Work

Co-Creation

I recommend that DEI educators collaborate and seek co-creation across institutional stakeholders. Moreover, I recommend that DEI educators create networks of critical communal co-creation across institutional types. From this project, I recognize the value in cultivating communities of care, particularly between the secondary education and institutions of higher education. *What could our sustained work look like if we had a network to dream into together? What additional supports and connections could we offer our students, particularly students with multiple minoritized identities, if we intentionally created spaces for co-creation across secondary and higher educational institutions?*

Storytelling

In this process I have come to appreciate and recognize storytelling as a means of persistence, resistance, and an act of revolutionary love. I recommend that DEI educators share their stories when it is safe to do so – the components of their identity and lived experiences that drive their purpose and approach to engage in this work. Our stories are assets to bring to the decision-making table, our authentic selves are worthy to take up space and contribute. More so, our stories and storytelling are a reminder of '*who we are and whose we are.*' A key component to finding sustenance in this work is (re)membering what brought us here in the first place… and, who and what keeps us here.

Commitment That is Spiritually Conscious

I recommend a (re)newed commitment to transforming the institutions we serve, while also committing to transforming ourselves, our spirits, and our understanding and appreciation of Blackness. Spiritual consciousness is an asset that can awaken in us a (re)envisioned understanding of commitment. By engaging the spirit, we open ourselves to (re)newed possibilities towards transforming educational institutions that are culturally relevant, anti-biased, and anti-racist. Spiritual consciousness is an invitation to nourish our deepest selves - beyond organized religion and religious practices. Spiritual consciousness allows us to tap into, or rather open up, room for our innermost selves to be cared for.

Wellness

I recommend that DEI educators prioritize their wellness by pouring deeply into themselves. I share the following specific recommendations from the suggestions of the practitioners interviewed in this paper: attend therapy (many networks offer free sessions for Black, Indigenous, People of Color in the field), seek out mentorship, move your body (dance, walks, exercise), establish healthy boundaries (turning off notifications after 6:00pm), build in at least one mental health day a month, cultivate a community of connection with other practitioners, protect your sacred time with family and friends, and keep a

keen eye out for the components of your work that 'fill your cup' - (re)membering to replenish often.

This work of liberation is taxing, sometimes defeating, and all the time exhausting. The fatigue we experience navigating the personal and professional simultaneously must be acknowledged and actively mitigated by prioritizing wellness in every sense of the word. We must be well mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally. We cannot be the educators our students need if we continue to operate from a scarcity-based functionality. Just as our approaches to this work must be asset-based, so too should our approaches to our well-being be.
It is essential that we allow ourselves to rest in love, rest in revolution, rest in joy! *What might our sustained work look like if our wellness and wholeness was prioritized?*

Conclusion

As an educator of DEI, I commit to sharing these findings and recommendations with my ever-expanding network of (re)connections. Our formation and sustainability within the areas of diversity, equity, inclusion are ongoing revolutionary acts of heart-work. When this work is done in community with a co-creative, spiritually conscious commitment, we can and will be more than alright. When we can pour love and healing into the spaces that these systems of White supremacy have broken open for generations, we shift educational institutions towards institutions of radical resistance, liberation, and freedom. DEI educators are often driven by a desire to create spaces where all feel seen, heard, and celebrated. For many of us, we are striving to cultivate the spaces of healing and love we so desperately needed when we were students. As educators, we have the divine opportunity to (re)member alongside each other, (re)visioning our academic institutions as spaces where students do more than survive… rather, where they heal gloriously forward and backward, reverberating love outwards beyond space and time to ancestors known and unknown, relatives past, present, and future. As educators of DEI, it is essential to (re)member the vastness and the wholeness of Black people as central to our vocational call to this work, for there is no true liberation in our educational systems without recognizing and (re)centering Black history, spirit, culture, and joy.

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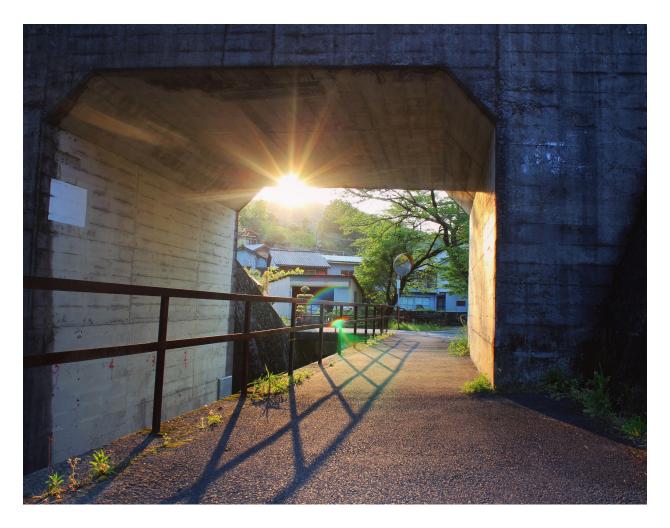
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Tsetsen Anuurad

This photo [image description below] was taken during the height of the pandemic, in April 2020, in Kochi prefecture, Japan. At that time, I had already committed to the SDA program and was preparing to go back to the U.S. in the summer.

During my two years in the SDA program, I developed a fondness for this photo and started using it in various places, particularly as my phone background. Because of the continued pandemic, the light seeping through the tunnel in the photo came to represent, at first, the perseverance I developed throughout the program during the pandemic. Initially, the light seeping through the tunnel in the photo represented the perseverance I developed while attending the program because of the continued pandemic. Eventually, as I started to develop relationships and connections in the program and at Seattle University, the light came to represent the power of community or the little rays of sunshine, that

I saw: The way the students I supervised came together to put out welcome events for transfer students after two years of virtual learning, the way my colleagues showed up every morning for our office in the corner, the way the 21-22 SUSDA Executive Board hopped on Zoom every other Monday night to think of ways we could engage full-time and part-time students in our program, and much, much more.

As I now adjust to a full-time position, I have realized that tunnels will continue to appear time and time again in my personal and professional life, and that the rays of sunshine will not always be visible (at least not immediately). This, I'm learning, is especially true when I get stuck in a me-against-the-world, or individualistic, mindset. When I reflect back on why this photo took on meaning during my time in SDA, I remember that it is because I started to associate it with the power of community and connections, which, funnily enough, is a flip from when I took this photo, by myself, wondering what the next chapters of my life would bring. Now, almost three years later, I have my answer: Community, and the rays of sunshine it brings.

Imagine description: The photo shows a gray short tunnel located in rural Japan. A metal handrail passes through the tunnel and its shadow is reflected on the road. On the left-hand corner, the sunlight is seeping through and makes the end of the tunnel bright. The greenery of the trees and the grass on the road contrast with the gray color of the concrete tunnel.

SDA PEARLS OF WISDOM

Pearls of Wisdom

"The SDA program taught me the importance of reflection. In our busy roles, I suggest you carve out time for yourself to reflect and check in with yourself" - Chanda Ishisaka, Career Specialist at Cal State Fullerton

"Be yourself" - anonymous

"Never be afraid to change course - trust your gut. You know when something isn't working for you" - anonymous

"Never let imposter syndrome prevent you from going after your dreams" - anonymous

"Grad school is not a lonely road. Rely and lean on your professors, advisors, classmates, and community to support you on that ride!" - anonymous

"To incoming students: connect with your cohort and try to engage with the program as much as you are able. Grad school is one season of your life; remind yourself to stop, take a breath, and enjoy the process" - anonymous

"Do not sacrifice your peace for any institution. You deserve to thrive where you work!" - anonymous

"There is no such thing as an academic emergency. Take your time, identify the needs of the students, and act intentionally" - anonymous

"Stay saucy" - anonymous

"Gather all the pieces that you are and wear them like armor.
Let your words spread like dandelion seeds in the breeze and take root like the strongest of weeds.
Take up space for yourself while you make space for others.
And teach your peers to read your words and to speak your name exactly the way you wrote them"
With Love, Nicole (She/Her) Assistant Director, Student & Young Alumni Experience

"Hang on to what brings YOU joy and embrace it unapologetically. It's okay to let your work be a source of happiness for you, but make sure it's not the only thing that fills your cup. Surround yourself with people you love, move your body, practice mindfulness, and do things that excite you" - anonymous